



New Volunteer Driver Program Dover, Rochester, Somersworth

COAST is working with the Alliance for Community Transportation and a community advisory committee with the hope of launching a new volunteer driver program in Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth. The Volunteer Driver Program would provide free non-emergency medical transportation to seniors and individuals with a disability that prevent them from driving. Medical care that would qualify includes doctor visits, dental care, physical therapy, dialysis, recovery treatment, and more. COAST's bus service and ADA Paratransit provides a great deal of transportation in the area for people who live near a bus route or who qualify under Federal Americans with Disabilities ACT regulations for curb to curb service. However, there are approximately 5,700 seniors and individuals with disabilities in Dover, many of whom don't live near a bus route and who don't qualify for ADA service.

To fill this service gap, COAST and ACT have been supporting volunteer driver programs throughout the region. Volunteer drivers are a great solution for non-emergency medical transportation because the volunteers are a decentralized resource that can serve many riders at the same time, even when they are going to different destinations. Having a pool of volunteers also will allow us to bring clients directly to and from their appointments without having to coordinate with multiple riders living in different cities and having conflicting schedules. And this can be done affordably because the volunteer drivers provide the trips completely free or accept only a small mileage reimbursement.

In addition to volunteer-driven transportation, this new program will also provide trips for those who require an accessible vehicle. The Americans with Disabilities ACT ensures that everyone will have equal access to Federally funded services. This portion of the service will be performed by COAST alongside its ADA Paratransit.

Clients will access the service by calling TriLink, the regional transportation call center that manages all the call-taking and scheduling for COAST, ACT, Ready Rides, and Rockingham Nutrition & Meals on Wheels. Hosting multiple agencies in a single call center allows for clients to access many agencies at once and to be registered for the most appropriate service(s).

COAST decided to pursue launching this program in the tri-city area after an initial meeting with a visiting nurse who often had difficulty securing transportation for her clients, and those conversations turned into a group focused on solving this issue. COAST decided that this project was worthwhile and that it would commit to launching it if there was at least informal support from the cities' leadership. Much of the funding for this program will be provided by ACT through the NH DOT and FTA, but local match is needed as well. A component of the overall financing of the project will include municipal support. COAST is currently soliciting grants from local philanthropies and health care agencies that will be used as the local match for the first year. While volunteer driver programs are cheaper to run than other transportation services there are expenses related to call-taking, background checks, training, management, insurance, and reimbursements for those drivers that want it.