

Getting to Work

An Assessment of the Mobility & Transportation Needs of StanWORKs WtW Customers

*A Report Prepared for the
Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors*

by the

*Center for Public Policy Studies
at
California State University, Stanislaus*

Kenneth Entin, Senior Researcher

Contributors

Michael Schmandt (GIS)

Steven Hughes

Stacie Bradford

Kelvin Jasek-Rysdahl

Margaret Tynan

Mobility Survey: Lynn Morey, Alicia Arreola, Veronica Santana, Julie Smulson

GIS Support: Jack Marciel

Data Coding and Project Support: Tammi Cranston

Contents

Tables, Graphs, and Maps.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Executive Summary and Findings.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	4
Some Preliminary Considerations.....	7
Assessments of Mobility and Transportation.....	14
How StanWORKs WtW Customers Perceive their Mobility.....	14
How StanWORKs WtW Customers Travel: Modes of Transportation and Final Destinations.....	16
How StanWORKs WtW Customers Evaluate the Transportation Available.....	19
Private Vehicles.....	19
Public Transit.....	23
How Bus Passengers Evaluate Bus Services.....	25
Mobility and Transportation Barriers.....	28
Barrier 1: Spatial Mismatch: -- Trip Origins and Destinations.....	28
Barrier 2: Conditions of Employment.....	40
Barrier 3: Trip Chaining: The Need to Make Multiple Stops.....	46
Barrier 4: Time Spent Traveling.....	48
Barrier 5: Frequency of Bus Service.....	50
Barrier 6: Public Transportation Not Readily Available During Early Morning and Late Evening Commutes.....	52
Barrier 7: Lack of Information About Transportation Available.....	53
Barrier 8 Reliability and Affordability of Private Vehicles.....	56
Pathways to Mobility.....	60
Appendix A: Detailed Journey to Work Tables.....	97
Appendix B: Stanislaus County Mobility Services.....	102
Appendix C: Promising Practices.....	114

Tables, Graphs, and Maps

Charts

Table		Page
1	Summary Measures in Idea Bank Relating to Transportation and Mobility	3
2	Welfare-to-Work Activities: 1994 to August 2001	8
3	TDA Funding for Transit and Other Purposes: Fiscal Year 2001-2002	12
4	Mobility Assessments of StanWORKs WtW Customers	14
5	Effects of Mobility and Transportation Problems	15
6	Reasons for Using Bus the Prior Month	17
7	Top Five Usual Modes of Travel to and from Work	18
8	Comparing Survey Recipients With and Without Current Driver's License	21
9	Comparing Survey Recipients With and Without Car in Good Condition	22
10	Perceptions of Fixed Route Bus Service	23
11	Perceptions of Dial-a-Ride and Runabout Service	24
12	Reasons for Not Riding Buses	25
13	Perceptions of Fixed Bus Route Service: On-Board Survey	26
14	Perceptions of Dial-a-Ride Service: On-Board Survey	26
15	Trip Chaining of Bus Passengers and StanWORKs WtW Customers	27
16	City of Residence of StanWORKs, Way-to-Work, and Workforce Investment Act Participants	29
17	Share of Stanislaus County Jobs by Place of Residence and Work: 1994 to August 2001	30
18	ZIP Code of Residence of StanWORKs, Way-to-Work, and Workforce Investment Act Participants (Sorted by StanWORKS Employed)	32
19	Share of Stanislaus County Jobs by ZIP Code of Residence and Work: 1994 to August 2001	33
20	Work Activity Residences and Sites by Community and ZIP Code: 1994 to August 2001	34
21	Bus Routes in Modesto Neighborhoods with Highest Concentrations of StanWORKs WtW Customers: December 2000 to October 2001	38
22	GAIN and StanWORKs WtW Employment by Type of Job Top 10 Jobs: 1994 to August 2001	41
23	Multiple Travel Destinations: All Trip Purposes	46
24	Trip Chaining for StanWORKs Customers Traveling to and from Work	46
25	Work Shifts and Travel to Work	52
26	Times Bus Service is Used	53
27	Age of #1 Car	57
28	Number of Days Unable to Use Vehicle in Past Week	57
29	Reason Unable to Use Vehicle	58

Graphs

Figure		Page
1	Journey to Work for Stanislaus County Workers 16 Years & Older: 2000	18
2	Hours Per Week Worked	41
3	Wages Per Hour for StanWORKs Customers Employed: Nominal and Constant 1996 Dollars	42
4	Distribution of Household Income: Stanislaus County & California, 1999	43
5	Family Status for GAIN and StanWORKs WtW Customers (1994 to August 2001) and the General Population (% of Family Households, 2000)	44
6	Trip Chaining to and from Work	47
7	Educational Attainment	55
8	Preferred Transportation Assistance	59

Maps

1. StanWORKs Employed Customers: Where They Reside (by ZIP Code – Numerical)
2. StanWORKs Employed Customers: Where They Reside (Percent of Total Customers by ZIP Code)
3. StanWORKs Employed Customers: Where They Work (by ZIP Code – Numerical)
4. StanWORKs Employed Customers: Where They Work (Percent of Total Customer Jobs by ZIP Code)
5. StanWORKs Employed Customers: Where They Reside, Where They Work (by ZIP Code)
6. StanWORKs Employed Customers Residing and Working in Same ZIP Code
7. StanWORKs WTW Employed Customers: Residential Locations (Residential Densities, Detail)
8. StanWORKs WTW Employed Customers: Residential Locations (Residential Densities, Countywide)
9. Dial-a-Ride Service Areas and Population Density (Map from StanCOG Final 2001 Regional Transportation Plan)
10. StanWORKs WTW Employed Customers: Job Locations (Job Densities, Detail)
11. StanWORKs WTW Employed Customers: Job Locations (Job Densities, Countywide)
12. StanWORKs WTW Customers: Residential Locations and Job Sites (Residential and Job Densities)
13. MediCal Recipients (Residential Densities, Detail)
14. MediCal Recipients (Residential Densities, Countywide)
15. Female Head of Household With Children Under Age 18 (Percent of Total Households by Census Block Groups)
16. Median Age – Female (by Census Block Group)
17. Population Under 5 (Percent by Census Block Group)

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▪ **Executive Summary and Findings**

Getting to Work pinpoints the mobility (i.e., movement) and transportation (i.e., modes of travel) barriers facing StanWORKs WtW customers and the working poor, examines the transportation options currently available to them, determines the extent to which existing options meet customer and program needs, and offers policy recommendations for improving both mobility and transportation in Stanislaus County.

The findings and conclusions are based on statistical and other information from a number of sources: welfare-to-work databases from the Community Services Agency and Department of Employment and Training, computer generated maps, public transit data from StanCOG and local transit operators, a 152 question bilingual survey administered to 200 StanWORKs WtW customers, the results of four focus groups, an on-board survey of bus passengers, Census 2000 and Census 2000 Supplementary Survey data, and inventories of promising practices nationwide as well as mobility resources in Stanislaus County.

The evidence from *Getting to Work* shows that the improved mobility of StanWORKs WtW customers is linked to both sustainable employment and successful implementation of the welfare-to-work program. Although the results are based on the assessments and travel behavior of a particular segment of the population, they can be used to gauge the mobility needs of other low income persons. However, they are not intended to describe or explain the mobility of the general population.

Among the many observations and conclusions in *Getting to Work*, the following stand out:

With Respect to Travel Behavior and Assessments of Mobility and Transportation:

- Mobility is a material concern for the StanWORKs WtW population. Two-fifths of the respondents in the mobility survey claim that they can easily get around by themselves while one-third are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their mobility.

- Four of the top six most frequently mentioned mobility and transportation issues stemming from these problems are work-related. Two of the top six identified barriers to employment are transportation-related.

- Although a majority of StanWORKS WtW customers participating in the survey report that they rely on private vehicles, especially for work trips, they also are more likely to use public transit than the general population. Public agency appointments, shopping, and medical appointments are the most frequent destinations for fixed route bus passengers. However, job preparation and employment combined account for as many trips as shopping. Dial-a-ride passengers indicate that they use the service for work travel as frequently as they do for medical and shopping trips.

- StanWORKS WtW customers express concerns about the capacity of public transit to meet their travel needs. Almost half of the fixed route bus passengers cite the “time it takes to use public transportation” as a major problem. Two-fifths mention that it is “unavailable at needed times.” One-third of the dial-a-ride passengers consider the “amount of waiting time” and “amount of riding time” to be major problems. When asked directly why they do not or would not ride fixed route buses, slightly less than half of the survey respondents refer to the amount of time it takes to travel. No single reason predominates for dial-a-ride or runabout.

- Overwhelming majorities of StanWORKS WtW customers believe that the automobile is a pathway to employment, better paying jobs, and long-term self-sufficiency. There is persuasive evidence from survey and focus group responses that having a driver’s license and access to a car or pickup truck in good working condition contribute to improved mobility, fewer transportation problems, and the greater likelihood of being employed. The survey results are consistent with the findings of other mobility studies of welfare-to-work participants and the working poor.

- The on-board survey reveals that existing fixed route and dial-a-ride passengers are both more positive than StanWORKS WtW customers in their evaluations of bus services and better able to cope with transit use. Two important reasons for the differences are the

multiple trip needs of WtW customers and their greater difficulties in understanding schedules and routes.

With Respect to Mobility and Transportation Barriers:

The attitudes and behavior of StanWORKs WtW customers are shaped by the mobility and transportation barriers they face. These barriers, in turn, are outcomes of personal circumstances as well as interconnected employment, work activity, and household travel needs.

Barrier 1: Spatial Mismatch--Trip Origins and Destinations

Between 1994 and August 2001, trips to, from, and within Modesto were the defining patterns of work-related and work activity travel for a majority of StanWORKs WtW customers. This was the case regardless of where customers lived. The geographic gaps between home and work or work activities were greatest for those residing outside the Highway 99 corridor, although west and southwest Modesto residents faced challenges as well. Spatial mismatch increased travel times and created obstacles to the successful completion of related household trips.

- Nearly one-half of the 10,576 identifiable commutes between 1994 and August 2001 required travel between Stanislaus County communities, and close to two-fifths of these involved trips to and from Modesto. Overall, 45% of all employed WtW customers living outside of Modesto worked in Modesto. Oakdale and Turlock were the only two cities where a majority of welfare-to-work customers were employed locally. Nearly 85% of Modesto's resident customers worked in Modesto, which constituted one-half of all work trips, while an additional 10% commuted from Modesto to other communities.
- More than two-thirds (68.7%) of all the jobs held by GAIN and StanWORKs WtW customers in Stanislaus County between 1994 and August 2001 were in Modesto. Nearly 1 in 8 jobs (11.8%) were in Turlock. No other city claimed more than 10% of the total. Three of the County's nine cities – Ceres, Hughson, and Riverbank – had less than 50% of the jobs held by resident StanWORKs WtW customers. In Ceres and Riverbank, one-half of the jobs were filled by Modesto residents. In Hughson, it was more than 40%.
- Slightly more than 45% of the jobs filled were located in three Modesto ZIP codes (95350, 95351, and 95354). Nearly three-quarters of all 10,191 job assignments required commuting between ZIP Codes. Almost two-fifths of the StanWORKs WtW customers living in other ZIP Codes commuted to 95350, 95351, and 95354.

- Even more striking evidence for the centrality of Modesto travel is provided by the work activity data. Prior to securing employment, StanWORKs WtW customers are assigned to one and often a variety of work activities, including orientation, counseling, vocational training, and job search. Between 1994 and August 2001, 97.6% of the 148,000 work activity assignments in Stanislaus County with identifiable locations were in Modesto, and almost 89% were in the 95358 ZIP Code. This is the ZIP Code for the Community Services Agency, the Department of Employment and Training, and the west campus of Modesto Junior College.
- The data highlight two sets of welfare-to-work travel needs: one for required pre-employment work activities and the other for employment.
- Computer generated maps show that five cities had neighborhoods with the highest residential concentrations of GAIN and WtW customers between 1994 to August 2001. The most densely settled neighborhoods were in west and southwest Modesto. Other high concentrations were east of Highway 99 from Whitmore in Ceres to the Airport District, north of Yosemite Blvd. east of Mitchell Rd., the area north of Canal Drive and bounded by Olive and Colorado Avenues in Turlock, east of Albers Road and south and north of Highway 108 in Oakdale, and west of Highway 33 and north of Sperry Rd that extends to the area east of Highway 33 and north of Las Palmas in Patterson.
- While there are a limited number of childcare facilities in neighborhoods with high concentrations of WtW customers, a large majority are located either on the fringes or outside of these areas.
- Fixed route public transit serves the neighborhoods with high concentrations of StanWORKs WtW customers. In Modesto, the five fixed routes covering these areas transported two-fifths of all weekday MAX passengers between December 2000 to October 2001.
- The most pronounced job clusters between 1994 and August 2001 were downtown Modesto and the Mall area north of Standiford Ave. Almost as dense were Briggsmore Ave. just east of Hwy 99 and west Ceres along Whitmore Ave. High density linear job areas included McHenry Ave., Standiford Ave. from Tully Rd. west, Coffee Rd. near Memorial Hospital in Modesto; Geer Rd in Turlock; Hwy 120 in Oakdale; and Hatch Rd east of Hwy 99.
- Although there are high capacity childcare facilities near those areas with greater concentrations of jobs, most (in terms of number of facilities) are located at some distance from the clusters. With a few exceptions (such as west Ceres), fixed route transit routes and stops serve the employment clusters.
- The residential concentrations of Medi-Cal recipients are similar to those of WtW customers. This points to a clustering of low income households in Stanislaus County.

Barrier 2: Conditions of Employment

Since 1994, GAIN and StanWORKs WtW customers have had relatively low skilled (i.e., entry level) and low paying jobs, increasingly full-time employment, and money incomes hovering around the poverty level. Although these conditions of employment place a premium on reliable transportation to and from work, financially strapped customers tend to give higher priority to basic household needs such as rent, utility bills, and food.

- Between 1994 and August 2001, there was a decline in the proportion of all StanWORKs WtW customers employed 20 hours or less and a corresponding increase in the percentage of those working at least 35 (and especially 40 or more) hours. Between January and August 2001, slightly less than a majority (46.1%) of all StanWORKs WtW customers were hired for jobs that the Bureau of Labor Statistics considers full-time.
- Although hourly wages have grown over time, the nominal wage was only \$7.20 over the first eight months of 2001; the average inflation adjusted wage was \$6.39. This means that a StanWORKs WtW customer working full-time in 2001 at the average wage had an annual money income that was slightly below the poverty level. Although non-cash benefits raised the total dollars available to StanWORKs WtW customers, they did not significantly increase disposable income.
- Slightly less than two-thirds of all GAIN and StanWORKs customers from 1994 to August 2001 were female householders, no husband present, with dependents. This proportion is significantly higher than for the general population. Census 2000 results show that poverty rates were highest for this household group in Stanislaus County. The mapping of the geographic distribution of these households underscores the close relationship between the neighborhood concentrations of poverty populations and both Medi-Cal recipients and StanWORKs WtW customers. The largest numerical concentrations are in west and southwest Modesto.

Barrier 3: Trip Chaining (The Need to Make Multiple Stops)

Trip chaining is a key mobility challenge for StanWORKS WtW customers who either use public transit drive or ride in a private automobile. The need to make multiple stops has two effects on the travel of StanWORKs WtW customers. First, it tends to lengthen the time it takes to journey to and from work and work activities. Second, it creates logistical hurdles, especially for those using public transit, to complete both work and household trips in timely ways. This is particularly the case when licensed childcare and other stopovers are not easily accessible or require one or more bus transfers.

- A majority (56.3%) of respondents in the mobility survey who are passengers on fixed route buses and nearly three-quarters (74.3%) who drive or ride in private automobiles indicate that they typically make multiple stops when they travel. One-fifth of those who use dial-a-ride do so. More than two-fifths of those who commute to work report that they trip chain. The results of the 1995 National Personal Transportation Survey suggest that mobility survey results may be understated.
- StanWORKs WtW customers taking fixed route transit are significantly more likely than passengers participating in the on-board survey to state that they trip chain (54.8% vs. 35%). On the other hand, the smaller number of WtW survey respondents riding dial-a-ride are less likely to trip chain than on-board survey participants (25% vs. 31.8%).
- More than three-quarters of the survey respondents who trip chain report that they drop off children at childcare or school on the way to work. One-quarter go shopping. The most frequent side destinations on the way home from work are shopping (48.3%) and picking up a child at either childcare (32.2%) or school (23.7%).

Barrier 4: Time Spent Traveling

Time spent traveling impacts employment-related and household travel, especially for StanWORKs WtW customers dependent on public transportation. It is an outcome of spatial mismatch and trip chaining, and is linked to waiting for transportation, getting bus service when it is needed, riding on the bus, and transferring. For those with automobiles and pickup trucks, time spent traveling is tied to unreliable vehicles and unpredictable backup transportation. The most formidable time challenges are faced by residents outside the Highway 99 corridor who must travel to work activity centers and employment sites in Modesto and Turlock.

- The reported mean waiting time for a fixed route bus in Stanislaus County is 23 minutes; the median time is 20 minutes. Although 12.2% of survey respondents wait 5 minutes or less, 40.5% wait 30 minutes or more; 5.5% wait one hour or more.
- 13% of dial-a-ride passengers state that they wait less than ten minutes for a bus while almost 1/3rd (30.4%) wait 30 minutes or more. Of the latter, only 2.9% wait more than one hour. The mean waiting time of nearly 45 minutes is considerably higher than the reported averages of transit agencies.
- One-third of the respondents (32.6%) in the survey claim that they travel more than 30 minutes to work. For almost 1 in 6 (15.6%), the commute exceeds 1 hour. The average reported commute is 42 minutes. Census 2000 results show that all Stanislaus County workers in 2000 had an average commute time of 26.8 minutes. Of those taking public transportation to work, according to the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey, one-third traveled 45 minutes or more.

- According to Census 2000, all workers in Modesto neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of low income residents experienced commute times that exceeded the countywide average. In the Shackelford neighborhood, it was 29.1 minutes while in West Modesto it was 30.1 minutes. These areas also have the highest proportions of commuters relying on public transit.
- For all trips, slightly less than two-thirds of all StanWORKs WtW customers in the survey report that they transfer when they ride a fixed route bus. Of those who transfer, a majority indicate that they do so to another bus system. Although a majority claim that they transfer when taking a bus to work, the results are based on a lower response rate.
- Available transit statistics may not capture many intersystem transfers since WtW customers rely on bus tickets and passes that are purchased by public agencies providing services to them. For CSA alone, there were 15,739 bus tickets and passes bought between June 2001 and May 2002. A customer showing a pass or ticket on MAX or any other transit system would not be counted as a transfer, even if that individual actually transferred.

Barrier 5: Frequency of Bus Service

Over the past decade, public transit operators in Stanislaus County have increased the number of routes, the types of services offered, and the frequency of service. Today, fixed route, dial-a-ride and runabout cover all cities and unincorporated communities. However, respondents in the mobility survey and participants in the focus groups raised concerns about the frequency of bus services, especially on routes serving areas outside the Highway 99 corridor.

An examination of fixed route bus schedules reveals differences in frequencies based largely on the densities of populations served. These variations are linked to both the number of passengers per vehicle hour and state mandated farebox recovery requirements. While bus operators are constrained by cost and revenue considerations, StanWORKs WtW customer mobility appears to be constrained by uneven bus frequencies.

- The most imposing challenges are faced by residents west of the Highway 99 corridor. The frequency of service for StaRT's Westside Stage ranges from 3 to 6 ½ hours while for the Westside Runabout, it is about 3 ½ hours.
- The most frequent fixed route weekday service is on Route 10 between Turlock and Modesto. This express bus, which does not make the same stops on all trips, has 1 to 1 1/2 hour

frequencies. Route 15, which stops in Keyes and Ceres, runs approximately every two hours. With a few exceptions, buses on the Modesto-Oakdale-Riverbank route run approximately every 100 minutes.

- Runabout frequencies reflect the customized features of the service. Passengers on the Waterford Runabout (which is the principal intercommunity public transportation serving Hughson and Waterford residents) can board 1 of 3 buses every 3 hours beginning at 7:30 a.m.; the three return trips depart the Modesto Transportation Center at 9:00 a.m., 11:45 a.m., and 4:30 p.m. Turlock-Modesto Runabout has weekday service frequencies that range from 2 ½ to 3 ½ hours.

- Buses on Turlock’s 3 BLST routes run every hour.

- In Modesto, five routes that serve neighborhoods with large numerical concentrations of StanWORKs WtW customers and other low income groups transported two-fifths of the system’s fixed route passengers between December 2000 and October 2001. Furthermore, each of the five routes had an average passenger per service hour rate that significantly exceeded the systemwide average. Buses run every 30 minutes on four of the five routes.

Barrier 6: Public Transportation Not Readily Available During Early Morning and Late Evening Commutes

Like other low income workers, StanWORKs WtW customers are likely to secure entry level jobs with “off-hour” work schedules. This often means the need to travel early in the morning and late in the evening. These are times when public transit (including fixed route service in the urbanized area) is not readily available. The outcomes are a reliance on other modes of transportation that may not be reliable and a concern about the capacity of public transit to meet travel needs.

- When asked about the time they leave home to go to work and the time their work shifts end (both tied to travel), between one-quarter and one-third (28.4%) of the StanWORKs survey respondents state that it is before 7:00 a.m. Slightly less than one-fifth (18.3%) claim they either leave home or end work before 6:00 a.m. In the evening, close to one-fifth (19.3% leave) home or complete their work shifts after 7:00 p.m.

Barrier 7: Lack of Information About, and Misperceptions of, Transportation Available

The apparent reality for many StanWORKs WtW customers and other low income residents is a transportation information gap, particularly with respect to public transit. In addition to the lack of information, there are misperceptions of existing transportation.

More than one-fifth of the survey respondents claim they do not use public transit because they do not know the bus schedule.

There are a number of possible explanations for the information and perceptual gaps:

- StanWORKs WtW customers are unable to grasp the details of increasingly diverse and more complicated transit services. Functional illiteracy was an issue raised in the focus groups. StanWORKs WtW customers find it difficult to understand maps or read bus schedules.
- Each of the transit agencies designs and publicizes its own schedule. There currently is no single telephone number (in fact, there are nine) that can be called for countywide trip planning. Transit operators are working on the establishment of a toll-free telephone line.
- A majority of customers indicate that do not have internet access and slightly less than two-thirds do not read a newspaper daily. Hence, these individuals are not likely to come into contact with the information disseminated by transit operators either through their Web sites or in local newspapers.
- StanWORKs WtW customers with and without jobs are significantly less likely to have a high school diploma or the equivalent than the general adult population. A slim majority of customers who are employed have a diploma compared to 70% of all adults. For those without jobs and the hard-to-employ (i.e., DET WtW customers), the percentages are even lower, significantly so for the latter group (30.3%).
- There are language and cultural challenges. Not knowing the destination of a bus, when to transfer, and being unable to communicate with the driver, contribute to passenger stress and apprehension about getting lost. Most transit agencies find it difficult to recruit bilingual bus drivers.
- The survey and focus group discussions reveal that misperceptions of public transit lead to misinformation, negative assessments of bus service, concerns about using transit to reach destinations, and a preference for other modes of transportation.

Barrier 8: Reliability and Affordability of Private Vehicles

More than three-fifths (61.4%) of the StanWORKs WtW customers participating in the survey assert they have one or more private vehicles in their households. Slightly more than a majority (54.8%) claim to have vehicles registered in their own names. There also is overwhelming agreement that the private vehicle is a pathway to success and long-term self-sufficiency. And, as noted previously, those having a driver's license and a reliable vehicle are more likely to be employed, have a better paying job, and have a more positive view of their mobility.

Yet, reliability and affordability are serious challenges faced by those relying on private vehicles:

- According to the mobility survey, the average age of the principal vehicle in the household is 12.8 years; more than one-third (36.3%) of the respondents have vehicles that are 14 years and older. These cars are less likely to operate regularly, more likely to require repair and maintenance, and more likely to be a source of auto emissions than newer vehicles.
- More than two-fifths (42.6%) of the respondents who answered a question about vehicle reliability asserted that they could not use their car two or more days the previous week. When asked why they were unable to use the vehicle at any time during the previous seven days, nearly one-fifth (18.9%) stated that the vehicle was not working.
- One-third (34.2%) of the respondents in the mobility survey with vehicles in their households state that they cannot afford auto insurance, nearly two-thirds (65.1%) cannot afford car maintenance, and slightly less than half (45.8%) cannot afford gasoline. Yet, even in face of these difficulties, they do not plan to abandon their vehicles.
- Focus group participants cited other issues, including outstanding traffic tickets, suspended driver licenses, and lapsed auto insurance policies. StanWORKs WtW customers are less likely to agree with these observations, but 10% acknowledge that they no longer have a driver's license.

Pathways to Mobility

The findings and evidence provide the foundation for the recommendations, which fall into three broad categories:

- (1) Organizing for the delivery of coordinated, collaborative, and flexible transportation services;
- (2) Informing and educating to improve mobility;
- (3) Delivering coordinated, collaborative, and flexible transportation services.

The recommendations are guided by eight principles: (1) no single set of transportation policy responses will meet all the mobility and transportation needs of StanWORKs WtW customers; (2) transportation policy options alone cannot mitigate the effects of restricted mobility; (3) no single mode of transportation can meet all the mobility needs of WtW customers and other transportation challenged residents, (4) no transit operator can

unilaterally address countywide mobility barriers; (5) neither local human service agencies nor transit providers can, on their own, guarantee that work-related and household transportation will be available when needed; (6) transportation opportunities are not limited to the public sector; (7) policy strategies for dealing with the mobility of StanWORKs WtW customers cannot be divorced from the broader goal of improving the mobility of low income and working poor populations; and (8) mobility strategies should not be limited to existing programs and funding sources.

The theme that binds the principles and recommendations is the need for coordination in the design and implementation of specific mobility and transportation initiatives.

Coordination is a policy objective that is incorporated into state law, the countywide Visioning Project, and StanCOG's Regional Transportation Plan and Regional Transit Study.

Organizing for the Delivery of Coordinated, Collaborative, and Flexible Transportation Services:

- *Give serious consideration to the establishment of a countywide mobility manager. This office, linked to StanCOG or the newly formed Business and Workforce Alliance, would be responsible for coordinating and overseeing programs designed to improve mobility and the connectivity of transportation services.*
- *Encourage job creation and the delivery of supportive services at locations that are easily accessible to StanWORKs WtW customers and low income workers. These residential-friendly strategies (including enterprise zones, the expansion of full service One Stop Centers throughout the county, the co-location of childcare facilities at transportation hubs, and the opening of licensed childcare facilities in neighborhoods with concentrations of low income workers) would reduce the time and cost of travel.*
- *Blend the missions of human service/workforce preparation and transportation agencies by expanding the membership of the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council. Other possibilities include a separate interagency transportation council and the involvement of the Business and Workforce Alliance.*
- *The annual unmet transit needs process should be fine-tuned so that it is more proactive.*
- *Case and employment managers in the Community Service Agency and Department of Employment and Training should more formally coordinate the delivery of transportation supportive services. This would help assure that eligible welfare-to-work customers are aware of, and receive, appropriate transportation support.*

- *Mobility and transportation should be more fully integrated into the orientation and assessment of StanWORKs and DET WtW customers.*
- *There is a need for public agencies, non-profits, and private groups with a shared stake in the mobility of StanWORKs WtW customers and other low income workers to identify and pursue public and private sources of funding.*

Informing and Educating to Improve Mobility:

- *There should be a single telephone number available for trip planning in Stanislaus County.*
- *All transportation information, including a countywide public transportation guide, should be available in English and Spanish.*
- *Human service and transportation agencies should work together on the development of a Web-based transportation guide for case and employment managers in the Community Services Agency and the Department of Employment and Training.*
- *Transit operators, StanCOG, CSA, and DET should explore the feasibility of a bilingual transit training video that could be shown at CSA and DET orientation sessions.*
- *A transportation mentoring program would enable StanWORKS WtW, Way-to-Work, and other low income bus riders to more effectively cope with transit service uncertainties and complexities.*
- *Encourage the development and coordination of volunteer transportation programs.*

Delivering Coordinated, Collaborative, and Flexible Transportation Services:

- *Consideration should be given to expanded hours of transit operations and more frequent bus service in those neighborhoods and areas with concentrations of StanWORKs WtW customers and low income workers. The feasibility of coordinated transit schedules should be explored as well. Given productivity and financial constraints, however, changes in bus services should be targeted.*
- *Shuttle bus services to transportation hubs and work activity centers can meet a transportation need for low income residents in less densely settled areas of Stanislaus County.*
- *Contracting for vanpool and other specialized non-profit transportation services when space is available would provide StanWORKs WtW customers with mobility options that are not currently available.*

- *Transportation micro-enterprises can create entrepreneurial opportunities for StanWORKs WtW customers at the same time that they address the transportation needs of low income residents.*
- *The Commute Connection program for Stanislaus County commuters is currently administered through the San Joaquin Council of Governments via contract with StanCOG. Consideration should be given to transferring the program to Stanislaus County and using it as a springboard for local ridesharing services.*
- *An emergency or guaranteed ride home program administered within Stanislaus County would be responsive to local employees who face family emergencies or work-related problems that require immediate transportation home.*
- *Employers can facilitate the travel of their employees by purchasing bus passes/tickets and offering transportation fringe benefits.*
- *Explore the feasibility of a countywide travel card that enables passengers to use all fixed route bus systems in Stanislaus County.*
- *Transportation hubs strategically located in Stanislaus County can enhance the visibility of public transit and serve as catalysts for bus passenger growth and the coordination of schedules.*
- *There is a need to consider the feasibility of a collaborative private vehicle program in Stanislaus County that is administered by a private non-profit corporation, that is based on income rather than cash assistance status, that links vehicle donations to leases and purchases, that includes volunteer auto maintenance, and that focuses initially on vehicle replacement.*