

What 5311 Funding Means for North Carolina Community Transportation Systems

June 20, 2014

Prepared by:
Kai Monast, Institute for Transportation Research and Education
kcmonast@ncsu.edu
919-515-8768

Source Document: FTA Circular 9040.1F, April 1, 2007, SAFETEA-LU
http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/FTA_C_9040.1F.pdf
Expect revised circular C 9040.1G to be issued soon

Why does Section 5311 funding exist?

“Specifically, the Section 5311 program intends to: (1) enhance the access of people in nonurbanized areas to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services, and recreation; (2) assist in the maintenance, development, improvement, and use of public transportation systems in nonurbanized areas; (3) encourage and facilitate the most efficient use of all transportation funds used to provide passenger transportation in nonurbanized areas through the coordination of programs and services; (4) assist in the development and support of intercity bus transportation; and (5) provide for the participation of private transportation providers in nonurbanized transportation.”

What is the purpose of Section 5311 funding?

“The purpose of Section 5311 assistance is the provision of public transportation services and maximum feasible coordination with other rural transportation services. FTA policy and the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) policy on vehicle resource sharing allow vehicles to be used for purposes other than that specified in the original award on an incidental basis.”

What is 5311 funding for in real words?

Nonurbanized is a technical term defined by census as areas with less than 50,000 residents. Anything greater than 50,000 is defined as urbanized.

5311 funds were designed to combine Federal transportation money that was split into different Federal programs, such as (Health and Human Services and FTA) and to improve general public transportation in rural areas. 5311 funds were the impetus for developing coordinated community transportation systems. Previously, many areas did not offer general public service. Some areas also maintained separate fleets of vehicles to serve senior centers, nutrition sites, Medicaid customers, and other federally funded program recipients. There was a large waste of resources because each Federal program operated dedicated fleets. 5311 money became a carrot to encourage the efficient use of resources while also providing general public transportation.

What can I do with 5311 funds and where can I do it?

Transportation systems can use Section 5311 funds for public transportation projects in nonurbanized areas. Because most rural trips end in urbanized areas, Section 5311 funds can be used for portions of trips in urbanized areas, however, the primary beneficiary of the transportation must be rural areas.

A rural transit provider may design its Section 5311 funded services to maximize use by members of the general public who are transportation disadvantaged. Transportation disadvantaged people include elderly people and people with disabilities. Coordinated human service transportation that primarily serves elderly people and people with disabilities, but is not restricted from carrying other members of the public, is open to the general public if it is advertised as public transportation service.

What does “not restricted from carrying other members of the public” mean?

This term ensures that closed door service is not being provided. 5311 funds expect all recipients to be open door. Closed door service is when service is provided to specific groups of passengers (usually sponsored by a single funding program) while passengers from other funding programs are not allowed to be on the vehicle at that time. An example is when seniors are picked up at the senior center and driven to the grocery store. If non-senior center customers are not allowed to be served by this vehicle at this time, then this is not general public transportation. Therefore, this transportation system is ineligible for 5311 funds. Sometimes there are legitimate safety reasons for not mixing customer groups.

Who is eligible to receive Section 5311 funding?

States and tribal areas receive Section 5311 funds. States usually designate local subrecipients for these funds according to an allocation process approved by FTA. At least 15% of the funds must be allocated to intercity bus transportation, unless the intercity bus needs are certified as having been met.

What is Public Transportation?

The definition changed slightly with MAP-21 by including a reference to ‘shared ride’ transportation. From the proposed FTA Circular C 9040.1G, the proposed definition is:

*Regular, continuing **shared-ride** surface transportation services that are open to the general public or open to a segment of the general public defined by age, disability, or low income... Public transportation can be either fixed-route or demand-response service, but excludes intercity passenger rail provided by Amtrak, intercity bus service, charter bus service, school bus service, sightseeing services, courtesy shuttle services provided by individual businesses, and intra-terminal or intra-facility shuttle services.*

Does the public transportation service have to serve everyone equally?

No. You may focus your service on general public populations that are transportation-disadvantaged.

A rural transit provider may design its Section 5311 funded services to maximize use by members of the general public who are transportation-disadvantaged. Transportation disadvantaged people include elderly people and people with disabilities. Coordinated human service transportation that primarily serves elderly people and people with disabilities, but that is not restricted from carrying other members of the public, is open to the general public if it is advertised as public transportation service.

What is Coordinated Transportation?

Section 5311 recipients must provide, “the maximum feasible coordination of public transportation service [assisted under Section 5311] with transportation assisted by other Federal sources.” In essence, coordination means that the same vehicle will serve customers with different funding programs if they live near each other, are going to destinations that are near each other, and are leaving and arriving at roughly the same time. There is no firm rule about the level of coordination, but FTA expects the subrecipient (transit system) to coordinate trips.

Are taxis public transportation?

Only if they are shared ride and the ride-sharing is determined by the 5311 transit system.

What am I required to do if I receive Section 5311 funding?

You must use the funds for coordinated public transportation open to the general public in non-urbanized areas. If you bought a vehicle, technology, or other capital items with 5311 funds, the item should be used in accordance with 5311 requirements throughout its useful life. If you receive 5311 operating assistance, you may only use the assistance for service that meets the 5311 requirements. If you receive 5311 administrative assistance, your agency is being subsidized with the expectation that you are adhering to the 5311 program requirements.

You must have adopted a Locally Developed, Coordinated Public Transit- Human Services Transportation Plan.

You must report to the rural National Transit Database. This is done for you by NCDOT using your OpStats submission. Therefore, you must submit on time and accurate OpStats.

What happens if I don't meet these requirements?

If you do not meet the requirements in this document and in the most current FTA circular concerning Section 5311 funding, then you are not eligible for 5311 funds, state funds that replace lost 5311 funds due to urbanization, or state funds that match 5311 funds. Most administrative salaries, vehicles and technology projects are subsidized by 5311 funds.

As the initial recipient of 5311 funds, the State must certify compliance with these coordination requirements for Section 5311.