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Highlights

TRANSPORTATION-DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS

Many Federal Programs Fund Transportation Services, but Obstacles to Coordination Persist

Why GAO Did This Study

Numerous federal government programs provide assistance to "transportation-disadvantaged" individuals—those who are unable to provide their own transportation as a result of a disability, an age-related condition, or an income constraint. The assistance is provided to help these populations connect with services such as health and medical care, employment and training activities, and education programs. Coordination of this assistance—through such steps as pooling resources, consolidating transportation services under a single state or local agency, and sharing information about available services—has been found to improve the cost-effectiveness and quality of service. GAO was asked to identify (1) the federal programs that provide these transportation services and the amount spent on these programs; (2) the effect of coordination—or lack of coordination—on the delivery of transportation services for the transportation-disadvantaged; and (3) any obstacles that may impede effective coordination and potential ways to overcome such obstacles.

What GAO Recommends

This testimony is based on ongoing work being done for the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. GAO expects to issue a report in June 2003, at which time there may be recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-698T.

To view the full testimony, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Katherine Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.
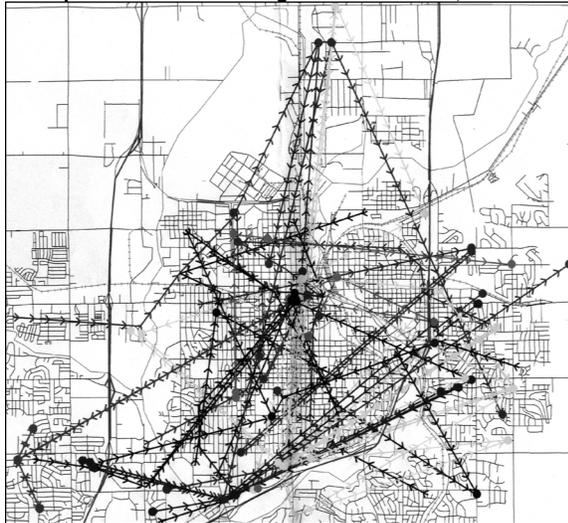
What GAO Found

GAO found 62 federal programs—most of which are administered by the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, and Transportation—that currently fund a variety of transportation services for the transportation-disadvantaged. The full amount of spending for these programs is unknown because transportation expenditures are not always tracked separately from other program expenditures. However, available information (i.e., estimated or actual outlays or obligations) on 28 of the programs shows that federal agencies spent at least an estimated $2.4 billion in fiscal year 2001 on these services.

Effective coordination can help avoid duplication of effort and inefficiency in providing transportation services. GAO's preliminary results indicate that some jurisdictions have realized significant benefits, such as improved customer service and lower unit costs, and through coordination efforts such as sharing vehicles, consolidating services under one provider, or sharing information among programs. By contrast, GAO found several examples of overlapping, fragmented, or confusing services resulting from a lack of coordination.

Overlapping Routes of the Vehicles of Seven Agencies that Separately Serve the Transportation-Disadvantaged in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Source: Sioux Vocational Services (reprinted with permission).

This graphic illustrates that many of these seven agencies' routes have similar starting and ending points. Many of these routes represent trips serving similar populations and occurring within 30 minutes of each other.

GAO identified numerous obstacles impeding coordination, including: (1) reluctance to share vehicles and fund coordination; (2) differences in federal program standards and requirements; and (3) limited guidance and information on coordination. To mitigate these obstacles, officials and experts suggested harmonizing standards among federal programs to better share resources and serve additional populations, expanding forums to facilitate communication among agencies, providing and disseminating additional guidance, and providing financial incentives or instituting mandates to coordinate.

United States General Accounting Office