Overview

In April, 2014 Indiana law [IC-8-25-2], Central Indiana Public Transportation Projects, was passed that afforded a stable funding source for transit in Central Indiana through a referendum process.

In July, 2014, at the suggestion of Hamilton County Commissioner Christine Altman, 55 county stakeholders from government, business and nonprofit communities came together to explore if the proposed transit funding was sufficient to create a useful network in Hamilton County. City of Noblesville Mayor John Ditslear provided staff support for this collective impact initiative, and the Hamilton County Transit Forum (HCTF) began a 19-month process to develop a proposed plan. Their work documents can be found at www.IndyConnect.org.

In addition to Mayor Ditslear, Mayors James Brainard (Carmel), Andy Cook (Westfield), and Scott Fadness (Fishers) all supported the Forum’s work and provided significant support from their planning, economic development, and public affairs staffs. Local chambers of commerce, hospitals, current transit providers, and transit experts all served on the Forum.

The Forum’s work became a laboratory for other Central Indiana entities interested in transit planning, with or without inclusion in IC8-25-2, which allows for a referenda process. This paper attempts to distill the effort into a simplified model for other counties, townships, industrial parks, etc. to modify for their unique needs.
Model Essential #1 – Use Collective Impact Principles

In the winter of 2011, John Kania and Mark Kramer published *Collective Impact* in the Stanford Social Innovation Review where they analyzed successful examples of “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.” Their work led to a new way of thinking about collaborative efforts for large-scale change, with collective impact training and professional groups developing in the United States and Canada. HCTF adopted (and adapted) these organizing principals.

Common Agenda

Participants must have a shared vision for change with a common understanding of the problem and a willingness to solve it jointly. It is critical that the team agrees on the nature of the challenges and steps for improvement. The Forum spent five months learning about transit, and developing their vision and objectives, before creating the transit plan. This investment saves time in the long run and provides for a smoother process. It also clarified that this team would have a limited life-span, sufficient time to create a plan and shepherd it through to referendum certification, as provided for in IC 8-25-2.

Shared Measurement Systems

Every collective impact initiative must agree on how to measure success and be willing to freely share data with each other. For example, groups working on education reform can pick from a wide variety of specific metrics to monitor and improve. HCTF’s primary measurements were less on metrics and more on delivering analysis. It would:

- Assess if the proposed tax revenues were sufficient to have a meaningful network. It had to include local routes that linked proposed rapid transit lines with employment, retail, recreation, and healthcare hubs.
- Create a 10-year transit proposal for Hamilton County. This proposal would be used for county-wide transit education, as well as a focusing point for elected officials in developing transit priorities.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

These initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders, willing to work together, but not required to all do the same thing. Coordinating differentiated activities, all toward the same goal, multiplies impact. Every organization approaches the transit issue from a different perspective, with their own unique mission. That doesn’t change with collective impact, but through coordination and cooperation, all organizations are “rowing together” toward the common goal.

Continuous Communication

It takes time to build trust among the partners, that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions are made on the basis of objective evidence. This trust is critical to developing solutions. To build this trust it is essential that the team meets regularly, face-to-face, and with the same organizational representatives from meeting to meeting. Reports and data are to be shared with the entire team.

Backbone Support

It is essential to identify a separate organization to staff and manage the collective impact effort. Partner organizations don’t have the time, nor desire, to focus all team members.

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In the best of circumstances, these backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people’s attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders. (Kania & Kramer, p. 40)
There are administrative costs to running the effort. Without a backbone organization these efforts frequently fail. Most collective impact initiatives have three management roles – project manager, data manager, and facilitator. For HCTF one person was able to be the project manager and facilitator (convener). Data needs were filled by the Indianapolis MPO. For the first year, these roles were not full-time. As work continued the project manager/facilitator role became full-time.

These five collective impact elements strongly shaped the work of the HCTF. It is recommended that entities wishing to follow this model begin by identifying the backbone organization and a strong convener. Characteristics for a good facilitator would be:

- Recognized and respected in the community. People will come to the table on the reputation of the convener and/or the backbone organization.
- Strong facilitation skills. Every meeting should be productive for the effort to continue, which require experience in small group exercises, brainstorming techniques, etc.
- Strong interpersonal and conflict management skills. Trust and relationships pull together the effort and the convener sets the tone for the team’s work.

Model Essential #2 – Create the Right Team

Time should be devoted to what skills, knowledge, and resources are needed for success. HCTF was a mix of interested novices and experts, along with representatives from key organizations. It intentionally did not include elected officials, although mayors sent staff.

Remember that team members are essentially volunteering time to the effort. While they are representing their organization, this is not their primary job. Create a team, with sufficient resources, so no single team member is overly burdened.

Once the team is developed utilize these principals:

- Be flexible in adjusting membership over time to meet your needs. HCTF cut its size in half in 2016, and added elected officials, as their new tasks required different team members.
- Use work groups to divide the tasks, and allow for small groups to create relationships. After developing objectives as a full team, HCTF divided into three workgroups – each chaired by a different municipality –to complete specific tasks. One designed routes, another examined governance and operating structures, and one dealt with public education and engagement.
- Don’t overly control the teams. If a good and balanced team has been assembled, trust them to do the work. The convener’s job is to keep everyone on task, meet deadlines, and ensure good communication between teams.

Model Essential #3 – Train the Team

It is likely that the team has mixed experience levels with transit and need to be educated on basics and best practices. Develop some training which can create a common language and understanding for members.

HCTF, as a first step, conducted an all-day network design workshop with Jarrett Walker & Associates. Workshop expenses were evenly divided among the four municipalities and the county. It was extremely helpful and jumpstarted the route design work.

We also encouraged people to read Jarrett Walker’s book, Human Transit: How Clearer Thinking about Public Transit Can Enrich Our Communities
and Our Lives. We purchased books for members as part of the workshop.

Other useful books/studies include:

- Rosabeth Moss Kanter – *Move: Putting American’s Infrastructure Back in the Lead*.
- Transit Center Research – *Who’s On Board 2014 – Mobility Attitudes Survey*
- Michael J. Hicks, Dagney Faulk, Kevin Kroll, Ball State University Center for Business and Economic Research, January, 2013, *Fixed-Route and Demand-Response Bus Systems: Financing Methods, Benefits and Costs in Indiana*.

Attendance at other workshops and conferences were encouraged and a number of team members attended these events.

**Model Essential #4 – Make Sure Your Culture is Ready**

All the planning and management skills will be wasted if the designated area isn’t ready for these conversations. A designated area can be a county, townships, or even public/private partnerships such as economic improvement districts (EID). Minimum community thresholds for this model would include:

- A wide variety of stakeholders are willing to talk about transit and agree that a need might exist. In addition, the designated area needs to incorporate a wide variety of stakeholders in transit development.
- There is a compelling reason to focus on being productive. HCTF set a goal to be ready for a 2016 referendum. This deadline kept the Forum on task. Elected officials would ultimately decide on the timing of a referendum, but the planning work had to be completed by December, 2015 to facilitate the process.
- Partners that are willing to be flexible and cooperative. HCTF experienced an amazing level of partner cooperation with all four municipalities, the county, chambers of commerce, nonprofits and experts in Indianapolis, working together on transit.
- A commitment to listen to different perspectives, ideas and suggestions, and the willingness to adjust accordingly. As part of HCTF research, the education and engagement team hosted listening sessions with every elected official in the county, and five months of public and stakeholder input was documented and considered. The plan document changed with this input. It flagged what concerns people had about transit and where we needed to better educate the public and elected officials.

**Model Essential #5 – Willingness to be Regional**

Transit is all about connecting people to places and many of those places are in other counties. In order to provide a great customer experience, consideration must be given toward what happens at the county line. HCTF research showed that the best systems in the country are regional. Unfortunately, the funding mechanism for Central Indiana is county/township-based, which precludes regional funding and priority setting. However, with conscious effort, planning can still be regional.
This requires more coordination, as well as the willingness to attend other transit-related meetings called by other organizations.

**Model Assessment**

### Outcome

The Hamilton County Transit Forum was able to meet, research and develop a work plan in 19 months. Phase One of the HCTF ended on December 17, 2015 with a final review of maps and a celebration of its hard work.

A leaner HCTF began in 2016 with the specific purpose of assessing township implementation, educating residents on the transit plan, and soliciting public feedback. They will also provide information to elected officials, and grassroots organizations on the plan details. While the 2016 team is a much smaller advisory team, it still represent business, nonprofits and governmental entities. It is not clear if Hamilton County will have a referendum in 2016 or 2018, but a plan is in place for either date.

This collective impact initiative was able to produce a plan quickly with a high level of community participation (average monthly attendance was 32), and was deemed successful by its participants.

### Model Limitations

- The effort never had a single funding source. Different partners paid for different elements of the initiative. All funding needs were met by parceling out the work. While it worked for this project, it could create difficulties. Primary costs were:
  - Convener/backbone costs: The City of Noblesville and then the MPO paid for convener and meeting costs. Each municipality also paid for their staff to assist.
  - Workshop/training costs: These were divided by the municipalities and the county.
  - Consulting/technical costs: The MPO had grant funds available to help examine governance structures with a consultant. They also provided significant help with map modeling and development. IndyGo provided financial modeling help and CIRTA provided office space for the effort.
  - Plan document design: The MPO and CIRTA provided design assistance, covered printing costs and website space on [www.IndyConnect.org](http://www.IndyConnect.org)

- Many on the Forum work for governmental agencies and are prohibited from transit advocacy (they are not allowed to encourage a “vote yes” for a referendum). Having a diverse team membership helps with this challenge but be aware that many on your team may not be able to be active with a referendum effort.

- While many will serve on the planning team, fewer are willing to be speakers at meetings, open houses and public meetings to explain the plan. You will need to create a speaker’s bureau of 5-12 people who can effectively explain the plan.

- This collective impact approach can’t manage the many jurisdictional votes required in the process. Be clear that the goal is to create the plan, explain the plan, and work, as members are able, for stable funding. At some point, this collective impact initiative ends as the political process takes over.