Itasca Transportation Initiative
Fact Sheet

The Issue

Many people in Itasca County struggle everyday getting to and from the places they need to be. Reliable transportation is a “must” for people to gain and maintain employment, get to and from appointments and participate in academic activities.

Itasca County has a population of approximately 43,000, and is located in north central Minnesota. At 3,000 square miles, the county is the third largest in the state. There are 16 cities and 42 organized townships. Among Itasca County residents, the overall poverty rate was 9.8 percent in 2007, compared to 9.5 percent in Minnesota overall.

(http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/saipe/saipe.cgi)

Because Itasca County is geographically large and rural, reliable or alternative transportation is a challenge, especially for three segments of the population:

1. Low income workers: Hourly wage data from second quarter 2008 reveals that 27 percent of Itasca County workers earn between $6.16 and $9.99 per hour compared to 18 percent statewide¹. Reliable transportation is key to low-income workers finding and keeping employment.

2. Students: In 2006-2007, eligibility for free and reduced lunch in Itasca County school districts ran from 35 – 57 percent². Transportation can be a barrier to student participation in academic and after-school programming, whether it be at their school or at another school district within the County, especially for students of low-income families and those not old enough to drive. At the college level, reliable transportation is also a barrier to participation in college courses and other college activities.

3. Senior Citizens: Itasca County has a large senior citizens population. There are currently limited modes of transportation within Itasca County to meet their needs.

Transportation options currently available to Itasca County area residents include: Arrowhead Transit, Rural Rides, school bus systems, taxi service, privately owned transportation (motorized and non-motorized), and the Leech Lake Indian Reservation transportation program.

¹ Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Labor Market Information Office
The Goal

Build on existing resources (where we can) to increase transportation accessibility for people in Itasca County area who have limited resources: low-income workers, elderly and students.

Project Overview

In 2008, the United Way of 1000 Lakes spotlighted the issue of transportation barriers in their report, "What Matters: Assessment of Health and Human Service Needs in Itasca County." The Blandin Foundation responded by convening a group of local stakeholders who have been working on this issue since February 2009.

In July 2009, the Itasca Transportation Solutions group selected the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs to deliver a report, to:

- Identify location and transportation needs of targeted populations
  - Low income workers
  - Students
  - Seniors
- Identify barriers and gaps
- Recommend solutions, including funding options

The final study was completed in December 2009, and is available at www.blandinfoundation.org/policy/policy-detail.php?intResourceID=428. In January 2010, Itasca Transportation Solutions met to identify the recommendations to move forward in 2010-2011. These recommendations include:

- Marketing Arrowhead Transit
- Discounted car purchase and maintenance program
- School bus usage including after-school circulator and non-school related use
- Ride Matching on-line program
- Transit Working Group (identify group to implement recommendations such as employer van pools, signs/benches at key locations, park and ride locations)

For More Information Contact

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