Nonprofit Transportation Feasibility Study

Commission | September 19, 2024

Public Comment Period

On August 21, 2024, NIPRC released the nonprofit Transportation Feasibility Study to the public for a 21 day public comment period, which closed on September 10, 2024.

One comment was received asking why the study did not include La Porte County. Staff replied to the question describing that the local match was provided by the Crown Point Community Foundation, the Legacy Foundation of Lake County, and the Porter County Community Foundation, that the proximity of people and services in Lake and Porter Counties being higher than in La Porte County was a consideration, that Paladin, who provides nonprofit transportation in La Porte County was consulted, and that the study aimed at preparing a pilot program that could be grown, if successful in Lake and Porter Counties.

Introduction to the Study

NIRPC engaged the TranSystems team to better understand nonprofit transportation needs in Northwest Indiana and develop a plan to address these needs.
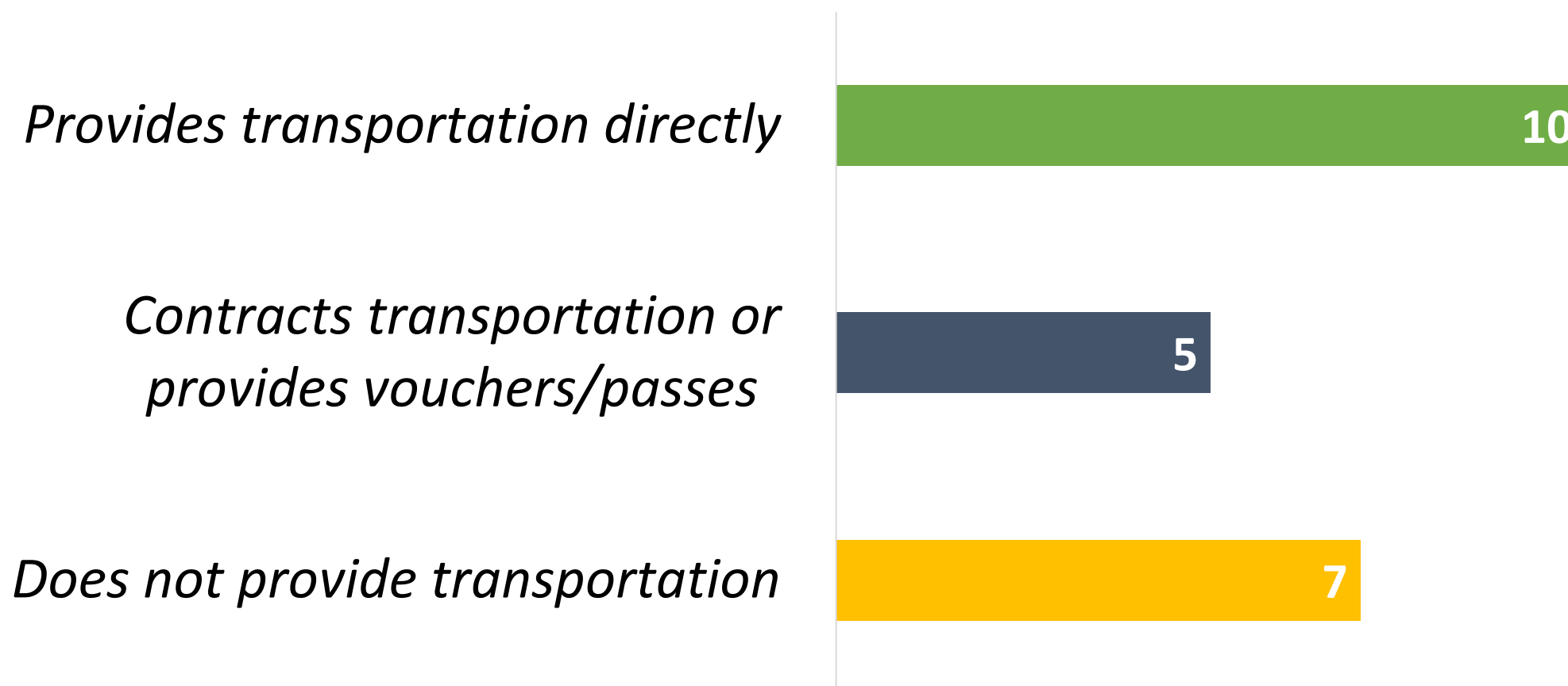
The study is being conducted in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Northwest Indiana (BGCGNWI), Goodwill Industries (Goodwill), the Crown Point Community Foundation, the Legacy Foundation of Lake County, and the Porter County Community Foundation.

Findings

Findings

A survey was sent to a list of **22 interested nonprofits organizations** to gain information about their services and need for transportation.

Many nonprofits reported that **lack of transportation is a barrier** for their clients accessing important services.

Provides transportation directly — 10

Contracts transportation or provides vouchers/passes — 5

Does not provide transportation — 7

Reasons for **not providing transportation** include:
- Funding
- Insufficient staff
- Geographic challenges
- Insurance
- Transportation needed at irregular times

Findings

Interviews

- Interviews were held with the agencies who provide transportation or provide vouchers/contract out rides

- Information gathered on clients, excess fleet capacity, funding restrictions, etc.

- Six agencies selected to discuss next steps:

  o *Pines Village Retirement Communities*
  o *Maria Reiner Center*
  o *Opportunity Enterprises*
  o *HealthVisions Midwest*
  o *PCACS*
  o *Goodwill Industries*

Success Definition for a Shared Transportation Model

Success Definition

Solve the mobility gaps, especially for nonprofit clients, in a cost-effective way by leveraging the capacity of multiple providers.

Shared Transportation Pilot

Case Studies

How do other communities approach nonprofit transportation?

Broker Model

- A broker or mobility manager coordinates transportation between requesting organizations/clients
- Multiple providers that have their own fleet, software and staff.
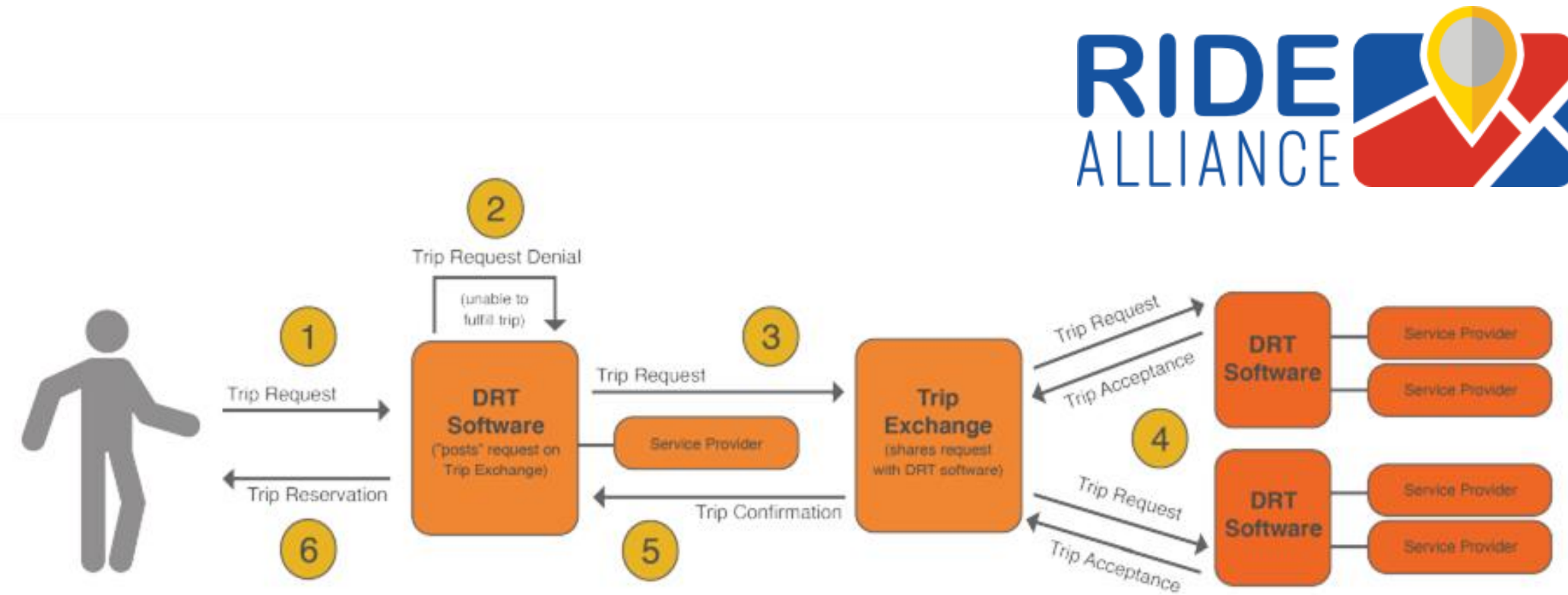
Centralized Model

- A single transportation provider, including a fleet, dispatching/scheduling software, and staff.
- Organizations make trip requests on behalf of their clients or customers book trips directly, similar to a demand response public transit service.

Case Studies

Broker Model

RIDE ALLIANCE

- Denver's trip exchange project, **Ride Alliance**, began with Via and RTD to coordinate trips in Longmont, CO where both agencies provided demand response services.

Source: National Center for Mobility Management

- They obtained a Mobility Services for All Americans (MSAA) grant in 2015 to automate the process and added two other nonprofit agencies.
- Ride Alliance integrates between different dispatching/scheduling software, allowing for automatic trip booking, coordination, payment and reporting between several transportation agencies.

Case Studies

Centralized Model

- **Community Transportation Network (CTN)** is a centralized, nonprofit transportation provider in Allen County, IN.
- CTN began in 1999 with Turnstone, a nonprofit for people with disabilities, acting as a broker between other nonprofit providers. In 2000, the participating organizations decided to create a single transportation agency. Their fleet began with vans donated by Aging and In-Home Services.
- In CTN's first year, they provided 1,000 trips; in 2019, they provided 100,000 trips for over 85 partner nonprofit agencies.
- They have a fleet of 43 total vehicles, including accessible vans and 7 school buses.
- They primarily provide trips for people with disabilities and seniors for medical, grocery and work purposes. CTN also provides transportation for Head Start, libraries, etc.

Source: Community Transportation Network

Pilot Concept

*A shared transportation pilot project with a **broker** or mobility manager and a **trip exchange**.*
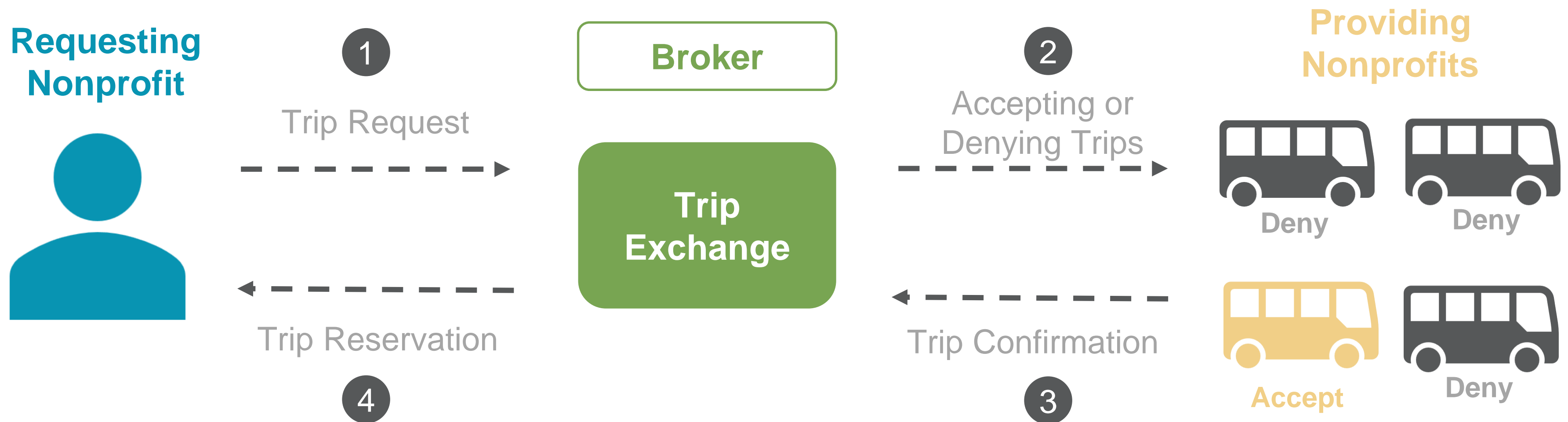
Broker Model: Technology Considerations

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Requesting nonprofits exchanging emails and calls with providing nonprofits to scheduling client trips

Pros
- Inexpensive
- No technology requirements
- Flexible

Cons
- Inefficient
- Manual coordination
- Payment handled separately

Recommendation for the Pilot: Google forms and shared Google sheet, facilitated by the Broker

Pros
- Inexpensive
- Flexible
- No special technology requirements
- More efficient than individual emails/calls to each provider
- Easier to track trip requests

Cons
- Trip acceptance/denial requires manual decision-making and coordination from providing nonprofits
- Payment handled separately

Fully integrated scheduling/dispatching software that allows for automatic trip booking, billing and reporting

Pros
- Efficient
- Integrated systems
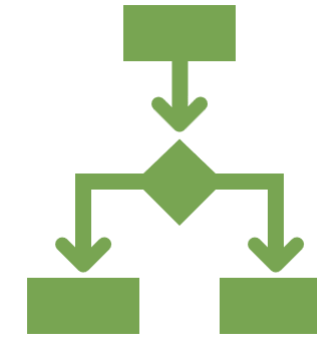- Booking, billing and reporting in a single system

Cons
- Expensive
- Special technology requirements
- Not as flexible

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Discussion

Policy Decisions

- Agreement/contract between nonprofits and broker
- Payment
- Cancellations
- Group rides

Process Decisions

- Trip exchange and broker
- Trip details
- Client needs
- Client fare
- Payment
- Cancellations
- Trip coordination
- Vehicles

Things to Note

- This study suggests sharing resources collaboratively
- This pilot project would not replace or become part of the public transit system in Northwest Indiana

- This should not take anything away from existing public transit operations
- NIRPC does not plan to fund this sharing of resources