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# Job Access and Reverse Commute Programs in the Chicago and San Francisco Metropolitan Regions

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## Abstract

While the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation has generated significant debate regarding declining TANF rolls, more research must be completed to show how TANF recipients use transportation services to access jobs, educational opportunities, child care, and health care. The inadequate transportation is acutely felt by many low-income workers, and transportation is a major barrier preventing the transition from welfare-to-work for many TANF recipients. In 1998, the federal government established the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) grant program to assist states and localities to identify and develop new or expanded transportation services that link TANF recipients to jobs and other employment related services. The JARC funds were supposed to stimulate the provision of new and innovative forms of transit directed at low income groups, though the regulatory burden meant non-traditional transit providers were generally not eligible to receive the JARC funds.

This paper will present findings from two case studies that examine job accessibility and reverse commute programs in the Chicago and San Francisco Metropolitan region. We first look at the process by which metropolitan planning organizations and regional transit agencies applied for JARC funds. We also examine the nature of new transportation services supported by these grants and examine how regional organization responded to the new challenges to provide flexible transportation services that meet low-income family needs such as paratransit, car ownership, and flexible routing. Finally, in this paper we offer insights to improve Job Access and Reverse Commute programs so that low-income neighborhoods and families can take full advantage of the program.

## Introduction

In 1996, Congress passed a sweeping welfare reform law called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), which replaced the existing welfare entitlement program and emphasized moving welfare recipients towards full-time employment. Congress recognized that the poor faced a major spatial mismatch in terms of where they lived (generally the central city) and where new employment opportunities were in metropolitan areas (generally the outer suburbs) (Gomez Ibanez 1984; Kasarda 1988; Sanchez, Stolz et al. 2003).[1] Thus, PRWORA was bundled with new transportation programs targeted at low-income workers to assist them to make the transition to full time work. One of the major obstacles that welfare mothers faced was a poor and insufficient transportation infrastructure (Blumenberg 2004; Cervero 2004; Ortoleva and Brenman 2004; Sanchez, Shen et al. 2004). In response to the transit poor access and service, several policy programs were designed to provide and fund reliable transportation for low-income families.[2] The underlying goal for all these programs was to provide social mobility and increase economic opportunity. The primary funds for transportation services for TANF families came from the following sources: TANF (user-side subsidies), JARC, Welfare-to-Work Grants (Department of labor) and Bridges to Work (Government Accounting Office 1998 ; Blumenberg 2002). However, the Department of Transportation (DOT) proposed the creation of a much larger $600 million Access to Jobs program to be administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) (Government Accounting Office 1998 ).

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) established the Access to Jobs and Reverse Commute (Access to Jobs) program in 1998 and authorized up to $750 million over 5 years to implement the program – FY 1999 through FY 2003.[3] One important aspect of the program was that TEA-21 limited funding of Access to Jobs programs to 50% of each grantee's project, unlike the 80% match generally available for highway projects and New Start transit projects (Government Accounting Office 1998). This is an important aspect of the Access to Jobs programs because relatively high local match requirements represent a desirable method of leveraging local and state funds for transportation projects for low-income families. The policy incentive was designed to encourage local, regional and state agencies to collaborate with each other as they craft transportation policies. Additionally, the JARC policy was also designed to equitably spread the funding to all regions of the U.S. Thus, the local and state high matches were very important in make sure the money went to the most deserving and underserved places. DOT tried to distribute the funds to as many areas as possible, setting targets of $1 million for large urban areas and $150,000 for rural areas. Another important aspect of the policy was JARC designed to be a competitive granting process. The rational beyond this aspect was to fund the most innovative and effective transportation programs for low-income families. The Department of Transportation used four key criteria for

[1] While transportation is frequently a key barrier to employment, other needs, such as access to child care, or even more fundamentally basic skills training, may be just as crucial.

[2] It is important to some scholars were concerned that too much emphasis was being place on transportation as the panacea for welfare mothers. See, Wachs, M. and B. D. Taylor (1998). "Can transportation strategies help meet the welfare challenge?" Journal of the American Planning Association **64**(1): 15-19.

[3] We will be using the terms Access to Jobs and JARC (Job Access and Reverse Commute) interchangeably to refer to this program.

evaluating grant applications on the basis of their merits: (1) project effectiveness (weighted by 35 points); (2) need for services (30); (3) local coordination (25); and (4) sustainability (10) (Government Accounting Office 1998).[4] At the time the program was instituted, there were indications that Congress realized that the transportation needs of the poor were different and could be difficult to meet, which is why there was an emphasis on local coordination and a willingness to try non-traditional approaches, including funding smaller transportation companies with no prior contact with FTA. Policies makers conceded that "existing public transportation systems cannot always bridge the gap between where the poor live and where jobs are located" (Government Accounting Office 1998 ). The policy incentive was clear, traditional transportation agencies were strongly encouraged to work with local social service agencies and non-profits to explore all nontraditional transportation alternatives to the fixed route or existing mass transit systems (Government Accounting Office 1998 ).

**Background**

DOT selected 179 grantees from 266 applications and awarded almost $71 million of the $75 million provided for the Job Access program for fiscal year 1999. Existing transportation organizations submitted 170 of the 266 applications for Job Access grants in fiscal year 1999. Transit organizations also accounted for 122 of the 181 grant awards that DOT made for fiscal year 1999.[5] Thirteen grantees were smaller community organizations, such as the African American Leadership Partnership in Chicago. The balance of the grantees included various government entities, such as the Chicago Housing Authority and DuPage County, Illinois (Government Accounting Office 1999). In terms of the types of services that would be supported by Access to Jobs grants, the funds generally went to van or shuttle services (41%) bus or rail (14%), or ridesharing (9%). Over half of grantees planned to use the funds for fixed routes service, while 43% of the grantees planned to create new services with the funds, 19% of the grantees planned to create demand-responsive services (19%) and only 14% of the grantees planned to create new connections to existing services (Government Accounting Office 1999).[6]

A Government Accounting Office (GAO) survey determined that almost 90% of the fiscal year 1999 Job Access grantees were satisfied with the goals and intent of the program. In addition, a majority of the respondents (55%) were reasonably satisfied with the DOT's responsiveness in helping them meet the FTA grant requirements applicable to Job Access grantees, though 51% said it took too long to satisfy these requirements. According to the report: "On average, it took about 9 months from the time DOT announced that an applicant had been selected for the Job Access program until the time the applicant had satisfied these grant requirements and could receive its grant. Over one-third of the respondents (37%) said they had experienced problems in obtaining matching funds because of the time they needed to satisfy these requirements. …

[4] It is notable that even in the early stages of program development, long-term sustainability of the projects had a low priority.

[5] Two of the projects winning funds in this initial round of applications were split into separate grants by DOT. See Government Accounting Office (1999). Welfare Reform: Implementing DOT's Access to Jobs Program in its First Year GAO RCED 00-14. Washington, D.C.

[6] The percentage will add to more 100 percent because grantees were allowed to use the money for multiple projects.

Despite some concerns, 81% of the respondents planned to apply for grants again in fiscal year 2000" (Government Accounting Office 2000).

While DOT had a relatively free hand in administering the program for FY 1999, Congress began to intervene heavily and earmarked 66% of the FY 2000 funds for specific projects and about 75% in FY 2001. Due to this redirecting of funds, DOT contended that "(Sööt, Sriraj et al.)here were many highly worthy applicants that were not designated for an earmark, and … many of these worthy applicants [were] not being funded"(Government Accounting Office 2001). The JARC funding became so tight that FTA did not solicit any proposals in FY 2001 and distributed that funds to project proposals submitted for FY 2000 that had not been funded due to funding limitations. This earned them the displeasure of the GAO, which was overseeing the implementation of the Access to Jobs program (Government Accounting Office 2001). The DOT proposed a formula for FY 2002 to allocate funds to the states and the District of Columbia rather than to individually selected projects in order to promote more predictable funding. According to DOT estimates, at the national level, 60% of the funds to areas would have gone to populations exceeding 200,000 and 40% to smaller areas. However, Congress did not accept the formula proposal, preferring to continue earmarking specific projects.[7] DOT did make some changes to the program, after being criticized by the GAO. They evaluated, scored, and ranked applicants for projects in "congressionally-designated areas" along with all other applicants, though it is unclear how this could actually affect funds guaranteed by a Congressional earmark (Government Accounting Office 2002).

There is no question that the JARC program distributed a large sum of transportation funding targeted towards low-income populations-- over $355 million in grants in 42 states from FY 1999 through FY 2002. What is less clear is if this funding was effective in allowing individuals to move into the workforce, particularly since the evaluations conducted by the GAO focused more on the process of awarding JARC funds rather than program outcomes. It is also unclear of the lasting impact of the JARC funds. According to GAO survey of the FY 1999 grantees, when JARC funds were reduced or discontinued -- as happened for roughly 20% of total grantees in the program -- 75% continued the service and 25% discontinued it. The money came from a variety of sources – 50% used state TANF funds, 33% local transit operator funds, 17% state transportation funds, 17% local government funds, and 17% private organizations and donations (Government Accounting Office 2001). In a follow-up survey, the GAO found that most of the programs supported by JARC funds were not financially sustainable over the long run. Only 12% of grantees indicated that they could continue their services after the end of program funding, while 41% reported they would likely terminate or decrease services, and 47% were uncertain about their ability to continue those services (Government Accounting Office 2002). While there was hope that JARC funds would serve as seed money to get deserving projects off the ground, the program implementers seemed to accept that many projects were experimental and would not be made permanent. This raises a legitimate point about the long-term sustainability of JARC programs. We were very interested in exploring this aspect in our case studies. We wanted to gauge the attitude

[7] Despite the GAO's assertion that DOT's approach may have left out promising projects in FY 2001, it never commented negatively on Congress's heavy use of earmarking for all years after FY 1999, which had a much greater impact on the shape of the JARC program at the federal level and almost certainly skewed the funds to less deserving programs.

regarding the long-term sustainability of JARC programs once federal funds dried up. The critics of JARC are right to ask if JARC is merely a cosmetic policy remedy or if JARC is truly designed to eliminate the deep structural inequalities built into the existing mass transportation systems?[8] Additionally, an equally important dueling tension emerges as to whether JARC is a transportation program or employment program (Wachs and Taylor 1998). If we view JARC as a transportation program, the goal and objectives will obviously be different compared to designing programs, goals and objective if we view JARC as an employment program. This dueling tension was and is a reality in many regions of the U.S. Without reliable transportation access many low-income families simply can't maintain stable employment. Thus, innovative transportation programs not only provide reliable transportation services but these programs are the umbilical cord to economic mobility for many families.

**Theoretical Framework and Research Design**

For this study, we follow the lead of Blumenberg and Cervero who have paved a path for scholars to follow in the effort to study the effectiveness of transportation programs to provide reliable social mobility and economic opportunity (Cervero, Tsai et al. 2002; Blumenberg, Miller et al. 2003). There were several key theoretical and policy debates that framed our inquiry: (1) private mobility vs. public mobility; (2) devolution of authority and decision making to small agencies; and (3) inter-agency collaboration (Lieberman and Shaw 2000; Blumenberg 2002; Cervero, Sandoval et al. 2002).

First, there is an ongoing debate if federal money should be used to buy cars for low-income families. The assumption prior to the 1996 welfare-to-work law was that federal money should be used for public transportation. Welfare bureaucrats were working with a similar assumption. For example, welfare families were sanctioned off of welfare if they own a car because it was deemed an asset. However, there has been a tremendous amount of research that shows the advantages of mobility by car versus public transportation (Ong 1996; O'Regan and Quigley 1998; Ong and Blumenberg 1998; Raphael and Rice 2002; Cervero and Tsai 2003). Second, building on the theme of collaborative policy design, the federal government encouraged non-traditional transportation providers to submit applications for JARC funding. However, several scholars have pointed out that this process of devolution had the potential to lead to a "race to the bottom" where non-traditional transportation providers would compete with other (Schram 1998; Lieberman and Shaw 2000). But a more important aspect of the devolution policy incentive was the real possibility that the large traditional transportation agencies would give real authority and power to non-traditional transportation providers. Finally, in a post welfare-to-work era, working on a transportation problem alone was not looked on favorably. To receive the new federal funds, Congress required transportation agencies to collaborate with each other to prevent duplication of services, capitalize on the strengths of each agency, and build on the collective effervescence of the new partnerships. This new policy incentive assumed that agencies had similar goals and objectives. The reality

[8] A recent article about JARC programs in Pittsburgh highlights this dueling reality. The JARC funding has dried, so the only solution for policy makers is eliminate the JARC programs. See Curry, J. (2007). Some low-income commuters might be left looking for ride to work. Pittsburgh Business Times. Pittsburgh.

is that there were and are dueling tensions regarding the goals, objectives, and definitions of success for JARC programs (Blumenberg 2002).

The motivation for this paper was to explore the barriers that local transportation agencies encountered as they tried to use JARC funding. At the very beginning of our discussion we felt it was important to study two regions. After much deliberation we choose the Chicago Metropolitan Region and San Francisco Bay Region. First, we wanted to study two metropolitan regions that were located in different regions of the U.S. We excluded Washington D.C. because of the geographical location to federal policy institutions and we excluded New York simply because of its size. Second, we wanted regions that had an extensive bus and light rail service. Third, we wanted to compare regions that had experience with innovative transportation services for the poor. Fourth, we wanted one region that appeared to have had success with JARC and we wanted one region that appeared to have had trouble with JARC. Finally, we wanted to compare regions that were somewhat similar in population size. We believe the two regions we selected offer an important analytical lens to study the implementation of JARC at the institutional level.

The issue that framed our inquiry was the role that institutions played in shaping JARC programs. We wanted to explore if traditional transportation institutions would take this opportunity to designed refreshingly innovative programs to meet the needs of low-income families. Our first hypothesis for this paper was that the inertia of traditional bureaucratic transportation institutions would not foster inter or intra agency collaboration in both regions (Government Accounting Office 1999). Our second hypothesis for this paper was that agencies would shy away from private mobility programs for both regions. Our final hypothesis for this paper was that agencies would not favor devolution of authority or decision making. By using these hypotheses as our guidelines, the analysis of JARC implementation at the regional level represents an exemplary case to study how some institutions create new processes that hamper innovation and how other institutions create new processes that foster innovation.

**Local Experience: Chicago**

The Chicago metropolitan area was well positioned to qualify for JARC funding when the program was announced. Due to pressure from community groups, the Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region, that established the Community Mobility Task Force. This Task Force had been set up primarily to look at mobility needs, particularly access to job opportunities for the unemployed.[9] In 1998-99, the Task Force had 21 members including IDOT, the Illinois Department of Human Services, the city of Chicago, the Councils of Mayors, the three public transit agencies, private providers, social service agencies and community based organizations, including the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT).[10]

[9] The process of instituting the Community Mobility Task Force was begun in June 1997, but it took several months to determine its composition. The Task Force is unique among CATS' working groups, since it is the only one to be chaired (in fact co-chaired) by citizen representatives rather than a representative of the government or a transportation provider. This structure was requested by a variety of community and environmental groups in Chicago.

[10] CNT had a history of working on community transportation issues and tried to restore Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) service cuts as well as to make the CTA Green Line renovation a success.

By early 1998, when it seemed likely that some kind of transportation funding targeted at former TANF recipients would be available in the upcoming federal transportation bill, the Community Mobility Task Force began looking into the issue in order to best leverage funds for Northeastern Illinois.[11] In fact, the Task Force had two meetings prior to the passage of TEA-21 in June. As the FTA worked on guidance, the Task Force continued to meet and considered early candidates for JARC funds, including an expansion of Metra Shuttle Bug service and a bus service to take residents from the South suburbs to industrial jobs around O'Hare Airport (Chicago Area Transportation Study 1998).

On October 22, the FTA guidance for the program was released. At that time, MPOs were informed that the applications for JARC funds were due by December 31, a very short lead time for such an important program, which was then cut further by two weeks due to the need to have the grant proposal ready for approval by the CATS Policy Committee (Chicago Area Transportation Study 1998). In October, the Task Force hosted a workshop for non-traditional transportation providers to explain the program and to solicit proposals for JARC funding. It soon became apparent that the local match requirement (a full 50%) was an insurmountable barrier for the vast majority of the small transportation companies unless they had partnered with a government agency, such as the city of Chicago or DuPage County. Of the 14 projects that were submitted, those projects not connected to a government agency were often grouped into a catch-all project called the Chicago Area Job Access and Transit Enhancement Plan, which would be administered by the CTA, Metra, and Pace. This happened to projects on the west side of Chicago, originally proposed by Suburban Job-Link Corporation, and one in Joliet, sponsored by the Joliet Area Church-Based Organized Body (JACOB).[12] Another project proposed by Fisher Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church was dropped when they did not supply the information required to evaluate the project. One of the few projects sponsored by a non-traditional organization to be granted first-tier status in the proposal was the City-Suburban Transportation Link project sponsored by the African American Leadership Partnership. Two projects sponsored by Clifton's Bus Company and Omni Transportation were combined into a first-tier project, though with funding lower than originally requested (Chicago Area Transportation Study 1998).[13]

After evaluating the proposals, the Task Force pulled together their grant proposal. The proposal included 8 first-tier projects at a total cost of $2.5 million, with $1.5 programmed for the Chicago Area Job Access and Transit Enhancement Plan. There were three second- and third-tier projects, which were basically requests for second year funding for several of the first-tier projects (Chicago Area Transportation Study 1998). It appears that when the FTA analyzed the grant proposal, the agency ran down the list and accepted the first five-first tier

[11] According to Jackie Grimshaw of CNT (one of the co-chairs of the Task Force), the Task Force had not been explicitly handed the assignment to put together the Job Access grant application, but instead had actively claimed this task as being within their purview and matching well with their knowledge and contacts in the community (Interview with Grimshaw, May 5, 2003 unpublished data). In November, the ISTEA Policy Subcommittee officially assigned responsibility for the JARC program to the Task Force, long after they had been working on the issue (*10*).

[12] Despite losing control of the program to Pace, the JACOB group could be considered winners, since they had been unable to convince Pace to implement their project in the past.

[13] This combined project, however, was not funded by the FTA.

projects for a total grant of $2.2 million and dropped the rest, for the award amounts for FY 1999 closely matched the CATS' figures in the proposal.

In Chicago, implementing the various JARC projects turned out to be considerably more challenging than winning the awards.[14] It turned out that few, if any, FTA regulations had been reduced or relaxed for non-traditional providers involved in the projects. This ultimately led to the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) acting in an oversight capacity to ensure that all FTA requirements would be met and to prevent violations that might result in lost funding. Since this relationship had not been completely worked out prior to the submittal of the JARC grant application, it took time to set it up. Staff turnover at RTA also hampered the implementation of the program. While some JARC funds were expended in 2000, it is clear that the program was severely delayed, above and beyond the nine months lag that most projects faced. The U.S. DOT noted that by mid 2001, there were only 7 projects selected for grants in FY 1999 where the funds had still not been fully obligated, and five of them were in the Chicago, IL, area – essentially the entire CATS proposal (Government Accounting Office 2001). It does appear that Chicago was objectively slower in using JARC funds than other metropolitan regions, which might have led to the frustration some activists had with the program. It is unclear if the long delay had anything to do with Chicago's funding prospects in future rounds of the JARC funding process. In fact, when compared to San Francisco, this lack of timeliness can partly explain why San Francisco was so successful. We argue that when trying to work in a new policy environment, you need to have success. The inertia from the small successful projects will provide an effervescence and willingness to collaborate; to be flexible; and to share power with non-traditional agencies. As we show later in this paper, this happened in San Francisco. We believe that, although small, this was one of the great failures that ultimately set the stage for larger policy failures in the Chicago region.

Of course, the delay cannot be laid solely at the feet of the RTA. Most of the sponsoring agencies had trouble coming up with the required 50% local match. For example, the African American Leadership Partnership (AALP) sponsored project was the most troubled in this regard.[15] Although it was one of first 13 grants for small non traditional providers, AALP did not have the resources or social and economic networks to make the project sustainable (Government Accounting Office 1999). They had anticipated that The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) would come up with the majority of the funds, but learned that this was beyond the financial resources of TWO. Ultimately, the AALP informed the Community Mobility Task Force that they were withdrawing from the project. The FTA, not unreasonably, insisted that the funds could not simply be reprogrammed and had to be spent for the same target group and in the target area originally proposed. This led to a several month process of determining another agency to take over the project, either the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) which was having some of its own problems with its CHARIOT program or Pace. It

[14] The required to collaborate with agencies assumed that agencies had similar goals, objectives for JARC funds. In Chicago, this proved to be a difficult task. There were many stakeholders at the tables all wanted a piece of the pie for different projects. Additionally, the FTA proved burdensome for non-traditional providers because they did not have the resources or time to complete the paperwork for the JARC applications.

[15] AALP is a group of black pastors that is to teach African-American clergy and laity with skills to transform and revitalize churches and distressed communities. Additionally, AALP is working to redress social inequalities in these communities, as well.

was finally decided that Pace would take over the project. In general, implementation of JARC funded projects went the most smoothly when run through transit service boards. Metra, Pace and the CTA were all able to report new JARC-supported service on the ground by December 2000.

Northeastern Illinois continued to receive a considerable share of JARC funds for FY 2000 through FY 2002. In all three years, the total grants were over $2 million. However, due to Congressional earmarking, CATS and the Community Mobility Task Force had less and less control over how the funds were allocated. For example, of the $2.2 million for FY 2000, $200,000 went to two DuPage projects (which were at least consistent with the original grant application) and $1.5 million went to UIC to help fund a National Welfare-to-Work Center to research job access issues, leaving only $1 million for CATS to distribute. The funds to be spent on direct transportation services for the poor were cut roughly in half, though of course the region did still have a considerable sum of unobligated funds from FY 1999. The funding picture was similar for FY 2000 where roughly $2 million was available for the Chicago metropolitan region, but $1.5 million had come from various earmarks. By FY 2002, nearly 90% of JARC funds were allocated by earmarks. Dispute the JARC earmark funds, the Chicago region still won some of the competitive grants, but by FY 2003, the entire federal JARC program had been earmarked. Chicago's share dropped to under $0.5 million. While the pool of funds did decrease from $125 million to $104 million nationwide, the San Francisco Bay area's funds grew from an average of $0.6 million in FY 99-01 to over $5 million in earmarks for FY 02-03 (see Table 1). One CATS official responsible for oversight of the Community Mobility Task Force's proposal commented that the heavy use of earmarks in the last years of the program made it a different program. Most agencies nationwide that asked their Congressional representatives for JARC earmarks did receive them, but in the Chicago region, only PACE, UIC and DuPage County made that effort. He did not speculate on why CTA and Metra did not seek out earmarks, though it could well be that those agencies were already asking Congress to fund massive infrastructure projects that had a higher internal priority than the reverse commute programs. We argue that one possible reason that Chicago did not get the large earmarks is that the organizations did not develop any refreshingly innovation programs like LIFT in San Francisco. We believe that there was a disconnect between Chicago transportation agencies and politicians in trying to figure out creative ways to earmark money for JARC projects.

*Insert Table One*

A major question remains about what happens to the service when the Access to Jobs funds expire.[16] For the smaller providers, the answer is clear that they cannot continue operating in the absence of some subsidy, though probably all would be willing to continue providing service even if the funding source switched from a federal source to the state or even local government. Thus, supporters of reverse commute programs must demonstrate the effectiveness of the service to gain any level of support in difficult financial times. The issue is not as straight-forward for the traditional transit service boards. In some cases, the notion that

[16] As we mentioned earlier in this paper, it appears that in some regions, the JARC programs are being eliminated.

the JARC funds were providing seed money to build demand for transit and make the service self-sufficient (at least meeting the roughly 50% farebox recovery ratio test) was an accurate one. Metra announced in 2002 that it would consider retaining at least one and maybe two of the service changes supported by JARC even after the funds ran out. The CTA was even clearer, declaring that the extra hours added to Purple and Orange Line rail service had been a success, and they would extend the extra service indefinitely. Some of the bus routes supported by JARC, however, might not be retained. By late 2002, it appeared that the Pace routes in Joliet would be cut since Pace felt they could not sustain the route at the current ridership levels without additional subsidy.[17] The unpleasant dilemma is that the programs most targeted at the poor, such as Suburban Job-Link or some of the vanpool programs, could not be sustained without JARC funds, while the CTA and Metra initiatives would continue. While these programs do provide important transit options, they benefit the public at large and are not specifically targeted at the poor.[18]

In giving her general evaluation of the program, one local official from the Center for Neighborhood Technology, felt that the JARC program was very important for simply trying to meet the transportation needs of the poor. She felt that there was considerable pent-up demand for non-traditional transit service, specifically targeted at welfare recipients and other low income individuals. Researchers at the University of Illinois of Chicago augment this argument that there is a strong need for non-traditional services (Thakuriah 2004; Thakuriah 2007). The new demands for flexible transportation services coincide with the changing and complex metropolitan opportunity structure that offers few alternatives to fixed-route bus lines. The person from the Center for Neighborhood Technology also echoed this sentimented for flexible transportation service. She expressed that she liked more flexibility in the program, particularly when it came to the FTA requirements, but a more critical need was to ensure that there was ongoing support for worthy JARC programs, since agencies generally were not willing to commit themselves to sustaining reverse commute programs in the absence of external funds. The program should have been structured to guarantee the operating funds for a longer time in order to build demand for transit in the region; even a three-year pilot program was not really long enough.

In an interview about the achievements of the JARC program, one city official stated that the region had benefited from the program, not only because the funds supported transit service targeted at low-income populations, but because the process of applying for and administering the JARC funds had allowed transportation providers and social service agencies to build better working relationships. He believed that in the future, even in the absence of new reverse commute funds, social service agencies would have a better understanding of how to inform transportation decision makers about where transportation needs were not being met. CATS was committed to going after additional JARC funds, however, since it was obvious that without funding, some services were not sustainable. He offered interesting observations about some of the problems in implementing the JARC programs. He believed that the local match

[17] One comment at the Task Force indicated that Pace might have kept the route at a 35% recovery ratio but not after the RTA mandated that they raise their recovery ratio to 40% system-wide.

[18] This is particularly true of the Purple Line, which runs from Evanston to the Chicago Loop, with stops in Lakeview and Lincoln Park.

requirement of 50% was really beyond the capacity of many low-income neighborhoods and even some lower income suburbs. In addition, FTA rules did not allow farebox revenue to be used towards the local match, which would have extended the life of some of the new services. It was clear to him that the non-traditional transit providers were not able to meet the FTA requirements, which had not been relaxed, so that the most successful programs were either those directly provided by the three primary transit agencies – CTA, Metra and Pace – or in close partnership with them. Those agencies were also the ones most likely to have the resources to come up with local match funds. He said that CATS position going into reauthorization of TEA-21 was that the JARC program should be extended, but with a reduction of the required local match from 50% to 20% and allowing the flexibility to use farebox receipts as part of the local match.

**Local Experience: San Francisco**

After the passage of the 1996 welfare-to-work law, state policy makers and non-profit organizations began working on California's state welfare-to-work plan. Transportation was immediately identified as one of the key barriers that needed to be addressed if welfare recipients were going to find and maintain sustainable employment. Transportation consistently ranks among the top barriers that single mothers list as they try to leave the welfare rolls. Transportation barriers can prevent TANF recipients from effectively seeking work or cause a TANF recipient to lose a job. Reliable and efficient transit service is a prerequisite for welfare recipients to find a job and keep a job (O'Regan and Quigley 1998). Bay Area welfare advocates have argued that finding a job is difficult for welfare recipients with young children, but getting to the job is even more difficult because many welfare recipients live in transit poor neighborhoods and have no reliable access to a car. The challenge to get to the workplace is compounded when a single mother has to get her children to day care, school, or after school programs (Scholl 2002).

After the passage of California's CalWORKs law, a diverse group of job access and reverse commute programs were introduced in the San Francisco Bay Area to meet the wide array of transportation challenges that CalWORK recipients face.[19] This is not surprising given that the San Francisco Bay Area has traditionally been a leader in innovative transportation programs for low-income populations. Bay Area transportation policy makers recognized that transit services--in select neighborhoods that have a high concentration of welfare recipients--were inadequate to meet the growing demands of welfare recipients. Studies have shown that many low-income individuals live in poor transit neighborhoods and have severe mobility challenges to find access to the new employment opportunities in the burgeoning suburban job rich corridors (Cervero, Sandoval et al. 2002; Cervero and Tsai 2003).

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) immediately took a leadership role to address the transportation barriers that poor women encounter as they looked for work. Because MTC is the transportation planning, coordinating, and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, they were in a unique position to lead the planning process and identify regional transit problems and solutions. MTC establish three objectives as they worked with non-profit and government agencies to develop programs to deal with the transportation barriers. According to an MTC official, the objectives were defined in

[19] CalWORKs is the California's welfare-to-work law.

collaboration with other transportation agencies and non-traditional providers. These objectives were: (1) "assess the transportation requirements of CalWORKs program participants and identify transportation-related barriers to obtaining and retaining work;" (2) "identify strategies to increase availability, affordability and effectiveness of transportation services;" and (3) "establish agreements among the transportation providers, employers and Social Services Agency (SSA) to ensure the availability of Transportation options" (Stewart 1999).

Prior to JARC funding, MTC began working with county officials to identify transportation barriers for CalWORK recipients. Working with county and local officials that had extensive experience with low income women, MTC was able to identify important and timely transportation barriers. What is important about these barriers is that they were identified through a planning process where individual and agencies were given a voice in the process. Eight regional transportation barriers were identified: (1) lack of extended-hour transportation; (2) complex, multi-leg trips; (3) cost per trip; (4) lack of access to automobile transportation; (5) safety at bus stops and bus lines in the evening; (6) emergency flexibility; (7) language and literacy; and (8) difficulty planning trips.

In 1998, with the support of MTC, AC Transit started an experimental bus line that operated during evening hours to connect welfare recipients in Richmond to employment centers that had job openings for shift workers. This was the first program enacted that specifically addressed a key transportation barrier for CalWORK recipients. The goal of the service was to provide more transit access to Richmond, which has one of the highest concentrations of CalWORK recipients, to areas that had a shortage of entry-level employees. In the eyes of MTC and AC Transit the "OWL" service was a success because they were providing a service to residents and the service was being used by the residents. Success in this context is relative. In fact, when asked to define success, the officials from MTC simply stated that the "OWL" service was a success because it was being used by underserved low incomes population regardless of the cost. With the introduction of the "OWL" service, AC Transit and Bay Area transit agencies began working with MTC to identify other neighborhoods that were underserved and had a high concentration of welfare recipients.[20]

MTC coordinated all the JARC applications to ensure that there was no duplication in services. MTC worked with groups on JARC applications that addressed the transportation barriers for CalWORK recipients identified by the welfare-to-work planning group. One of the most innovative programs funded with JARC money is the regional JARC Low-Income Flexible Transportation program (LIFT) program administered by MTC. The regional JARC program provides funding to fill transportation gaps that have been identified through local and regional welfare-to-work planning workgroups. The LIFT program is one component of the Regional Welfare to Work Planning project, which was initialized in April of 2000. In addition to coordinating the JARC applications, MTC also applied for JARC funding for the regional Low-Income Flexible Transportation program (LIFT), which was designed to improve services

[20] Scholars have found the 376 line cost$7 per passenger trip versus a fare of $1.50 (Sööt, S., P. Sriraj, et al. (2002). A User Survey of Transportation Services Funded by the Job-Access-Reverse-Commute Program. Urban Transportation Center. Chicago, IL.

in transit poor neighborhoods in the Bay Area as part of the Regional Welfare to Work Transportation Plan.

Organizations that are seeking JARC funding can apply directly for JARC funding or they can apply for LIFT funding, which is partly funded with JARC funds. This was a very important innovation in terms encouraging local agencies to apply for money to provide transportation services. The main goal of LIFT was to encourage more non-profit and social services agencies that had limited resources to submit a grant to the federal government, to submit a more streamline grant to MTC to seek JARC funding for innovative transit programs. MTC clearly understood that submitted a grant to federal government was a hug barrier for many small non-profit groups. Anticipating this institutional barrier and creating an alternative solution to tap federal JARC funds allowed MTC to create an institution process that encouraged agencies to submit ideas to local transit authorities regarding promising transit programs for the poor. The data clearly suggest that the creation of LIFT encouraged more non-profit and social services agencies to seek JARC funding for innovative transit programs.

For the fiscal years 1999 to 2002, 11 projects have been funded by JARC funds. Four additional projects are currently earmarked for the 2003 fiscal year. Of these 15 JARC projects, 60% are administered by a local transit agency, 20% are administered by non-profits, and 20% administered by the local MPO. A total of $8,175,248 was spent on the 11 JARC projects from 1999 to 2002, and $4,200,000 has been earmarked for the four projects for the 2003 fiscal year. Of the $12 million of JARC funds allocated or earmarked, half has been given or will be given to local transit agencies. Thirty-five percent of JARC funds have been allocated to the local MPO and 15% has been allocated to non-profit agencies. For the 2000-2002 fiscal years, MTC received 12 applications for a total amount requested of $6.5 million. For the 2003 fiscal year MTC received 26 applications. The total amount requested for the 26 applications was $9.5 million. This was three times the amount that MTC had available for regional JARC projects. Given the gap between expected expenditures and the amount of JARC funds, MTC was unable to fund all the second round applications for the LIFT program. MTC has approved funding for 14 LIFT projects. However, only 13 will receive JARC funding for the second round (See Table 2).

*Insert Table Two*

The first round of MTC's LIFT programs was dominated by bus line services. More than half of the projects for 2000-2002 fiscal years were bus line improvements. This lack of JARC program diversity may be a result of confusing guidelines as to who was eligible, lack of human capital by non-profit agencies to prepare a LIFT application, and an institutional competitive advantage for transit agencies to prepare the LIFT grant. The abundance of public transit LIFT programs also was partly due to the California Transit Association efforts to push public transit as the most viable service to meet the transportation needs of welfare recipients (Murray 1998). Public transit agencies clearly were more organized in promoting public transit as the only viable solution to get welfare recipients to their work location, and if the services were not available, they were in a position to create new fixed routes to meet the needs of

disadvantaged populations. Whether these new fixed route bus lines are efficient, is currently being debated among policy makers in the Bay Area.

Many of MTC's public transit LIFT projects are clearly meeting a previously unmet demand. Contra Costa's new bus line experienced a 169% increase in ridership after just three weeks of extended service.(Press Release 2001) On the first Sunday of use 162 passengers used the new 314 bus line. On the third week of service, 437 passengers used the new 314 bus line.[21] According to Cindy Dahlgree, "Based on everything we've heard over the past year from our bus operators and from passengers, we knew that there was a real need for bus service on Sunday along these corridors"(Press Release 2001). Another example of MTC innovation was its effort to provide funds for several shuttle services which provide flexible routing services for individuals that live in neighborhoods that currently have infrequent fixed route transit access from their neighborhood to jobs centers.[22] The success of these programs may be short lived as California's budget crisis looms and threatens to cut these programs. AC Transit's most popular welfare-to-work bus line is in jeopardy of getting cut because of low ridership and large subsidizes to the line. A study by professors at the University of Illinois, Chicago, found that the AC Transit 376 "OWL" line cost $7 per passenger trip versus a fare of $1.50. They also found that on average about 300 riders use the "OWL" service (Sööt, Sriraj et al. 2002). Regardless of the budget uncertainty and proposed cuts, residents that use this new bus services feel that it is important and without it, they simply could not get to work. This dueling tension between the economic feasibility of the service and the need, regardless of the cost, for reliable and flexible public transit to connect low-income families to jobs and social services highlight the precarious future of innovative JARC programs.

Taking advantage of JARC's flexibility, in the first round, MTC funded two projects designed to provide transportation for children and one project designed to provide non-traditional transportation access. One reason why there were a low number of these projects is that they require more time and coordination from MTC staff. Another reason why there were a low number of applications was because it took a significant amount of time to clarify JARC program objectives and regulations and identify resources that could be used to ensure that the program would work.

Even though half of the LIFT programs were for bus line improvements, MTC recognized that public transit could not meet the needs of all CalWORK recipients. This is a new and awkward position for MTC given that their overall mission is to promote public transit. By funding two car programs and one vanpool program, in the second round of LIFT funding, MTC has taken an important step to increase the diversity of transit options for low-income populations. Studies have consistently shown that welfare recipients that own a car are more likely to leave the TANF rolls and find sustainable employment (Ong 1996; O'Regan and Quigley 1998; Ong and Blumenberg 1998; Blumenberg 2000; Cervero, Sandoval et al. 2002; Cervero, Tsai et al. 2002; Raphael and Rice 2002; Lucas and Nicholson 2003). Other studies have shown that

[21] Although the Press Release states the ridership jumped 270% in three week. The actual percent increase was 169%. There was a calculation error by the paper.
[22] Similar programs were created throughout the U.S. See, Minton, E. (1999). "On the Road Again." Planning **65**.

even those welfare recipients that found employment using public transportation would immediately buy a car when they have saved enough money for the down payment (Blumenberg 2000).

More significantly, MTC has increased funding for transportation services specifically targeted at children of low-income families. These types of services have become increasingly important as single women with children try to reduce the number of multi-leg work commutes to simple one-leg commutes, thus reducing the amount of time they have to spend on commuting and transferring from bus line to bus line to get from their home to work. Perhaps one of the most innovative uses of LIFT is a program in Sonoma County. One component of the Long-Term Transportation Solutions project is learning how to make complex trips via public transit more efficient. Many of the entry level job openings for Sonoma County residents are located in San Rafael, which is in Marin County. Getting these jobs via public transit is doable, but bad trip planning can result in a passenger spending unnecessary hours on public transit. Learning how to read a transit system and plan appropriately for bus transfers is essential for residents in the North Bay where bus service is not as frequent as the East Bay.

**Conclusion**

We framed this paper around three hypotheses: (1) greater inter-agency collaboration; (2) little support for private mobility programs, and (3) little support for devolution of authority. Our analysis clearly shows the Chicago and San Francisco responded in different ways and intensity to the opportunity to create innovative transportation programs for low-income populations. We conclude that MTC was more active than CATS in actively pursuing inter-agency collaboration. MTC recognized the benefits of the collaboration but, they acknowledge that maintaining the momentum with welfare-to-work programs was difficult and coordinating with many players was a huge challenge in terms of censuses building and accountability.

In regards to our second hypothesis, to our surprise, MTC actively pursue private mobility programs for low-income families. Although, these programs were discussed for the Chicago region, CATS did not provide the type of institutional support that MTC provided. In fact, MTC unbridled enthusiasm for these car sharing programs showed that they recognized the structural barriers that can't be overcome by fixed transportation lines. By recognizing that public transit is simply not flexible enough to meet all the needs of CalWORK recipients, MTC opened up an important avenue of private mobility services that in the long run may foster sustainable economic self-sufficiency.

Finally, our last hypothesis showed that in comparison to Chicago, MTC, spearheaded an effort to create a regional JARC program to allow smaller non-traditional transportation providers to apply for federal money. Although MTC considers the LIFT program to be a success, they have expressed concerned about institutional and programmatic barriers that have interfered with the coordination of welfare-to-work and job access programs. Programmatic barriers that MTC consistently encounters are a lack of flexibility in JARC guidelines and a failure by FTA to answer questions regarding JARC guidelines in an appropriate time-frame. As far as the institutional barriers are concerned, MTC has found that it is difficult to maintain momentum with welfare to work plans. MTC applauds JARC's focus on coordination, but MTC has also

found that it is difficult to coordinate JARC activities with a diverse group of organizations providing services for CalWORK recipients. Trying to coordinate with a diverse group is time consuming and it is difficult to build consensus given that the organizations have different goals. In Chicago, coordination between agencies is viewed as important and is partially handled by the RTA welfare- to-work clearinghouse. However, the lessons learned in Chicago appear to be that non-traditional companies were not well positioned to administer JARC programs on their own or even with the assistance of the RTA. Successful partnerships were possible where a smaller company partnered with CTA, Metra or Pace.[23] One potential solution of the Access to Jobs program would have been for the Federal Transit Administration to undergo a cultural change, making them more willing to accept nontraditional approaches for addressing welfare to work barriers (Government Accounting Office 1998 ). Many observers contend that this cultural shift did not occur and made implementing the program more difficult.

It is too early to assess the overall impact of JARC projects. In fact, evaluation of JARC programs has been minimal and generally restricted to surveys of program grantees However, there have two important studies for California's transportation programs (Cervero, Tsai et al. 2002; Blumenberg, Miller et al. 2003). However, if there is one overall conclusion that we can draw from the San Francisco Bay area, it is that JARC has created an environment that has forced key institutional players from all nine counties to participate in a discussion about social equity and transportation. This discussion has demonstrated that even in a region like the Bay Area, which strives to create social equity, certain neighborhoods have been underserved by transit. Similarly, the Chicago metropolitan has low-income neighborhoods underserved by transit. A UIC study determined that mean travel times in some of the poorer neighborhoods in Cook County were longer than the mean times for wealthier communities (Sööt, Thakuriah et al. 2003). The success of these discussions to create transportation programs that create access to opportunities for the most disadvantages populations will be measured by the financial commitment of these organizations to continue these programs after JARC and welfare-to-work grants end.

The most important question is the hardest to answer. Did these funds help meet the transportation needs of the poor? There does not appear to be any systematic study of how many users were served by JARC-supported services and whether this additional service helped them gain full-time employment, though UIC did survey users of JARC transit service and found that for many their travel times and costs had decreased due to the programs (Sööt, Sriraj et al. 2002). A sizeable percentage, roughly 12%, had shifted from auto mode to transit to take advantage of a JARC program, which was an unusual finding. The users surveyed overwhelmingly said that the service was important to them (77%) and that they could not reach the destination – often a work-related destination – without the JARC-supported service (66%) (Sööt, Sriraj et al. 2002).

One of the most striking aspects of the JARC program was that the goals were noble but vague, and there were no clear targets to help justify the continuation of a particular program. This probably made it even more difficult for DOT to fend off the Congressional earmarking that

[23] The DuPage Federation, which had earmarks in all years after FY 1999 did work with smaller companies.

altered the nature of the program. In previous research, one of the authors found that evaluating reverse commute programs on the basis of inappropriate goals could cause the failure of worthy programs (Petersen and Sermons 1996). In that research, we argued that focusing on securing employment for low-income individuals received priority over retaining a certain number of individuals who used the transit service. Unfortunately, the limited evaluation of the JARC program has fallen into the same error of not establishing if it is an employment program or a transportation program that is to be evaluated, and which should be prioritized when they come into conflict. Some advocates clearly believe that targeting geographic areas is appropriate, even though this does not guarantee that low-income individuals are using the service and are using it to access employment. Others would argue that the scattershot approach is too diffuse and allows too many middle income individuals to benefit from funds that should be directed at the poor. Without resolving this question, a true evaluation of the JARC program cannot occur. While the JARC program has clearly helped meet transportations needs for many low-income individuals and of many neighborhoods, there are still unmet needs. Having a clearer focus on what is important and worth retaining from the five years of Access to Jobs funding for TEA-21 reauthorization is critical in order to meet those needs more effectively in the next round.

## Glossary of Acronyms

AALP – the African American Leadership Partnership
AC Transit – Alameda-Contra Costa Transit
CATS – Chicago Area Transportation Study, the MPO for the Chicago region
CHA – the Chicago Housing Authority
CNT – the Center for Neighborhood Technology
CTA – the Chicago Transit Authority
DOT – U. S. Department of Transportation
FTA – Federal Transit Administration
GAO – Government Accounting Office
JACOB – Joliet Area Church-Based Organized Body
JARC – Job Access and Reverse Commute Programs
LIFT – Low-Income Flexible Transportation program
MPO – Metropolitan Planning Organization
MTC – the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the MPO for the San Francisco Bay area
PRWORA – Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
RTA – the Regional Transportation Authority
SSA – Social Services Agency
TANF – Temporary Assistance to Needy Families
TEA-21 – The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century
TWO – The Woodlawn Organization
UIC – University of Illinois at Chicago

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**Table 1: DOT criteria for Access to Jobs applications**

| | **Criterion Weight** |
|---|---|
| Project's effectiveness | 35 |
| Need for services | 30 |
| Local coordination | 25 |
| Sustainability | 10 |
| **Subtotal** | **100** |
| Bonus points | 10 |
| **Total** | **110** |

***Source: Department of Transportation***

| Table 2 - JARC Funds in Metropolitan Chicago and San Francisco Bay Area | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | FY 1999 | FY 2000 | FY 2001 | FY 2002 | FY 2003 | Total |
| Chicago Metro | 2,186,500 | 2,220,000 | 2,088,393 | 2,364,003 | 495,335* | 9,354,231* |
| San Francisco Metro | 614,111 | 1,056,937 | 379,000 | 6,125,000 | 4,160,818 | 12,375,048 |

*FY 2003 Chicago figures do not include $0.5 million for statewide Illinois Ways to Work program.

***Source: CATS, MTC, US DOT***

***Table Created by Authors***

| Table 3 - MTC LIFT Projects by Agency Type | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | FY 2000-2002 | | | FY 2003 | | |
| | **Number** | **Amount*** | **%** | **Number** | **JARC Amount** | **%** |
| Transit | 4 | $1,788,000 | 36% | 4 | $1,072,554 | 36% |
| City | 2 | $875,000 | 18% | 3 | $761,603 | 25% |
| Social Service Agency | 5 | $1,586,330 | 32% | 4 | $872,637 | 29% |
| Non-Profit | 1 | $750,000 | 15% | 2 | $297,205 | 10% |
| Total | 12 | $4,999,330 | 100% | 13 | $3,003,999 | 100% |

**** This Amount includes JARC, STA and Local Match***

***Source: Metropolitan Transportation Commission***

***Table Created by Authors***

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