TP4A - Rural MOD Webinar

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Welcome everyone, my name is Brittany Mitchell from the Institute for Community Inclusion. Welcome to today's webinar on rural transit planning on demand and demand response solutions. This webinar is part of the transit planning for all projects funded by the Administration for Community Living. Before we get started with today's webinar, I want to run through some quick housekeeping or resume keeping items. As participants you're automatically muted for now. But towards the end of the panel, we'll have an opportunity for q&a. So feel free to unmute yourself and verbally chime in then, you can also participate at any time via the chat bots. For those new to zoom, you will find a bar at the top or the bottom of your screen, which will allow you access to the chat box and you can leave your comments or questions there. You can comment or chat throughout the presentation and we'll address them at the end of the presentation during the q&a. Also, today's panel discussion is being live captioned and recorded and will be posted on the project's website. At the end of the session, you will also receive a link to a survey to let us know how you felt about this webinar. Without further ado, I like to introduce the presenters for this webinar. Valerie Leffler of Phoenix mobility rising, and Kevin chambers of full path transit technology will talk to us about their experiences with on demand and demand response transit solutions in rural areas. Valerie?

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All right. Good afternoon, everybody. I am actually coming to you from a church in rural Lexington, Mississippi. So I am a quote unquote on location working in a small rural community. So really excited. So I word is on realtor in action. And what I'd like to go through today is an overview of just briefly who Phoenix is and then give an example of

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two contrasting rural mobility on demand deployments, and then talk through some of the key elements that we have seen as successful in this space, one of which is embracing the ecosystem approach. The next is navigating the supply and demand when you're launching mobility services in this innovative nature. And then understanding the user experience and then looking at technology as a power tool versus the solution. So I'm really excited to to hear from everybody during the q&a. And welcome also follow up conversation after today. So with regard to Phoenix, just a really quick overview, we are a 501 c three nonprofit established in March of 2018. We have projects across the United States, working on the key element of transportation solutions for the health and well being of every person in every community. And we believe this with all of our souls and our partners embody the same key mission and goals in in the pilots that we work in. We look at by this. We do this by removing barriers promoting equal mobility, but it all starts and ends with local leaders. We bring in support in technology options, and then building dependable and safe transportation networks. And our core values at Phoenix that embody how we work internally and externally. Our collaboration work to collaborate, innovate and empower. And then we all work very hard. There is no shortcuts in this space, there is no silver bullet, there is no quick solution. We are all working very hard, but we get to rise together. So without further ado, let me jump in and give an overview of contrasting are two very different role mobility on demand deployments. So the first one that I'm going to share about is our pilot that we launched in Winnebago County, Wisconsin, this actually, this community is in total throughout the entire county is around 117,000 people. median household income is around 58,000. And so it's a relatively well off community in comparison to some of the other communities that we work in and there's a lot of kind of Urban economic development need but there's also a lot of rural areas and areas and that have struggling in real poverty. But there is an anchor or a base of economic development that is going on. And so what we actually started this project in 2018 with a grant from Easter Seals and in partnership with the central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, launched this program called Winnebago catch a ride. And our main mission is employment for underserved community members. In Winnebago county. We support refugees, we support families living in poverty, we support young students, we support individuals who are seeking re entering after serving time and just really trying to help the community fill the employment gaps that are that are in the community. Another key partner, the lead partner that we're working with day in and day out hand in hand is the local 5310 real public transit agency make the right happen. We also work with the Oshkosh Department of Economic Development go EDC, and received funding to continue the pilot. So easterseals provided the seed funding. But three years later, we're still going strong, we're still growing the program, thanks to continuation funding from the community. And this is a multimodal on demand pilot. It is not a one size, one transportation provider solves all the answers. We have a number of volunteers lift as a part of the ecosystem. There's three taxi agencies, there's two public transit agencies

and also one specialty transportation provider. And so in this pilot, we went from only having when we first started fixed route transportation that did not go into the industrial park. One of the big things that we were looking for, for the solution is getting people access to jobs. The Economic Development Department go EDC did a study and 81% of job seekers that they surveyed said transportation was a major challenge for them. And so when we started out, we're like, we're not going to start providing service to all things for all people. We want to get people back to work. And so together we have done that.

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Another example of another mobility on demand project we're actually launching right now is in Holmes County, Mississippi. This is a very rural county, about 17,000 across the entire county median household income, roughly 21,000. It is one of the top five poorest counties in the United States. And it is been deemed by major publications as the poorest county in the poorest state in the US. And we're really invested in launching a mobility on demand pilot program to support the healthcare community. And so our focus is on access to care and supporting all social determinants of health. This pilot actually started due to a collaboration with centene Corporation to address the rural healthcare crisis to say how can we stop rural hospitals from closing I think there's somewhere over 200 Hospital rural hospitals have closed right the risk of closure in the past 10 years. And we really need to dig deep and sentences. We know mobility is one of the top three, if not the top issue in every rural community, it needs assessment that we've looked at, and we need to invest in the transportation ecosystems within our community. This pilot is also multimodal, we are working with three rural public transit agencies. We're launching a volunteer driver program here, and we're also partnering with the nmt services and supports that support the Medicaid transportation. And it's really come together with strong partnership with University of Mississippi Medical Center, the city of Lexington, rotary, the food pantry and the medical clinic. And together we are going to launch this pilot here in the next couple of weeks. And so it has been just an incredible opportunity to work in the community and to address these needs. And so as you look at those two options, there's some similarities that I'm going to go through in terms of what what what has been our setup for success in these pilots. So first is we're not going in alone. We're not saying we're going to launch one service and it's going to serve all the rides and all the all the geography is not jumping off a cliff.

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I'm getting some feedback.

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Okay, so, number one priority when you're launching a mobility on demand pilot and Phoenix is experienced as you've got to create a mobility ecosystem. Public transit is an incredible partner, nonprofit partners with regard to it for example, the food pantry with regard to the rotary And Lutheran Social Services. There's just a variety in every community small and large, that these organizations are the fabric of the social support network, private transportation providers, taxis, and small businesses volunteers. We really have been innovative at Phoenix when we've looked at launching these programs. In some cases, we've, for example, in Winnebago County, one of the challenges that we had was finding transportation 234 in the morning, for some of the third shift workers, and we tried volunteers, we tried lift, we tried the taxi, and the service was just hit or miss, if you will, for a variety of different reasons. And one of the things that we noticed was there was a security company that was supporting the, the economic development Park and they had cars, and they had officers and they were driving around. And we've we, you know, they approached us and said, Hey, we see you guys dropping fuel go off, and we say, Hey, we see you in the, you know, as we're, you know, around, and it came out, and we established a partnership, and that they're off. Officers and their staff provide rides for our partners who need our team members who need rides in the in that 234 in the morning timeframe, when it's really hard to find anything else. So we went to small business, and we said, if we match what we're paying the taxi providers, will you provide these rides for those these folks in need? And I said, Absolutely. And they actually started doing it for free. And then we're convinced to the value in the community. And that said, We'd like to continue doing this. But we just need to be able to pay for the gas and compensates our drivers. So that worked out wonderfully. Another example of this is when we work with a home health agency. So we're working in Colombia, Mrs. Columbia, South Carolina. And it's not a small town, but it's not a huge town, either. But one of the challenges that we had were rural, or were accessible vehicles in community. And so we actually partnered with a home health agency that was run by husband and wife. And we said, Hey, the cancer hospital has said that you guys provide incredible service and provide rides every once in a while. Would you be willing to provide accessible rides as part of the AARP ride a 50 Plus program? And they said, Well, sure, how much should we charge? Well, how much does it cost and we work together. And so it's all about collaboration and thinking outside of the box. But it's about creating redundancy in your ecosystem as well. And churches have been incredible partners as part of this, in terms of they have vehicles in many cases, it's incredible way to recruit volunteers. I'm sitting in a church right now. So it's absolutely part of the fabric of many rural communities. I think there was one county, we were working in a we counted 762 churches in one rural county that had like, you know, a few small towns, and it was like, unbelievable.

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Another element of the establishing this ecosystem is we have a what we call a mobility leadership circle. And we all work together to you know, network, who in the community is engaged in this in the pilot, who could we bring together? And how do we identify where the gaps are at? And so here's a chart, for example, on the right, of the way that those mobility leadership circles came together, and said, okay, there's this subsidy, and there's this subsidy, and there's this subsidy, and there's this subsidy, and there's the subsidy. But where are the gaps, and together, we identified the gaps, and then the Winnebago catch a ride program helps place individuals who need help getting rides to work, and the subsidy that supports them where they're at. So for example, one of the things that we found is some of the jobs paid to well, to qualify for some of the get to work benefits that were out there. And so if you made too much money, I think it was 14 or $15 an hour, you weren't eligible for the program to get to the good jobs that were in third that were in that shift. And so we're like, Okay, well, we're not going to certainly change the regulations at this point. But can we create a service that will complement that and so it's really an incredible element to not go it alone in establishing rural mobility on demand so we can all you know, work hard and rise together at the top of that summit. There's an African proverb that I believe embodies this very well if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, you want to sustain your program, you need to go together. Okay, next step is navigating supply and demand we hear this a lot is one of the major challenges when launching real mobility on demand. And there's there's what is the supply and what is the demand and how do you navigate it and so step one is you know, take stock, take inventory, assess how many vehicles the services or have or are able to have, are the ambulatory versus wheelchair accessibility are accessible number of drivers. So just because they have certain number of vehicles may they have drivers For all of them that some of the drivers may not have certain training, so there's a complexity there. What hours of service? are they available? What days a week? are they available? What are the rates is their eligibility criteria? And then the other very important question is, what's your current capacity. So you may have two buses or two sedans, and you may have four drivers. But if your vehicles are already maxed out, providing these existing services in the community, there may not be capacity. But in other cases, and a lot of small businesses coming out of the pandemic are like, we need rides, we absolutely need rides, that's if they're blessed with being able to find drivers. And that is another challenge in the mobility ecosystem today. So first is what is the supply of literally butts in seats that we have in our county or in our city, during what days and what times of the week, that is El demand. So one of the key things that we have heard and has been over and over a challenge when we talk to partners and communities is, oh my gosh, we have so much need for transportation, we have so much need Oh, we every day we run into this or, or every week, we run into this or once a month, and this is incredible issue. But one of the

things that has we have learned over time, is to get as much clarity and specificity on this as much as humanly possible. Because one of the things that we have done in many cases is we were like, okay, we heard there's lots of need, we heard there's lots of demand, we put multiple vehicles out there, we put multiple drivers in there, we put a manager in the field, there's like four rides a week, that's a lot of infrastructure to support that, that amount of demand. And so when we're looking at understanding how much you need is there as much clarity as you can get any type of data that you can pull will be incredibly helpful in establishing that. So this can be working with the Area Agency on Aging, often they have a good pulse of how much how many needs. Many times their caregivers or their partners are providing, you know, adult day assistance that then blends into rides, senior living facilities, assisted living centers, ardc, Aging and Disability Resource Center Centers for Independent Living community action agencies, United Way federally qualified health centers, hospitals, family support programs, one of the programs that we've launched in in a previous life was actually supporting the Ronald McDonald home, that's where families stay near the hospital, he want to talk about mobility on demand. If you're, you know, significant other your family members clinging to life, you know, in intensive care, when they wake up, you want to be able to get over there tomorrow or not tomorrow, in a few minutes, not tomorrow, if you know, when the doctors making rounds, you need to be good, you need to get over them right away. And so there's their specificity and understanding how many rides these organizations need in your community, community colleges, universities, if your county or city is blessed with university Veterans Service Officers, all of these organizations and hundreds more, actually are great elements to get what is the demand in the community, and they'll be private rides to go get to dinner, or to go to the county fair come home from the county fair from the beer garden, or whatever all of those rides are out here. But tried and true. Very frequently, these types of organizations are the heartbeat and the soul of understanding where the immediate need is, when launching mobility on demand. And then it's a matter of navigating the supply and demand. Another element of this is prioritizing your services and your offering. So you cannot boil the ocean and provide all services to all people all the time. But to really roll it out in layers. And so for example, by type of ride purpose. So that's exactly what we did with go EDC when we launched that service. When we started out, we're like we want to get people to work we need to help get people get to jobs, and we're going to start there. And that is a slog, it is really hard to establish rural mobility on demand in a rural community. Because those rides, that's 10 trips a day per person, if they're working five days a week, and that's a lot to demand for one passenger. And especially if you're working with volunteers, it's really tough to pull that off. And it's really hard on fragile ecosystems that many times exists in rural areas. But we said this is our charge. This is our commitment. This is what we promise the sponsor, we don't make it happen. The next one is is so then you say okay, we're doing employment. Now. There's another program that's launching, we're expanding to sit with thedacare one of the hospital partners, we're

expanding access to care, and then we're adding in another county. Next is that you could say all right, we may not roll out mobility on demand. Monday through Sunday 5am to midnight. Maybe you say we're going to do you know Monday through Friday or Monday through Thursday to start 24 are seven and I really would say do not start 24 seven. And many times when you get a bunch of people together and like, Oh yeah, we want to be just like Uber, and we want 24 seven service, which sounds wonderful, but in reality, it will, it will, it's very, very, very, very, very hard to sustain. Um, the next is rolling out by service area, you can say, okay, we're going to start out by offering service mobility on demand in the city. And then once we're successful to that, we're going to do the county or maybe a second city, or maybe we're going to do the whole region. And then another way that you could roll it out in the layers is by agencies eligible to book rides. So when you roll mobility, on demand out, depending on what your mission is, and depending on your organization's preference, you can say, Okay, well, these three agencies we want, or maybe they're funding the pilot, we want to meet these three agencies needs rights first. And then when those three agencies have their needs met for their members, or clients, or whatever that may be, then we will expand it to, you know, XYZ purpose. So just another way to roll this out in a way that makes sense, that is simple, and is effective. Okay, next is understanding service design dynamics. So when you're creating your your plan for service, and how you're going to offer your your transportation opportunity within your community mobility on demand, you have to think about your program from three key perspectives, at least, what is it like for the passenger? What is it like for those caregivers? And then what is it like for those third party partners, those individuals who are booking those rides on behalf of somebody? So for example, a federally qualified health center or a hospital or a cancer center or a church, you know, what is what is that user experience? booking a ride on whatever platforms you're going to offer app online or phone? What is the experience paying for a ride? In the vehicle in the app using a computer? Maybe somebody unbanked? How do we do this? And then ultimately, what is that writer experience in the vehicle. And so when you're designing your service, it's incredibly important to think first and foremost of what that customer will experience because as they say, in the private sector, the customers came, if the service is not effective, if it's confusing to understand your rates, if it's confusing to understand how to book a ride, you're you're you're you're you're going to run into some challenges. One of the groups that we have had the opportunity to work with in another project in Michigan, is called Menlo innovations. I don't know if any of you guys are book, like, like to read a lot. If you've seen the chief joy officer on the New York Times bestseller list, he founded Menlo innovation out of Ann Arbor, Michigan, but they have a program, they are a framework they call high tech anthropology. And they really break down what problem are we trying to solve? What are we trying to solve it for? And what is the best solution and I would encourage when you're setting up your mobility on demand program, to put this kind of framework in practice, and if you have funding from a partner, I would endorse

1,000,000%, engaging them as part of your program, they've been phenomenal. And what we were doing in this pilot is actually implementing a technology that was used for paratransit, in booking the services with an app, they went from calling in to book their rides for Detroit do tea and smart to the,

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to an app. And, and the feedback that we received from the users and the writers and the caregivers that were using, it literally changed their life. Because it was so intentionally designed to solve a specific barrier. And, and to address the highest needs that those customers said, were the issues. It wasn't like, well, we need to fix this. So we're going to hire a software company and they're going to fix it, it was, well let's understand exactly what the issue is. And then and then solve for it. And so these are some of the great stories that happened as part of this pilot and many more. All right, finally, I'm gonna wrap this up and then hand it over to Kevin is using technology as a power tool. So I grew up on a dairy farm for those who know and and using power tools to you know, fix fence and you know, all the other things that go along with that with with this part of it. And I really see technology as a

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you know, one of the tools and not a solution. Start when you're creating your pilot, I would encourage you to start low tech as possible. Because then as you design your service, you can add in the technology, paper clipboard, MS Office, Google Monday, comm air table jobber when Phoenix was first started, we didn't have a technology. I mean, I went eight months without a paycheck. We barely had. I don't know. I mean, we started from scratch. And we actually used an app called jobber that was made for like at home repair and plumbing. I'm not even kidding you. It was really interesting. is really affordable couple 100 bucks a month, the drivers had an app, we could see the schedule. It's fabulous. It's still available today. But it was cheap, it was easy quick to implement, you do not if you're deploying in brand new mobility on demand pilot, you do not have to say, well, let's we got to find some tech, and then we'll build a solution, new, have your solution, then invest in the tech technology creates complexity versus solving it. And it saves you in investing in the wrong tool. Because when you're creating the pilot, you're going to learn so much when you're launching it. If you if you purchase the wrong technology, you're going to burn through cash you desperately need, or time you don't have. And so I would not do or say we need a solution. To launch our mobility on demand. No, it's just going to be one of the elements that is part of the success of your pilot, and fit the technology to what is needed for your program to be successful for your clients and

your partner needs. There's a program that we've launched are in the process of launching with the neighbor network of Northern Nevada. And it's a huge, super complex rural mobility as a service. And it's just one of the largest programs that we've worked. It's 12 counties that we are connecting with one technology. And we understand and respect that different organizations that we're supporting are different points in their journey of understanding what the where I'm at with technology. And so in our mobility as a service, we have some agencies that are joining that just really want to be part of the digital phonebook, I just want to put my service out there and be available and have those details all the way to this inap experience like an Uber and Lyft. And we're not saying to the partners, well, you have to use our technology. And it's going to be have to be this way. We're saying how do you provide service and then we go and find a technology partner that works with the way that they provide service. And if they want to cascade up or down depending on the level of technology they're comfortable with? Hallelujah, fantastic. And we're really fitting the technology to the transit agency or to the partner versus having showing up at the transit agencies door or the private sector partners don't say, well, you want to be part of our pilot, where you got to change how you do business, that's going to go over like a lead balloon. So as part of this pilot, for example, and with a neighbor network in northern Nevada, we're using sketch go, which is a Australian platform, we're using icandy, which is an Irish platform, we're using spare, which is a Canadian platform and who you know, who knows who else will be joining this party. But it's based upon who the transit agencies feel are important. But it's human centered design to the approach to technology and rollout. We've also utilized what three words so if you're not familiar with what three words, they've divided the entire surface and given you a three meter square for every, you know, location, and it's a much more accurate addressing system. If you've ever used rural addressing on Google Maps, reliability may vary. And in some cases, there's not addresses like rural trailer parks. And when you're trying to pick up somebody at two in the morning, and it's dark out in a trailer park, you can't see unless you hope you're driving up to the right one that has the lights on. So what three words is a tool in our tool belt to ensure we have accurate addresses, and we could put it in SDS address number two, for the drivers. And sometimes we even use job forms when working with hospitals who we need lots of information, date of birth, we need other details that may be available. And we can't put that in some of our booking platforms, we have an alternative. So in a nutshell, I've tried to go through this very quickly. But we'll talk a little about about Phoenix and two different deployments, the importance of embracing an ecosystem approach, navigating that important supply and demand, understanding user experience and seeing technology as a power tool versus a solution. So thank you so much for your time, everybody. I'm super excited for the q&a. And I'm going to turn it over to Kevin.

Hello, everyone. I'm going to see if I can get my own screen sharing set up here. Great. Okay, I hope you can see my screen and that we can talk about a little bit this from a little bit more of a technology focus rather than a program focus. First, I want to just comment, a remark just a couple remarks on Valerie's presentation. I wholeheartedly endorse all the broad, you know, topics or strategy she said around technology. I everything in there was wonderful and I my general feeling is I'm just going to find a few different ways of embellishing or building on it. Everything she just said. So thank you, Valerie, and thanks for all your work, the programs you described across the US are, I find just personally very inspiring. So that's great. So let's get right into it and talk a little bit about technology. So let's talk about what is technology in rural transit. So here I have an incomplete list of the things that count as technology. And I put that in quotes. And you can see there's a lot of different things, it is quite a hodgepodge of things. And, you know, what are these things all have to do with one another? Well, they're all used in real transit. And we all call them technology there. But what do they really have in common? So I'm going to take a shot at, first of all, pointing out one thing that isn't technology, this thing, the bus, so for whatever reason, the bus doesn't count as technology or the vehicle, whether it's a sedan, or a 40 foot bus or sort of a cutaway vehicle like this. This doesn't usually fall into the technology category, though, of course, it is, if you look at it from sort of a more objective point of view. And it's also the core technology, right? It's what you actually need to have a transportation services, you actually need a vehicle. So what are we actually talking about when we call when we talk about technology in quotes, I have two working definitions that I think both work well for our conversation today. One is that technology is everything that doesn't work yet. From Danny Hillis technologist and sort of generalist and thinker about technology. And I'm going to add my own second definition of that. Technology is any place where expertise heavily influences success, if you've got to have some sort of person who knows how thing x works, in order to get thing X to work, then we're talking about technology. And you can take those two things and actually, like, chart them and say, okay, for any given thing is something how, what's the level of effort, how techie is the technology. So I just created a quick back the napkin matrix here, with immaturity being the the first bullet point from the slide before and the required specialization as the next axis. And you can see it just without being precise about it, this is not meant to be really quantitative so much is just to give people an idea of a way to think about this, you can see that different things fall in different spots and cameras on vehicles are almost reaching the point where it's almost not technology anymore. Like they're they're fairly plug and play they work, especially, you know, the most basic cases of them are pretty easy to put into place and maintain. And then you've got these other things that involve a lot more coordinated, scheduling, dispatching the development of a mass ecosystem that Valerie was talking about his way up, they're both not very mature and requires a lot of

specialized expertise to get it and keep it working. And then you have things that are fairly mature, but they still require a lot of specialized knowledge, like demand responsive scheduling dispatch, as I have there in the lower right hand corner. And then there's all sorts of things. So everything we had,

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on an earlier slide, we could plot here and use that to help think about what what that technology is in relationship to these areas that come to describe the level of effort needed to put something into place. So I want to focus more on that second item of expertise as key to success with technology because I think it really is a defining element. And it's it's a hard area for us to think about. Because a lot of times when we're talking about technology we talk about we think about the effort to implement, what does it take to get that technology into place. And, and often we can bring in contractors, we have our vendors, and we and we have sort of like the Museum of novelty and getting something to work and that's very exciting. And that often gets things implemented. The the bigger challenge around expertise is the effort it takes to use maintain and replace a technology over time. And so it's important, you don't miss need it at the beginning. You need it all the way through. And in rural communities. That's a challenge because Often the expertise is over there. And when you really want it in house, you want it over here, where you are, where you're doing your work. And it's just very much the rare case that a rural transit agency has their own IT department that they have their own in house expertise. So that's, that's really what it gets down to, for rural transit agencies and technology in a broader sense. So there's some strategies for how to get that expertise. A lot of it can happen through in house training, I am a big believer in building internal resources to the maximum extent possible. So if you've got people who are seem like they're okay with computers, but they haven't used spreadsheets very much, give them a training in an Excel, if they know Excel really well, and they want to go further, give them a training and data management, if they're good in data management, and they, and you want to train them on but you know, I think a culture and a budget for ongoing training is a key success for getting technology into place. Obviously, there's hiring and hiring people for the skills you want. There's project based contracting, where you pull them in for an analysis or an implementation, there's long term contracting. So in a lot of places, there's the concepts or a lot of, say, tech fields, there's the concept of the managed service provider. And a lot of businesses use managed service providers to manage their networks, Master computers, I think that can work completely well with transit technology also, and just hiring somebody to work with you long term to have your technology work, there is aggregating. So there's multiple agencies going in together to maintain knowledge across an organization and maybe together hiring an FTP that can support an entire region or state. There's merging the organizations themselves if they're too small, to, to do the

things they want to do. I think merging is something that is on the table. And last, and I will broadly say at least probably, is the concept of privatization and actually offloading your services to organizations. We all know who they are, at this point, the Uber lift others that are saying, Hey, we're just gonna take it off your plate, and we're gonna do it for you. And that can be beneficial in a lot of situations. The big challenge there is, how maintainable is that over time? And what is the alignment of interests? So that's a big topic, I'm not going to try to dive into that any further than other than, you know, there'll be dragons. So. So I really, when I talk to people about technology, you know, I everything Valerie said, again, I just really want to say was really well thought out and is jives with my experience. So one thing is, as Valerie said, you know, it's I don't think it's all that useful to think about technology as a solution.

38:27

And her metaphor as technology as tools, is much more appropriate. I really encourage people when they think about technology is that you think in terms of trade offs. So some of you may be familiar with the graphic on the right, around projects that you can have things, you can have two of the three of the things on the right, you can have fast, good or cheap, but you can't have all three of those. So I think that's a great simple model for a sense of trade offs, the choices you have to make when you're embarking on a project. But there's other elements also. And I just list a few of them over there. Cost simplicity, robustness, scalability, speed, and gain kind of echoing from the prior slide and talking about privatization, business model alignment with your vendors. And I'll just stop for a moment and say when I say business, model alignment, so it's not just that we really like them, and they really like us. It's really what are the interests? And how does what, what opens and closes the flow of money between you and your, your vendor? And, and what, what incentivizes them, what incentivizes you and how well do those things match up? So that's a big conversation. But it's important to talk about in the context of technology because it's common now to see people selling something where The business model is unclear. And so I just flagged that, you know, maybe that we can talk about that more later. I want to encourage everybody to think in terms of systems. And so that really going back to Valerie's presentation that was sort of all the way through everything she said she was really thinking about the the networks and the systems and the resources and how to relate them how they connect. And I really encourage everyone who wants to be successful with technology, to think in terms of systems and becomes a noticer. So this is actually a term I just heard, apparently, Colson Whitehead, the author uses this term, and he perhaps wrote an essay about this, about the importance of being a noticer. If you really want to see how things work and think about how they can be different. It takes time, it takes some repose, it takes some stepping back and thinking about how things flow and how it could be different. And with that curiosity is really your best asset, rather

than thinking about what's the, what's the technology, I'm going to get and plug in. Because we often want technology to serve as sort of a like, Oh, it's dark in this room, I need a light bulb, I need to go to the store and buy the light bulb, screw it in and flip the switch. And I'm done. And that's not how transit works. We're not just a darkroom. And the solution is not a light bulb, it's more like we are. We're more like the electric company, we manage a grid of resources. And we need to think about how those resources are all going to connect. So it's a. So I would encourage that systems level thinking when think about where technology fits in. And you want to think in terms of what are the non technical supports you need for your technology to be successful. So planning and design, which Valerie talked about, really well. So I won't go dive, dive much more into it. But also just basic things like documenting your systems on training, as we talked about, in the past, having a few slides back, having a culture of training, and just continuous training, there's always room for training. And if there's not room for it, then you really want to think about whether you want to add more technology to your organization, having your procurement systems that really allow some flexibility in how you procure technology. Don't apply the same tech procurement process that use for buses to technology, technology. And buses are different beasts, and you want to don't want to sort of like apply that bus procurement metaphor to things that aren't buses, grant management, you know, what's your strategy for raising funds over time?

42:56

And how does that fit in with what kind of technology you want to put into place? How good are your relationships with your vendors? How are you evaluating whether the technology you're getting is actually successful? A lot of places are just procuring technologies like, Okay, we got it, but you're not actually measuring whether the reason you got it is actually coming to pass, whether you're actually getting that outcome that you wanted. So figuring out what those measures should be, and then actually doing the measuring is important. Big one these days, especially with all the news that sitting right now around cybersecurity is we need a culture of security within transit. And so that's, that's a big deal on that, again, links back to training, and having resources to test and iterate. So I want to give a quick example. I'm just going to spend a couple of minutes on this. This is something that my organization full path has been working on with AARP. And it's a basically a specially designed spreadsheet that has some code behind it, to put in some business logic and move data around and make some things easier. It's built in Google Sheets, basically with some links to other things like Google Docs and calendar and Google Maps. And it's being used in Lake County, Oregon, which is one of the most rural counties in Oregon, and probably the country by the size of Massachusetts and with a total population of around 1000 people and working with a couple organizations that

want to coordinate had basically been on paper or something very close to it whiteboards, index, you know, index cards, all that and helping them digitize their systems in the most simple way possible and start to build in their resources for coordination. So what ride sheet does, besides being a tool for within an order organization is we're building and so that you can exchange data with other organizations around trip requests in the simplest, most bare bones way possible, that addresses the friction, the barriers to coordination. So is it is it end all be? Absolutely not. Anybody who has gotten over their heads in spreadsheets know that spreadsheets are no silver bullet by any means. So scaling is a question. Getting data out in complex ways is more challenging than say with a compared to a relational database. But it addresses a need and it in terms of the trade offs that people are willing to make for this project contacts, it's a real exciting opportunity for various for really small organizations. And because it's API capable, it's able to pull in, is able to do geo locating estimate travel time distances, and it's able to exchange data with other ride sheet instances, to around trip capacity, and trip requests. So it's an exciting example of ways you can do be creative with simple tools. And also build organizational capacity along the way, so that the people who are in these organizations are now getting better and better at using spreadsheets, which I think is a real core capability that I think is valuable in any organization. So to wrap things up, I this is all just to echo everything Valerie said, you really want to get crystal clear on the problems you're solving, you want to focus on your institutional barriers first, before you jump to technology, attempts to use technology to solve an organizational or institutional barrier is just a very bad way to go. I encourage you to think in phases. So what's the minimum that Where's where it's the place where you can start. So that really means you have to know what's important, and you really have to prioritize ruthlessly. And and you need to plan for what resources you'll need to sustain your systems over time. That's I think, if there's one thing I can encourage people to think about is not just what's the technology, I need to get the thing I want, but how am I going to keep that technology working over time. So I'll stop there. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you all. And let's jump on into the q&a.

47:53

Well, thank you so much to both Valerie and Kevin for fabulous presentations, you both talked about some really important concepts. And we have an active chat box. And so going back to Valerie, there were a couple of questions post for you. And one of them is from Rachel. And she says, could you clarify what role Phoenix plays in the ecosystem? For example, what exists before Phoenix comes in? And then what changes occur due to Phoenix's participation? And also what makes a region or an organization as suitable fit or working with Phoenix?

48:33

Yeah, so I think the role Phoenix plays in this ecosystem or in this role is really the integrator. So we we do we support the community organizing, we support the collaboration with partners, we support support it, we support supporting, you can tell it's Tuesday afternoon, we support finding or sourcing the technology, options, pricing, just a variety of roles where we have a lot of experience from working in this space across a variety of different community priorities. And so in some cases, when we go into a community, there's nothing there's not a single transit agency. There's not a single taxi provider, it's it's a mobility, starting place. And some communities we go into, for example, South Dallas and Arbor, Michigan, there's an incredible wealth of providers that's there. But maybe they don't even know about each other. Maybe the services aren't coordinated. Maybe the social service agencies aren't aware those programs are available. I mean, when we first started working in Dallas, we talked with the United Way, and they're like, well, there's only really two taxi companies that we you know, have been able to find that are out there that we refer to refer to. And so it really just comes down to, you know, understanding what the what the needs are of the folks who are prioritizing the community's goals. Some cases that particular partner, such as the health system Or a city, a city council and other cases, it's, you know, just a municipal government. And so we really just seek to provide support in meeting the goals of the community with the tools and the resources that are available.

50:18

Thank you, Valerie. And I'm looking at a list of questions. So I'll try to ask one for you. And then one geared towards Kevin. So, Kevin, one question that we had during your presentation from Steven was when procuring hardware or software or technology support, which approach offers better results and perhaps lower costs, picture separately than integrate or procure the full package of what is affordable? with options to add aspirational capabilities?

50:50

There's no simple answer to that. I think it's really good. It depends. So, you know, I, my experience is that often we want that silver bullet and Valerie kicked off her talk saying, by the way, there's no silver bullet. So here's where I'll remind people, there's, there's, there's no silver bullet. And so, you know, depending on what size of agency you are, I think that's a big determiner of whether it's better to go with one vendor that sort of provides everything versus maybe a bunch of different pieces back that, that when you put them

together provide a whole solution. You know, some of the things you want to take into consideration is like, what are the costs of managing multiple vendors? With, in some cases, that cost is significant. I mean, if you're going out for an RFP, and then and then negotiate, you know, is this just very resource intensive to establish a relationship with a contractor that tilts things towards going towards a single vendor solution? Things have changed recently, in the last, I'd say, five years, or now, there's a lot of software's a service solutions were, often the cost of taking on a vendor is less than the threshold for needing to go with an RFP, and you could actually just, you know, look, do a cost estimate, you know, find the least expensive vendor that meets your solutions and just procure, right, you don't need to go out for an RFP. And, you know, there's even cases in, you know, for some e fare vendors where there's no upfront cost whatsoever, because they're taking a portion of your fares, right. And in those cases, you know, acquiring the contractor is fairly simple. And then in that case, that part of the formula of like, well, what's the upfront cost to establish that relationship is low, then that sort of thing towards going with multiple contractors. Another element is there's how mature is the field that you're working in that you can reasonably integrate systems together when you need to do that. So in the case of save, for example, onboard hardware for GPS, where like, there's a lot of cases where you can get one piece of equipment onboard your vehicle that has GPS information. And if you pick that piece of equipment carefully, you can have multiple systems go in and ping that, and say, I want to know where the vehicle is, I want to, you know, and that you can do that, you can have your scheduling dispatch system do that you can have your asset management system do that you can have other systems that just need to know where the vehicle is in a given time, all sort of connecting to that one system. And then again, that brings down the cost of, of having multiple vendors involved. So there's no single answer to that. I think things are gradually gradually tilting towards it being more and more viable to go with multiple vendors. And, but a lot what drives that is, is I say factors like that what's, what's the cost of integration? What's the cost of contracting? And, you know, how big are you how, how well, can you manage that complexity of having multiple vendors? Does that answer the question you think?

54:33

I think so. Thank you, Kevin. Um, and speaking of managing complexity, so Valerie during your presentation, Brian asked a question about how you got organizations to to Yes, to finally cooperate and not say we can't due to liability or staff or whatever else excuse they can think though.

54:55

Yeah, absolutely. That that L Word liability and Pilots is like the Oh, it is a can of worms, if you will. And it definitely a lot of times gets used as a smokescreen for I can't. And I think one of the important elements, the when you're working in these pilots that we have found successful is to actually start with the why. And start with the person and say these are, this is our charge, this is our mission, we want to deliver food boxes, we want to provide accessible work rides, we want to do all of these certain things, and we and for the purpose of supporting the community, but if you start with a liability, y'all never gonna get to talk in about the person because you just get wrapped up so tight in the red tape and, and the conversations and the I can't I shouldn't you never get to the person. So I always advocate for starting with the why. I'll say that was one of the actually the first when we started the Winnebago catcher ride program, we had 47 community partners all together in this incredible room. And you could feel the energy and the excitement about the program and pilot and launching it. And one of the individuals from one of the major manufacturing facilities stood up and said this exact same thing. liability if we advertise your services that are available to our, our our employees, we could potentially be a party to a lawsuit involved in and then everybody went on or you know, got really scared about it. But I'll tell you what, that manufacturing facility today because we didn't let that stop that we proceeded with why we are doing this is now one of our number one customers and using the service for their employees. And so where there's a will there's a way, and you just it's it's not and or it's not either or it's and or, and so yeah, that is an issue. But there are volunteer firefighters that go into burning buildings, that's a liability issue, but people still do it. So it's there's, it's just it's about starting with the entire purpose as to why you want to launch the program and the pilot, and then you will get through it. There will be naysayers, but don't let them stop you and learn, acknowledge, accept, understand, but then keep moving forward. And they'll come around if they're really interested.

57:07

That's great. And inspirational advice. Valerie. Thank you. And Kevin, we had a couple of questions about rice sheet. One is from Rachel. And she says, if a nonprofit asked her about rice, she would she give them or send them to help them understand whether it will be a good fit. And from Stephen, he wants to know if ryushare offers standard reports for use in billing sponsoring agencies.

57:35

There is nothing standard about right sheet at this point, it is a proof of concept. We have it in use by two agencies, and we're working on the exchange of data between them. So reporting is managed on a kind of per agency basis, we look at what they need to report

on. And so we've worked out cost allocation models and data validation schemes for those. But really, right cheat is has a total of two agencies using it right now. And it's still sort of an early work in progress. If people want to know more about it, they should contact me. And I'm happy to talk with them about it and explore opportunities for using it. Anybody interested in it should know that at this stage, they would be as are the two agencies in Lake County, they would be guinea pigs. So if you are willing to be a guinea pig and, and explore using a simple tool at a small scale, so you know we're thinking 10 or fewer vehicles, probably. And you want to explore those sort of opportunities for exchanging data between agencies. Yeah, let's talk.

58:51

Thanks, Kevin. And Valerie, thank you both so much for your time today. I see we have a couple of minutes left in, Kevin, you offered for folks to contact you directly. So if Okay, maybe I can share email addresses with the attendees if they have any further questions from either you. Certainly. Awesome. Thank you. Thank you both. So we want to thank the attendees as well for taking the time to spend this hour with us. And the last thing is we have an evaluation. If you can, if you have time, please click on the link and it's just promises No, no more than about 10 questions, just to let us know how we're doing and what you thought about today's webinar. So thank you so much for your time. And I hope you have a great evening, everyone. Thank you, Brittany. Thanks, team. Thank you. Have a blessed evening.