

Bridging Public Transportation Gaps: Transportation Focus Group Summary Report

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Part I.

Introduction

In October 2006, at the Community Action Network (CAN) annual retreat, members identified transportation as a cross cutting health and human service issue. As a result, CAN decided to survey the Health and Human Service providers in the Capital Area of Texas to define current transportation barriers and gaps for their organizations and clients. To begin the process, CAN scanned the transportation provider community and identified the key public transportation focused organizations. Next, CAN facilitated eight focus groups with more than 80 participants and over 35 organizations represented. In the following analysis, an outline of the process and methodology of facilitating the focus groups will be defined; key themes that represent barriers to transportation and existing gaps in the transit system will be identified; possible solutions, opportunities and next steps will be given, and a transportation information guide will be provided.

Process and Methodology

It was determined that the best way to obtain quality, specific and detailed information about the existing barriers to transportation would be through a medium of open dialogue with small to large focus groups. The focus groups were composed of various Health and Humans Service providers who represented a vast range of organizations. Most of the groups that participated in the focus groups were part of the Community Action Network's supported Issue Areas such as Aging Services, Disaster Response, Basic Needs, Behavioral Health, Education, Developmental Disabilities and Homelessness.

Structure of Questions and Meetings

To ensure, that the information obtained from each focus group was consistent with the objectives, CAN created five focused and specific questions that would be appropriate in both a small and large focus group setting.

Questions:

1. What specific impacts does transportation have on your daily operations?
2. What are your clients' specific transportation needs?
3. What are your clients' and your organizations' specific transportation barriers?
4. What are possible solutions?
5. What type of structure should be implemented to make sure this dialogue continues?

Compiling the Information

Once all of the focus groups were completed the key re-occurring themes from each question were identified. Next the recommendations for possible solutions were organized into four overarching categories, including:

(.1) Resources and Collaboration, (2.) Policy, (3.) Education and Training (4.) Resources.

Impacts on Daily Operations

Focus group participants were asked to identify how transportation relates to the participants' daily operations. The eight focus groups identified:

- Increase in repair and maintenance costs on service vehicles constraining agency budgets.
- Increase in no show and late for appointment rates due to transportation challenges.
- Rising transportation costs causing increased demand for bus fares and taxi vouchers.
- Increase in transportation costs such as insurance and gas, leading to decrease in volunteers.
- Lack of funding reimbursement for transportation services.
- Health and Human service staff are often not allowed to transport clients, for liability reasons.
- Due to lower housing costs, increase in clients moving to rural regions without access to community services.

Examples of Impact:

- 1. Healthcare providers have to keep discharge patients longer than usual because of transportation challenges.**
- 2. Healthcare and Mental Health service providers offices often not in same locations as pharmacy which sometimes results in clients not receiving or delaying medication as they cannot find transportation to the pharmacy.**
- 3. Transportation challenges causes emotional and physical stress on both service providers and clients.**
- 4. As a result of rising gas prices, some Social Services providers that use their own cars will try to combine visits, which can reduce the time allotted to clients and the quality of service provided.**

Transportation Gaps and Barriers

The focus groups identified the following specific needs and transportation barriers within the existing public transportation system:

- Limited to no transit services outside of Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CMTA) including Pflugerville, Manor, Del Valle and Kyle.
- Special populations such as the elderly and people living with disabilities lack the physical ability to cope with the fixed route transit system.
- Lack of infrastructure such as ADA compliant sidewalks and shaded bus stops.
- Affordable housing is located where there are no fixed bus routes.

- Lack of flexibility and efficiency within the existing transit system. Workers on evening/night shifts have very few transit options.
- Personal vehicle maintenance is very expensive and time consuming. Many clients have unreliable vehicles.
- Challenges with the Special Transit System
 1. Clients who only have cell phones may be on hold for extended periods of time.
 2. Lack of consistency in delivery and more extensive qualifying requirements reducing numbers of people eligible.
- Texas Department of Transportation not willing to put in sidewalk infrastructure within the capital improvement jurisdiction.
- Lack of education for the youth on how to utilize the fixed route bus system.
- Language and literacy barriers diminish access to transportation, especially for people who speak African and Asian languages.

Examples of Impact:

- 1. Disadvantaged youth can't stay after school to participate in after-school activities because they don't have the transportation to get home.**
- 2. Special populations such as the elderly and people living with disabilities who rely on STS have limited trip options that often don't support emergency appointments or quality of life destinations.**

Solutions/Opportunities

The focus group participants were asked to define possible solutions and opportunities for collaborative efforts. Each focus group identified various solutions and possible opportunities, which are arranged under the following four specific categories:

1. Education/Training

- Establish programs to educate clients on how to perform car repairs and route maintenance on vehicles.
- Educate and empower clients to get involved and have a voice at transportation meetings.
- Provide more transportation educational resources for service providers and their clients.
- Increase access to City of Austin sidewalk inventory information in Pedestrian/Bike Plan.
- Increase community awareness of transportation options.

2. Policy

- Changes to transportation legislation, including additional funding for Health and Human Service providers to be able to provide transportation.
- Amend current American Disabilities Act to require Special Transit or Paratransit services beyond the taxing areas.
- Amend current legal or liability policies to allow social service providers to transport clients, if there are extenuating circumstance.

3. Resources/Collaboration

- Create partnerships among organizations to leverage resources.
- Increase funding assistance in addressing volunteerism at a community level.
- Explore centralized transportation coordinator, phone system or website.
- Coordinate car donation and work with Austin Car Share to explore car sharing at low-income sites.
- Increase grant funding for Health and Human Service providers and their volunteers that transport clients.
- Explore shared vehicle maintenance and repair facility for agencies and clients.
- Engage and partner with employers and neighborhood associations around this issue.
- Encourage Taxi Company's to get more involved in providing services.
- Seek funding from Texas Department of Transportation for maintenance service vehicle and bus passes.

4. Systemic

- Examine public transportation best practices in other cities, such as in New York, Washington D.C, Denver, etc.
- Explore reduced fare bus passes, based on financial need.
- Increase planning focused on special populations and their location to community services and transit.
- Increase reliability, frequency and flexibility of Special Transit System.

Next Steps: At the conclusion of each session the focus groups were asked whether they thought there should be an on-going conversation between Health and Human Service providers and public transportation providers. They responded affirmatively. All of the focus groups suggested that a list serve and quarterly meetings with the Regional Transit Coordination Committee would be vital to sustaining this dialogue.

Conclusion: According to the participants in all eight of CAN's transportation focus groups, community awareness and ownership of the existing transportation challenges within the Capital Area are vital to bridging the gaps in the public transportation system. It is extremely important that this dialogue between social service providers and transportation providers is continued and that the lives of the special populations mentioned in this report are not overlooked in planning and public transportation policies. In addition, it is important that Health and Human Service providers continue to work collaboratively together to help their clients overcome the transportation challenges identified in this report.

Part II.

Introduction

The following brief overview of state, regional, local, authoritative, and other transportation related organizations is provided by the Community Action Network (CAN). This document provides the opportunity to view information on most of the transportation related organizations in Central Texas and obtain a brief analysis of each group’s goals and role in regional or local planning. Transportation organizations with the ability to plan and implement capital improvements are listed, contact information on most of the groups is provided, and a matrix of key background facts on each organization is attached.

State, Regional, Local and Authoritative Organizations

Texas Department of Transportation, Austin District: is a state agency that’s authorized to plan, design, build, operate, and maintain for all state and federally owned highways, interstates, roads, railroads, and airports in Central Texas. To achieve the following goals:

- Increasing competition within transportation services to help lower costs
- Requiring transportation service providers to be customer service oriented
- Utilizing all financial leveraging techniques to construct transportation projects

TXDOT Austin District’s utilizes the following operational strategic concepts; *plan it, build it, maintain it, use it, and manage it* to allocate state and federal funding for maintenance and new construction projects. This organization creates 5 year Statewide Preservation Programs (SPP) and Statewide Mobility Programs (SMP), which prioritize projects and the level of federal and state funding. The 2007 SPP Budget is approximately \$115, 300,382 and the SMP budget is about \$274,344,319.

Recent projects include:

- 2007 Unified Transportation Program: Statewide Mobility Program & Statewide Preservation Program
- Major Investment Studies and feasibility studies for High Occupancy Volume (HOV) lanes on Loop 1 and US 183

Contact Dept	Contact Number & Email	Mailing Address
General Information: Public Affairs, John Hurt	(512) 832-7380 ausinfo@dot.state.tx.us	P.O. Drawer 15426 Austin, Texas 78761-5426

Web Site: <https://www.dot.state.tx.us/AUS/>

Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO): is a federally required agency that *is delegated the authority of long range, and cooperative transportation planning in Hays, Williamson, and Travis counties*. CAMPO’s decision and policy making is overseen by its Transportation Policy Board, which consists of elected, state, county and local officials, and extensive public participation efforts. CAMPO adopts a federally required Unified Planning

Work Program, which provides specific directions to guide CAMPO during the planning process, a Long Range Transportation Plan, and a Short Range Program. In order for a project to receive federal funding, it must be included in CAMPO's Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.

Recent projects include:

- 2035 Regional Growth Concept
- Mobility 2030 Plan

Contact	Contact Number & Email	Mailing Address
General Information: Elaine Diaz, Administrative Specialist	(512) 974-2275 campo@campotexas.org	P. O. Box 1088 Austin, Texas 78767

Web Site: <http://www.campotexas.org/>

Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA): is a local agency *created to improve and enhance the transportation network in Travis and Williamson county*. To achieve its mission, the CTRMA has focused initially on toll roads as a vital instrument in reducing congestion and improving the quality of life in Central Texas. This organization works closely with CAMPO and TXDOT Austin District, to fund, develop, manage, and maintain the new toll roads.

Recent project:

- Management of the construction of US183A toll road.

Contact	Contact Number & Email	Mailing Address
Steve Pustelnyk, Director of Communications	(512) 996-9778 spustelnyk@ctrma.org	301 Congress Avenue, Suite 650 Austin, TX 78701

Web Site: <http://www.ctrma.org/>

Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Cap Metro): is a transportation agency in Central Texas, which *is authorized to provide bus, Paratransit, and commuter rail service to Travis and Williamson counties urbanized areas*. To achieve its goals of providing accessibility, mobility, and improving air quality, Capital Metro provides bus routes schedules that have a relatively high frequency and connects customers to any destination within the service area. This organization is funded with the earmarking of the 1% sales tax, bus fares, and federal funds.

Recent project:

- All Systems Go: Commuter Rail and MetroRapid Services.

Contact	Contact Number & Email	Mailing Address
Dianne Mendoza, VP of Community Relations	(512) 389-7475 dianne.mendoza@capmetro.org	2910 East 5th Street Austin, TX 78702

Web Site: <http://www.capmetro.org/>

Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS): is an agency, which has been *mandated the authority to provide public transit services to all rural areas in the Central Texas region.* To achieve its main goal of providing a tailored transit system to its customers, CARTS states that it provides excellent customer service and user-friendly web resources. CARTS services the following counties and their rural communities: Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Travis, and Williamson. In addition, CARTS is funding with federal funds and fares.

Recent project:

- Provide transit services to more than 131 rural communities.

Contact	Contact Number	Mailing Address
Customer Service	(512) 481-1011	PO Box 6050 Austin, TX 78762

Web Site: <http://ridecarts.com/>

Austin-San Antonio Inter-Municipal Commuter Rail District: is an organization that has been *authorized to plan, develop, and manage the Austin San Antonio Inter-Municipal Commuter Rail system.* To achieve its goals of improved quality of life, mobility, and connectivity between regions, the Austin-San Antonio Inter-Municipal Commuter Rail District's staff works extensively with surrounding communities to develop Feasibility Studies, Station Area Plans and Location and Economic Impact Studies.

Recent projects:

- Economic Impact Analysis studies for the City of Austin and San Antonio
- Relocation of Freight Line Fund

Contact	Contact Number	Mailing Address
General Information	(512) 558-7360	P.O. Box 1618 San Marcos, Texas 78667

Web Site: <http://asarail.org/>

Hill Country Transit District (HOP): is a political subdivision of the State of Texas, which is authorized to *provide public transit services in the nine counties that make up the Hill Country and other urbanized regions such as Killeen and parts of Temple, TX.* To achieve their goals of accessibility, economic stability, and improved quality of life, the HOP states that they provide dependable routes, ADA compliant Paratransit services and a safe transportation network.

Recent project:

- Provide transit services to urbanized areas in Killeen, Copperas Cove, and Harker Heights

Contact	Contact Number	Mailing Address
Administrative Services: Carol Warlick, General Manager	(325) 372-HOPP (4677)	P.O. Box 217 2905 West Wallace San Saba, Texas 76877

Web Site: www.takethehop.com

City of Austin Public Works, Transportation Division: is a subdivision of the City of Austin that is responsible for constructing, managing, and maintaining city owned roads, sidewalks, and right of ways. To achieve its *goals of sustainability, creating pedestrian and bicycle friendly environments, and mobility*, this department works closely with neighborhoods to determine their needs, provides services based on level of priority, and then allocates funding from their budget to provide maintenance and construction services.

Recent projects:

- Oltorf Road Utility Improvement and Reconstruction Project
- Cesar Chavez Two Way Road Construction

Contact	Contact Number & Email	Mailing Address
Office of the Director of Public Works	(512) 974-7065 public.works@ci.austin.tx.us.	P.O. Box 1618 San Marcos, Texas 78667

Web Site: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/publicworks/>

Capital Area Planning Council of Governments (CAPCOG): is a voluntary planning commission and association formed under state law that is guided by members of cities, counties, and special districts within the Central Texas region. *This commission's primary function is to serve the Central Texas region as an Advocate, and assist various levels of governments in planning and coordinating.* In addition, CAPCOG serves as the Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CARTPO) in the counties of Bastrop, Blanco, Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Llano, Travis and Williamson. The CAPCOG is primarily funded through local membership dues and state grants.

Recent projects:

- Providing Geospatial Data and Information Clearinghouse for the public
- Working extensively with the Regional Transit Coordination Committee

Contact	Contact Number & Email	Mailing Address
Sean Moran, Director for the Regional Development	(512) 916-6000	6800 Burleson Rd, Bldg. 310, Ste 165, Austin, TX 78744

Web Site: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/publicworks/>

Additional Organization Contact Info:

Organization/Group Name	Phone No.	Address	Contact Dept/Name/Email	Website
Aging Services Council:	(512) 451-4611	3710 Cedar Street, Box 2, Austin, TX 78705	Joyce Lauck, Austin Groups for the Elderly	http://www.agingservicescouncil.org/
Austin Cycling Association	(512) 478-5221	P.O. Box 5993, Austin, TX 78763	Suzy Truxillo, Membership	http://www.austincycling.org/
Bicycle Advocacy Council	(512) 453-0438	N/A	Mike Librik, Public Outreach outreach@urbancycling.com	http://urbancycling.com/pol/
Bicycle Austin	N/A	N/A	N/A	http://bicycleaustin.info/index.html
Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization	(512) 916-6184	6800 Burleson Rd, Bldg 310, Ste 165, Austin, TX 78744	Chris Ramser, Community Planner,	http://www.capcog.org/crd/transportation/cartpo/
Capital Area Transportation Coalition	(512) 587-6625	N/A	info@catransco.org	http://www.catransco.org
CarShare	(512) 448-4477	4032 S. Lamar, Ste 500 Austin, TX 78704	Elliot McFadden, Executive Director info@austincarshare.org	http://www.austincarshare.org/
City of Georgetown, Utility Systems, Transportation Services,	(512) 930-2576	300 Industrial Avenue Georgetown, TX 78626	Administration Gus@georgetown.tx.org	http://www.georgetown.org/departments/gus/transportation/
City of Round Rock, Transportation Services Dept	(512) 218-5562	301 W Bagdad St, Suite 250 Round Rock, TX 78664	Lilly Cardenas	http://www.roundrocktxas.gov/home/index.asp?page=341
City of San Marcos, Public Works, Transportation Division	(512) 393-8036	630 East Hopkins San Marcos, TX 78666	Richard Mendoza PW_Info@ci.san-marcos.tx.su	http://www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/publicworks/index.html
Commute Solutions	(512) 974-2529	P.O. Box 1088 Austin, TX 78767	Maria Caminos, CAMPO maria.caminos@campotexas.org	http://www.commutesolutions.com
Envision Central Texas	(512) 916-6037	P.O. 17848, Austin, TX 78744	General Information	http://www.envisioncentraltexas.org/
Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce Take on Traffic	(512) 478-9383	210 Barton Springs, Ste 400 Austin, TX 78704	Sandy Hentges, Senior Vice President Regional Infrastructure and Development	http://www.takeontraffic.com
Just Transportation Alliances	(512) 451-2634	P.O. Box 10472, Austin, TX 78766	info@justtransportation.org	http://www.justtransportation.org/
Regional Planning and Transportation Study Group	(979) 845-1713	3135 TAMU College Station, TX 77843	Texas Transportation Institute	http://www.regionalserviceplanning.org/
Texas Bicycle Coalition	(512) 476-7433	P.O. Box 1121, Austin TX 78767	mail@biketexas.org	http://www.biketexas.org/
Texas State University Tram	(512) 245-2585	601 University Dr, San Marcos, TX 78666	Auxillary Services	http://www.aux-srvcs.txstate.edu/tram.htm
Texas Toll Party	N/A	N/A	N/A	www.austintollparty.com
Travis County, Transportation and Natural Resources	(512) 854-9383	411 W 13 th St., 11 Floor Austin, TX 78701	Steve Manilla, P.E.	http://www.co.travis.tx.us/tnr/default.asp
WALK Austin	(512) 451-9335	P.O. Box 7553, Austin, TX 78713	Marilyn Rogers, Public Information snm@io.com	http://www.io.com/~snm/walk/

*Contact Info from the websites provided, Community Action Network

List of Organizations that Participated in Focus Groups

211/United Way
Advocacy, Inc.
American Cancer Society
Arc of the Capital Area
Austin Area Urban League
Austin Independent School District
Austin Travis County MHMR
Austin Travis County MHMR – A New Entry
Basic Needs Coalition and Members
Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Caritas of Austin
Catholic Charities
Center for Social Work Research – UT
City of Austin ADA Coordinator
City of Austin Health and Human Services Department
City of Austin Health Department
City of Austin Medical Director
Developmental Disabilities Planning Partnership
Faith-In-Action Caregivers
Family Eldercare
FEMA Volunteer Agency
Goodwill Industries of Central TX
Homeless Task Force/Ending Community Homelessness Organization
Indigent Care Collaboration
Long Term Recovery
Mayor’s Committee for People Living With Disabilities and Members
People’s Community Clinic
Salvation Army
Seton Health Care
St. David’s Community Health Foundation
Texas Interagency/Interfaith Disaster Response (TIDR)
Travis County Criminal Justice Planning
Travis County Health & Human Services & Veteran Services
Travis County Healthcare District
UT School of Social Work

Transportation Gaps/Barriers

- ✓ Limited to no transit services outside of CTMA jurisdiction (i.e. Pflugerville, Manor, Del Valle, Kyle, etc.).
- ✓ Special populations such as the elderly and people living with disabilities lack the physical ability to cope with the fixed route transit system.
- ✓ Lack of infrastructure such as ADA compliant sidewalks and shaded bus stops.
- ✓ Affordable housing is located where there are no fixed bus routes.
- ✓ Lack of flexibility and efficiency within the existing transit system. Workers on evening/night shifts have very few transit options.
- ✓ Personal vehicle maintenance is very expensive and time consuming. Many clients have unreliable vehicles.
- ✓ Challenges with the Special Transit System
 1. Clients who only have cell phones may be on hold for extended periods of time.
 2. Lack of consistency in delivery and more extensive qualifying requirements reducing numbers of people eligible.
- ✓ Lack of education for the youth on how to utilize the fixed route bus system.
- ✓ Language and literacy barriers (esp. Asian or African languages) diminishes access.

Examples:

1. Disadvantaged youth can't stay after school to participate in after-school activities because they don't have the transportation to get home.
2. Special populations such as the elderly and people living with disabilities who rely on STS have limited trip options that often don't support emergency appointments or quality of life destinations.

Solutions/Opportunities

Education/Training

1. Establish programs to educate clients on how to perform repairs/maintenance on cars.
2. Educate and empower clients to get involved and have a voice at transportation planning meetings.
3. Provide more transportation educational resources for service providers and their clients.
4. Increase access to City of Austin Pedestrian/Bike Plan.
5. Increase community awareness around transportation options.

Policy

1. Changes to transportation legislation, including additional funding for health and human service providers.
2. Change ADA legislature to require Paratransit or special transit service to serve beyond taxing areas.

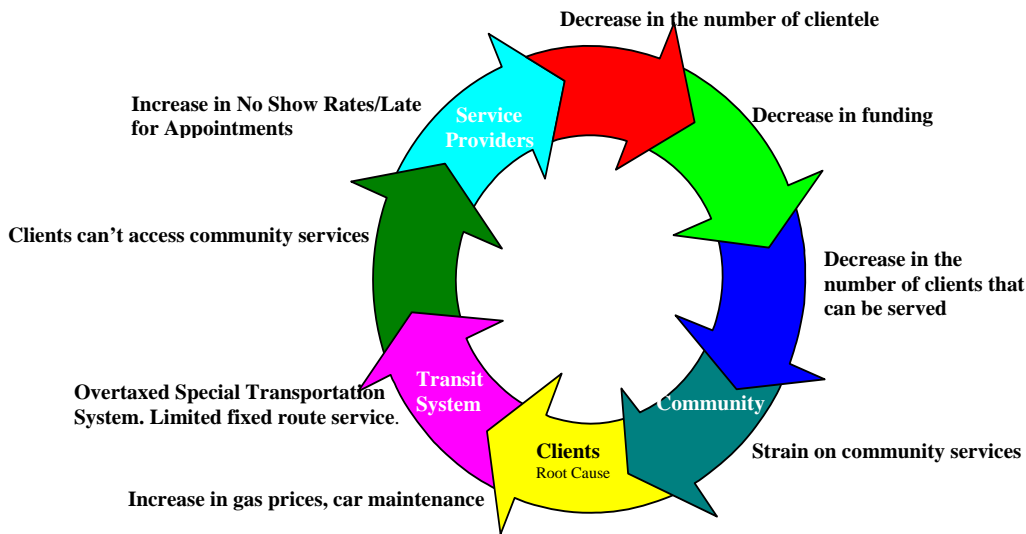
Resources/Collaboration

1. Increase funding for Health and Human Service providers that are transporting clients.
2. Create Partnerships among organizations to leverage resources.
3. Explore centralized transportation coordinator, phone line, or web site.
4. Coordinate car donation program and work with Austin Car Share to explore car sharing at low-income sites.
5. Explore shared van/car maintenance and repair for agencies and clients.

Systemic

1. Examine public transportation best practices in other cities (i.e. NY, Washington D.C., Denver, etc.)
2. Explore reduced fare bus passes, based on need.
3. Increase planning focused on special populations and identify their location to community services and transit.

Highlights: Transportation Gaps & Barriers Focus Groups



Focus Group #7: General Interest

“We notice that when our clients request services from our food pantry [in Del Valle], because they are walking and don’t have transportation, they will take only 1 bag of food, when they are eligible for 4 because they can’t bear the heavy load.”

-Norma Gutierrez
Travis County H&HS

Transportation Impact on Daily Operations:

- ✓ Increased gas and mileage reimbursement negatively impacting budget.
- ✓ Increase in repair and maintenance costs on service vehicles constraining budget.
- ✓ Increase in no show and late for appointment rates due to transportation challenges.
- ✓ Decreased access to bus passes, causing increasing costs for bus passes and taxi vouchers.
- ✓ Increase in transportation costs (i.e. insurance and gas) leads to decreases in volunteers.
- ✓ Lack of funding reimbursement for transportation services.
- ✓ Some social services provide legally required to not transport clients.
- ✓ Increase in clients living in rural or out of Capital Metro region without access to transportation.
- ✓ Lack of means to transport clients to food banks.

Examples:

1. Healthcare providers have to keep discharge patients longer than usual because of transportation challenges.
2. Healthcare and Mental Health service providers offices not in same locations as pharmacy which sometimes results in clients not receiving medication as they cannot find transportation.
3. Transportation challenges causes stress on service providers and clients.
4. As a result of rising gas prices, some Social Services providers that use their own cars will try to combine visits, which can reduce the quality of service provided.