



# **Sylvania Township, OH**

## **Community Transit Study**

### **Project Review and Recommendations**

January 12, 2012

Presented to:

**John C. Zeitler, Township Administrator**  
**Sylvania Township Administration Building**  
**4927 Holland Sylvania Road**  
**Sylvania, Ohio 43560-2121**

**Submitted by:**  
**J. M. Rubino Consulting**  
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John C. Zeitler, Township Administrator  
Sylvania Township  
Administration Building  
4927 Holland Sylvania Road  
Sylvania, Ohio 43560-2121

Re: Community Transit Study- Project Review & Recommendations

Dear Mr. Zeitler:

In October of 2011, Sylvania Township engaged the services of J. M. Rubino Consulting to conduct an analysis of the transit services available to township residents through the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA). With my analysis completed, I am now pleased to submit my recommendations, with comments, regarding proposed transit options for your municipality. The following pages will summarize the **Project Goals** and **Scope of Services** I was to provide, as well as the aforementioned **Recommendations**.

I would also like to state at this time that Sylvania Township, as we had suspected, has been contributing far more taxpayer dollars than is actually required to operate a transit service for your municipality. I believe that the Township's contribution to TARTA has been approximately \$2.1 million annually. In my professional opinion, Sylvania Township can replicate current services, at a higher level of rider satisfaction, for 50% to 67% of that total. While I would caution you to expect that your prospective transit service will begin with an initial budget that would project to approximately 1.4 million, I believe that the system flexibility and service options that I have suggested in my recommendations will allow you to gradually bring your annual spending down much closer to \$1 million.

I look forward to hearing your comments regarding this report.

Sincerely,

Joseph Rubino  
Principal, J. M. Rubino Consulting



## Summary of Project Goals

J. M. Rubino Consulting was asked to study the transit environment in Sylvania Township and then to make recommendations as to how the municipality might be able to provide both commuter and local transportation in the most efficient and economical manner. We were to assist Sylvania Township in addressing its local transit issues, identify its available options, and then provide suggestions for going forward.

This project has the primary stated goal of providing better local transportation service to its residents through a program of Mobility Management, and a companion goal of saving money for Sylvania Township taxpayers.

**Summary of Scope of Services-** J. M. Rubino has completed the following tasks:

1. Held initial organizational meetings with Sylvania Township trustees, staff and other interested parties that were recommended by the trustees and staff.
2. Identified all Township funding for transit services.
3. Conducted and/or attended stakeholder meetings in which the concept of Mobility Management was explained and feedback was sought from riders, public and private transit operators, as well as from transportation advocates and community activists.
4. Conducted site visits with potential project partners on which their respective transportation components will be observed and analyzed.
5. Presented to Sylvania Township, via this document, prospective community and commuter transit options and suggested solutions to current transportation challenges.

## Recommendations for Sylvania Township

**Recommendation #1-** The Township should begin service by replicating your current transit services as closely as possible both in schedule time and in service area, with vehicles smaller than TARTA uses but still rider-appropriate. These types of vehicles would range from shuttle-style vehicles that would accommodate approximately 12 passengers to mini-buses with room for 24 passengers. Inaugurate the fixed route portion of your new transit service based on what is currently being supplied by TARTA, which is all day in the township and only certain hours for commuters, basically 6:00 AM to 9:00AM, then again from 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM.

**Comment-** On commuter routes leaving Sylvania Township, your service does not need to follow the route currently run by TARTA, nor are you obligated to do anything at all other than pick up your passengers and convey them to their destination. For example, if the first bus of the day heading downtown has only one Sylvania rider, then no other stops (that TARTA would normally make en-route though Lucas County and the City of Toledo) are necessary.

**Recommendation #2-** The first day of your service will be the day following the last day of TARTA's service to Sylvania, but you may also choose to operate a concurrent service for the last week of TARTA's operation. That would give you a week of redundancy to discover any possible kinks in your system. You should operate your new service according to TARTA's existing schedule (See **Recommendation #1**) on a trial basis. Sylvania Township should conduct this trial period (3 months, 6 months, etc) while operating according to the same services and scheduled hours that TARTA has provided.

This trial period will be built into both the RFP (See **Recommendation #5**) and the contract with your selected provider. This trial period is the most essential part of your new service. You need to not be bound by fleet size nor by vehicle seating configuration. This is one of the major drawbacks of municipal transit systems, including TARTA, that is, lack of flexibility of infrastructure. If you do not implement a trial period, you might be, like TARTA, stuck with vehicles not appropriate to their application, and waste hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process.

After this trial period, you will have better established ridership patterns and true ridership count. At this point, if the Township so desires, the transit service can be modified in several ways to better suit both ridership and the Township's budget. For example, it may be discovered that two particular fixed routes may be easily combined into one. Another option would be to abandon certain fixed routes and convert them into door-to-door services. This option might be appropriate both for local routes and for commuter routes.

**Comment-** When TARTA supplied Sylvania Township with encounter data for trips involving Township riders it admitted that its totals were estimates. It also admitted that it did not record trip totals for riders whose outbound trips left the Township. This is another way of saying they do not know how many riders they actually transport for your municipality. In my opinion, there are reasons to believe that their undercount of riders on return trips might actually balance out any unduly optimistic estimates of actual ridership in the encounter data they have provided.

That being said, in my experience it has always been advantageous to assume that there will be more riders than projected. Sometimes this is due to the previous operator under-counting or estimating, as TARTA did. In other cases, the increase in ridership is due to the new operator actually providing a better service, so that residents now want to ride more frequently than they did on the old system. Regardless, I have based my analysis and my recommendations on TARTA's data multiplied by a factor of 1.25.

**Recommendation #3-** Since I am suggesting a trial period, Sylvania Township should not invest in vehicles at service inception, nor should they require their service provider to do such a thing. I recommend that the Township on its own or through its service provider establish its initial fleet through leased vehicles, or by using vehicles already available to the provider.

I make this recommendation for two reasons; 1) During this trial period, the Township's provider will analyze ridership totals and patterns and will decide on what vehicles are most appropriate for each route, each time of day, and each individual transit application. 2) After the trial period, the Township, along with its provider, will jointly decide on the configuration, and the acquiring, of a more permanent fleet.

**Comment-** J. M. Rubino Consulting has already had extensive meetings with 2 well-established, long-operating, local transportation entities (Lucas County Board of Development Disabilities, and Black & White Transportation) who are potential project partners with the Township regarding your transit services. These partners already have existing inventories of more than 100 vehicles apiece, not to mention extensive rosters of trained and licensed drivers, dispatch and fleet management facilities, as well as existing infrastructure for repair and maintenance.

These two organizations are each willing to assist the Township in either a temporary or long-term manner to solve your short term and long-transit options. This assistance is not necessarily related to whether or not either organization contracts with the Township as your service provider. For example, after an RFP process, you may choose to sign a contract with Company A for local shuttle and commuter services, yet contract with the Lucas County Board of DD to lease vehicles for Company A to operate, and with Black & White Transportation to provide a Dial-A Ride service to replace TARPS.

I am suggesting that we create an approach that gives you flexible, and multiple options.

**Recommendation #4-** Sylvania should design its transit service after closely observing other similar models. I would suggest that the Township observe and seek comment from the cities of Newark and Bowling Green, Ohio. While Bowling Green is a great model that is also close by geographically, it has a smaller geographic footprint than Sylvania Township and operates for fewer hours per week than is currently available to Sylvania Township through TARTA.

Newark receives its transit service from a private provider through a contract with Licking County, and this contracted model as been in effect for more than 30 years. Furthermore, the City of Newark and Sylvania Township are very similar both in population and in size of geographic area.

**Comment-** I have already made studies of both cities, but I would recommend some investigation by Township trustees or by staff. This investigation could be done by phone, but if it is possible to visit either one or both, I believe that it would be very helpful.

**Recommendation #5-** After completing the tasks that were suggested in Recommendation #4, and after considering all the ideas and concepts suggested in the previous recommendations, I am recommending that you put your projected service out to an RFP process. While I understand that there are many other considerations that affect your timing, I would advise you to allow about 3 months for project implementation, in other words, from the time you select your vendor. It could be done in two months, but 3 months is optimal.

**Comment-** J. M. Rubino Consulting would be pleased to help Sylvania Township with the RFP process as my firm has written numerous RFP's over the years, in addition to the fact that we have implemented transit systems for dozens of cities and other municipalities. I would also like to state that although this effort may seem daunting to some, I can assure you that this is a relatively easy project to a transportation professional, and to a professional transportation company.

I can design an RFP in which the contractor would be bound by certain service parameters, including projected amount of trips. Therefore, the proposers would bid for contracted services based on those trips. However, I have created a "tiered-pricing system" that I have used successfully on transit projects for more than 25 years. This is NOT a fee-for-service pricing format which would involve large accounting expenditures for both the Township and for your provider. My system provides for a fixed cost annual contract, so the Township will have monthly invoices identical to the month before. But above the fixed pricing, the tiered-pricing system will allow Sylvania to not only control its costs, but will require the contractor to lower his price if trips are lower than projected.

### **Suggestions re: Possible Aspects of a Prospective Door to Door Service**

(Some of this information is courtesy of BG Transit)

- Eligible riders should be those traveling from addresses in the Township or TO addresses in the Township.
- All riders must register for the service, and I would recommend issuing an ID Card for riders. This is a one-time expense and can be passed onto the rider.
- While the trial period that I suggest would replicate current services, I believe that in the long run, all rides during commuting hours and having either the pickup or drop-off point outside the township, need to be pre-booked. This can be done by phone, by internet, by mobile device, including by text.
- When you move to a door-to-door service, riders traveling locally should allow at least 25 minutes from their scheduled pickup time till the time they arrive at their destination. Commuters should allow 45 minutes to an hour.
- It should be suggested that riders call the day before to reserve their ride. Same day trips during commuting hours (6-9A, 4-6P) should be done on a first come, first served basis.
- The service is curb-to-curb. Drivers may not go beyond the curb or enter any building while assisting passengers.
- Drivers are not responsible for loading or unloading any items into the vehicle.
- Wheelchairs must meet full safety regulations. Drivers may not lift passengers in or out of wheelchairs.

- The transit vehicles should not be used as moving vans.
- Drivers may not transport passengers through drive-up windows of banks or restaurants, or wait for passengers who leave the vehicle for any reason.
- Transit ID cards must be shown upon entering the vehicle.
- No eating, drinking or smoking is allowed.
- Only authorized service animals are allowed.
- All passengers must wear seatbelts.
- All wheelchairs should be safely locked down.
- If an elderly and/or disabled passenger requires assistance, one personal care aid may ride free.
- Subscription service should be made available, meaning a rider may place advanced orders for recurring trips, such as for work or medical appointments, up to one month in advance. There are several responsibilities attached to these rides:
  1. The rider will be required to notify Sylvania 24 hours in advance if there is any change in their schedule that would cause them to not need the trip.
  2. If a rider misses the initial trip (no-show) the rider must contact B.G. Transit and let them know if they will still need the return trip.
  3. Consecutive no-shows or late cancellations may be grounds for suspension of the advance order privilege.
  4. If the passenger wants to change their destination after making a reservation, they should cancel the original order and make a new one. Destinations cannot be changed upon entering the vehicle.

