Planning for the Transportation Needs of Welfare Participants: Institutional Challenges to Collaborative Planning

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Abstract

The responsibility for developing transportation programs for welfare participants spans multiple public agencies. Consequently, federal funding programs require that agencies work together to develop a coordinated response to addressing the transportation needs of welfare participants. Based on a survey of transportation, welfare and employment agencies in 19 California counties, this study examines the potential institutional obstacles to successful local collaboration and coordination among public agencies. The research shows that new sources of federal funds have encouraged interagency efforts to address the transportation needs of welfare participants. However, the divergent organizational goals, methods, and approaches of the participating agencies heavily influence these collaborative efforts. As a consequence, stakeholders may have difficulty moving beyond the narrow interests of their individual institutions to identify and plan for the transportation needs of welfare participants.

1. Introduction

The devolution of responsibility for welfare programs from the federal government to states and local governments is one of the most dramatic changes in U.S. social policy in the last quarter of this century. The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996 mandates that states and localities rapidly transition welfare participants off public assistance and into the labor market. In this context, many state and local governments have adopted transportation policies and programs to assist welfare participants in finding employment. However, there has been relatively little systematic analysis of how public agencies have responded to improve transportation services for welfare participants.

The responsibility for developing transportation programs for welfare participants spans multiple public agencies – primarily transit, human service, and employment agencies. Each agency type brings to this policy arena a unique perspective and expertise. Transit agencies contribute their competence in providing public transportation. Welfare agencies bring an understanding of the characteristics, behavior, and needs of their largely female, low-income clients; and employment agencies provide the vital link to the labor market and to employers. Acknowledging the unique roles and contributions of the three agencies, the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Transportation issued joint guidance in coordinating service provision (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).

Federal legislation to facilitate and, in some cases, mandate local interagency collaborations is intended to increase their number and quality. However, despite the increased attention paid to interagency collaboration, local program administrators

frequently complain about the difficulties of collaborating with staff from agencies that do not share the same overall mission and organizational culture (Waller and Hughes, 1999). The relationship between federal efforts to facilitate local interagency relationships and the actual practice of coordinated service provision among public agencies forms the basis of this research. In particular, this study relies on a survey of transportation, welfare and employment agencies in 19 California counties to examine institutional obstacles to successful local collaboration and coordination among public agencies.

The study finds that new sources of federal funds encourage interagency efforts to plan for the transportation needs of welfare participants. However, the divergent organizational goals, methods, and approaches of the participating agencies may limit stakeholders' abilities to move beyond the interests of their respective institutions to identify and plan for the transportation needs of welfare participants. The paper begins with a discussion of welfare reform, transportation and interagency collaboration and follows with an examination of interagency collaboration in the context of federal programs to develop and fund transportation services for welfare participants. The subsequent sections include the research design and findings. The paper concludes with an exploration of the implications of these findings for collaborative planning.

2. Welfare Reform, Transportation, and Interagency Collaboration

In 1998 and then again in 2000 the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and Transportation issued joint guidance "…to encourage States, tribes, and communities to take full advantage of existing resources to develop seamless, integrated

services addressing the transportation challenge of moving people from welfare to work." (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). These agencies view collaboration as the best means to providing "…the right mix of transportation services necessary to meet the needs of welfare recipients as well as deliver the most efficient use of existing transportation resources (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000)." Rather than creating new policy initiatives and programs within single agencies, policymakers now emphasize coordination of services as the predominant policy response.

To understand the motivation and context for these collaborative guidelines, three different, but overlapping, streams of thought and practice are relevant – service integration, new federalism, and theories of collaboration. The social work profession embraced interagency collaboration in the 1960s when "…social programs expanded and a wide range of professionals and advocates recognized the efficacy of dealing with multiple causes and responses to problems" (Agranoff, 1991). During this period, human service integration – the development of a coordinated response to the needs of persons most at-risk – became an acceptable approach in social service administration (Agranoff, 1991). With the enactment of increasingly work-oriented social programs such as the Family Support Act of 1988 and related state-run experiments, human service agencies expanded beyond simply dispersing benefits.[1] Interagency service networks included county welfare departments and a variety of other institutional partners that, together, provided job placement services, education, job training, and other support services, such as child care and transportation (Agranoff, 1991; Martinson, 1999; Riccio, 1989).

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 represents the latest step in the transformation of the existing welfare system from a cash assistance program to a program whose principal goal is moving program participants into the labor market. The legislation cements the need for services that extend beyond those that human service agencies have typically provided. With the recent decline in welfare caseloads, public agencies have had to support fewer welfare participants with their federal block grants which are fixed at early 1990s caseload levels and, therefore, have had the resources to expand their range of services. Consequently, many agencies have moved beyond providing services narrowly focused on moving welfare participants into federally-defined work activities and provide more comprehensive employment services including assistance with job placement, retention, and advancement (Tweedie, 2000).

Since most welfare participants commute outside of their neighborhoods to find employment, transportation provides a vital link to the labor market (Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist, 1998). In many cities commuting even short distances is made difficult by limited access to fast and reliable forms of transportation whether that be on public transit or in cars (Blumenberg and Ong, forthcoming; Sawicki and Moody, 2000). Consequently, many welfare participants identify transportation as a major obstacle to their employment (Ong and Blumenberg, 1999) and a growing number of studies show an empirical relationship between welfare participants' access to transportation and employment outcomes (Cervero et. al., forthcoming; Danziger et. al., forthcoming; Ong, 1996). Therefore, agencies that provide transportation services to low-income residents – transportation agencies, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and non-profit

organizations – have become important actors in efforts to assist welfare participants in finding employment.

The objective of recent federal policies is to offer flexible funding opportunities that allow for and, in many cases, mandate the creation of interagency partnerships to improve the transportation services available to welfare recipients. Published interagency guidance for the use of federal funds identifies the weaknesses associated with relying exclusively on human service agencies to provide transportation services for welfare participants:

> Historically, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Labor (DOL) have defined transportation in terms of the individual client. As a result, funds were used to directly reimburse clients for transportation costs rather than to develop and support transportation services necessary to meet their needs. When transportation services were provided, they were often not connected with the existing transportation systems. Welfare reform calls for a more systemic approach to break down the transportation barriers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).

Recently, interagency collaboration and coordination has resurfaced in the context of new federalism, the devolution of governmental powers or functions from the federal government to states and localities. The overall goal of devolution is to create local "laboratories of democracy," and through increased competition and experimentation, develop more efficient programs that better meet the needs of local citizens. Despite predictions of a "devolution revolution" (Nathan, 1996), welfare reform stands as one of the major examples of government reorganization (Kincaid, 1998). The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act sets national policy goals and other regulatory requirements while providing federal block grants to states that allow wide discretion in the use of the funds so long as they are "reasonably calculated to

accomplish the purposes of TANF." (Section 404(a)). The Act gives states the authority to decentralize welfare functions to local governments that can, in turn, contract for services with nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Devolution suggests the importance of intergovernmental management – between federal and state governments and between state and local governments – to the success of welfare reform. In an evaluation of welfare implementation in 21 states, Thompson and Gais (2000) show that welfare reform occurs through a "…sprawling, decentralized, and fragmented system involving a broad spectrum of administrative agents." In a survey of city managers, close to 50 percent state that devolution has resulted in increased involvement of for-profit and non-profit organizations in program planning and service delivery and 44 percent state that devolution has resulted in greater regional and inter-jurisdictional cooperation and collaboration (Cole et. al., 1999). Decentralization has also been a component of federal transportation funding. Outside of federally-mandated demonstration projects, states dominate the project selection process with metropolitan planning organizations playing an increasing role particularly in major urban areas (Dilger, 1998).

Finally, the merits of service integration and the devolution of state functions are supported by research on collaboration that argues for a positive relationship between strong interagency ties and effective planning and social service delivery. As one manual on collaboration states, "Bringing together diverse stakeholders, melding their resources, and stretching their minds to embrace new ideas and a new language is essential to resolving our problems" (Winer and Ray, 1997:ix). With respect to transportation services, the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Health and Human Services

established the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility to encourage the coordination of government and non-profit human service agencies with public transit and paratransit providers. The Council (2000:4) emphasizes the many benefits of interagency service planning and provision:

> The potential benefits from coordinating transportation services can be significant for participating agencies and consumers. Benefits include increased service levels, increased mobility for all consumers, better quality of service for riders, cost savings (especially on a unit cost basis), upgraded maintenance programs, better reporting and record keeping, more equitable cost sharing between participating agencies and individuals, more professional delivery of transportation services, and safer transportation services. An absence of coordinated planning processes has resulted in duplicated services, gaps in service, and greater expenditures for transportation operations.

A rapidly expanding body of scholarship on collaboration highlights its many advantages including: responding to "indivisible" social problems that cross organizational boundaries (Alexander, 1993; Bardach, 1998; Gray, 1985; Rittle and Weber, 1973; Schon, 1971); overcoming the limitations of traditional adversarial methods of resolving conflict (Gray, 1985; Innes, 1999); balancing the need for local autonomy while creating economies of scale (Bardach, 1998; Graham and Barter, 1999); and reducing environmental turbulence that can lead to conflict or violence among competing organizations (Gray, 1985; Innes, 1995; Healey, 1997).[2]

Terms describing interagency relationships are many, including collaboration, coordination, cooperation, consensus building, policy networks, partnerships, networking and service integration. Each represents a slightly different interpretation of how organizations interact with one another; however, in practice these terms are often used imprecisely and interchangeably (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992). For example, in planning for the transportation needs of welfare participants, the Federal Transit

Administration produced a brochure on their Job Access program. Under the heading of "local stakeholder collaboration," the text provides very general definition of interagency coordination; it reads: "…a common ingredient to success is getting the stakeholders to discuss what will work best and how the resources of all stakeholders might be leveraged to produce the best result" (Federal Transit Administration, no date). Despite the "fuzziness" of the vocabulary, the intent of federal policy is clear – to increase interagency relationships in providing transportation services for welfare participants.

Evidence of the specific mix of factors that influence the success of interagency collaboration is uncertain, much of it drawn from individual case studies. Alexander (1993:334) writes, "Much of this literature is taxonomic or descriptive. Relatively little is explanatory in any clear cause-effect sense, and most of that is at a high level of abstraction…." However, scholars typically focus on five key determinants of interorganizational relationships; they include having a shared vision, an interactive planning process, broad stakeholder involvement, political and financial support, and skilled leadership. (See Table 1.)

Having a shared vision or common purpose is one of the fundamental components of successful collaborations. Stakeholders must have agreement on the scope of the collaboration and a clear set of goals with respect to the overall purpose of the joint undertaking (Gray, 1989; Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Innes and Booher, 1999; Austin, 2000). A second ingredient to successful collaborations is broad stakeholder participation in which power is widely dispersed (Gray, 1985; Gray, 1989; Innes and Booher, 1999). Failure to include key stakeholders may reduce the likelihood of plan implementation since those with the power to make decisions may be absent (Gray,

1989). However, concentrated power undermines collaborative alliances by stifling the interests of weaker stakeholders (Gray, 1985).

Table 1: Determinants of Successful Collaborations		
1	Shared Vision/Common Purpose (problem domain)	Gray, 1989; Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Innes and Booher, 1999; Austin, 2000; Imel, 1992; Community Transportation Association of America, 1999; Education and Human Services Consortium, 1991; Melaville et al., 1993
2	Broad stakeholder involvement	Gray, 1985; Gray, 1989; Innes and Booher, 1999; Imel, 1992; Community Transportation Association of America, 1999; Education and Human Services Consortium, 1991; Melaville et al., 1993
3	Interactive planning process	Austin, 2000; Gray 1989; Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Innes and Booher, 1999; Education and Human Services Consortium, 1991
4	Political support and financial resources	Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Austin, 2000; Community Transportation Association of America, 1999; Education and Human Services Consortium, 1991
5	Skill of actors	Bardach, 1998; Community Transportation Association of America, 1999; Sarason and Lorentz, 1998

Additionally, collaboration is also facilitated by the implementation of an ongoing, interactive planning process (Gray 1989; Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Innes and Booher, 1999). An interactive planning process is one that incorporates democratic participation and decisionmaking, power sharing, and open communication around both substantive and process issues (Gray, 1989; Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Austin, 2000). Political support and financial resources also influence the success of these organizational relationships (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; Austin, 2000). For successful collaborations, there needs to be an organizational commitment to the partnership oftentimes demonstrated in the form of resources, in other words, the allocation of people and funds. Finally, democratic participation is no substitute for leadership that

establishes and facilitates the collaboration (Community Transportation of America, 1999; Sarason and Lorentz, 1998) and enables the participation of other stakeholders. Network coordinators or facilitators can contribute an understanding of the broader social context in which the collaboration occurs, maintain connections to other organizations and their efforts, and forge common ground among participants (Sarason and Lorentz, 1998).

3. Federal Programs and Interagency Collaboration

Prior to welfare reform, very little formal coordination existed among transit and welfare agencies.[3] These agencies typically pursued their legislatively mandated objectives. Transit agencies provided transit service (much of it used by transit-dependent, low-income riders) while social service and employment agencies typically provided transportation largely through user-side subsidies. In contrast, new welfare-related federal funding programs have motivated interagency planning efforts. Today, almost all California counties have created public forums in which stakeholders jointly plan for the transportation needs of welfare participants.

The promise of additional resources has drawn new stakeholders to this policy issue – transportation planners lured by new federal funds and social service providers motivated by retaining much of the savings generated from caseload reductions. Figure 1 traces the flow of federal funds from their origins in the three major federal agencies, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Transportation and Labor, to state agencies and then down to an array of local and regional public, private, and non-profit

institutions. The flow chart illustrates the complicated institutional relationships that exist across levels of government and among local agencies.

Federal funding requirements encourage and, in some instances, mandate interagency relationships. For example, collaboration is central to the Job Access and Reverse commute program, a component of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the major surface transportation bill that was enacted in June 1998. One of the two major objectives of the Job Access program is to "…increase collaboration among the transportation providers, human service agencies, employers, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), states, and affected communities and individuals" (U.S. Federal Transit Administration, 1998). To receive funds, applicants must demonstrate that they have developed a comprehensive regional approach to meeting the transportation needs of welfare participants through a coordinated public transit/human service planning process.[4] The performance of grantees is monitored, in part, based on the level of ongoing collaboration in the region. Collaboration is measured by (a) the number of participating organizations, (b) the level of activity among these organizations, (c) the extent to which organizations collaborate in the provision and/or the funding of services, and (d) the development of new cooperative initiatives (Federal Transit Administration, 1998). To underscore the importance of collaboration, the program mandates cost sharing. Grant funds awarded for projects may not exceed 50 percent of the projects' total cost; however, the local share of the cost can be met by other federal programs including TANF, Welfare-to-Work, and HOPE VI administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Funds from the U.S. Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work program are largely distributed to Workforce Investment Boards (formerly Private Industry Councils) that provide vouchers or contract with local non-profit organizations for services. Local applicants for Welfare-to-Work funds are asked to describe the coordination and contributions of local housing and transportation authorities; state agencies are required to describe strategies to promote and encourage coordination with the State Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, transit operators, and other transportation providers. Similar to the Access to Jobs program, Welfare-to-Work grants require that states provide one dollar of non-federal matching funds for every two dollars of federal welfare-to-work funds.

Relative to the two other funding programs, TANF has the weakest language regarding collaboration. Still human service agencies are encouraged to "coordinate with other transportation services" so long as TANF funds do not subsidize non-TANF individuals. Additionally, TANF funds can be used as matching grants for the Job Access program.

While federal policies promote inter-agency relationships, at the same time they limit their ability to function effectively since the funding programs themselves are structured to expand the resources and services of the funding agency. All three programs restrict how the funds can be used which, in turn, defines how organizations can and cannot work together. For example, welfare block grants can fund transportation services for TANF-eligible families "so long as the expenditure reasonably accomplishes a purpose of the TANF program, such as promoting job preparation and work (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000)." In most instances, social service

agencies have provided user-side subsidies – vouchers and reimbursements – since they are easily targeted to the eligible population. Using welfare funds to subsidize public transit is much more difficult since the funds may not "pay for or subsidize use by non-TANF individuals." The Welfare-to-Work funds can be used to provide employment-related services -- including transportation assistance. However, the program is designed to move hard-to-employ welfare participants into unsubsidized employment. The funds are specifically targeted to long-term welfare participants, defined as those participants within 12 months of reaching their time limit on receipt of assistance, and who have barriers to employment related to education, work history, or substance abuse. The Job Access and Reverse Commute grant program "assists States and localities in developing flexible transportation services that connect welfare recipients and other low-income persons to jobs and other employment related services." This program is intended to develop new or expanded public transit services such as shuttles, vanpools, new bus routes, connector services to mass transit, employer-provided transportation, and guaranteed ride home programs for welfare recipients and low-income persons.

4. Data and Context

This research examines the extent to which local transportation and welfare-to-work efforts in California embody three of the five determinants of local interagency relationships – shared vision, broad stakeholder involvement, and political/financial support.[5] The analysis draws on a survey of representatives from transportation, welfare, and employment agencies in California and includes 98 individuals from 19 California counties.[6] The counties were selected based on the size of their welfare populations and

their location; they represent urban, agricultural, mountain, and northern and southern coastal areas and include 89 percent of the welfare participants in the state.

Informants were identified either through telephone inquiries to the various agencies, or based on a snowball method, starting with one or more key informant(s) identified either through survey respondents or through focus groups held prior to the administration of the survey. The interviews were conducted by phone and interview lengths ranged from 20 to 90 minutes, averaging 45 minutes. Interview lengths varied based on the extent of the agencies' involvement with the issue as well as the respondents' willingness to elaborate on open-ended questions. The sample includes 33 transit or metropolitan planning organizations, 20 social service agencies, 25 employment agencies, and 20 other agencies and organizations (primarily municipalities).

The survey was designed to determine how agencies defined the transportation problems facing welfare participants, the types of programs and services being implemented by their agencies, and the extent to which agencies were collaborating in planning for the transportation needs of welfare participants. In the survey, we asked each respondent a series of structured questions, both closed- and open-ended questions. Survey respondents were asked to define the particular transportation barriers facing welfare participants, to rate the importance of transportation as an employment barrier relative to other obstacles that welfare participants might face, and to identify the types of transportation programs that would best meet the needs of participants. Respondents were also asked to identify their organization's involvement in collaborative efforts on this issue and on other issues. The survey included questions on collaborative planning as well as on efforts to develop and implement programs in conjunction with other

agencies. Finally, respondents were asked to rate how important it was to their agency or organization to address the transportation needs of welfare participants. To examine the potential challenges to developing interagency working relationships, we analyzed the survey data by agency type, stratifying our sample by welfare, transportation, and employment agencies.

5. Local Collaboration – Common Vision, Involvement, and Organizational Support

Most survey respondents believe that transportation is a significant barrier to the employment of welfare participants. However, beyond this initial point of agreement, respondents enter the collaborative planning process with varying opinions on the specific transportation problems facing welfare participants, the best way for the agency to achieve its individual, agency-specific objectives, and with varying levels of organizational resources devoted to addressing the problem. Responses, particularly from the transit agencies, reveal the difficulty of rising above the parochial modal interests of such agencies to broadly define the transportation problems facing recipients.

Shared Vision/Common Purpose. Across the three agency types, survey respondents revealed fairly widespread agreement about the importance of transportation in facilitating recipients' transition into the labor market. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to rate the importance of an array of employment barriers in welfare recipients' efforts to find employment. The list of barriers provided to the respondents included child care problems, limited job skills, transportation problems, education deficiencies, available jobs located too far away, limited English, drug/alcohol abuse, domestic violence, health problems, and too few jobs available. Survey

respondents from all three agency-types ranked transportation as one of the top three employment barriers facing welfare participants with the modal response from representatives of the three agency types as "very important." This finding is consistent with those of the state-mandated program evaluation of California's welfare program (CalWORKs) in which welfare administrators cite transportation as one of the major barriers facing their clients (Ebener, 1999).

Table 2: Top Three Employment Barriers Facing Welfare Participants

	Transportation Agencies	*Social Services Agencies*	*Employment Agencies*
1	Limited job skills	Transportation problems	Childcare problems
2	Childcare problems	Childcare problems	Limited job skills
3	• Transportation problems • Education deficiencies	Drug/alcohol abuse	• Transportation problems • Education deficiencies

While all respondents identified transportation as a major employment barrier, respondents from social service agencies ranked transportation as recipients' top problem. For the representatives of transit agencies, transportation barriers were ranked third after difficulties with childcare and having limited employment skills. It seems that agency representatives respond to the transportation issues facing welfare participants based on socialized, organizational values and established methods rather than on, perhaps, more objective interpretations of the problems. Transportation might not figure high among transit providers since these agencies are already in the business of transporting welfare participants and other low-wage workers. When asked about the transportation programs currently being developed to aid welfare participants, respondents consistently mentioned the existing public transit infrastructure. In contrast, social service agencies are structured to aid welfare participants in acquiring job skills.

Respondents from these agencies may view transportation as the leading problem because their agency has limited capacity to provide transportation services.

Although respondents were in agreement that transportation posed a major obstacle to the employment of welfare participants, there was less consensus regarding the specific characterization of the problem and, in particular, the role of automobiles in aiding welfare participants in their travel to employment-related destinations. Respondents across all three agency-types were concerned about the limitations of public transit; the number one problem identified by respondents was limited hours of service. Many of the respondents believe that public transit does not adequately serve the travel needs of welfare participants, many of whom travel during nights and weekends when existing service is minimal. Additionally, the survey revealed the concern of many respondents that current transit routes are insufficient, failing to provide service to job-rich areas of the county.

However, one key difference across the agency types is the extent to which respondents identified not having a car as a problem for welfare participants. Respondents from social service and employment agencies include not having access to automobiles as one of the top transportation barriers facing welfare participants. In contrast, representatives of transportation agencies identified transit-related issues – hours, routes, and the dispersed urban structure of metropolitan areas that makes providing transit service difficult – as the most important barriers. Differences in the defining the transportation problems facing welfare participants and, particularly, the relative ranking of auto versus public transit problems emerge in many planning efforts on this issue (Waller and Hughes, 1999). Transit agencies may be influenced by early

statistics showing that very few welfare participants own or have access to cars (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997).[7] Also, many urban planners seek to reduce dependence on automobiles and to create "sustainable" urban environments that promote the use of public transit and other, non-car-based modes of transportation. However, these worthy goals clash with a growing body of research showing that cars are associated with positive employment outcomes for welfare participants (Cervero et al., forthcoming; Danziger at al., forthcoming; Ong, 1996).

Table 3: Most Important Transportation Problems Facing Welfare Participants

	Transportation Agencies	*Social Services Agencies*	*Employment Agencies*
1	Transit hours	Transit routes/transfers limited	Transit hours
2	Transit routes/transfers limited	Transit hours	No auto
3	Jobs too far/dispersed	No auto	• Transit routes/transfers limited • Multiple trips

Therefore, when asked to list the types of transportation programs that would be most effective in helping welfare participants find and keep jobs, representatives from social service and employment agencies, ranked fixed-route and non-fixed-route transit as well as auto programs in the top three most important programs. (See Table 4.) In contrast, auto programs fell to 6th in importance (out of 11) among respondents from transit agencies, following non-fixed-route transit, fixed-route transit, information sharing and brokering of services, non-transportation-related programs, and direct user subsidies.

Table 4: Most Important Transportation Programs

	Transportation Agencies	*Social Services Agencies*	*Employment Agencies*
1	Non-fixed route transit	Non-fixed route transit	Auto programs
2	Fixed-route transit	Auto programs	Fixed-route transit
3	Information/brokering	Fixed-route transit	Non-fixed route transit

Broad stakeholder involvement. The survey was not designed to determine whether all of the necessary stakeholders were involved in interagency planning and implementation. Rather, the survey examined the involvement of the three major agency types. We asked respondents to identify whether there was an interagency planning process in their county and the extent to which their agency was involved in this process. Ninety-one percent of all respondents affirmed that there was a transportation component to the welfare reform planning process in their counties. Involvement in this planning process differed substantially by the type of agency with social service agencies being the most actively involved in these processes and employment agencies being the least involved. Eighty-four percent of all social service agencies were very involved in this countywide process compared to 64 percent of transit agencies and 41 percent of employment agencies. However, with one exception, the seven metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) were also heavily involved in countywide planning on this issue since, in areas with populations greater than 200,000, they are responsible for selecting eligible projects

Table 5: Involvement of Agency in Countywide Planning Process

	Very Involved	Somewhat Involved	Somewhat Uninvolved	Not involved
Social Service	84%	11%	5%	0%
Transportation	64%	29%	7%	0%
Employment	41%	41%	18%	0%

However, with respect to program implementation, transportation agencies work much more closely with other agencies. We asked respondents to describe efforts to develop, fund, and implement particular transportation programs. Among survey

respondents, their agencies were involved in 282 different types of planning programs to meet the needs of welfare participants, most of which are planned, funded, and/or operated by transportation and social service agencies. Among transportation agencies, 72 percent of all their programs designed to assist welfare participants involved some form of collaboration with other agencies. In contrast, among social service and employment agencies, only 52 percent of the programs included an element of collaboration. The differences across these agencies is likely due to federal funding programs that "mandate" various levels of collaboration and restrict the use of funds for certain purposes.

Political support and financial resources. Finally, we asked respondents to evaluate how important the issue was to leaders within their own agency. As Table 6 shows, high level managers and policymakers in social services agencies have the greatest interest in addressing the transportation needs of welfare participants. In contrast, respondents from transportation agencies thought that their managers and policymakers were the least interested. Over 20 percent of respondents from these transit agencies stated that they believed that providing transportation services for welfare participants was *unimportant* given the overall mission and priorities of their organization.

Table 6: Importance of the Issue to High Level Managers and Policymakers in Agency

	Very important	Somewhat Important	Somewhat Unimportant	Not Important at All
Transportation	45%	32%	19%	3%
Social Services	85%	15%	0%	0%
Employment	64%	32%	4%	0%

Overall, the survey illustrates the varying perspectives that respondents from the three agency types bring into the collaborative planning process. Social service agencies tend to adopt broad policy outlooks toward the transportation needs of welfare participants. In general, respondents from social service agencies were more likely than respondents from transit agencies to support a mixture of transit- and automobile-related programs. Social service agencies have been involved in collaborative planning efforts on this issue and have entered these arenas with the strong support of leaders in their organization. In contrast, representatives from transit organizations tend to focus much more narrowly. They frequently promoted public transit as the primary solution to the transportation barriers facing welfare participants, even in locations where fixed-route transit service provides limited access to employment (Blumenberg and Ong, forthcoming). Additionally, they were more likely to collaborate on particular programs and less likely to participate in countywide planning efforts.

Transportation Programs for Welfare Participants. Finally, survey respondents were asked to describe the type of transportation services their agencies provided to help participants with their work-related travel. These 250 programs can be grouped into nine major categories including fixed-route transit, non-fixed-route transit, auto programs, user subsidies, information, employer-sponsored programs, rideshare programs, mixed (fixed and non-fixed-route service) programs, and other miscellaneous programs. Table 7 shows that the program priorities of the agencies' are consistent with the mandate and traditional approaches of each. Transit agencies tend to adopt programs to enhance public transit service. Social service and employment agencies typically focus on

programs such as user subsidies, non-fixed route service, and automobile programs that can be easily targeted to their eligible population.

Table 7: Top Three Program Types

	Transportation Agencies	*Social Services Agencies*	*Employment Agencies*
1	Fixed-route transit	User subsidies	User-side subsidies
2	Non-fixed route transit	Non-fixed route transit	Auto Programs, Fixed-route, Non-fixed route transit
3	Information	Auto programs	

Overall, the survey shows that stakeholders enter the policy arena with very different expectations of the relative benefits of collaboration. These expectations are influenced by the broader program objectives of each agency. The mandate for social service agencies is to move welfare participants off of welfare and into the labor market. Additional resources hinge on agencies' ability to meet caseload reduction targets. In contrast, public transit agencies have less interest in providing transportation services for welfare participants since the "client population" of transit agencies is quite broad. The goal of transit agencies is to provide an alternative to single-occupant auto travel, help reduce congestion, improve air quality, and provide mobility for those without auto access (Garrett and Taylor, 1999). For transit agencies an important motivating factor in "collaboration" appears to be the promise of additional resources. Therefore these agencies tend to collaborate extensively with others in the development and implementation of particular transportation programs for welfare participants, but are less active than social service agencies in countywide planning efforts.

Finally, the planning process appears to be dominated by the three lead agency types, in part, because federal programs formally regulate the types of agencies that can receive their funds. These formal restrictions explicitly limit stakeholder involvement.

Moreover, since meeting the various federal requirements is extremely difficult, most of the recipient organizations have been larger, more well established entities. For example, among first-year grantees for the Job Access Program, 67 percent were from existing transportation organizations, 25 percent from various government entities, and only 7 percent from community-based organizations (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1999).

Ultimately, interagency collaborations can find themselves unduly influenced by the priorities and interests of lead agencies rather than empowered to build effective partnerships (Bardach, 1999). Public agencies may compel their staff into following their organization's priorities and fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in their job descriptions rather than emphasizing external outcomes (Sarason and Lorentz, 1998). The inability of stakeholders to bridge institutional differences may limit the possibility of "…joining human actors in a shared purpose (Grubbs, 2000)" and may, ultimately, lead to planning outcomes that do not effectively meet the transportation needs of welfare participants.

6. Lessons for Collaborative Planning

This research suggests some potential opportunities and pitfalls in relying on interagency collaborations in the implementation of welfare reform. Federal mandates to "increase collaboration among transportation providers, human service agencies, employers, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), states, and affected communities and individuals" appear to be associated with widespread involvement in collaborative planning efforts. The promise of additional resources – whether from caseload reductions or from supplementary federal funds – has motivated participation.

Federal funding programs and, in particular, the Job Access Program, stress the importance of collaboration and coordination yet do not specify the form that these efforts ought to take or the extent to which collaboration ought to occur. Therefore, despite federal mandates, effective collaboration may be difficult to achieve since, as this research shows, agencies appear to enter this policy arena with very different perspectives, shaped in part by the same federal policies that mandate collaboration as well as the unique cultures of their agencies or organizations.

Case studies of successful interagency efforts indicate that collaborative efforts can succeed provided they contain certain elements. This study suggests that in planning for the transportation needs of welfare participants, planners and policymakers ought to implement policies and strategies that enable stakeholders to step beyond their individual organizational identities and to embrace the objectives of the group or collaborative. One strategy may be to create more fully participatory planning processes that attempt to equalize power among stakeholders. Many planning scholars (Innes, 1995, 1999; Mandlebaum, 1996; Healey, 1997) who embrace the theory of communicative rationality developed by Habermas (1981) have promoted this approach. They argue the merits of planning through discursive communities that through dialogue, creative thinking, the challenging of assumptions, dispute resolution, and other such strategies would achieve consensus on the definition of the problem and a set of proposals to meet the needs of welfare participants. However, this consensus-based approach assumes equal power among participants and ignores the role of government legislation in influencing the rules of the game. Unfortunately, most of the inter-agency collaborations are only advisory bodies from which specific proposals must be adopted by the funding agency and are

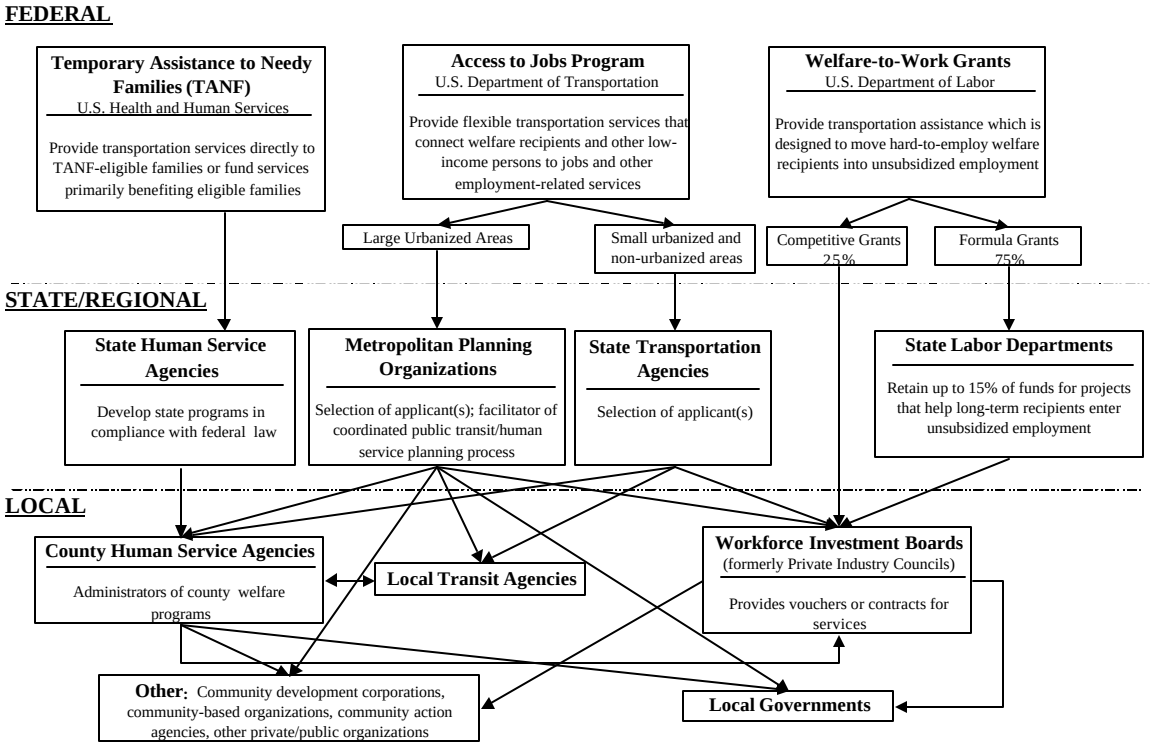
potentially in need of approval by local elected officials. Therefore, stakeholders necessarily enter these planning forums with unequal power extending from their relative access and control over resources.

However, other approaches might help agencies overcome their divergent perspectives. Increasing the flexibility in the use of federal funds may allow agencies to develop broad-based and coordinated transportation plans for welfare participants that includes cars, public transit, and non-fixed route transportation. The research and documentation of the transportation needs and behavior of welfare participants may also provide a common foundation for subsequent planning efforts. For example, Los Angeles County recently completed a comprehensive transportation needs assessment that is intended to provide the information necessary to developing targeted policy proposals (Los Angeles Urban Research Division et al., 2000). Other agencies in California and elsewhere have begun to analyze and publicize the transportation needs of their welfare populations. (See, for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission [1998], the New York Metropolitan Council, [1999].) Effective leadership is also a necessary component of successful collaboration (Waller and Hughes, 1999; Sarason and Lorentz, 1998). This study suggests that the leadership should rest with agencies, organizations, and individuals who are committed – first and foremost – to improving the lives of welfare participants and who are able see beyond opportunities to gain access to additional resources.

In many cases, it is still too early to evaluate the overall effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration since many counties are in the early stages of welfare-to-work planning and implementation. However, ultimately, planners must examine not only the

process – strategies to overcome the institutional barriers to interagency collaboration – but also the conditions under which interagency collaboration leads to effective plans and transportation service improvements for welfare participants. As Bardach (1998:23) states, "…previous theories of interagency collaboration have aimed to explain collaborative behavior rather than capacity…." For welfare participants who are facing time limits on their receipt of public assistance, transportation capacity is what ultimately matters.

Figure 1: Transportation Funds for Welfare Participants



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[1] The Family Support Act of 1988 required all states to establish mandatory work placement programs for AFDC recipients. Resulting from this act, states expanded their work requirements through welfare-to-work programs (Blank, 1997).

[2]There are a few scholars who have argued against certain forms of inter-agency relationships. For example Neuman (2000:345) argues that consensus processes do not necessarily lead to optimal outcomes since they tend to be divorced from arenas of power and it "…often shuns important issues, it tends to result in general and vague agreements, and is usually interest- or position-based." See also Project Share (1981).

[3] There are clearly some exceptions including the creation of the Joint Department of Health and Human Services/Department of Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility. In addition, there have been efforts to coordinate transportation services targeted to both the disabled and elderly.

[4] The FTA uses four weighted criteria to evaluate the merits of each proposal; they include project effectiveness (35%), need for services (30%), local coordination (25%), and sustainability (10%) (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1998).

[5] The overall purpose of the survey was to examine public agencies and the types of programs and services they offer to welfare participants. Therefore, respondents were in an excellent position to discuss their own organizations but not necessarily in the best position to comment on the other two determinants of successful collaboration that emphasize the collaborative planning process – the process itself or the leadership.

[6] The survey was conducted in Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, Shasta, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Ventura counties.

[7] Early figures from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1997) reported that only 7 percent of welfare participants own automobiles. Subsequent studies report automobile ownership or access rates of more than 50 percent (Danziger et al., forthcoming; Murakami and Young, 1997; Federman et al., 1996).