

Tackling Transportation – One Step at a Time

Access to transportation is a long-standing issue in the Rochester community, as well as in many communities across New York State. Whether it be urban bus routes that do not meet the current mobility needs of the community, or rural bus routes that simply do not exist, lack of access to timely transportation that is within reasonable proximity to where people live, learn, work and receive healthcare or other services, impacts the health and well-being and quality of life in our communities.

In an effort to improve access to safe, timely, accessible and cost-effective transportation for program participants, staff and visitors at CCSI's Jay Street Rochester location (Water Tower Park) and the surrounding Jay Street neighborhood, the *Transportation Access Team at Water Tower Park* was established. Members of this Team include representatives from CCSI programs that provide direct client services at the site, along with the building co-occupants, Catholic Charities Community Services and the Villa of Hope. Although this Team had been focused on transportation to/from the Water Tower Park site, the efforts of this team are well-connected to broader community efforts to redesign the public transit system to meet today's needs.

In the Rochester/Monroe County region, the public transit system, RTS, has launched the RTS System Redesign: Reimagine RTS. Reimagine RTS is a planning process that will study and explore changes to the RTS fixed-route transit system to better meet the changing needs of the region. This study focuses on transit service within Monroe County, NY, including Downtown Rochester and the surrounding suburbs. The study includes an on-going community engagement process, with recommendations expected to be formulated by the end of 2018. RTS hosted a variety of meetings and events for people to attend and share their ideas in the fall of 2017. An online survey was also conducted during October to December 2017 for interested parties to provide input. Per RTS, "Further comments can be sent through our online comment form at any time. Those who choose to share their thoughts on Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter are encouraged to include our hashtag #ReimagineRTS to help us capture their input." (<https://www.myrts.com/Reimagine-RTS/About-Reimagine-RTS>)

The Team Lead for the Transportation Access Team at Water Tower Park, Linda Hagerty (CCSI), Community Liaison and Family Voice, Monroe County Children's System of Care, provides her insights on this Team's work, illustrating how a small group can work together to have an impact on an important community issue.

What are the goals of the Water Tower Park Transportation Team?

The purpose of the Transportation Access Team at Water Tower Park (WTP) is to improve access to safe, timely, accessible and cost-effective transportation for program participants, staff and visitors at Water Tower Park and the surrounding Jay Street neighborhood.

What transportation challenges / priorities have been identified to date?

- Offer service that is more frequent, consistent and easily accessible to the Water Tower Park complex and Jay Street neighborhood.

- Provide year-round shelter for bus users.
- Provide seating either indoors or outdoors or both for those waiting for rides and/or buses.
- Offer training in the community, and at our site for new users. Utilize current and long-time users as "transit ambassadors." Develop training that is relevant to the ages and abilities of users, including training that is age-appropriate, easy to understand, interactive, and offers real-time opportunities for practice.
- Re-design bus schedules to make them easier to understand. Also include visual aids for those who may not understand English, have visual impairments, etc. Create signage with the same points in mind. Bus stop signs are often too hard to read, understand and are inaccurate.
- Promote transit use as a viable option for all people, not only for those who cannot afford their own transportation.

What has been done so far – and what is underway to address transportation challenges?

- Arranged for Reimagine RTS to conduct paper surveys at Water Tower Park in December 2017 as a part of their community engagement process. Close to 120 surveys were completed in a four-hour period. An RTS bus was parked at WTP to both draw attention to the event and provide warm space to complete the survey. The paper surveys offered an easy alternative to the on-line option and Transportation Team members were available to provide assistance for those with low literacy levels, as well as those who spoke Spanish.
- Conducted studies with RTS to track ridership and use of other transportation options while lacking adequate bus service at WTP (transportation providers/cabs).
- Placed a shared bus schedule rack on the first floor, stocked with schedules for routes all over the city and suburbs.
- Designed and posted a visual aid that outlines specific information including best routes around the neighborhood, tips and hints in a colorful and larger format than a bus schedule.
- Some next steps to pursue include:
 - Enlarge the visual aid; make it available in a handout for agencies and businesses in WTP and the neighborhood.
 - With the help of Reconnect Rochester, have colorful bus stop cubes built and painted with company logos from WTP and the neighborhood. Bus stop cubes are a simple, cost effective solution to no bus seating near bus stops. Possibly get sponsors for this project.
 - Have a formal RTS bus shelter built and installed in the front of WTP to include all of the available technology to assist users.
 - Have a pathway from the center of Building J, our primary service site, out to the sidewalk so that patrons / customers have a safe and secure way to leave our building and travel to the sidewalk and bus stops.

How does the work of this group connect with other community strategies to improve transportation?

- **Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative** - Partnered with the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative and their Transportation Work Group.

- **Reconnect Rochester** – Have met with this organization to discuss our concerns and ideas; utilize their research, work and recommendations for improving transit options; attend community meetings, show our support; partner with them to build "bus stop cubes" as temporary seating, and continue to advocate for improvements both at Water Tower Park and in the greater community.
- **Reimagine RTS** – We have partnered with RTS to bring the community input survey to the WTP site and encourage all to stay connected with this initiative and its opportunities for community engagement.

Through team work and the development of relationships with the community and key stakeholders, this Team continues to work to tackle transportation – one step at a time.



Linda Hagarty, (CCSI) Community Liaison and Family Voice,
Monroe County Children's System of Care
and
Joy Pacheco, Community Outreach Manager,
Regional Transit Service (RTS)
handing out Reimagine RTS surveys at CCSI in December