

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF AMES  
STUDY OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS IN STORY COUNTY  
Final Report – November 2003**

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Adopted January 2004

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

People need transportation to get to school and work, as well as to access childcare, health care, and many other services. The need for affordable, convenient county-wide transportation within Story County has been expressed for many years. A committee of the League of Women Voters of Ames began a study of these transportation needs in May 2002.

Interviews were conducted in person or by telephone with individuals representing agencies and organizations involved with public transportation, non-profit providers of restricted-use private transportation as well as for-profit providers of transportation, organizers of car ownership programs in Central Iowa, and agencies that refer those with transportation needs. Story County supervisors and the Executive Director of United Way of Story County also provided information.

Based on the data collected, recommendations were developed regarding public transportation and private transportation. A position for the League of Women Voters of Ames was proposed based on these recommendations. The recommendations are listed below and the proposed position statement follows.

Recommendations addressing public transportation needs in Story County and related issues of communication, cooperation, and cost-effectiveness are:

1. Expand public transportation on the Nevada-Ames-Boone corridor through a partnership among the three cities and Story and Boone Counties.
2. Undertake a feasibility study of public transportation (CyRide route) to serve E. 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Dayton Avenue, and E. Lincoln Way in Ames.
3. Encourage providers of public transportation to sit down together and design a comprehensive, cost-effective, collaborative plan to meet Story County's transportation needs.
4. Investigate successful models of public transit in other urban-rural locations.
5. Seek increased federal/state/local funding for public transit and mitigation of the cost of public transportation for low-income people.
6. At a minimum, urge legislators to fully fund public transit through the existing state "use tax" formula.

Recommendations related to private transportation are:

1. Suggest that ASSET conduct a survey of agencies providing transportation to their clients and lead the way toward development of an efficient and cost-effective model for providing transportation services.
2. Encourage non-profit organizations to assess cost-effectiveness of contracting with a public transit agency for transportation services as an alternative to operating their own vehicles.
3. Encourage expansion of opportunities for low-income families to become car owners.
4. Support existing efforts by Wheels to Work to enable welfare recipients to be car owners.
5. Encourage development of additional car ownership programs for low-income families that

include the following elements found to support successful programs in other communities:

- a. Professional management of program
- b. Screening of recipients (including valid driver's license) and on-going case management of car recipients
- c. Educational components on money management, safe driving, and vehicle maintenance.
- d. Reliable, well-maintained vehicles
- e. Mandatory auto insurance coverage and assistance in acquiring insurance
- f. Element of reciprocity, such as subsidized car loan for purchase or community service in exchange for vehicle
- g. Partnership with at least one financial institution willing to grant low-interest car loans to low-income people.

### **Position Statement**

(adopted by concurrence January 2004)

The LWV of Ames:

- Encourages providers of transportation in Story County to collaborate in designing a comprehensive, cost-effective, environmentally-friendly, and energy-efficient plan to meet the transportation needs of Story County;
- Encourages ASSET to survey member agencies that provide transportation to their clients to explore sharing of services or developing contractual arrangements with public transit agencies;
- Encourages non-profit organizations to contract with public transit agencies or other transportation providers as an alternative to operating their own vehicles;
- Encourages agencies to seek efficiencies through shared services such as centralized vehicle maintenance and driver training;
- Supports increased federal/state/local funding for public transit or, at a minimum, full funding of public transit through the existing state "use tax" formula;
- Supports expanded efforts to mitigate cost of public transportation for low-income people;
- Supports existing efforts by Wheels to Work to enable welfare recipients to be car owners; and
- Encourages expansion of opportunities for low-income families to become car owners through the development of additional car ownership programs that include elements found to support successful programs in other communities.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The need for better mobility and access in small urban and rural communities is an on-going challenge. People need transportation to get to school and work, as well as to access child care, health care, and many other needed services. Regardless of their current economic fortunes, these communities often lag behind in providing adequate public transportation (American Public Transportation Association, n.d.). The lack of transit options puts car-less households and non-drivers, particularly those who are low income, at a tremendous disadvantage. And, car ownership requires significant financial outlays. On average, Americans allocate about 20 percent of their expenditures to transportation, ranking this spending category second only to housing (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003).

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A review of literature demonstrates the importance of transportation access in meeting households' daily needs, and suggests that policy solutions must be multi-modal (supporting both public and private transportation) and tailored to the community or region. This review begins with a brief overview of Story County, and then focuses on research findings about the debate between public versus private transportation.

**Story County**

Story County is an atypical Iowa county in several ways. Its population has increased--growing from 72,326 in 1980 to 79,981 in 2000 and ranking 9<sup>th</sup> among the 99 counties. The City of Ames acquired "metropolitan" status with a count of 50,731 residents in the 2000 Census and serves as a social and economic hub for the county (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Findings from a community assessment survey conducted in 2000 suggest that nearly 2 in every 10 Story County residents use public transportation; however, most of these public transit users (89%) reside in Ames (Community Development-Data Information and Analysis Laboratory, 2001).

In other ways, Story County looks like most other Iowa counties. There are 14 incorporated places scattered throughout the county. The number of farms in the county has declined by more than half in the last 20 years with 3,856 reported in 1980 and 1,594 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Many residents of the county's small towns and rural areas seek employment elsewhere. With adjacency to Polk County to the south and Interstate 35 connecting the two, many Story County residents travel to Des Moines for employment, shopping, entertainment, and other needs. A rural transit system meets some transportation needs, but the vast majority (89%) of Story County residents indicate that the most frequently used mode of transportation is the automobile (Community Development-Data Information and Analysis Laboratory, 2001).

## **Public versus Private Transit**

The debate over support for public transit versus private automobile ownership has focused mainly on the viability of public transportation systems in urban areas. Comparatively little is known about the link between access to public transportation and the ability of households to participate in the labor force or meet other needs. Only recently has much attention been given to the value of car ownership, prompted by welfare reform mandates that many low-income households enter the labor market.

**Urban Studies.** Using 1990 Census data, researchers in Cleveland looked at public transit use and auto access among residents of Cleveland itself, the outlying county, and the surrounding counties. Auto access was lowest for city dwelling recipients below the poverty line (Leet, Bania, & Coulton, 1999). Just 45% of welfare recipients in Cleveland were in households where there was an available automobile. Travel times to work for those persons commuting via public transit were double the transit times for private auto commuters. Clearly, those without access to automobiles were at a time disadvantage in commuting to work.

Studies in Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and several other urban areas support the conclusion that access to a car is an important determinant of labor market outcomes (Taylor & Ong, 1995; Ong, 1996, 2002; Leete, Bania, & Coulton, 1999; Bania, Coulton, & Leete, 2000, Danziger et al., 2000; Raphael & Rice, 2000; Raphael & Stoll, 2001). Recent studies have examined the more complex travel needs of welfare mothers traveling to work and child care while maintaining other domestic responsibilities. Citing Bureau of Transportation, 1997 Census, and Urban Institute data, a General Accounting Office report (1998) concluded that public transit was not likely to be able to meet the complex trip needs of many welfare mothers. Blumenberg (2000) outlined the difficulties of women's use of public transportation indicating that it is generally not set up for the specific needs of women. Public transit stations and vehicles are not equipped to accommodate strollers, young children, or shopping carts. Flat fees are charged regardless of the length of the trip, and women commonly "trip-chain", adding non-work stops to their commute while commuting shorter distances than men commute. Further, safety issues contribute to women feeling less comfortable using public transportation.

Holzer and Wissoker's (2001) survey of 3,000 employers in four metropolitan areas found that transportation was a major source of absenteeism for 41% of recently hired welfare recipients who experienced it. A survey of top executives of the Welfare to Work Partnership, a consortium of large corporations committed to hiring former welfare recipients, found over half the executives listed transportation as a serious problem in hiring a welfare recipient. Of those who identified transportation as a barrier to work, 51% indicated that new hires often couldn't afford a car or car insurance. One-third said that public transportation did not run near their workplace, and one in five said that public transit did not operate the hours needed.

**Rural Studies.** The viability of public transportation for job access in rural areas is an increasingly important question. A 1994 study by the Community Transportation Association of America found that two in five rural residents had no access to any form of public transportation, and in 25% of rural areas, the access that did exist was minimal (Bogren, 1998). Rosenbloom (1994) found women in rural areas to be highly dependent on the automobile, making 91% of all trips and 96% of all work trips by car. A study of employed women in rural Iowa found that although nearly 98% had a car available to them daily, they had many concerns about car reliability (Peters & MacDonald, 1994).

The heavy reliance on private transportation indicates the importance of access to cars in non-metropolitan areas. Several studies document a lack of access to cars among the rural poor; however, studies vary widely in their estimates of the magnitude of the problem. Analyzing a national survey, Zedlewski (1999) found 10% of welfare recipients reported living in non-metro areas and having no access to a car. Fletcher and Jensen (2000) matched welfare rosters with vehicle registration records and found 24% of the adult welfare population in Lee County (Iowa) owned and registered a vehicle in the county. Further, in focus group interviews, welfare recipients in the county reported unreliability of cars, affordability of insurance, affordability and reliability of maintenance, and inability to obtain a driver's license to be barriers to their employment. They questioned the ability of public transportation to meet their needs. They were concerned about how they might get to a central pick-up point, how they would transport their children to and from child care, how accessible public transit would be in off-hours, and how stable funding for any type of public transportation would be. A longitudinal, qualitative study of Iowa welfare recipients in seven communities found that most families either did not own a vehicle or owned a car that was old and unreliable. Many relied on friends or family for some of their transportation needs. Those families with access to city bus systems found often the bus did not take them where they needed to go, or did not operate on a schedule that coincided with their work, school, or child care needs (Fletcher et al., 2002). In a study of a representative sample of households in northeast Iowa, Fletcher, Garasky and Jensen (2003) have documented very limited use of the fixed-route bus system as a mode of transportation to work in a metro county, and the positive effect of owning a "very reliable" vehicle on predicting employment.

**Policy Implications.** A Brookings Institute report on barriers to work in metropolitan areas offers the following observations that may be useful:

- (1) Transportation programs designed to meet the needs of low-income people are not simple to execute. They may need to be integrated with other services and be flexible in order to adapt to the work schedules of entry-level workers (i.e., account for multiple start times for work shifts, emergency rides home, or other elements of the daily "trip chain" undertaken by low-income people, particularly mothers);
- (2) Transportation solutions should aim to enact incremental and systemic changes that create transportation equity for low-income people and improve long-term transportation systems for families of all incomes. Imbedded in this observation is the understanding that transportation policy solutions must be multi-modal.

Public policies should not discourage low-income car ownership while they facilitate the car-based commute of the vast majority of middle- and upper-income workers (Pugh, 1998).

## **PROCEDURE**

Although the need for affordable, convenient, countywide transportation has been expressed for many years, including ASSET's Compass I and Compass II needs assessments of human services in Story County (1989 and 1995), much of the evidence has been anecdotal. The study group decided that facts were required to understand the extent of the need and to focus on potentially viable solutions. We agreed upon a two-pronged approach to identify and interview (1) transportation providers, and (2) agencies and organizations whose clients/members use and/or need transportation.

The study group held interviews in person with the following individuals who are involved in public transportation services: Peter Hallock, Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT); John Mass, Heartland Senior Services (HSS); Bob Bourne, CyRide; and Steve Andrlle, Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE). Lois Smidt (Beyond Welfare) joined the study group to discuss the Wheels to Work program. In addition, individual members of the study group held telephone interviews with persons involved in transit for the public in Story County (Ames City Manager's Office; Ames Taxi/Cyclone Cab; Central Iowa Transit, Inc.; and Des Moines Metro Transit Agency, Central Iowa Ride Share Program), and with representatives of agencies and organizations that own vehicles for specific restricted-use purposes including Boys and Girls Club of Story County; Mainstream Living and Story County Development Center; Youth and Shelter Services, Inc.; faith communities; child care centers; residential facilities for seniors in Ames (Green Hills, Northcrest, Silvercrest); and ISU Transportation Services (vanpool). Input on transportation needs was provided by the Story County supervisors and the executive director of United Way of Story County.

Many agencies in Story County provide referral services for the transportation needs of their clients but do not own vehicles to transport them directly. Those identified by individual interviews included Emergency Residence Project; Good Neighbor Emergency Assistance, Inc.; Help Central/Lincoln Way Chapter, American Red Cross; and National Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Central Iowa.

The Internet was used to identify car ownership programs available around the country designed to meet the needs of low-income individuals. Personal contacts identified a new program operating in Des Moines, and details were obtained from Chris Hensley who administers the program for Commercial Federal Bank.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings and recommendations are discussed in two major sections: Transportation for the public and private transportation. Supplemental information can be found in two appendices. Appendix A includes the dates of meetings of the League of Women Voters of Ames Study Group on Transportation Needs in Story County and persons interviewed at study group meetings. Also included is a glossary of abbreviations used in the text of this final report and a map of the boundaries for the Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. Tables with detailed information about transportation services referred to in this report are in Appendix B.

### **Transportation for the Public**

Transportation for the public in Story County is provided by several agencies and companies. Both non-profit and for-profit options exist.

#### **Non-profit Agencies**

Several non-profit agencies provide transportation services within Story County. All receive some government funds to support their operations.

**Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA).** In 2002, the Office of Public Transit, Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT) published *Public Transit Agency Profiles* with information on the 35 transit systems in Iowa: 19 urban transit systems, including the City of Ames, and 16 multi-county regional systems. Every county in Iowa is served by a regional system, and Story County is part of Region 11, which serves Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story and Warren counties (4,095 sq. miles) as Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA). HIRTA is governed by a policy board that is appointed by the county supervisors (Wayne Clinton represents Story County), which meets on the third Thursday of each month. HIRTA contracts with Heartland Senior Services (HSS) to provide public transit services for Story County.

**Heartland Senior Services/HIRTA.** There is a communication problem in understanding the scope of HSS/HIRTA services and a need for more general awareness of them. Story County residents of all ages are eligible passengers, although the HSS mission is to serve older adults. Ralph Rosenberg, interim director of HSS, states that “transportation is a common thread that links all services within HSS and serves other human service agencies in the area”. In FY03, HSS transported 51,164 people across 280,246 miles. See Appendix B, Table 1 for details on equipment, fixed routes, and charges.

HSS receives transportation funding from eight sources including public money (federal, state, county, and city) and private contributions (United Way, individuals, and businesses) in addition to passenger charges. Currently Iowa law does not allow counties to levy taxes for transit services. Story County and the City of Ames provide funding through the ASSET process. Title III/Elderly Service Contractors funding is available to the HIRTA counties plus Polk County through a non-profit organization. HSS receives Aging Resources money for transporting clients to HSS’s Adult Day Care Center and to congregate meals at the Ames Activity/Resource Center. Meals are prepared at the Ames Center for delivery by HSS buses to seven congregate meal sites throughout the county and for meals that are home delivered by volunteers. HSS transports clients to the Story County Development Center (SCDC) for work and bills the agency monthly for that service, which is covered by federal and state funding.

Many of the buses are old and frequently need expensive maintenance. Four, averaging over 180,000 miles each, should be replaced for safety and cost efficiency. HSS is eligible for bus replacement and has been on the waiting list for over 2 years, but receipt of the buses has been delayed by state financial problems (HSS pays about \$10,000 per bus, and the state covers the rest). The earliest possible delivery date for the needed equipment is estimated to be May 2004.

The cost of providing the countywide service exceeds the income received from funding sources and minimal fare-box revenue. The HSS Transportation Director has sought means of supplementing that revenue by broadening the user base to provide income-producing services that can be accommodated by the regular schedules while still meeting the HIRTA contract. Some of these additional runs include transporting children to swim classes (Monday-Friday @ \$33/hr.), shuttle service for Special Olympics, Community Life bookings, special tours (e.g., water plant tour), transporting hospital patient discharges and medical transfers, and rental of buses to retirement communities for needs beyond the capacity of their own vehicles. Limited commercial advertising on the buses provides another modest source of income.

**Heartland Senior Services/Dial-a-Ride.** Since October 2002, the City of Ames has contracted with HSS to operate Dial-a-Ride service during weekday, evening, and weekend hours within the Ames city limits. See Appendix B, Table 2 for details. The 10 buses and 3 minivans in use are all handicapped accessible, and the passengers using this service are almost entirely eligible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They must qualify through CyRide for subsidized disability fares. HSS is reimbursed \$9 per ride during weekday daytime hours and \$30 per hour for evening and weekend service. The public can ride at a taxi fare of \$18.

**Ames Transit Agency (CyRide).** The Ames Transit Agency that operates the CyRide System is governed by the Board of Transit Trustees, a six-member board made up of one City Council member, the Ames city manager, an Iowa State University vice president, a student appointed by the ISU Government of the Student Body (GSB) president, a GSB senator, and an appointee of the mayor.

Bob Bourne, director of transit, recalls that CyRide developed out of a LWV of Ames project. The innovative nature of CyRide and the collaborations involved in its success were largely responsible for Ames being recognized as an All-America City (1982-83). The League entered Ames in the nation-wide competition. The CyRide bus system has received numerous awards, most recently (2003) the Iowa DOT award as “the most improved urban transit system of the year”. With a 12.2% gain in ridership, the cost per ride was reduced by 7.2% during FY02.

CyRide operates 67 buses on 9 fixed routes on arterial streets within the city limits of Ames. See Appendix B, Table 3 for details. One popular route running from the Iowa State Center to campus and to the College of Veterinary Medicine reduces the pressure on campus parking. Beginning with the 2002-2003 academic year, ISU students ride free on all CyRide routes, thanks to a major subsidy from the ISU GSB with funds from mandatory student fees. Ridership increased substantially (nearly 37%) as a result, and CyRide has added eight buses. There were 4,678,548 rides over 1,229,503 miles recorded in FY03. All CyRide routes, except the Iowa State Center-ISU campus shuttle, are equipped with wheelchair lifts. The largest source of revenue for CyRide comes from GSB. Other sources are passenger fares, property taxes (\$0.49 per \$1,000 assessed value), contributions from ISU administration and the ISU Parking Systems, and federal and state assistance.

In addition to the fixed routes, CyRide operates a “Moonlight Express” on Friday and Saturday nights when ISU is in session. Calls for pickup are taken from 10:15 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., and everyone rides free. CyRide also provides free transportation between Ames and the Des Moines Airport for ISU students at the beginning and end of class breaks.

Until recently, the cities of Ames, Nevada, and Boone, along with Story and Boone counties, were affiliated with the Central Iowa Regional Transportation Planning Alliance (CIRTPA), but a new Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) has been mandated for Ames as a result of the city’s population exceeding 50,000 in the 2000 census. County supervisor Donald Toms will represent Story County on the new AAMPO board along with all six members of the Ames City Council and Mayor Tedesco; Michael O’Brien, Boone County supervisor; and Dennis Kroeger, city representative on the Ames Transit Agency Board. See Appendix A for the AAMPO boundary map, which shows the inclusion of small pieces of Boone and Story counties outside the City of Ames corporate limits.

CyRide's 40% increase in insurance for FY03 presents a major problem along with the loss of \$200,000 in federal funding as Ames has received a metropolitan area designation. Under the former formula, Iowa DOT distributed federal funds based on efficiency and productivity, but the new formula for funding is based on population numbers and population density. Ames now is "at the bottom of the heap" in allocations compared with larger cities.

When asked about his perspective on transportation needs in Story County, Bourne commented that the greatest unmet need or "opportunity" is Ames/Nevada service and the next greatest is Ames/Boone service. Bourne says he cannot afford to run a scheduled route between Ames and these cities, and CyRide's charge is to provide transportation in the City of Ames. He mentioned that HSS could provide service at a lower cost than CyRide but would still require outside funding because these routes would not pay for themselves. Under current conditions of demand and cost, neither CyRide nor HSS can afford to provide the scheduling frequency and number of bus stop locations that potential passengers would require. Bourne suggested that Boone County, Story County, the cities of Boone, Ames, and Nevada, and CyRide are likely collaborators in such a service. The transportation section in the recently adopted *The Nevada Plan, A Comprehensive Plan for Nevada, Iowa* (2003) states "Nevada should partner with Ames and other Story County communities toward the development of a flexible and appropriate countywide transit system. This system may interface with CyRide as additional development occurs between Nevada and Ames." Mayor Tedesco also has voiced a need for collaboration. Bourne says there is no current action on such a system, but we should ask "when, not if".

In 1998, Jack Whitmer, then a Story County supervisor, submitted a planning and implementation grant proposal to the Federal Highway Administration, US DOT for a monitoring system to examine travel patterns in Story County. The proposal was endorsed by the cities of Ames, Nevada, and Story City, by the Ames Economic Development Commission, CyRide, HIRTA, ISU Extension, Iowa DOT, CIRTPA, Story County Board of Supervisors, and the Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE), but it was not funded.

In June 2003, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced the official designation of Ames as a new "metropolitan statistical area" in Iowa, one of nine in the state. Ames made the OMB list because its population exceeded 50,000 in the 2000 census. The Ames Metropolitan Statistical Area is comprised of Story County (population 79,981 including Ames population 50,731). OMB has maintained and updated the metropolitan area classification once every decade since the 1950 census. This classification makes Ames an entitlement community, eligible for block grants. More federal money should be available for roads and for the purchase of buses but not for the operation of the CyRide transit system. Bourne is waiting for the reauthorization of the Federal Transportation Act in October 2003 to know whether he can buy buses.

Bourne commented that the ISU campus is the most common destination for riders who are not ISU students; North Grand Mall was the second most common destination. He noted that CyRide has enough buses to serve the present mall area adequately, but a proposed new mall at 13<sup>th</sup> St. and I-35 would require two additional buses 7 days a week.

**Des Moines Metro Transit Agency/Central Iowa Ride Share Program.** The Des Moines Metro Transit Agency operates ride-share van service for commuters from Ames and Huxley to Des Moines, with departures scheduled to meet work schedules. The vans are owned by the system, but drivers take the vans home at the end of the commute. See Appendix B, Table 4.

### **For-profit Companies**

Companies that operate for a profit provide a number of transportation services for the public. These include chartered or public bus service, as well as taxi and limousine services.

**Central Iowa Transit, Inc.** Central Iowa Transit, Inc., also operating as CIT Charters, is a private, for-profit business in Ames, operated by John Grzywacz. CIT has the contract for school bus transportation to schools in the Ames Community School District. This is a 3-year contract, renewed annually. In FY03 the Ames Community School District paid \$1.56 million, billed over 9 months by CIT. Grzywacz meets with school district committees and is advised of changes in school plans and student assignments to specific buildings.

In addition to the school bus service, CIT operates a charter service and is licensed and insured as a travel service to provide packaged tours. The company owns four 47-passenger motor coaches and one 55-passenger motor coach. Rates are based on destination and duration of the trip. The CIT charter service is used by Mid-Iowa Community Action (MICA), Head Start, Ames Chamber of Commerce, and Ames Convention & Visitors Bureau. A van can be chartered for transportation to the Des Moines Airport at a charge of \$65 one-way for one to five adult passengers. See Appendix B, Table 5.

**Private Taxi Services.** Ames Taxi is a private taxi service that is not associated with CyRide or Dial-a-Ride. Drivers are on call 24 hours/7 days per week/all days per year, pending availability, and will transport passengers anywhere in Iowa, although they mostly serve Story and Boone counties. A company representative noted that passengers usually are older adults during the day and students at night. See Appendix B, Table 6.

**Bus and Limousine Services.** Greyhound Lines, Jefferson Lines, and Burlington Trailways operate intercity routes that serve Ames.

Bob Bourne noted that there is interest in Ames in having better transportation service to the Des Moines International Airport, but he cautions that such service would not be self-supporting and would require subsidizing.

Several private companies that operate out of Des Moines serve Central Iowa: Out of Town, Personal Chauffeur Service, Unique Services Limousine, Gene's Transportation and Delivery Services, and Fraser Ambulance and Wheelchair Service. Out of Town Charter Service charges \$50 one-way between the Airport and Ames for one to four passengers. Both Gene's Transportation and Delivery Services and Personal Chauffeur Service charge \$65 for this service.

### **Recommendations**

Although Ames is well served by CyRide and Dial-a-Ride, and Heartland Senior Services provides Story County public transit through a HIRTA contract, these non-profit agencies are financially limited in their ability to expand services to fill transportation needs that have been identified. The major expressed needs are scheduled regular routes between Nevada and Ames and between Boone and Ames; a perceived need for a CyRide route on East 13<sup>th</sup> St., North Dayton Ave., and East Lincoln Way in Ames; and regular service between Ames and the Des Moines Airport. The following recommendations address these issues and related issues of communication, cooperation, and cost-effectiveness.

- Expand public transportation on the Nevada-Ames-Boone corridor through a partnership among the three cities and Story and Boone counties
- Undertake a feasibility study of public transportation (CyRide route) to serve East 13<sup>th</sup> St., Dayton Ave., and East Lincoln Way in Ames
- Encourage providers of public transportation to sit down together and design a comprehensive, cost-effective, collaborative plan to meet Story County's transportation needs
- Investigate successful models of public transit in other urban-rural locations
- Seek increased federal/state/local funding for public transit and mitigation of the cost of public transportation for low-income people
- At a minimum, urge legislators to fully fund public transit through the existing "use tax" formula.

### **Private Transportation**

It is unrealistic to expect public transportation to be available within Ames or Story County at all hours and to meet all needs for transportation. To meet the needs of specific groups of individuals, some organizations have become restricted-use providers of transportation. Another option is car ownership.

#### **Restricted-use Providers**

A number of non-profit agencies, faith communities, child care centers, and senior residential facilities, as well as Iowa State University, own vehicles and provide their clients/members with restricted-use transportation.

**Boys and Girls Club of Story County.** The agency owns two 15-passenger vans, given by the Variety Club of Iowa and driven by staff members only. One of the vehicles is very old and cannot be driven out of town. Insurance and maintenance on an old van are very expensive, and the size of the vehicles is limiting. Variety Club spreads its gifting of vehicles over an area, so an agency must wait its turn and hold its request for a new vehicle until present vehicles have reached a mileage or safety limit. Geff Gescheidler, executive director, would like to have a bus for field trips and larger capacity usage, and that will be his next request to the Variety Club. The vans pick up students after school from Ames Christian School, Ames Middle School, and Ames High School, and twice a week from Nevada, but there has not been enough interest to transport from Gilbert. About 50 elementary school students now come to the Club 5 days per week after school and are transported by the school buses (Central Iowa Transit) at a cost of about \$15 per month per child, but this service may be discontinued. Families are responsible for picking up the children at the Club at the conclusion of activities. Boys and Girls Club is funded by United Way, the City of Ames through the ASSET process, and by private donations. See Appendix B, Table 7.

**Mainstream Living, Inc. and Story County Development Center.** The agency serves adults with mental retardation; about one-third are served in their homes. The agency has 16 passenger cars and 4 wheelchair-accessible vans in Story County, driven only by staff members. Staff members are hard on the vehicles, so passenger cars are traded in at 80,000 miles and vans at 150,000 miles. Mainstream Living clients are transported for incidental purposes (non-scheduled) such as medical appointments, grocery shopping, and recreation. Each client has a staff person assigned, and each staff person uses an agency vehicle. Clients who go to work are not transported by the agency; however, some ride CyRide. Story County Development Center purchases transportation from HSS, at no cost to the clients, for the clients who work at the Center. Story County Development Center is fully funded by Story County. Mainstream Living receives 62% of its funding from federal sources and 38% from Story County. See Appendix B, Table 8.

Reno Berg, CEO of Mainstream Living, Inc. and Story County Development Center, recommends establishment of a regularly scheduled CyRide route on East 13<sup>th</sup> St.. He claims this would not replace the HIRTA contract, but if clients can learn to use CyRide, they would be more independent and able to use it on weekends. He also suggests that ASSET take a good look at all of the agencies providing transportation to their clients and help lead the way to sharing services.

**Youth and Shelter Services, Inc.** The agency owns five vans (four from Variety Club of Iowa and one from McDonald's Children's Charity) and employs four to five staff drivers throughout Story County. Staff workers may drive their personal cars and get reimbursement plus expenses. School buses are used for field trips, and YSS also rents HIRTA buses. More than 100 youth are transported per day. Each YSS service area handles its own transportation needs and scheduling. There is no central scheduling coordinator, and each service area must work under a separate transportation budget for that area. Maintenance for the vehicles is bid out. Funding comes from United Way, Story County, and the City of Ames through the ASSET process. See Appendix B, Table 9.

**Faith Communities.** Fifty-two communities in Story County were contacted in a random sample. Nine had buses or vans for transporting only their own members or attendees. See Appendix B, Table 10.

An option used by two churches in Des Moines (Plymouth Congregational and Central Presbyterian) is to contract with public transportation (Des Moines Metro Transit Agency) to provide bus service rather than providing it with a church bus or van driven by a volunteer. In these situations, when the church vans broke down and vehicle purchase, maintenance, and insurance costs were evaluated, it was concluded that contracted services made sense.

**Child Care Facilities.** Both Ames Community Preschool Center (ACPC) and Formative Years Growing and Learning Center in Ames have two 13-passenger vans that are used only to transport children on field trips. The vehicles are not used to pick up children, and they are not for hire. ACPC does use its vans to transport children to different sites. Eagle's Loft Child Care Center on North Dayton Ave. in Ames owns a mini-bus that transports children without charge to and from schools on the north side of Ames and to the ISU Child Development Laboratory School on campus. Transportation is a real challenge, especially to the Gilbert and Nevada families and to the families

whose children attend other schools in Ames. CyRide does not have a route that serves North Dayton Ave.

Child Serve on East 13<sup>th</sup> St. in Ames is an integrated child care program (infancy to school age) that serves families with special needs children. They provide community living services support and work with special needs clients to develop goals. Meeting these goals requires that they be transported to community locations. The agency has two Sunshine vans from Variety Club of Iowa that are used for this purpose. Currently, the agency is providing its community living services program at a church located near the ISU campus because CyRide does not go out East 13<sup>th</sup> St. to their location. Decreased county funding has reduced transportation for special needs teenagers to participate in the program; now only two are served. The summer enrichment program serves 30 special needs children who are integrated into the child care program. Families pay a discretionary fee for transportation if they live outside a CyRide bus route and need to be picked up. An agency representative expressed need for a coach-sized vehicle for field trips and bus transportation to their East 13<sup>th</sup> St. site.

Under the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, administered by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, it is not legal for an automobile dealer to sell a new passenger vehicle that is not a school bus and is designed to carry more than 9 passengers to an organization for the purpose of transporting children to school.

**Senior Residential Facilities.** Eleven senior living, assisted living, or nursing homes in Story County were contacted. Six had vans or small buses, and these were for use only for their own residents. See Appendix B, Table 11.

**Iowa State University.** Iowa State University offers its employees who have regular work hours the opportunity to commute to work using the ISU vanpool. Two sizes of vans are available: 7- and 15-passenger vans. There are routes to and from Roland, Story City, and Boone. The cost of operating the van is shared by those using the service, excluding the driver who is responsible for the van. There is a set monthly fee based on the size of the van plus an additional charge per mile. The average number of participants has declined from 53.65 in FY00 to 34.10 in FY03, or a drop of about one-third. Fewer riders are using the vanpool in all three communities, but the greatest drop has been in number of riders to and from Boone. In FY00, there were three vans operating to and from Boone with an average of 26.82 riders. In FY03 there was only one van serving an average of 11.1 riders. There have been two vans operating to and from Roland serving an average of 14.33 in FY00 and 13.0 in FY03. There is one route to and from Story City. Average participation has dropped from 12.5 riders to 10.0 over the 4-year period.

ISU Parking Systems subsidizes CyRide passes for faculty and staff at 50% of cost.

### **Car Ownership Programs**

Public transit alone cannot meet the transportation needs of low-income persons living in rural and small town locations, considering their constraints of differing work hours, getting children to and from child care, and the inevitable emergencies such as illness. Operating a transportation service in rural areas hinges on creating a critical mass of riders for a route or system to be viable (Fletcher &

Jensen, 2000). Studies have reinforced the general consensus that personal vehicles are the best solution for residents whose needs cannot be met by public transit.

Privately-owned vehicles provide flexibility in meeting transportation needs of individuals and households. Various car ownership programs have been designed specifically to meet the needs of low-income people. Best practices have been identified for operating successful programs. Two programs were identified (Cars Now operating in Des Moines and Wheels to Work of Beyond Welfare in Ames) that were instituted to meet the need for private car ownership by those with low incomes in Central Iowa.

**Car Ownership Programs for Low-income Individuals.** Many programs exist in all parts of the United States with the objective of providing cars to low-income individuals. Some of the names of these programs are Good News Garage (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont), Wheels to Work (Arizona, Georgia), Working Wheels (Washington), Job Express (Arizona), and Jump Start (Wisconsin). Each program is unique in trying to respond to local needs and comply with state laws regulating auto dealers and use of welfare funds. A study of seven such programs found that they had many elements in common. All seven programs included these provisions:

- Acquire cars by donation from general public or purchase them from dealers
- Recondition and repair the cars to good working order
- Lease, sell, or donate the used cars to low-income workers and job seekers (usually TANF recipients and therefore generally single mothers)
- Screen clients to ensure they can afford not only the price of the car but all related car costs, such as gas and insurance
- Take only clients referred from government or non-profit agencies that must provide ongoing case management to the clients during the car payment period
- Charge clients less than retail value for the cars, usually a flat fee
- Pay their clients' first 3 months of insurance coverage
- Offer a limited warranty on their cars
- Have a state auto dealer's license, allowing the program to sell cars to clients and to purchase cars at wholesale
- Recoup some costs through client payments for cars, but must raise additional funds to cover all costs.

(On the road, 2001, p. 6)

**Best Practices for Working Wheels Programs.** Some best practices derived from research of car provision programs are as follows:

- On-going case management to ensure that clients maintain auto insurance and car payments throughout the period of the car loan
- Linkage to a financial institution for auto loans and assistance in completing loan applications
- Screening and assistance in obtaining auto-related assistance for which clients may be eligible, such as additional insurance and car repair assistance
- Training in financial management and credit repair
- Training in defensive driving and basic auto maintenance
- Auto insurance coverage for up to 3 months or up to 12 months for individuals eligible to receive TANF assistance

- Obtain cars from public and private fleets rather than donations from private individuals (vehicles tend to be newer, more reliable, have complete service records, require less storage space, require smaller staff)
- (Blueprint, 2001, p. 3)

**Cars Now Program in Des Moines.** Commercial Federal Bank in Des Moines is partnering with Cars Now, a car rental agency, in a new program to increase low and moderate-income individual's access to affordable loans and reliable vehicles that are 2-3 years old. To participate, individuals must:

- Have been employed for at least 1 year
- Have been a local resident for at least 1 year
- Lack access to conventional credit
- Complete a financial literacy class

A credit check is done, but these people usually do not have a credit history. When criteria are met, a loan is approved at the current rate offered to "good" borrowers with a 0.25% discount. Loan applications are completed as part of the financial literacy class. The loans are monitored closely by the bank and followed up if payments are late.

This program was started in November 2002, so the partners are still learning as time passes. Two problems encountered to date are that even with favorable interest rates, the cars are too expensive for many people. Also, car insurance costs are a burden. Chris Hensley of Commercial Federal Bank stated the program is mutually beneficial to Cars Now and the bank, which counts the program toward its Community Reinvestment Act responsibilities. Commercial Federal Bank has a branch in Ames.

**Wheels to Work of Beyond Welfare in Ames.** Wheels to Work is one of several programs within the Beyond Welfare Community Engagement Program in Ames. Beyond Welfare strives to build community where everyone has the resources to realize their potential, to fulfill their relationships, and to contribute to the common good. A crucial component of that goal is to be able to hold a job or undertake further education. In many cases, that requires having reliable personal transportation. To meet this need, Beyond Welfare initiated and administers a program wherein residents in the community donate reliable personal cars for assignment to Beyond Welfare participants who have met certain requirements. Recipients must:

- Participate in the intake process
- Receive job coaching/education and training
- Complete a comprehensive assessment
- Develop a budget and self-sufficiency plan
- Attend at least three weekly dinner/support meetings
- Have a driver's license
- Obtain car insurance
- Agree to contribute back to the community in some way.

When requirements are met, the participant is added to a waiting list to receive a car. Some recipients have received a second car when the first one wore out.

As of the end of October 2003, approximately 135 cars had been donated and assigned to Beyond Welfare participants. The program relies on assistance from service stations/repair shops as allies in

evaluating and servicing the vehicles. The cars and the support of other participants have been crucial elements in helping individuals reach their goals. However, the program cannot provide personal transportation for many people nor do many individuals qualify.

## **Recommendations**

Transportation provided by non-profit agencies, faith communities, child care centers, senior residential facilities, and Iowa State University on a restricted-use basis meet some of the needs of individuals who need to get to work, school, a service agency, or to their faith community. However, the restricted-use aspect of these services severely limits the number of individuals who are served and the service areas involved. Purchasing, maintaining, and operating such vehicles by these agencies may prove to be too costly in the future, and other options should be considered.

Peter Hallock, Office of Public Transit, Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), acknowledges that there are gaps in provision of transportation in Story County. He has mentioned inefficiency in the area of human service agencies and other groups that purchase vans with private funds. In his opinion, there is a need for communication and for private groups to maximize use of their vehicles. He supports identifying the needs and resources available to provide transportation in Story County.

Public transit and restricted-use vehicles do not meet the needs of many individuals. Privately-owned vehicles will continue to be part of the solution to meeting transportation needs in Story County.

The following recommendations are offered:

- Suggest that ASSET conduct a survey of agencies providing transportation to their clients and lead the way toward development of an efficient and cost-effective model for providing transportation services
- Encourage non-profit organizations to assess cost-effectiveness of contracting with a public transit agency for transportation services as an alternative to operating their own vehicles
- Encourage expansion of opportunities for low-income families to become car owners
- Support existing efforts by Wheels to Work to enable welfare recipients to become car owners
- Encourage development of car ownership programs for low-income families that include the following elements found to support successful programs in other communities:
  - a) Professional management of program
  - b) Screening of recipients (including valid driver's license) and on-going case management of car recipients
  - c) Educational components on money management, safe driving, and vehicle maintenance
  - d) Reliable, well-maintained vehicles
  - e) Mandatory auto insurance coverage and assistance in acquiring insurance
  - f) Element of reciprocity, such as subsidized car loan for purchase or community service in exchange for vehicle
  - g) Partnership with at least one financial institution willing to grant low-interest car loans to low-income people.

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