

## **SUMMARY OF EFFICIENCY AND REGIONALIZATION GRANT PROPOSAL**

The purpose of the Efficiency and Regionalization (E&R) competitive grant program is to provide financial support for governmental entities interested in implementing regionalization and other efficiency initiatives that allow for long-term local government sustainability. The grant program will be administered by the Division of Local Services. To be submitted by MAPC, 2.15.19

**Proposed Project and Purpose of Grant: The proposed project entails the creation and/or improvement of age/dementia friendly transportation services to (1) health resources and (2) community amenities that support the well-being and reduce the isolation of seniors, people with disability (physical, cognitive, emotional, etc.), and financially vulnerable residents.**

This application (**Making the Connections**) seeks funds for an efficiency and regionalization pilot to address a particular set of high-priority transportation needs in several rural towns in the MAGIC region (Bolton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Stow, Sudbury, and Westford). The initiative will utilize taxi, ride-hailing, and other private as well as public operators of available rolling stock (e.g., the region's CoA vehicles) to meet unmet weekday transportation demands and also serve weekend and after-hour needs as far as possible. Data and lessons learned from the pilot will be used to determine how a larger system that closes the remaining transportation gaps can be designed.

The proposed project has been developed by several government agencies and organizations working together to evaluate and find solutions to gaps in transit services, particularly for seniors, those with disabilities, and financially vulnerable residents.

**Project Objectives:** This project is designed to achieve two objectives. First, the pilot will increase transportation options for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and financially vulnerable residents by addressing specific gaps in existing rural transit services. Such options will cross municipal and regional boundaries, creating more effective and efficient services. Second, by means of this pilot, municipalities will be able to collect data on trip needs that are currently lacking. Such data can then help determine where there is enough demand to warrant investments in new technologies and infrastructure, to create more effective, publicly operated on-demand transit services (sometimes known as microtransit). The data from this pilot will shape a future initiative (scale and costs to be determined) that expands the geographic reach of the ride-hailing and taxi partnerships and provides efficient and effective on-demand public transit system.

We have chosen to focus (1) on seniors, people with disability, and financially vulnerable residents in the rural towns; and (2) on providing transportation to health resources and community amenities, because the needs are urgent. Data from a recently completed assessment in the town of Sudbury revealed the following:

- 42% of residents with a participation limitation reported they “had missed, canceled, or rescheduled a medical appointment due to lack of transportation.”
- More than a third of residents who are not financially secure are not satisfied with their “ability to get where they want to go.”
- Nearly half of residents 60+ are not satisfied with their “ability to get where they want to go.”
- 29% of those who are not financially secure do not have nearby support.
- 40% of respondents with participation limitations do not know anyone living within 30 minutes on whom they can rely for help when needed.

We believe that other communities face similar issues. In the MAGIC region more generally, between 11% and 27% of residents are 65 years of age or older; in 2030, this will jump to 14% to 36%. Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) report the top unmet need is transportation for medical, social, recreational, and other requirements. Data on residents with disabilities are assumed to map CDC data: (1) 60% of adults 65 years and older report at least one basic action difficulty or complex activity limitation; (2) about 15% of adults report hearing trouble; and (3) about 9% of adults report vision trouble. Cognitive disability among seniors in the region averages 15%, and several towns are characterized as “vulnerable” according to CDC’s Social Vulnerability indices for disability and transportation.

Although rural towns that are part of this project have some form of dial-a-ride transportation services for seniors and individuals with disabilities, many of these services cannot meet all of the trip needs – there are limits on the number of vehicle hours available, and the distances the vehicles can travel. These limits help perpetuate the problems noted above – social isolation, missed medical appointments, and lack of access to employment opportunities that create financial opportunity. Creating a pilot project with ride-hailing and taxis is a lower cost and less capital intensive way to meet these unmet transportation needs and collect data to develop a more sustainable transit system.

**Benefits:** The primary benefits of this initiative are (1) creation of new transportation services and (2) collection of vital data on new and continuing customers. We expect efficiencies and enhanced service delivery (e.g., freeing up CoA vans for social transport by providing rides to health services via ride-hailing vehicles). Cost savings should be experienced by regional healthcare providers, in the form of more effective healthcare utilization (e.g., fewer missed appointments, seeking care in a timely manner thus reducing emergency unit utilization, etc.). Cost-savings should be experienced by residents in the form of access to local government services that might not otherwise be attainable (e.g., transport to benefit offices, food pantries, counseling, etc.). Lack of access to these can result in ill-afforded personal outlay and, tradeoffs (food vs. rent) that can compromise health and the ability to work. Other benefits will be identified in the ongoing data collection efforts and inform the continuous quality improvement processes.