



**2013 update  
Somerset County  
Coordinated Public Transit- Human Services Plan**

**Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders**

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## Introduction

The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access & Mobility and New Jersey Transit ((NJT) requires that all 21 counties and any agencies that receive funding (5310, Casino Revenue, TANF, etc.) for transportation be a part of a “Coordinated Plan” and to satisfy federal and state planning requirements the plan must be updated every five (5) years.

This plan provides for an update to the 2007 plan previously submitted. Only relevant data which has changed will be included here. We held our stakeholder meeting on November 19, 2013 to obtain input into this plan update.

## Somerset County Demographics and Transportation Services

The development of the coordinated transportation plan for the County of Somerset required that prior documentation and current data sources be examined to assist in updating the plan.

The data sources requiring consideration included the 2010 census and age cohort data for the county. This data provides a wealth of information on the location of senior citizens in the county.

The US Census reported the 2010 county population at 324,893 people. Of this population, 40,989 are over age 65. Somerset County continues to be predominately suburban in nature, although there are some towns with more dense pockets of population. Given that the population is predominately dispersed in a suburban growth pattern there is very little public transportation service available or economically feasible. The most densely populated communities are North Plainfield, Bound Brook, South Bound Brook, Manville, Somerville and Raritan. These are some of the oldest developed communities in the county and most are served by heavy rail and/or public bus routes enabling at least some transportation option other than the passenger car.

Franklin Township, Bridgewater Township and Hillsborough Township together comprise approximately 45% of the County’s population base. The county has recognized this concentration of population and has structured 10 public fixed route buses to service these areas. Franklin Township is served by the DASH and CAT buses connecting residents and businesses and the County College in a north and south direction. Hillsborough and Bridgewater Townships are served by the SCOOT bus which also provides north south transportation connecting residents and businesses. CAT also serves the communities of Bedminster, Raritan, Bridgewater and

Branchburg. CAT, DASH and SCOOT buses operate Monday to Friday. Ridership on these routes has shown substantial increases.

New Jersey Transit operates both heavy rail and limited public bus service within Somerset County. The Raritan Valley line passes through the heart of the county providing east-west service into Newark with connecting service to New York. The Gladstone Branch of the Morris and Essex line provides east-west service to Newark as well. The Gladstone Branch operates in the northern section of the county and provides access in an east-west direction. This rail service operates seven days per week with more frequent service provided during the peak commuter times. New Jersey Transit also operates six bus lines predominantly serving the central east west transportation corridors (Route 22 and 78). The only NJ Transit bus serving a north-south orientation is the 605 which provides service to Montgomery Township and then proceeds south to Mercer County.

### Service Needs and Opportunities

Somerset County has studied the availability of transportation options in the area for many years. There are several prior studies that were examined in consideration of the present study.

### Evening and Weekend Service

All of the prior studies as well as the current request indicate a need for evening and weekend services to address medical, employment and recreational transportation. Currently there is no service for vast areas of the county during the evening and weekend hours. This lack of service affects seniors, persons with disabilities and economically disadvantaged persons who benefit from both public transit and para-transit services. While there is long standing knowledge of this lack of service there has been no availability of consistent stable funding to address any expansion of service to address this need.

### Expanded Public Transit

Somerset County, in partnership with RideWise and NJT is discussing a number of routes that would provide assistance to the businesses and residents of the County of Somerset. A number of transit investment priorities are included in the Somerset County Investment Needs Framework (2013) and the Somerset County Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (2010).

### Transportation to volunteer positions

The County para-transit services has never provided for transportation to volunteer positions. This has been a long standing criticism of the county's services as it impacts an individual's ability to job sample or socialize in order to develop marketable job skills or to have an opportunity to give back to the community through volunteering. Currently given the capacity constraints on the para-transit system there is no opportunity to provide for this service. The only available options are those available through the use of public transit to access the volunteer position.

### Transportation for children under age 18

Currently there is no para-transit service for children under the age of 18. This too has been long standing county policy. The drivers at the county division of transportation are not certified to transport school aged children. There are currently no plans to expand the Somerset County para-transit services to include this group of individuals. Children however, can and do use the public transit routes available within the county.

### Transportation to recreational events

The issue of transportation to recreation activities or weekday shopping opportunities is another open issue and has been for many years. Additional service available through the CAT and SCOOT routes provides some residents along the routes or ADA route deviation areas with additional recreational and other services. The financial constraints associated with providing additional transportation opportunities is the primary reason many of the identified services are not available.

### Expanded para-transit opportunities

Currently the existing para-transit services are severely stretched and at capacity on many peak hour routes. There is a waiting list for some passengers requesting dialysis and employment transportation. Additionally, not every medical trip can be accommodated on the date and time it is requested and the passenger finds it necessary to reschedule the trip so that transportation can be arranged. The County has sought to expand the transportation opportunities as grants or fare and donation money becomes sufficient to provide the funds for a driver and related fringe benefit costs. Currently the fare and donation funds received by this division provide the funding for some drivers within the division dedicated to providing expanded para-transit services. We continue to look for additional

sustained funding to supplement this critical lifeline for County residents. It must be noted that the County provides substantial funding to provide for this service to eligible county residents and has continued when possible to provide additional funds to assist in the delivery of these services.

### Coordinated Transportation Services?

The purpose of this executive order was to forge a working relationship among all providers of transportation services. Somerset County enjoys the fact that much of the coordination has already occurred. The County began working cooperatively with other county providers of service and has taken over the scheduling and dispatching of most of the services which were available within the county structure.

The County has contracts for the provision of transportation services with a number of non-profit agencies in the county; these include the Adult Day Center of Somerset County, Somerset Hills Adult Day and the ARC, Somerset Unit. Additionally, the county provides services under contract to Franklin and Warren Townships, Montgomery Township and Veterans Affairs. The County has consistently sought to coordinate services where there would be a direct benefit to the passenger base or maximize the use of capital equipment through the consolidation of the transportation programs.

Several human services and municipal agencies provide a variety of services that are currently not available through the coordinated program operated by the County. Services provided by these agencies and the municipalities provide a link for county residents which would otherwise not be provided. These services include, but are not limited to, same day short notice medical trips, recreational trips, social service agency trips and numerous other trip purposes otherwise unmet by the county para-transit program. This provision of service is recognized as being a part of the county transportation coordinated effort without the need for any formal recognition of the agencies or municipalities through contract or other means. The County does not feel the need to enter into contracts with these entities in order to see the benefit of having a network of service providers available within the County. It is the intent of the County to certify all entities which provide for transportation services, either directly or through contract as being an integral part of the County network of transportation providers. In making this statement, the County is certifying these entities as eligible to apply for and receive any and all grants, contracts or funds as might be made available through any state or federal program.

Specific details regarding unmet needs and the means to address them were addressed within the paragraphs above. It must be noted that the issue with any transportation service is the direct labor costs associated with providing service. In many cases, funding is made available for a short term with the

**caveat that long term funding be identified by the local entity developing the new program. This has been the case with several recent federal programs including Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) funds and the New Freedom Initiative. Both of these programs provide seed money with a requirement that sustained funding come from other sources. Frankly, this type of funding is the reason there are so many unmet needs in a county such as Somerset which has a dearth of public transit. The County, local and private funds are spent trying to make up for the fact that there are no transportation options available to the general public, passengers who are disabled or senior citizens who do not or can not drive. Local resources are consumed attempting to fill the entire range of service options for this population base as the public transit program is not adequate to address any, but the most limited service areas in the suburbs. It has been the County who has taken the lead in Somerset, developing public transit options and funding them with minimal assistance from State and Federal agencies. Somerset County has also funded para-transit services at a substantial level for many years. Somerset County presently has the largest para-transit fleet in the State. It is anticipated that without substantial new sources of state or federal funding that the county will be required to continue funding para-transit services in order to meet the needs of our residents.**

RESOLUTION Adopting the  
Federally Mandated United We Ride Coordinated Transportation Plan  
for the County of Somerset

WHEREAS, the Presidential Executive Order 13330 required participation in a community transportation planning process; and

WHEREAS, the County of Somerset Division of Transportation was the lead agency for the United We ride planning effort undertaken in Somerset County; and

WHEREAS, the County of Somerset Division of Transportation has completed the updated United We Ride Plan 2013.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Somerset that the United We Ride Plan Update (2013) is adopted as required by Executive Order and shall be considered the coordinated transportation human services plan for the County of Somerset.