

# research in brief

## **Special Transportation Program**

This study in Meeker County, Minnesota, funded under Title V of the Rural Development Act responded to community needs. The study's framework was consistent with similar studies investigating rural transit systems (see "Rural Transit Operations and Management" memo report, Secretary of Transit, Washington, D.C., 1972-73).

Previous research on 15 rural transit systems in areas of low population density showed that fixed routes and schedules were best and that transportation systems in rural areas are used primarily by the elderly, low-income households, and the handicapped. Usually these systems aren't profitable private business ventures and are operated primarily as public ventures.

The authors point out that: (1) each community must demonstrate a transportation need before funding can be obtained, (2) estimating demand is basic to establishing any rural transportation system, and (3) a fixed route and schedule often must be supplemented with "on-demand" feeder system to and from the pick-up (discharge) points.

This study was interested in how the level of ridership influenced costs and how costs affect the choice of transportation. The authors developed a county-wide system of three fixed routes with three levels of anticipated participation and considered four modes of service: (1) volunteer drivers paying 15 cents per mile for use of their personal automobiles, (2) an 11-passenger van with paid driver, (3) rented 44-passenger school bus with paid driver, and (4) owned 44-passenger school bus with paid driver. In mode 2, 3, and 4, volunteer drivers were paid mileage to carry people to and from the pick-up points on a demand-response basis. All modes assumed one ride per week to the county seat (largest city).

For the lowest level of ridership (6% of potential or 110 riders), volunteer drivers and mileage paid for use of their personal automobiles was the most economical. The authors wondered, however, if 41 volunteers and automobiles can be found to drive the necessary 41 trips covering 55,692 miles per year. If volunteer drivers can't be found, then the owned 44-passenger bus on fixed routes with volunteers covering the demand-response service to pick-up points is the most economical at all 3 ridership levels. Levels 2 and 3 anticipated 220 and 440 weekly users, respectively.

"Developing a Transportation Program for Older Americans."  
Steve Levy, Harold Jensen, William Easter, and Jerry Fruin.  
Reported as letter number 588, *Minnesota Agricultural Economist*, Agricultural Extension Service, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, April, 1977.

*Del Dyer*