

The Resettled Refugee Population in Vermont: Public Transportation Orientation and Accessibility

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Transportation Planning Partners

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Recently there has been discussion in the greater Burlington, Vermont area about the hardships that face newly resettled refugees and public transportation. Since this is a fairly new issue facing those in public administration, literature reviews from other related fields have been synthesized in an effort to provide information on how other areas of the country are dealing with public transportation access, understanding and navigation. Specifically, this study focuses on the best and most efficient way to provide information about public transit systems to newly resettled refugees in Vermont.

Key words

Refugee resettlement, transportation access, navigating public transportation, public transportation education, transportation workshops

“Since 1989, at least 6,300 men, women and children have come to Vermont through a federal refugee resettlement program. That 25-year total includes 1,705 Bosnians, mostly Muslims; 1,437 Bhutanese, many of whom had been living in exile in Nepal; and about 1,000 Africans fleeing violence in Burundi, Congo, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan. Hundreds of additional non-English-speakers from poor countries have made their way here as asylum seekers or ordinary immigrants. Another 300 or so are expected to arrive this year.”

-Seven Days, “Twenty-Five Years and 6,300 People Later: A Vermont Refugee Report”, published January 15, 2014

Problem Definition

Refugee Transportation Support in Vermont

According to the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP), refugees have been resettled in the greater Burlington, Vermont area since 1980 (Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, 2011). Even though this program has been in place since 1980, Vermont has grown since that time and as a result many entry-level jobs are now located outside of the Burlington area. This poses a major problem for New Americans as they may live in an area where employment could be further than 20 miles away. This problem is compounded due to the rural nature of the state of Vermont and the small population size. The bulk of the public transportation networks in Vermont are in the greater Chittenden County area.

Many New Americans are able to take advantage of low-cost or free options, such as the Chittenden County Transportation Authority bus system, Special Services Transportation Authority (which has a partnership with the state Economic Services Division), the Green Mountain Transit Authority, Go VT and Go Chittenden County, VABIR's Creative Transportation Solutions, or Recession Rides. Options such as standard taxi cabs, the Greyhound bus service, Megabus, Lake Champlain Ferries, Burlington International Airport, and Amtrak train service may be out of reach for low income individuals in the community. Car-ownership coaching programs such as More than Wheels in New Hampshire or the Car Coach out of Central Vermont Community Action offer budgeting services to clients to assess the feasibility of car ownership and assist with purchases and/or financing of a vehicle. In interviews, directors of both of these programs reference the perceived social status of car ownership for many New Americans.

Beyond just being able to commute to places of employment, resettled refugees also face the daunting task of learning the means and modes of transportation in rural Vermont. Unlike other metropolitan areas of the country, there aren't any major rail lines or subway lines that connect adjacent towns and cities. The main options for transportation in the area are bus lines, taxis, bicycles, carpools/car shares and foot traffic. Though the bus may seem to be the most easily accessible and reliable means of transportation, the bus network in the greater Burlington metropolitan area can be confusing for those that speak English and are familiar with the area. This problem is much more severe for resettled refugees in Vermont. This report primarily speaks to three specific issues regarding transportation and refugee populations; these topics serve as the guiding principles for the recommendations of the report.

Rural Job Location: Entry-level jobs are dispersed across a broad geographic region in Vermont, and often away from urban/sub-urban centers.

Transportation Network Reach: Transportation options reach only a portion of the locations and times that are needed for refugees to get to entry-level jobs; transportation networks and public transportation in general may be difficult to access or inaccessible in rural areas.

Cultural Barriers: Language and cultural barriers make it difficult for refugees to take advantage of those transportation options that do exist.

This project seeks to present recommendations for how transportation service providers, human services agencies, the resettlement community, and community partners can work to overcome the challenge of workplace location and barriers to transportation access or use by refugee populations. This resource guide presents a compilation of model programs around the country and points to potential strategies that would close the gap between existing transportation services and the level of use by refugee populations.

Literature Review

Parallel Programs

Our methodology included a literature review and identification of other municipalities' transportation access challenges and successes. As a part of this report, a broad-based search was performed to discern where there are other resettlement communities in the country that are facing similar challenges. We analyzed what these cities are currently doing as particularly for the portion of the population that cannot easily navigate public transit on their own. We realize that the language barriers add another level of complexity to any major problem for those who live in the United States, but thought that valid suggestions for how to best serve that population may generate more relevant consideration for this complex problem. The different programs organizations that we looked at are highlighted below (Table 1) and will be expounded upon in the paragraphs that follow.

-Table 1- Organizations researched for this project	
Creative Workforce Solutions, VT	Idaho Office for Refugees
Washington State Department of Transportation	Orange County California
Johnston County Indiana	International Rescue Committee,
Creative Workforce Solutions	American Public Transportation Association

There are a couple of municipalities that use a **transportation workshop model** method for delivery of transportation and commuting information. The most descriptive workshop explanation came from the *International Rescue Committee* (IRC), specifically out of their Washington state affiliation. The office notes that many refugees will require the use of public transit within the first days of arrival in a new area and use the workshops to coordinate the familiarization of refugees with the public transit system on the greater Seattle area. (International Rescue Committee, 2013):

- *Refugees are given a three part workshop, the first portion is classroom based followed by two fieldtrips that provide hands on experience with using public transportation*
- *The local public transportation agencies assist in providing the workshops*
- *In 2011, this program ran 4 times a year*

A **survey for clients and providers** was administered in *King County, Washington* (the county that encompasses Seattle) as part of a research study based around transportation of elders in the resettled refugee population. The goal was to identify the possible reasons that the elder population was hesitant to use public transportation. This study gives a breakdown of the specific areas that were highlighted as major problems for elderly refugees. The lessons learned from this study are as follows (King County Mobility Coalition, 2011):

- The main conclusion focused on three areas, 1) Lack of knowledge, 2) language barriers, 3) financial difficulties and 4) the importance of community organizations. These common themes prevent many refugee and immigrant elders in King County from using public transportation (King County Mobility Coalition, 2011, pp. 3-14) (and pp. 20-22)
- This study was funded through a grant from the National Center on Senior Transportation (King County Mobility Coalition, 2011, p. 2)
- A survey was conducted to validate what the main barriers for using public transportation were in their service area.

The King County Mobility Coalition was the organization that had oversight of the survey project. Their current work now clearly shows that they took the recommendations generated from the project to heart. Their website's opening page offers videos on how to navigate public transportation and they have guides that can be printed out as well (King County Washington, 2014).

The State of Idaho also has a **workshop based approach**, but they use this to reach out to prospective employers and transportation agencies to brief them on the needs of newly resettled Americans (Idaho Office For Refugees, 2014). The lessons learned from this model are:

- Prospective employers must understand that though refugees face the challenge of navigating public transportation, efforts are being managed to

assist them with this process. This should aim to lessen the “risk” employers face in regard to hiring individuals without reliable transportation.

- Public transit agencies must be briefed on the challenges that face refugees regarding public transportation.

Though these were the only areas that specifically dealt with transportation workshops for refugee populations, navigating and accessing transportation is not a burden faced only by the refugee population.

We found multiple organizations that have held some sort of transportation workshop, though some of them were not specifically designed for navigating the nuances of public transportation. It seems that the state of Washington and some counties in California have been the most specific in taking steps to best serve those who cannot easily access or navigate the public transit systems.

Washington State Department of Transportation has a plan in place (Washington’s Transportation Plan) which reads, “Identifying key issues for people without access to an automobile or the ability to drive who face increasing isolation and the inability to have access to basic necessities or activities enhances the quality of their lives.” (Washington State Department of Transportation, 2014). This program groups together many facets of the population that have trouble accessing public transportation.

Orange County California (Orange County Transportation Authority, 2014) and Johnson County Indiana (Access Johnson County, 2007-2014) both do this as well. Both the programs in California and Indiana are under similar program headings and, like Washington, both programs offer services to more than one portion of the population.

Another possible resource for either funding or information is the *American Public Transportation Association*. This is an overarching association for all public transit in the United States which hosts a “Sustainability & Public Transportation Workshop” annually which “features cutting-edge speakers and break-out groups presenting environmentally/energy efficient, economically sound and socially responsible developments and practices to advance public transportation’s role in sustainability (Association, 2014).” They also have many contacts listed over many different arenas of public transportation. The lessons learned from this portion of the literature review are:

- Have a breadth of area covered by your program in order to allow for the most funding sources possible
- Look to other areas in transportation to see if there are models that can be adapted for use in your program
- Inform not only the refugee population, but those in public transit and prospective employers of the goals of the program

Though this is just an overview of the recent literature that is available, it is apparent that this is a newly identified issue in the public transit world. The IRC and King County in Washington State have pioneered the transportation workshop method and may be good contacts to make to inquire about program implementation. We tried to also provide some organizations outside of the refugee resettlement project arena, but still in public transit, as this is the model that is trying to be incorporated through this new program.

Funding

The King County Immigrant and Refugee Elders Program was funded by a \$20,000 grant from the National Center on Senior Transportation. The National Center is administered by the Easter Seals in partnership with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. Cooperation for funding support of this center comes from the Federal Transit Administration and United States Administration on Aging. These funds helped to provide compensation for service providers putting on the workshops. This included a stipend of \$400 per workshop or community conversation gathering.

Funding for the workshops held in Sacramento came from the International Rescue Committee with support from the Sacramento Regional Transit group and the help of volunteers. The IRC has a specific program that provides grant funds for work related to strengthening organizations that assist refugee communities, SOAR. They provide technical assistance and support for organizations all over the country. This could be a potential avenue for support, more information is found on their website, www.ethniccommunities.org, which houses a resource library that provides information for programs regarding 'ethnic community-based organizations' through their SOAR program. Of importance to note is that the SOAR program currently supports the Association for Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), which has played an important role in Vermont's refugee program over the years.

Monitoring and Evaluation

For implementation of broad-based social programs like this, evaluation metrics and benchmarks are essential. In order to know if models are effective, monitoring of success in achieving certain outcomes is necessary. We attempted to discern which techniques were used to measure success in the cases we studied. We were unable to find formal evaluation measures in any case. Most of the information obtained was about the planning and implementation of these programs, and we were disappointed to not be able to access any information about outcomes.

For this reason, we believe that future research on this topic could be focused on initiating broader conversations with leaders and developers of any of the models studied, to find out whether time and resources had been dedicated to monitoring or evaluation.

Recommendations

Vermont's Response to Refugee Population Transportation Demand

→ Our recommendations are made in part from literature review information and the Transportation Coaching Meeting project proposal initiated by existing transportation partners.

First Steps

1. Contact some of the organizations that are mentioned in the paper to ascertain their best practices around the transportation workshop model
2. Survey the refugee population to figure out what their specific areas of concern are regarding transportation
3. Set a timeline with goals to help achieve the transportation workshop model within a given timeframe

Recommendation 1

Survey for Clients and Providers

Conduct Client and Provider Surveys

Potential topic areas for survey to include feedback on:

1. Traveling in the community
2. Barriers to service
3. Communication within refugee communities
4. Ideas and recommendations
5. Interest in a Refugee Advisory Council or other guiding body

Identify stakeholder list of local service providers and refugee community members (clients) within the Chittenden County region. Service providers would include those networks outside of transportation providers, included but not limited to social workers, health care providers, housing coalitions and support services. The King County group had a sample population size of about 130 people with about a 90/10 split in percentage of clients to service providers.

For enhanced success rates in surveying, this method could be run in conjunction with focus group sessions. Surveys should be short, simple and straightforward.

Identify partner agencies that work with refugee populations. King County partnered with 6 community-based organizations during their survey process. In Vermont, examples could include:

- Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program

- Association of Africans Living in Vermont
- Vermont Immigration and Asylum Advocates
- Connecting Cultures
- Vermont Department of Health’s Refugee Health Program
- Fletcher Free Library
- Economic Services
- Visiting Nurses Association
- Committee on Temporary Shelter
- Community Health Center

Surveys can also be administered at the end of each community conversation workshop if workshops are held as part of this program. See pp. 15 of the King County report to review full findings of their survey approach.

Recommendation 2

Community Conversations (or Workshops)

The community workshop’s primary goal is to learn from refugee populations and gather data on the greatest needs according to their perspective.

Step 1: To facilitate workshops, there should be a careful pre-selection process that identifies a set of community partners. An example would include partners that represent different services, such as transportation, housing, healthcare, job training and education. Working with a variety of community partners will bring service providers together in order to create a more cohesive message regarding transportation options available to refugee communities.

This scenario could include:

Transportation	Housing	Economic Development/ Job Training	Education	Healthcare/Emergency Services
CCRPC	COTS	CVOEO	Vermont Adult Learning	211
CATMA	Champlain Housing Trust	Economic Services	Area High Schools	JUMP
Local Motion	Burlington Housing Authority	VocRehab/VABIR	Sara Holbrook Center	Community Health Center/FAHC

Multiple workshops should be held; the King County program hosted 9 different workshops over the course of the five-week program starting in the spring/early

summer of 2011. The culminating event was a Transportation Summit held that July that drew together agencies serving refugee populations, transportation providers, planners, and funding sources to discuss new strategies and review feedback from the workshops and surveys. Vermont's plan could follow this scheduled approach by leading community workshops to be followed up by a summit to identify future action items and strategies for implementation. This process will pull stakeholders in throughout the course of a hypothetical five month period and start to build buy-in by refugee populations on the use of existing transportation resources.

Step 2:

Select locations and schedules for workshops or 'community conversations' (King County model).

Step 3:

Provide a facilitator's guide so that there is continuity in the various community conversation meetings. The guide should ask about 1) existing travel habits and schedules, 2) barriers to service or desire to use public transportation, 3) communication within the community, and 4) ideas and recommendations for improving public transportation use and options. The King County model also asked about interest in an advisory committee - Vermont could consider building an ad hoc committee as part of an action plan to maintain efforts moving forward, building this work into a more institutionalized model for sustained success.

The community conversations in the King County project were grant funded, and subsidized by generous in-kind donations and volunteer time. Partner organizations volunteered to host the workshops. The grant money provided a stipend of \$400 per focus group conversation, which was to cover translation costs, facility use and transportation costs for participants. 22 participants attended the 9 sessions over 5 weeks. Many of the New Americans who were invited to these conversations were already connected to partner organizations (service providers) in the community. If this model is piloted in Vermont, outreach would have to be strategically planned get a representative sample of participants.

Recommended Materials

- Wallet sized translation card with basic transportation-related phrases
- Municipality-wide and public transportation systems maps, translated.

Additional Comments

The community workshops could use either the full MobilityShare Transportation Resource Guide created by CarShare Vermont or an abridged version as material that is distributed to participants. Additionally, this could serve as a template in the community conversations and an outcome would be to collect feedback on ways to enhance or grow this type of resource guide to speak to an even greater audience among refugee populations. The community conversations should provide opportunity to learn more about the needs of refugee populations but also leave space for service providers like CCRPC and Local Motion to present and promote existing resources.

Recommendation 3

Transportation Mentors

In King County, providers followed a model that provided ‘Field Trips’ for refugees. This was part of the transportation workshops. Field trips allowed for refugees to actually experience the transportation system options and see how the process works from purchasing fare to reading maps to actually getting from point A to point B. This approach really helped to conceptualize the areas that are gone over during the workshop and helped to build confidence for the refugees who would be using public transportation in the King County region. These could be managed in Vermont with volunteers out of the workshops and then refugee volunteers who gained experience could then serve as mentors for new members of the community.

Additionally, we suggest looking at a model for a **Coordinated Case Management Linked with Vanpool**. This would promote the following benefits:

- **Case-by-case basis - ID individual need**
- **Individuals will be served for one year while receiving targeted transportation case management**
- **Vanpool will be paid for and staffed directly by New Americans while they are working on their plan**
- **More client centered and strengths based - doesn't lump everyone together because everyone needs a different approach**
- **Present cost-benefit analysis to stakeholders - impactful in regards to providing better access and consistency with employment opportunities/tasks**

Important notes for this recommendation:

- **Transportation to employment - requires employer buy-in**
- **At least one fluent English-speaker “point person” per shift will entice employers to take on larger groups**

Local Examples: What's Happening Now?

Action in Vermont

GoVermont

[GoVermont](#) is a resource directed at Vermonters who are interested in reducing the cost and environmental impact of driving. They offer:

1. [Carpool Matching](#)
2. [Vanpool Services](#)
3. [Bus Routes](#)

This program is run through the State of Vermont's Agency of Transportation

Contact: Q/A Hotline, at 802-685-7433

And in Chittenden County! [GoChittenden County](#)

Action in Vermont

MobilityShare

For people looking to join CarShare Vermont, [MobilityShare](#) offers financial assistance to low-income qualifying families and individuals. The program not only offers reduced rates but also provides a toolbox of resources and financial trainings. To verify eligibility regarding income and basic driving skills, you can review the program [requirements](#). Please also view MobilityShare program [rates](#).

Contact: Program Manager, Alicia Taylor, at 802-861-2340 or email alicia@carsharevt.org

Action in Vermont

Bike Recycle Vermont

Local Motion has piloted this program where donated bicycles are refurbished and then donated to low-income Vermonters. This program is a means for those who normally could not afford sustainable transportation to achieve that freedom. Specifically, "By expanding access to affordable, sustainable transportation, we work with our customers to improve lives and our community."

Contact: (802) 264-9687 or <http://www.localmotion.org/programs/bikerecycle>

Conclusions

Final Words

This problem is one that is complex in nature and was challenging to research. Throughout the course of our research into this problem it is of note to mention that there is not a lot of information available specifically on transportation workshop models for members of the resettled refugee programs around the United States of America. The information that has been provided should act as an overview or guide

to what we believe could be beneficial based on the information that we were able to find and synthesize.

Cost Benefit

The cost of running the programs we have outlined are minimal when compared to some of the benefits that would be gained by the New American population and by Chittenden County as a community. Providing better access and education regarding transportation will allow for greater access to jobs. Employers will see the direct benefit as workers are able to better attend job duties. Currently, the Burlington community offers a great deal of support for housing, health services, and other programs to help refugees become more independent from government subsidies. By further connecting refugees to job opportunities the cost burden on the city for providing these services will be decreased.

Additionally, this type of outreach is primarily focused on enhancing the public transportation infrastructure, shifting the focus away from the common notion of New Americans to simply be working towards car ownership.

Broadening Participation

We recognize the challenges around building capacity to promote programs such as those outlined in our recommendations. Community service providers are often understaffed, under funded and overwhelmed by needs from clients. We suggest thinking about ways to leverage existing programs or engagement that would connect well with something like a transportation workshop. In King County, they teamed refugee and elderly populations together to garner support to receive a grant from the National Center on Senior Transportation. The table on page 11 should serve as a resource guide for partnerships throughout the Chittenden County community. Identifying other stakeholder gatherings or partners that have existing programs that run similar meetings could be the perfect avenue for joining these efforts with other groups that are working to provide support for underserved populations in the region.

Final Suggestions for Future Action

- Look into an internship partnership with UVM to continue this project during the times that the Capstone Course is not in session
- Look for what the desired outcomes of the community partners are and how UVM and the MPA Program can help within that process
- Lay out a roadmap for the next semester of the MPA program and define goals/desired outcomes for the next Capstone class
- Possibly group this issue into a larger/broader area (i.e. the ACCESS programs that are mentioned above) to become eligible for the most sources of funding

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CarShare VT's MobilityShare Program: CarShare Vermont.

<http://www.carsharevt.org/how-it-works-mobilityshare/>

Go Vermont: <http://www.connectingcommuters.org/>

Go! Chittenden County: <http://gochittendencounty.org/>

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Additional Resources

Local Motion Concept Proposal: [Here is a link to the proposal as a Google doc](#)

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