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**COMMUNITY**  
**HEALTH**

Prevention, Access, Collaboration

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## Planning for Improvement of Rural Transportation in the *Foundation for Community Health's Service Area*

A Legislative Forum on the issue of transportation was convened on October 15, 2008, by the Foundation for Community Health in order to discuss the current situation and to explore possible improvements relevant to transportation in the Foundation's service area of north-eastern Dutchess and southeastern Columbia Counties in New York and northwestern Litchfield County in Connecticut. New York and Connecticut state and local officials, transportation providers and health and human service providers attended the forum, as well as board and staff members of the Foundation.

### BACKGROUND

Rural communities lack the infrastructure and economic strength of urban and suburban areas, most profoundly in the area of transportation. Low density population areas are not cost-effective for fixed route services and commercial taxi services. Complicating the issue is the difficulty and/or inability of larger municipalities, like Poughkeepsie, NY, and Torrington, CT, to provide transportation in surrounding rural areas where ridership is at a minimum and distances are greater. Often, the

responsibility for providing transportation falls to focused citizen groups, non-profit organizations and government mandated services that are restricted to providing transportation for medical appointments.

The population diversity of Columbia and Dutchess counties in New York and Litchfield County in Connecticut is changing with sharp increases in the number of senior citizens (projected to double by 2030) and low-income families, including immi-

### Available Transportation Services

Fixed Route · Demand Response · Non-profit Organizations  
Medicaid · Taxi (Commercial)

**FIXED ROUTE** There is no fixed route transportation available to service communities in Columbia and Litchfield counties. The LOOP bus in Dutchess County offers four routes that variously serve Pawling, Millbrook, Wassaic, Dover, Amenia, Pine Plains and Millerton. All routes are contained within Dutchess County and pick-up and drop-off is made at a central location in each of the towns. As of this writing, there is a distinct possibility the LOOP bus will be eliminated from the Route 22 corridor due to budget concerns.

**DEMAND RESPONSE** Dial-A-Ride is available in most Litchfield County communities, but not in Dutchess or Columbia counties. As of this writing, the last service available in Dover only has been discontinued. Dial-A-Ride provides curb-to-curb service on a limited schedule for citizens 60+ or anyone physically or mentally handicapped. Advance reservations must be made between 24 hours to three days prior to the needed service.

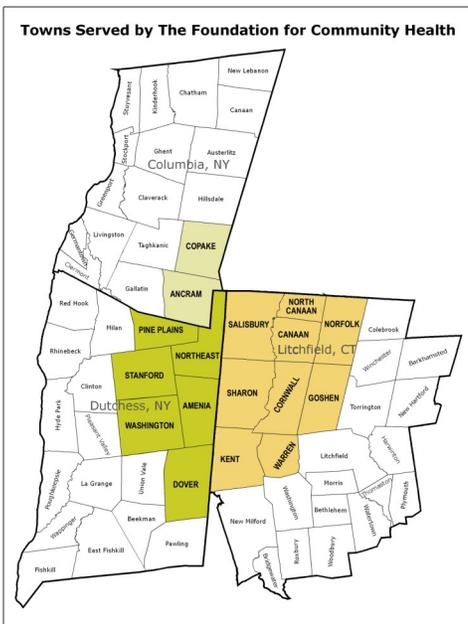
**NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** A number of non-profit and volunteer organizations offer rides to medical appointments and other needs such as, grocery shopping, social events and family visits. But most are stretched to capacity, like North East Community Center. They offer the Care Car program to seniors in Millerton, Pine Plains, Amenia, Dover and Wassaic. Rides are provided free-of-charge to medical appointments, grocery shopping or social events. The program is limited to two vehicles that are in daily use. Geer Adult Day Care in Canaan, CT, provides transportation in northwestern CT for medical appointments (with advance reservations) and Thursday-Saturday transportation to social events.

**MEDICAID** provides patients with transportation to medical appointments through Logisticare in CT and Department of Social Services in New York. Advance reservations are required.

**TAXI** Services are limited to private companies based in Dover and Pawling in NY and Torrington in CT.

grants from Latin America. The increased population in the groups that are most in need of transportation services is straining the current system.

Currently more than 15 organizations provide transportation ranging from fixed route to curb-to-curb service in the 17 towns served by the Foundation for Community Health, but there is no clearinghouse of information on these services. Without a central resource that provides information on the transportation options offered in the FCH's service area, many potential customers are unaware of their options and the guidelines that must be followed to



take advantage of a service, like the reservation requirement for using curb-to-curb services such as Dial-A-Ride and Logisticare.

Transportation is a long-time and ongoing issue of concern in this community and as such requires vigilance and periodic review. In order to create an effective

transportation system, there must also be collaboration and cooperation from stakeholders including local government, non-profit organizations and focused community groups.

### Barriers

- In the best scenario, it takes 18 months to get a rural transportation system up and running. This is assuming the area to be served exists in one political district. The geography of FCH's service area is 17 towns in three counties in two states.
- More than 15 organizations provide transportation

services in these communities, making coordination and cooperation among these organizations complex.

- The random mix of the wealthy and those in need in rural areas makes "mapping" efficient routes and schedules a difficult task.
- Those who could be served by a transportation system may not want to be identified because they fear being seen as "needy".
- Economic efficiency is difficult to achieve due to the limited size of the consumer base and large geographic area.
- Funding for rural transportation systems is limited and private donations decrease with the current downturn in the economy.
- State and local regulations make it difficult to pool resources.

### Next Steps (Long Term)

- Conduct a survey to identify potential consumers by need and geographic location.
- Investigate the ability of United Way's 211 help and crisis telephone system to assist in coordinating and facilitating a transportation system.
- Determine licensing and insurance requirements.
- Inventory successful transportation models and assess strengths and weaknesses of their strategies.
- Include the Dutchess County Office of Aging (NYS) and Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging, Inc. as stakeholders.
- Identify funding sources mandated to provide transportation.
- Explore pooling options with legislators and regulators to improve efficiency.

### Next Steps (Short Term)

- Support ongoing communication among stakeholders including state and local government officials, transportation providers, health and human service providers and potential riders.
- Review successful transportation models and match them to the needs and the current structure of transportation systems in the FCH service area.

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*The Foundation for Community Health is a non-profit public charity dedicated to improving the health of the people living in its community through funding, advocacy, outreach and collaboration.*

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