

Sustainable Transportation: Storytelling Project Report

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Introduction

We are a group of Middlebury College students, and this project is our final coursework for the Environmental Studies Program. The Program's Community-Engaged Practicum course (ENVS 401) offers students the opportunity to embark on a semester-long group project in collaboration with local community partners. The structure of the course relies on the interdisciplinary skills of its students, interest in participating in intimate group research, and guidance from both faculty members and the needs of community organizations.

Our project team is made up of five students; each of us came to this course with different knowledge bases, educational experiences, and critical interests. Although we all majored in Environmental Studies, we each joined those studies with an additional academic focus—philosophy, biology, sociology/anthropology, architecture, and writing. These academic backgrounds, in addition to each of our individual experiences, characters, skills, and interests, informed the interdisciplinary nature of our project and allowed us to address multiple aspects of sustainable transportation more deeply than each of us could have on our own.

We began this project on Middlebury College's Vermont campus, but when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and the college transitioned to remote learning, we scattered to four time zones in the United States. We continued this work together amidst a public health and inequality crisis, constantly changing circumstances, and an air of uncertainty and loss. While we worked from different places, the time we spent connecting with each other during this period felt all the more significant given the circumstances of disconnect. We relied on each other's humanity and care through this time, and in doing so, were able to both achieve our aims of storytelling and foster a network of academic and personal attentiveness.

Project Context

Our project is framed by two points highlighted in the Vermont Agency of Transportation's (VTTrans) 2019 Public Transit Policy Plan (PTPP)—Vermont's aging population and the potential of storytelling tools to raise awareness and increase use of sustainable transportation options. Our partner in this project was Addison County Transit Resources' (ACTR), and their interests in increasing access and mobility for Vermonters through dynamic modes of transportation informed and guided our work. ACTR's Dial-A-Ride service provides door-to-door transportation for elderly and disabled folks living in Addison County. While the service is predominately used for transportation to medical appointments, ACTR also encourages its clients to utilize it for other necessities including grocery shopping, haircuts, and visits to see friends, family, and community groups. Individuals who use the service must call in advance to let ACTR know they need a ride. The ACTR dispatcher then does the work of matching them with a volunteer driver who will pick them up and drive them wherever they need to go. The two primary barriers to expanding this service are funding and a lack of volunteer drivers. While drivers are not paid, they are reimbursed for mileage, and many use this as a source of income. As the PTPP points out, "volunteer driver service is essentially invisible to the general public" in part due to the use of unmarked personal vehicles.

In order to highlight the diverse experiences of Dial-A-Ride riders and drivers and to honor the various impacts of storytelling, we designed four outcomes for our work. Our three original products were profiles for operations and funding use by our community partner, a presentation to offer professors, peers, and community members a glimpse into our storytelling project, and a report of our work for future 401 classes engaging with issues of transportation and mobility. Given the pertinence of COVID-19 to transportation and the changes that have been made to adapt Dial-A-Ride over the last several months, we created a fourth product, an Op-Ed that highlights themes of social connectivity and displays ACTR's response to current circumstances. We see each of these products as an opportunity to share how this service is meeting the essential needs of Vermonters.

Project Justification and Need

This project arose out of a stated desire by ACTR officials to increase awareness and give a human voice to recent survey data collected by VTrans. The survey data were collected to gain broad feedback on the service, and the survey gave ACTR information on how well the Dial-A-Ride service was meeting the needs of current users in Addison County. Responses were limited to short answers, so there wasn't much of a chance for ACTR to gain a deeper understanding of the important role their service played in the lives of riders. While reports, studies, and data are all an important part of the policy-making process, stories by real people are essential to changing the general consciousness and demonstrating how transit has a real impact on people's lives. Storytelling has a crucial role in planning and can be a model for how everyday planning practices should occur (Sandercock, 2011; van Hulst, 2012). Gathering the stories of people who engage with the essentiality of this service, either as drivers or as riders, can have a compounding impact on securing funding, increasing participation in the service, and highlighting how intertwined transportation is with issues of mobility, environmental impacts, food access, mental health, independence, connectivity, and community.

The 2019 VTrans Public Transit Policy Plan suggests one way to elevate these voices, learn more about individuals' perspectives, and raise awareness: develop personal stories of riders. Currently there are only three "Rider Stories" on the ACTR website that concern Dial-A-Ride users; we hope to increase that number with quality, relatable rider profiles that explain the possibilities of the service and also demonstrate the ongoing need for more funding and volunteer drivers.

Much of our project falls within the "Transit and Independent Living" storyline suggested by the Policy Plan, which emphasizes how transit can benefit and increase mobility for those who don't drive. We hope that telling the stories of those who use the service will raise awareness of Dial-A-Ride in Addison County, with the aim of recruiting more volunteer drivers. Additionally, we hope that the stories we created can be used by ACTR, VTrans, and others in publishing, fundraising, and grant writing documents to increase the funding available for Dial-A-Ride.

Project Methods

1. **Digitized ACTR survey data**
 - a. A survey created by VTrans was distributed by AARP, AgeWell, and Addison County Home Health & Hospice in January and early February 2020
 - b. Some respondents indicated they would be open to further communication; it was from this group that we chose interview participants
2. **Selected 8 riders and two volunteer drivers as possible participants**
 - a. Mary-Claire Crogan (Community Relations Manager at ACTR) suggested four riders and one driver to interview who she knew would be able to speak charismatically about their experiences with Dial-A-Ride
 - b. We chose additional riders to try to get a balance of male/female riders and riders from differing towns
3. **Developed interview guide**
 - a. We wrote a semi-structured interview guide with both follow-up questions to the survey and questions about COVID-19 (See Appendix A)
 - i. Sample questions: *How long have you been using ACTR services? How does the service impact your life? What does your relationship with Dial-A-Ride drivers look like? Have you used Dial-A-Ride or another ACTR service since self-isolation started? If so, what was the experience like? If not, why not?*
4. **Mailed consent forms to participants for signatures** (See Appendix B)
5. **Conducted, recorded, and transcribed phone interviews**
 - a. Interviews were recorded on computers either through QuickTime or through the website Otter (otter.ai)
 - b. Otter creates preliminary transcriptions, which we edited for accuracy
 - c. Not all possible participants responded/answered their phone, leaving us with 7 completed interviews (6 riders and 1 driver)
6. **Selected participants for individual profiles/presentation**
 - a. We selected participants who had interesting anecdotes, poignant and concise quotes, and whose stories articulated well the themes we observed across interviews
7. **Wrote short profiles on selected individuals**
 - a. These profiles for fundraising/publishing use were modelled off of profiles found in the Tri-Valley Transit Driving Towards a Brighter Future 2019 Annual Report pamphlet
 - b. All profiles were sent to the participants concerned before their official submission

8. **Presented our project**

- a. We shared our aims and products with Middlebury College professors, peers, and community members

9. **Wrote op-ed for VTDigger**

- a. This op-ed addresses themes of social connectivity in the time of COVID-19 and the crucial role that ACTR currently plays for many people

Survey Data

One component of our project was to place our individual stories within the context of the data gathered from surveys. To this end, on March 3rd, 2020 we input data from about 125 VTrans surveys taken in January and February of 2020 by folks who use ACTR's Dial-A-Ride service. Due to disruptions related to the COVID-19 outbreak, VTrans has not been able to compile the data and send it to us (as of 5/19/20). These data will likely be ready in the coming weeks. For more info, please contact:

- Jackie Cassino, VTrans, Planning Coordinator, (jackie.cassino@vermont.gov)
- Mike Winslow, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, Transportation Planner, (mwinslow@acrpc.org)

Additional survey data were collected by AARP on their VT members in 2019. These data were also not compiled by the end of our course due to COVID-19 disruptions. For an update on these data, please contact:

- Kelly Stoddard-Poor, AARP Vermont, Associate State Director, (kstoddardpoor@aarp.org)

Dial-A-Ride Profiles

As one of the deliverables of this project, our team compiled profiles of three interviewees, (Martha Soderberg, rider; Teja Tanner, volunteer driver; Leah Orvis, rider) for ACTR's use and publication. While ACTR had a photo of Teja on file, no such photos were available for Martha and Leah. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are unable to personally take photos. It is recommended that photos be taken and added to these profiles.

Profile 1: Leah Orvis (rider)

Leah Orvis

Leah has been a rider of ACTR's Dial-A-Ride service for thirteen years and says she would recommend the service to others, 100%. She has experienced Dial-A-Ride through multiple stages of her life — first as a helpful service to her mother, and then as a facet of her own life.

Leah is a life-long Vermonter. She has been living in the same house all her life, the "same house [she] was conceived in," as she says. Now, apart from her cat, Leah lives alone. She recognizes how vital Dial-A-Ride is not only for her medical appointments and day-to-day necessities, but also for rejuvenation and human connection.

Though she uses Dial-A-Ride primarily for medical trips, Leah is able to expand her use of the service and accommodate her other needs. If the time provides and with driver availability, Leah will squeeze in an errand on the return trip from her appointments, whether a stop at the grocery store, the pharmacy, her hair salon, the food pantry, or her favorite shop "Twice is Nice."

Leah understands that sometimes Dial-A-Ride is too short-staffed to bring her on these errands, but she also understands that the service is meant to serve more than just medical needs. "You know, you have to be flexible too," Leah says. "You can't be rigid. You have to be just as flexible as everyone else is," and she is just that. The strength of this service, to her, is its humanity, and she has many memories of drivers that make it so.

Apart from these trips and access to medical appointments, Dial-A-Ride connects Leah to the world around her.

ACTR's rides give Leah a chance to get out and see the world a bit, to spark new conversation. Leah is an avid and curious learner. She reads myriad books from a wide range of subjects, to keep a dynamic knowledge of current issues and thought. But Dial-A-Ride gives her a chance to connect with the folks around her. In many ways, this service is how Leah keeps up with the world, insofar as the world is just other people and their ongoing lives.

"There will always be a need for this, if not more, in the future ... I hope we can be a groundbreaking state for others."

- Leah

Profile 2: Martha Soderberg (rider)

Martha Soderberg

Martha began using Dial-A-Ride 10 years ago, after being diagnosed with breast cancer. Over the course of her daily radiation treatment in Rutland, she developed a friendship with her driver, remembering, "He loved to tell stories, and I had a good time just listening... If I didn't have that service, I couldn't have done it."

Nowadays, Martha goes to Burlington for regular eye injections. The door-to-door service of Dial-A-Ride is very helpful for her; when she had a bad leg, she remarked that the drivers "would go into the doctor's office and get the wheelchair for me and bring it out. And put me in a wheelchair and push me in again, which is really nice."

While recognizing the assistance of Dial-A-Ride in getting to medical appointments and other essential trips, she also points out the importance of rides for giving her the freedom to get out of her house. Remembering her longer trips, she explains, "I was amazed to see the scenery for a change on the way up and back. I'd go, 'Oh! That's a new building, isn't it?'"

Martha highlights that some of the main benefits of the service are the bonds she has made with the amazing drivers, and the sense of community it creates within Middlebury. On the drivers, she praises, "I can't say enough good things about them, and because I live on my social security alone here... they are the only people that I give money to. Because I just think that they are well worth it."

"I arrange for a ride, mainly when I have to go to a doctor's appointment. And then I try and work it out that I could maybe stop in for a little shopping too."

– Martha

"Since I decided not to drive anymore, [Dial-A-Ride] sure has been a godsend."

– Martha

Profile 3: Teja Tanner (volunteer driver)

Teja Tanner

Teja started as a volunteer driver for ACTR fifteen years ago. After tearing her rotator cuff, she was unable to perform physical work and started driving on a temporary basis. She decided to keep driving for ACTR even after her shoulder healed because she saw that more drivers were needed.

Teja acknowledges how vital Dial-A-Ride is for elderly Vermonters. "I like to pay it forward. Someday down the road I'm not going to be able to drive, and I'm not going to be able to go out and do these things for myself. I'm going to need somebody's help to help me do what I do now," Teja offers.

Given the varied needs of Dial-A-Ride clients, Teja is available seven days a week and regularly drives people to the hospital or airport in the middle of the night. "The job comes before my personal life," she said when describing her schedule.

With many clients needing weekly or even daily rides, Teja has developed strong relationships with many people who use the Dial-A-Ride service. "You're the person that that helps them not only go do what they need to do, but every week you do the same thing and, and they get to know you. You're a person that's there for them that they can interact with."

Still, there are difficult parts of being a volunteer driver too. "It's hard when you actually lose a cancer patient or a dialysis patient. It's tough on the drivers because you get to know them," Teja reflects.

Regardless of that difficulty, Teja continues to drive because she sees herself as a helper. "We should always look out for the people who need help. And that's basically how I feel about this driving for ACTR."



Volunteer driver Teja Tanner (right) with her mother (left) and former dispatcher Marcia Brown (center).

"It's overall just a nice heartwarming thing and I just feel good. At the end of the day when I get home, I feel like I've done everything I could to help whoever I helped that day."

-Teja

Discussion

Our experience of this project took place primarily through phone interviews, and rigorous meetings on the framing and reframing of our project questions. Due to COVID-19, the plan for our project changed drastically from the beginning of the semester. Originally, we aimed to have a highly visual project that was geared toward a video deliverable, made up of footage and in-person interviews. We hoped visually to show what ACTR's Dial-A-Ride is like, and through visual storytelling paired with the human voice, we planned to articulate the stories of the riders and volunteer drivers who use Dial-A-Ride as a primary function of their lives.

Once COVID-19 hit the East Coast, in-person interviews, and even in-person meetings between our group members became impossible. We changed our project to one that could function remotely. We reframed our product and message from one that would have been visually evocative to a product that was straight-forward in its message and purpose, and one that could be built over the phone and via team video conferences. We consolidated our efforts from creative, visual storytelling to specific, almost survey-oriented interview questions. Without the ability to create this flexible kind of story, we believed it was the best use of our time to both seek the specific answers that ACTR was looking for us to procure and to get a sense of how people's lives were changing within this service under the current crisis. This meant that our questions clarified themselves both into a set of narrow focused questions that followed up on results from the VTrans survey, and amorphous, emotionally driven questions that got at the changing existential landscape that people are experiencing under COVID-19. See Appendix A for interview questions.

Our interviewees responded with resounding enthusiasm. They reported that ACTR meets their needs admirably, that they feel cared for and supported, that they would recommend the Dial-A-Ride service to others and hope to continue using the service in the future. All riders responded that their experiences and relationships with drivers were pleasant, valuable and generative, with the exception of one or two drivers with "colorful personalities." Many of our riders struggled to come up with gaps in how the service provides for them, or ways that ACTR could improve on its service. The most common suggestion and request was that ACTR expand its rides and network or provide more compensation for volunteer drivers. For this, ACTR would need more funding. For elaborated notes and feedback on the services as described by each interviewee, see our "Notes from Interviews" in Appendix C or Appendix D for complete interview audio recordings with transcription.

Beyond simply understanding how Dial-A-Ride functions in a normal year, we also thought it was critical to share the story of the current moment as COVID-19 changes all of our lives. To this end, we wrote an Op-Ed that tells that very story. First, we conducted an email 'interview' with Mary-Claire Crogan who shared with us how ACTR's professional priorities have shifted in response to the pandemic. She specifically mentioned that while Tri-Valley Transit (ACTR's umbrella organization) typically has four pillars, Safety, Schedule, Service, and Stewardship, in the current moment Safety trumps all other priorities. Sometimes that focus on safety even means taking a Dial-A-Ride client up to Burlington on a bus all by themselves. While this might normally go against their stewardship pillar, they have had to make compromises to meet the needs of their clients.

Additionally, Dial-A-Ride now only transports one client at a time and has started to offer delivery services for groceries and other essential items in order to limit how often their clients come into contact with drivers and others who may be infected with COVID-19. For Mary-Claire's complete response, see Appendix E. We wove what we learned about Dial-A-Ride during the pandemic from Mary-Claire together with what we had learned from our phone interviews to flesh out the story for our Op-Ed. Ultimately the Op-Ed focuses on themes of social connectivity and how important it is not only for its clients physical health but also mental well-being. For the Complete Op-Ed, see Appendix F.

Overall, clients of Dial-A-Ride seem to be very grateful to have this service and are overwhelmingly positive in their responses, particularly where ACTR's volunteer drivers are concerned. Broadly, Dial-A-Ride clients use this service primarily for doctor's appointments, though most of them do know that they can use it for other needs as well. ACTR has specified that medical appointments are not the only essential service that Dial-A-Ride can provide access to -- social connectivity can also be critical in terms of one's well-being and health (VTrans 2019). This is an incredibly successful service in enhancing social connectivity in our Vermont communities. Riders and drivers alike respond that they appreciate and enjoy the social interaction that Dial-A-Ride creates. For many, these rides are their most reliable resource to connect them to conversations with another human being. It is this ability of Dial-A-Ride that can help the bonds between drivers and riders to grow strong.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank every single person who assisted in the development of this project. Your guidance, voices, and stories brought this project to life and we are so grateful for your help.

To Molly Costanza-Robinson and Diane Munroe,

Thank you for the endless amount of effort you have put into our class. Knowing that both of you are so attentive, considerate, and available has given our group so much confidence throughout this process. When we had to leave campus halfway through the semester, you matched our feeling of grief and sadness, but you instilled a hope that we could finish the semester together. Thank you for keeping us motivated and energized, and for always being there for us.

To Mary-Claire Crogan,

Thank you for devoting your time during this immensely stressful time, and for all of the support you have given this project. From the onset of this semester, you provided us with critical information, pointed us in the direction of amazing stories, communicated openly, and did it all with a smile on your face. The joy and care that you put into ACTR and its people is visible and contagious.

To Mike Winslow,

Thank you for meeting with us and working with us so gracefully to distill the surveys. Those of us that entered the survey data with you thoroughly enjoyed our afternoon!

And to Kelly Stoddard-Poor, Ross MacDonald, Jackie Cassino, Katharine Otto, and Leah Soderquist, and Andrea Hamre,

Thank you for providing us with valuable information, data, and ideas for interview questions. Your knowledge of and experience in the transportation sector and beyond helped us both frame and execute our project.

To those whom we interviewed,

We cannot thank you enough for openly and honestly sharing your opinions, narratives, and jokes. You were the voice of this project, and there would have been no storytelling without you. Thank you for your participation, your sincerity, and your amazing stories.

To Leah Orvis,

Thank you for such a warm and stimulating conversation. You gave such a fresh perspective, and so many valuable suggestions that we are excited to share with ACTR. You filled the gaps in our questions and spoke with honesty and care. We appreciated our conversation with you greatly.

To Martha Soderberg,

Thank you for sharing your stories and thoughts with us. Talking to you was both delightful and enlightening. You so clearly demonstrated how crucial, flexible, and enjoyable the Dial-A-Ride

service is to so many in the county. We hope your story will encourage others to benefit from the service as you have.

To Virginia Rorhbaugh,

Thank you for your stories and insight. You shared such thoughtfulness with us, and such color about your life and experience with ACTR. We are quite grateful for our conversation with you.

To Virginia Wolf,

Thank you for sharing stories of your life in Vermont with us. You so clearly demonstrated your appreciation of the service. Thank you for your humor and your care in talking with us.

To Peter Pinan,

Thank you for the honesty and humor that you shared with us in your interview. We really appreciated the way that you warmed up to us through the conversation and conveyed both your experience and your warm character.

To Calvin Ball,

Thank you for sharing your time with us and letting us know your thoughts about ACTR's services.

And to Teja Tanner,

Thank you so much for your perspective as a driver. The stories you told were both heartwarming and heartbreaking, and we cannot thank you enough for your candor. We loved hearing about your experiences, and very much admire the strength and hard work it takes to be a driver.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Interview Guides

Advice from Mary-Claire Crogan:

“When calling participants, clearly identify yourselves as volunteers from Middlebury College who are assisting Addison County Regional Planning and ACTR with gathering feedback on Dial-A-Ride services. Remind them that they recently completed a survey and had opted for follow-up questions. Ask if they will consent to a ~30 min phone interview and then schedule. And ask them to please complete and return the release form that will arrive shortly.”

Interview Outline

1. Introduce self and purpose of call.
 - a. Make sure to reference the survey, and how they indicated being willing to be contacted in the future.
2. Ask if they are still willing to do an interview.
3. Set a time: “Does now work for you, or would you like to set a later time?”
4. Get consent: “Do you consent to being recorded during this conversation? Do you consent to having your name and story published?”
 - a. We also have signed consent but want to make them comfortable and ensure they can read our work before publishing.
 - b. “Is it okay if we record this interview? We can send you any quotes that we use in our project before we publish anything.”
5. Be conversational:
 - a. Introduce who you (personally) are and relationship to ACTR
 - i. “We are not part of ACTR but are helping them tell stories about the service to garner / raise public awareness and help with fundraising efforts.”
 - b. Ask how they are doing, how their day has been, etc. - be personal.
6. Introduce types of questions we want to ask:
 - a. “We’d like to get an overview of how you use the Dial-A-Ride service, and later we’ll ask about how the current moment, with Coronavirus, is affecting your needs and interactions with the service. But first, we want to get an idea of who you are. Would you tell us a little bit about yourself, maybe starting with how long you’ve lived in Vermont?”
 - b. Allow them to take the conversation where they want and refer to the two following guides for rider and driver interview questions, respectively.
7. Bolded questions are those that concern larger topics, that are key to the interviews. Normal text was used for related, filler questions that can be asked if an interviewee skips over them in their response (these are of less importance). Don’t stress to have every question answered, and remember, this is a conversation - don’t hesitate to share your own experiences!

Interview Questions for Riders

General Experience

1. **How long have you been using ACTR services?**
 - a. How did you first hear about Dial-A-Ride service?
 - b. Walk us through your first ride with Dial-A-Ride...
2. **What kinds of trips do you use it for?**
 - a. How often do you use it?
3. **On the survey you answered The question: *What things does ACTR do well (strengths)? What could ACTR do better (weaknesses)?* Could you elaborate on those questions?**
 - a. How well does ACTR meet your needs?
4. **How likely are you to recommend the service to someone who hadn't used it before?**
 - a. What kinds of things influenced your decision to recommend or not recommend the service?
 - b. If you have recommended the service to someone you knew, how did it go? Did they start using it?
5. **How does the service impact your life?**
 - a. Say you can't get a ride through demand and response...what other options do you have?
 - b. How would your day-to-day life be different if ACTR/Dial-a-Ride didn't exist?

Driver-Rider Relationship

1. **What does your relationship with ACTR/Dial-A-Ride drivers look like?**
 - a. What are some of the most memorable interactions or experiences you've had with a driver?
 - b. Do you have any regular drivers?
2. **How well do drivers meet your needs?**

Current Situation

1. **If you're comfortable sharing, can you tell me a little bit about your situation now during the stay-at-home mandate and COVID-19? I imagine things are different...**
 - a. How have your transportation needs changed or stayed the same in the present situation?
2. How would you describe your relationship with ACTR during this time?
3. **Have you used Dial-A-Ride or another ACTR service since self-isolation started? If so, what was the experience like? If not, why not?**
 - a. Right now, what does it mean for you to be safe (i.e., going to the grocery store with a mask on, getting groceries delivered, having a family member do it, etc.)?
4. I think we're all feeling a bit isolated right now, but people are also really coming together. **How have you seen your community respond to the pandemic (in relation to transportation especially but not exclusively)?**

- a. Returning to these services post-COVID - what does safety look like for you?
5. **Well our conversation has covered all of the questions I had. Is there anything else you want to share with us about your experience with ACTR?**

Interview Questions for Drivers

General Experience

1. **When did you start driving for ACTR? What inspired you to do so?**
2. What are some of the benefits of driving for ACTR?
3. Would you recommend driving to friends or family?
4. What are some of the challenges you have faced working with ACTR?
 - a. Technology?
 - b. COVID-19?
5. **What are some of your favorite memories that remind you why this service is important to your community?**

COVID Experience

1. **What does it mean to be a volunteer in an essential worker position?**
2. **How do you calculate risk?**
 - a. What does safety or comfort look like to you right now?

APPENDIX B - Consent Form

We are part of a Middlebury College environmental studies class working with ACTR on their Dial-A-Ride service. Our team is focusing on storytelling. We aim to tell the story of ACTR's Dial-A-Ride as experienced by its riders and drivers. By bringing the human voice and experience to this service, our team hopes to broaden ACTR's audience, publicize the stories of those involved in this service, and support ACTR in securing funding for the future. Through personal interviews with riders, drivers, and ACTR officials, we will compile short, informative profiles that ACTR may use on their website or in publications. Additionally, we will be writing a longer piece or Op-ed that reflects on our current crisis and tells the stories of Vermonters relying on Dial-A-Ride services during the Corona Virus.

As part of our class project, you are being asked to participate in interviews that will take between 15 to 45 minutes. With your consent, these interviews will be audio recorded so that we can ensure that we accurately capture the information you share. You may choose to not be recorded. Your name (and potentially your contact information) will be shared with ACTR and will appear in our final report which will be publicly available through our class website (<http://sites.middlebury.edu/envs0401/>).

You can choose not to participate or to end your participation in this project at any time. You can refuse to answer any questions.

If you have any more questions feel free to contact us, Lily Shale (lshale@middlebury.edu), Jessica Saunders (jsaunders@middlebury.edu), Gabe Desmond (gdesmond@middlebury.edu), Tara Santi (tsanti@middlebury.edu), and Amelia Jones (ajones@middlebury.edu), or our project advisor Diane Munroe (dmunroe@middlebury.edu; 802.443.5925). Thank you so much for your participation!

I have read and understood the above. I have been offered a copy of this informed consent form.

- I consent to having this interview recorded.
- I consent to my name being used in a final written project report
- I consent to my contact information being used in a final written project report

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

APPENDIX C - Notes from Interviews

|| LEAH ORVIS ||

General / Background

1. Born and raised in Vermont, has lived in the same house all her life
2. No TV, no computer, no internet, no cell phone. Operates via landline, books, and DVDs from the library.
3. Neighborhood
 - a. No children, mostly older people that keep to themselves, she's the oldest in the neighborhood
 - b. Not friends with anyone, doesn't call or talk to them (2:46)

Experience with ACTR

1. Been using the service since 2007
2. Her mother also used it before she passed away in 2004 (3:45)
3. Uses for doctor's appointments primarily
4. Tries to schedule other errands after the doctors
5. Errands: groceries, Kinney's, secondhand store "Twice is Nice", if time permits
6. Gets rides scheduled as far ahead of time as possible
7. Gets them scheduled the 23rd of every month
8. Tries to give ACTR plenty of time to put a route together

Feedback

1. High value of service
 - a. Meets needs 99%
 - b. Would recommend the service 100%, in fact has. Recommended to several people
2. Drivers
 - a. Enjoys talking to them
 - b. Memorable anecdote with driver Caroline DeLisle*

Issues

1. Riding in smoking cars
 - a. She has asthma so it's a big issue
2. One or two drivers she didn't like

Recommendations

1. Ask drivers if they are smoking or non-smoking
2. Advertise at employers, at people's place of work
3. Advertise online
4. Posters at offices - lots of seniors don't have computers
5. Put ads in Addison Independent because it's the most read around here
6. On ads, give people a phone number and an actual person to talk to

COVID-19

1. Hasn't been able to go to the doctor

2. Appointments been cancelled
3. Had to do over the phone instead
4. She's more of an "in-person person"
5. A couple of friends get and deliver her groceries, but they're getting tired of doing it

Anecdotes

*Caroline (Driver) Anecdote

"I had a doctor's appointment at Hinesburg, my primary. The driver was Caroline DeLisle, and she's been driving for years. She's in her 80s, almost 90s. And she drives, seven to six days a week about 1,000 miles a week she says. She's driving from 5 till late at night, and a doctor unbeknownst--I did not know, it wasn't planned--but my primary sent me to the hospital to get some blood work done and something else taken care of, I can't remember. But Caroline stayed with me the entire time. And she's a diabetic, and I knew by the looks of her she was getting hungry and her sugar was going down. So, I remember asking in the emergency room--Warren, was his name, the nurse--I said Warren, I said, this young lady here is a diabetic and she needs some food in her so her sugar doesn't crash. So, he took her, right, he said, 'Come with me,' and she could have a choice of egg salad sandwich or a turkey sandwich, and she took that with a glass of water, and she thanked me. So, I didn't want to--cause I didn't know how long the doctors department was going to go on, it was almost seven o'clock at night, and I knew it was getting late, and she needed something to eat because I could tell she was, you know, starting to fade. So, that was one memorable moment that I had there. ... That was one of the best ones that stuck out in my life was that Caroline stayed with me, and, it was an unexpected hospital visit. At least I was able to get her something so she didn't have a sugar crash" (8:11).

Flexibility anecdotes

"Each day is different. So, you just go with the flow and they'll say, you know, for example, 'Caroline will pick you up and drop you off. But she won't pick you up in the evening, you know, Joe Blow will pick you up or whatever, pick you up on the return trip.' And sometimes drivers have gotten sick. Oh, you plan on going with, Sue, or whatever. And she gets sick, so, then you're waiting for somebody in a, you know, a red minivan, and somebody shows up in a blue car. So, you know, you gotta be flexible too. You can't be rigid. You have to be just as flexible as everybody else is" (10:15).

Flexibility and need for more drivers (to pay more drivers)

"I've ridden home when there's been a car-full. Caroline's had three or four other people in the car also, that she just had to pick up at the same time cause they were short-staffed on drivers that particular day. So, I've had to ride home with more than one person at a time." (11:20).

“That makes good conversation too! But the driver doesn't get paid for each of us, they only get paid for the one trip, so they get shortchanged on it. ... They get only paid for one trip not for three even though they got three passes” (11:35).

Flexibility and use

“Sometimes I'll squeeze in a haircut, if I'm in Hinesburg or going back that way and there's time, I'll say, 'Can I squeeze in a haircut and put it on the books?' and sometimes they said no we can't, you know, we got we're short on drivers, we can only take you to the doctor's appointment and back, and I understand that, you know. The client has to be just as flexible as the driver does” (12:35).

What if Dial-a-Ride didn't exist?

“I'd have a very hard time getting to doctor's appointments and getting errands done. I have a brother in South Carolina and I have family in Hinesburg but they all work, [so] if it wasn't for that [Dial-a-Ride], I'd have a very hard time getting to doctor's appointments, picking up groceries and, and just doing errands in general” (12:15).

COVID -- Limited interaction

“I miss getting out. I miss getting out and going to the grocery store and getting a chance to stretch my legs and get groceries, or even just like I said go to the discount store or the pantry or, you know, anything. Just see somebody else's face besides mine. So yes, it's been kind of stressful when you've got is yourself and a cat--not that I don't love my cat--but you know, talk to another human” (16:45).

Issues with Drivers

[LEAH]: (13:01) “I've never had a problem with anybody yet. There's only one, um, I don't want to use his name, [name omitted - she wanted to tell us but in confidence] he's very very religious. And he keeps a Bible in his dash, he keeps one on the backseat window, he keeps three four Bibles in one vehicle. And he will get -- I'm not a religious freak nor am I against it. I'm neutral -- and gets on the high horse about and starts pounding the dash and pounding the steering wheel and he really gets raging. So, I really don't enjoy my rides when I get him. That type of thing. For the most part, I've had a few that some men have come on to me. There's one guy [name omitted] that's hit on every girl that rides, that type of thing, but for the most part, I've enjoyed all my drivers, and that type of thing.”

[LILY]: “Do you find that if there's a driver that you don't feel comfortable with you have the ability to control whether or not they're driving you?”

[LEAH]: “Um, yeah, I've had that, like I said with [name omitted]. You know, I've never said I don't ever want to ride with him because, you never know, or, you don't have a choice. But I have called and just said, 'You put me with a smoker,' and they didn't realize it, or I've called after my trip and said. 'That person's a smoker so I don't want to have any future rides with that person' -- the person was fine, it's just that I couldn't stand to be in their car. ...

Or, like I said, you know, every girl I'd known that rides with [regular rose] he's asked them to marry him. That's like a rolling joke because like everybody, he's asked to marry. So, that type of thing. But, everything for everything else. No, I've had no problems with anybody.”

General / Background

1. Bought house in 2000 after seeing bus stop by Mary Johnson Day Care
 - a. Reason for buying: ACTR bus stops there, and loved the house
 - b. Stop no longer exists - very sad about this
 - c. "I would love it to stop by at my house again. That's the only thing. Because I'll never be able to walk or push myself on a walker up to the bus stop now. But I hear that sometimes you can get it to stop at your place. And I remember a couple times when I'd take the bus to go to Hannaford or something, and they'd be coming back up and the bus driver, who knew where I lived, would say, "Do you want me to let you off? It's your street." And so he'd come down by the high school, and come down so I could get out where the old stop used to be, which was very nice." (22:01)
2. From interview with Teja Tanner, we know Martha is quite a hoot and knows how to put a smile on your face
 - a. Martha joking, "I mean, nobody's as nice as I am" (30:36)
3. Doesn't have a cellphone

Experience with ACTR

1. Overall, ACTR has been a godsend
2. Crippled now, uses ACTR any time she needs a ride
3. For the last 10 years has used Dial-A-Ride - mainly for medical services, but also some shopping
4. 10 years ago, diagnosed with breast cancer - trips to Rutland every morning for 6 weeks for chemotherapy
 - a. Many times, it was the same driver, with whom she developed a wonderful friendship
 - b. "And I had to go every day for six weeks, and I used ACTR again. And that was also just an amazing thing that they would do. And lots of times it was the same drivers that we really got to know each other. Whatever, it was kind of fun. If you can think of radiation as fun." (7:51)
5. "I try and not use ACTR just for, well I guess you would call it a pleasure ride, versus a doctor's ride. I go to a doctor, and that's enough." (9:58)
6. For the past 3 years, has been getting eye injections in Burlington once every 2 months and uses Dial-A-Ride to get there
 - a. Always a different driver, always enjoyable

Feedback

1. High value of service
 - a. Without ACTR, doesn't really have any other options
 - b. "You know, if I didn't have that service, I couldn't have done it and it would have been really hard to juggle having friends do it, you know, and line them all up for who's doing which day, and blah, blah, blah." (9:08)
2. Drivers

- a. Never a bad experience with drivers
- b. Drivers pick up on social cues - if you want to talk, they will talk, but if you just want to be quiet, they stay pretty quiet
- c. Feeling of community - 3 or 4 of her drivers go to church with her
- d. You really get to know the drivers and create friendships
- e. Door-in-door service:
 - i. Drivers assist in getting her up and down the stairs of her house
 - ii. Drivers will go into the doctor's office to get a wheelchair for her, and then wheel her from the car into the appointment
- f. Overall, absolutely loves the drivers

Issues

1. Only one time, had a bad experience with a driver who played a political radio station in the car
2. Didn't ask them to turn it off, but was very relieved once she was able to get out of the car
3. Driver no longer works for ACTR anymore

Recommendations

1. For personal drivers (Dial-A-Ride), nothing to improve
2. For ACTR bus, would like it to have more bus stops / replace that old stop
 - a. She knows she can ask the bus to stop at her place, but doesn't want to be an inconvenience and can't make it to the stop by herself

COVID-19

1. Took bus to Burlington all alone
2. Flexibility of ACTR: UVM changed her appointment time the day before her scheduled ride, she called ACTR and they were able to change it for her
 - a. "So then I had to call ACTR back and, bless them, they were able to do it. So it just shows how much they can take care of situations." (6:51)
3. Front Porch Forum is much more active, people connecting through this means

Anecdotes

Story with granddaughter:

"I haven't used the bus except to take my granddaughter who I was babysitting. And she's now 20. So maybe that was 15 years ago. And I said, 'You want to go for a bus ride?', when the bus still stopped there. And so we climbed on the bus. And we took it all over town and that was the most fun thing I think she ever did with me... She kept begging every other day, 'Granny, can we go for a bus ride?'" (3:20)

Issue with driver

"(Laughing) Maybe you better not print it, although he doesn't work for them anymore. I asked my driver [about it] this last time, if she was still [working]. Once I described the situation he said, 'Oh, I know who that is.' And anyway, it was when I came out of the hospital, they had - it was the only time they had to do it - to have another driver bring me

home, because they were so busy and they were switching, you know, back and forth and stuff. I said, 'Well, how do I know who's bringing me home?' And they said they would go to the front desk, you know, and let them know they were waiting for me. So that part worked out all right. And this lady said, yes, she was giving me a ride home. So I went and got in the front seat with her because I always sit in the front seat with them. And we had no sooner pulled out of the UVM loop there and she said, 'I hope you don't mind but my favorite radio station is on and I got to listen to it.' I think this was around, I don't know, I'm gonna say 11 o'clock in the morning or something. And I have to kind of keep my eyes closed after this eye injection anyway, if the sun's out, because they're dilated and the sun really hurts. So I just had my eyes shut and I said, 'No, go ahead.' And this political station came on... Now, I don't want to step on any toes for politics. But, oh my god, that was all I could do. I wanted to leap out of the car after he made a few comments. So, I didn't get along too well with listening to that and I couldn't wait to get home." (15:25)

ACTR is the only people she gives money to

"And I can't say enough good things about them, and they are actually - because I live on my social security alone here and kind of struggle to get from one end to the other of a month - they are the only people that I give money to. Because I just think that they are well worth it. Yeah, like paying for my taxi driver once a year." (29:44)

COVID-19

"The only time I have been on the bus since [COVID-19] was extraordinary. And that was just last week when I had to go to Burlington to get my eye injection, dreaded of all things. And I was told by a nice lady, over there at ACTR, that I would have to have a bus. And I said, 'To take me to Burlington all by myself?' And she said yes. So I felt like Lady Got Rocks and I told the driver I said, 'Well, you should be serving champagne.'" (4:07)

General / Background

1. Believes she is the most educated person where she lives. Has a Master's in psychology. (6:20)
2. Her family was here before the revolution and fought in the revolutionary war. Grew up in the Northeast Kingdom. (6:45)
3. Worked for Senator George Aiken on Capitol Hill for a little while (8:48)
4. Although her family is well-off, she has decided to live in low-income senior housing. (12:14)

Experience with ACTR

1. Great Overall. Specifically likes Lee, Amy, Mike, and Zach as volunteer drivers (5:47)
2. ACTR has let her stay mobile now that she can no longer drive, especially because all of her daughters have their own active professional lives (9:41)
3. Volunteer drivers are often interesting but sometimes are lonely (11:17)
4. She likes knowing people where she shops and in the community (16:01)
5. She mainly uses ACTR to visit the doctor (16:41)
6. Feels that drivers should be more amply compensated for the work they do and care they take.
 - a. "I just don't believe in anything for free...You know, what is it worth to you? So, I wish they got a little more money" (20:27)

Feedback

1. Some volunteer drivers' cars are not the cleanest (17:48)
2. She believes that the volunteer drivers should get their cars cleaned monthly (paid for by ACTR) (18:36)

COVID-19

Has not used the service in several months so cannot speak to Dial-A-Ride during COVID (4:31)

Anecdotes

1. Talked to how it is such a small world in her community. She has figured out mutual friends and other connections by talking to drivers.
2. [LILY]: "I'm sort of wondering, do you have any thoughts on how your day to day life would be different if dial ride didn't exist?"
[VIRGINIA]: If it didn't, I'd have to curl up with something else, because I'm that kind of person. I'm almost 90. So, I feel very not that needy. You know, I don't have to, like I used to, get in my car and drive to Maine or something. I don't, I don't have that yearning anymore... I would feel--it gives me a sense of freedom... I think, well, what do I want to do? I think this is sometimes, anything, is a learning experience. So, I think sometimes it's a good learning experience for all of us. But for me, I would have to start thinking of how to replace it aside like, I need it, and I want it and I don't want it to change too much." (26:13)
3. "I think this is a kind of a gift to us and should be respected and respected. So, I haven't had I don't think one character that has kind of made me go on guard." (30:37)
1. "I'm kind of critical. I'm not proud of that. But I've been a professional for 40 years. And I think once you're one, you look at things a lot differently." (39:48)

General / Background

1. Self-described “old lady with a sense of humor”
2. Will be 100 years old in October
3. She doesn't have any family left, has to go to the doctor and the dentist.
4. She has been coming to Vermont since the 40s, renting a place
5. Finally built her own home with her husband on Fern Lake in the Early 60s
6. Her husband retired in 1969, they moved up here in October of 1969
 - a. Fern Lake became their permanent residence, she lives there now
7. He died 2 months after moving there, so she's been alone since Nov 1969. She went to work for the counselling service until she was put on disability for heart condition
8. Has been very active in volunteer work

Experience with ACTR

1. Been using ACTR services for “a couple of years” (She doesn't really know - said “up to 5 years” but believes we should check ACTR's records)
2. Using it to go to Rutland hospital and different doctors' offices
3. Mostly for medical reasons
 - a. “I don't bother them for anything else, I have friends do shopping for me when I need them. The only things I use it for is for medical, or for legal [reasons]”

Feedback

1. All positive things to say -- anything she has to say would be a compliment
2. Everything she has to say is “affirmative and appreciative”
3. Drivers
 - a. Enjoys their company - we speak, not always familiar with the topics of their conversations.
 - b. She enjoys them
 - c. Drivers always very positive and cooperative
 - d. “I complimented them on their drivers. I've had a few drivers since then, I enjoy the conversations I have with them. We have mutual backgrounds.”
 - e. Any experience she's had is positive
 - f. “It's very nice companionship”

General / Background

1. Age: 76
2. Self-proclaimed hermit, quiet, shy, warm and ready to laugh. Identifies with the drivers in age
3. Retired
4. Born in Vermont and lived here most of his life
 - a. Was in the navy, in service for 3 or 4 years in Florida

Experience with ACTR

1. Only been using the service since this winter, state took his license away
2. Uses it for medical needs
3. Hasn't been using it recently, and hasn't gotten a ride for a month or so because all of his appointments were done

Feedback

1. [paraphrase] If I had my license, I might even volunteer
2. Value of service
 - a. Without the rides, could not have made his appointments
 - b. "It was a necessity at the time" (7:04)
3. Easy and simple to make the appointments, the people taking calls and messages are great
4. Drivers
 - a. [paraphrase] I call it begging - they say they get paid for it
 - b. [paraphrase] Everyone drives their own way, takes care of me, cordial, always on time
 - c. They are reliable even in bad weather, in snow, or anything else
 - d. [paraphrase] I would ride with any of them, a couple as old as I am and a little bit wandering
 - e. All drivers are relatively his age so they get along pretty well
5. Key takeaways
 - a. Identifies with the drivers
 - b. Very simple use of the service, good reviews

COVID-19

1. A necessity at the time, but have no reason to think I'll be sick or "broken down" - if I do need a doctor's appointment I will call and make a ride appointment
2. If he had an appointment tomorrow, would still use ACTR
3. During COVID-19, tries to stay away from people

Anecdotes

"If I had my license and all that, I might even volunteer" (11:52)

[JESS]: "I know you said you only had a few minutes, but thank you for all of your responses"

[PETER]: “Oh I always say that to anybody that wants to ask me questions, ‘Only got a few minutes!’ But then I go off for half an hour or so and start talking about everything. Yeah, it’s kinda nice to talk to somebody once and a while.”

General / Background

1. 75 years old, lived here in Addison County his whole life

Experience and Feedback

1. Has used Dial-A-Ride for at least 11 years
2. Uses it for doctor's appointments
3. No complaints about ACTR
4. Originally learned about Dial-A-Ride through the Home Help Office
5. He would drive himself but he can't afford to do that all the time
6. Always has different drivers

COVID

1. Hasn't used Dial-A-Ride recently because his doctor's appointments have been cancelled

General

1. Born and raised in Vermont
2. Tore rotator cuff 15 years ago and started driving temporarily (mom was driving at the time. Loved it and hasn't stopped. (1:24)

Driver experience

1. "Well, I like I like to pay it forward and someday down the road I am not going to be able to drive and I'm not going to be able to go out and do these things for myself, and I'm going to need somebody's help to help me do what I do now. So I always just feel like, you know, as I'm helping the elderly to bring their groceries to their, their house...that someday that's going to be me. So I like to pay it forward. That's what I try. (2:12)
2. "We should always look forward, look out for the people who need help. And that's basically how I go about this driving factor. That's why I never bothered. Even after my shoulder was healed, I just kept driving because they need people to help people" (2:45)
3. "You're kind of like the person that that helps them not only go do what they need to do, but every week you know, you kind of do the same thing and, and they get to know you and you're kind of like a person that's there for them that they can interact with" (3:49)
4. "It's kind of hard on the other side of that when you actually lose, you know, a cancer patient or a dialysis patient or an elderly or whatever, it's kind of it's kind of tough on the drivers because you get to know them" (7:05)
5. "Sometimes it's sad, sometimes it's happy, but overall it's just a nice heartwarming thing and I just feel good. At the end of the day when I get home, I feel like I've done everything I could to help whoever I helped that day (21:31)

Availability

1. "Well, I personally drive whenever they need me. I mean, literally, seven days a week. I do airport runs in the middle of the night. I mentioned the emergency call from the hospital. Somebody came in on an ambulance and now they need a ride home and it's like the middle of the night" (8:33)
2. "And so I've always been available whenever they need, I kind of structure my life around that part of my life, like the job comes before my personal life" (8:33)

Staffing

1. "I absolutely try to get drivers in there all the time, because we're just so short-handed, especially, like during the winter months when we have a lot of our drivers who are only here for the summer. And then they go back to Florida or Arizona or some other warm place to the winter" (11:00)

Employment

1. "Well, so this is the only thing I do. And like I said, I drive like a lot. So my, this is my entire income. So I had to call the bank and say, Look, I can't pay my camper, or my tractor payment for a couple of months. And so they pushed it back for me. I mean, now, I'll figure it out. I'll get through it. But yeah, and then like, you can't possibly get unemployment

because obviously we don't have an income so therefore, we don't get to do unemployment” (31:11)

COVID-19

1. “But they decided that there was a six-foot rule that was not being observed in cars. So obviously, you can't drive because you can't be six foot away. But they allowed me and my mom to drive because we both had dance. So we took out the center seat and they ride in the third-row seating, which is literally 6 feet from the driver's seat. We measured” (24:10)
2. “missing our clients is probably the biggest issue. Like I have clients and I see them every day or every couple of days or whatever. And, and I'm sitting here going, I wonder how this turned out. I wonder how that turned out. Yeah. You know, and that's, that's kind of what we're all just sitting around wondering how our clients are.” (33:59)

Anecdotes

Difficulty of losing riders

1. “At one point, I had like three dialysis gentlemen that I would take [to Rutland], one at four in the morning and then get back and grab the next one at 10 and take him and then I would get back and I would take my last one at three. And the one that I took at three, he was this old guy, he was like in his 60s, and he lived in Ripton. And he was like, one of the old time Ripton boys that, you know, they used to go drinking, and they'd go out there, run around, and they would get away from the game wardens. And they were just like, you know, just the bad boys in this place. And he would tell me the stories of his life. We actually went hunting near the end of his life. He was so cool... It was an instant thing over a few months where he just... I felt like I knew him my whole life, you know what I mean? And he was like my grandfather and I was looking up to him, and that stuff. And we went hunting and he slipped and fell on a rock and came down hard on his back. And so he was hurting, and that went on for about two months. And he really hurt a lot. I was taking him to dialysis, and something happened. Anyways, he died. I gave him mouth-to-mouth and brought him back. I did CPR and got him back. I got him down to the hospital and we found out that he actually had cancer in his entire spine and by falling like that it aggravated it, but it was already there. It was too late to do anything about it, and it was awful. We found this out at the end of January. He didn't want to tell anybody because he didn't want anybody to know... So he would just tell me all the stuff that happened throughout his entire life, like all the fun they had, all the everything. And he goes, ‘You know what? The only thing I ever wanted to do was live to be 70. And I'm going to do it.’ The next month, February, he's going to be 70, so I said, ‘Of course you're gonna live that long. We're gonna get you set up with chemo,’ and he's like, ‘I don't really want to do that. I'm sorry, I just - I've lived my life. I outlived my wife, I outlived my kid, I've lived my life. I only want to be 70. And I don't care if my older sister's gonna live beyond me, and she gets all the toys - because, you know, the last one standing gets all the toys.’ (Laughs). So he actually turned 70 and died the next day of a heart attack in the hospital. But it was like, the whole three weeks before that happened, he went through his entire life, from little kid to 70. And I just... that one hurt me pretty bad.” (16:44).

2. “I’ve had two clients that hurt me bad, one was a child and one was [the Ripton man]. The child was 10 when they found out he had cancer, T-cell. And then he lived till he was 14. But we did a lot of Boston trips and Burlington trips and all of that. He was going to be my ninja warrior, and he was going to go into the White House and clean that place out. Make everything better for everybody.” (20:33)

Appendix D - Links to Audio Recordings of Interviews with Transcription

Audio recordings were uploaded onto the transcription website Otter. Full interviews can be found at the following links:

1. Leah Orvis - <https://otter.ai/s/aUd9i1INRO-ZIimwgCdgnQ>
2. Martha Soderberg - <https://otter.ai/s/j6iQakd5SMqf5EUC5l7Kxg>
3. Virginia Rohrbaugh - <https://otter.ai/s/ckmZF63NRJu1xgMelJPh1w>
4. Virginia Wolf - No audio recording
5. Peter Pinan - <https://otter.ai/s/0rVDHEsqTSSbeHn5eejxIA>
6. Calvin Ball - <https://otter.ai/s/MjKXWHO3R2mMcRZ-FY-Ujg>
7. Teja Tanner - <https://otter.ai/s/spIQU8qrTCWkrM31tdx-Kw>

Appendix E – Email Interview with Mary-Claire Crogan

How are services changing since COVID? We know things are changing everyday so a snapshot of what is going on now is okay. How have they changed since shelter in place?

Mary-Claire:

We always knew that TVT/ACTR's drivers are dedicated, but they are really shining right now! During the crisis, most volunteer Dial-A-Ride drivers remained available to provide rides, except for a few with an underlying health issue or a loved one with a compromised immune system. All our CDL certified public Shuttle Bus drivers continued working. They donned personal protective equipment (PPE) and implemented new sanitation and operating protocols to keep everyone safe. Their steady commitment, despite personal risk, is saving lives.

Essential rides are being provided for critical care (dialysis, chemo, and Medication Assisted Therapy), nutrition access for those who don't drive and job access for essential workers. We are also offering new service – free delivery of food and essential goods for those who are elderly, disabled, or unable to self-transport. Sheltering in place has decreased other ride demand. It was well publicized that the virus could have more dire effects on older people. Consequently, we had many self-cancelled appointments in the early days. Then medical offices further reduced demand by booking only essential visits and relying more on telemedicine to meet non-critical needs. Residential facilities locked down, congregate meal programs cancelled, and adult day care shuttered. Addiction treatment centers provided more “take home” treatments and counseling sessions from remote. Colleges, schools and many businesses shifted people home to work via internet. Local destinations like salons, restaurants and stores either closed temporarily or shifted to curbside pick-up service.

To protect both our riders and workers, we have been diligent in monitoring and adhering to CDC and VDH guidelines and adapting services to meet or exceed that guidance. Our administrative staff have been working unbelievably hard to procure hygiene, sanitation and PPE supplies that we need to sustain service. Market scarcity of these items has been our greatest challenge. Staff and friends of ACTR help by raiding their own craft supplies and sewing masks after hours. Lots of innovation and sharing is also transpiring between Vermont transportation agencies, including VTTrans, to source necessities and develop best practices and public information.

To minimize risk of transmission, information was developed and shared to educate staff, volunteers and riders about safe hygiene, monitoring for symptoms and risk avoidance. Fares on public buses were waived to eliminate hand to hand contact. On-site exposure was minimized by creating remote (work from home) workstations, closing the office to the public and increasing CDC-guided sanitization efforts. We began prescreening each rider and driver for risk factors and suspended our usual practice of having volunteers transport more than one Dial-A-Ride client at a time. Then to further promote physical distancing we moved Dial-A-Rides out of cars and onto buses. Every other seat on the buses is taped off to promote physical distancing. The reduced seating capacity brought a most drastic change, we now discourage people from riding if they can stay home or have a means to self- transport. In fact, only prescreened riders who have

prescheduled a ride may board; and they must also wear a mask or other cloth face covering to be eligible to ride.

How do you calculate risk?

Mary-Claire:

Driver and rider health are both assessed prior to boarding through a prescreening process. Riders can expect to be asked:

1. Have you confirmed with your doctor that their office is still open and that your appointment is still scheduled?
2. In the past 14 days, have you:
 - a. Have you, or someone you live with, traveled outside the State of Vermont? If so, where?
 - b. Been closer than 6 feet to any person who is infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?
 - c. Had any of the following symptoms – cough, high temperature, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing?
3. Have you discussed with your doctor the possible options available to you regarding the need for you other than going in the office – phone screening, video conferencing, or rescheduling your appointment?
4. Are you aware that your being transported to this appointment may result in you being in close proximity to a person who may end up testing positive for COVID 19 and that this transportation may have potential additional health risks due to the current situation?

How have your professional priorities shifted? What is your outlook for future work?

Mary-Claire:

We recognize the essential need for public transportation and have balanced that with a concern for the safety and well-being of our employees, volunteers, passengers and communities. TVT's four pillars are typically Safety, Schedule, Service and Stewardship. In this crisis Safety trumps all. Taking the time needed before boarding to ensure passengers are prescreened, scheduled and masked for everyone's optimal safety is more important than a perfectly timed schedule. Serving essential needs only with as much physical distance between seats as possible is more important than serving a large ridership, despite our usual motto "Transportation for Everyone." Waiving fares to reduce contact, paying crisis-level prices for needed supplies and purposefully limiting small numbers of riders onto large vehicles are all counter to our usual stewardship standards, but these measures are needed right now for safe operation.

It's unclear how much time will be needed for our region to ride out the threat of contagion and return to normal activities. The financial health of businesses and individuals also remains to be

seen. Clearly community transportation has proved itself as an essential service for those who can't drive themselves. It's reasonable to anticipate a surge in Dial-A-Ride demand as our elderly and disabled clients emerge from isolation to attend deferred medical appointments, reconnect with friends and restock their pantries. And workers returning to recovering businesses are likely to need commuter bus service even more than before.

Certainly, we'll continue to see our demographic of aging Vermonters (and their needs for community transportation) continue to rise. What's uncertain is whether we'll see an uptick in "choice" bus riders (people who can self-transport but choose transit instead). The sheltering in place of the masses paused our car culture and its negative effects. Bikers and pedestrians are reclaiming public spaces formerly dominated by cars; waterways are running clearer; wildlife is emerging from deep cover; and air pollution has greatly diminished. People are noticing the healing of the environment, but it remains to be seen if they will make carbon-reducing choices once our time of isolation is lifted. Maybe some people will come out of this placing a higher value on public health than cars. Maybe city-dwellers will migrate to less-populated places like Vermont and demand for transit services will grow. Maybe some people won't be able to afford driving anymore and will need to ride the bus to work.

TVT/ACTR will continue to balance safety and need while the new normal develops.

Appendix F - Op Ed submitted to VT Digger

ACTR's Dynamic Dial-A-Ride Transportation Service Cultivates Connectivity

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us are a bit lonelier than usual. We also face shifts in that which we take for granted, as many of us reconfigure our habits to keep each other safe. Struggles with isolation and connectivity, however, are nothing new to many Vermonters.

Addison County Transit Resources' Dial-A-Ride service (ACTR) plays a critical role in providing mobility – and social connectivity – to those who don't otherwise have it. Vermont has the second oldest population of any state ([VTTrans 2018](#)). Many of these folks live alone and find that their transportation options dwindle if they are no longer able to drive.

Over the past three months, our team of five Middlebury College seniors worked on our Environmental Studies capstone project, gathering the stories of local individuals who use the Dial-A-Ride service. While reports, studies, and data are all critical parts of policymaking and planning processes, storytelling is also essential to shifting the general consciousness in favor of lived experience.

The central sentiment of our project is that gathering the stories of people who engage with the essentiality of this service can be vital. Gathering stories has a compounding impact on securing funding, increasing participation in the service, and engaging with how mobility, environmental impacts, food access, mental health, independence, connectivity, and community all intertwine with transportation ([VTTrans 2019](#)). To our surprise, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic opened a window to explore the unique ways Dial-A-Ride provides social connectivity in a time when most of us are feeling a little more alone.

So, what exactly is Dial-A-Ride? The service provides door-to-door transportation for Addison County residents who are 60 years or older or have an ADA disability ([ACTR](#)). Volunteer drivers use their private vehicles to take clients on up to six trips each month. While most clients use the service primarily for medical appointments, Dial-A-Ride helps them get other places too: the grocery store, the hairdresser, or a family member's home. Before being approved, drivers go through a series of background checks to ensure client safety. While the drivers work on a volunteer basis, they are reimbursed for each mile driven to compensate them for gas expenses and wear on their vehicles.

Like many other services, Dial-A-Ride is adapting to the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent orders for the State of Vermont. Tri-Valley Transit (the umbrella organization for ACTR) has four pillars: Safety, Schedule, Service, and Stewardship. That being said, Mary-Claire Crogan, the Community-Relations Manager for ACTR, told us that “in this crisis, Safety trumps all.” To this end, Crogan says ACTR “began prescreening each rider and driver for risk factors ... then, to further promote physical distancing, we moved Dial-A-Rides out of cars and onto buses.”

During COVID-19, many clients are using the service less. For some, this comes from choosing to self-isolate, while others have had their non-essential medical appointments canceled. This exacerbates social isolation for many clients who rarely have the chance to interact with others. This isolation is something that rider Leah Orvis spoke about in our interview with her. “I miss

getting out,” Orvis said, “I miss getting out and going to the grocery store and... just [seeing] somebody else's face. So yes, it's been kind of stressful when all you've got is yourself and a cat -- not that I don't love my cat -- but you know, it's nice to talk to another human.”

COVID-19 has also been hard on many of the volunteer drivers. Though they drive on a volunteer basis, many rely on mileage reimbursements as their primary income. Given the need to maintain six feet between drivers and riders, drivers with smaller personal vehicles are unable to volunteer. However, some are still able to participate in ACTR's new essential goods delivery service, which brings groceries, toiletries, and other essentials to those who are elderly, disabled, or otherwise unable to self-transport. Because these drivers were never officially employed, though, they do not qualify for unemployment even if they are no longer able to drive.

Amidst all of that hardship, one volunteer driver, Teja Tanner, told us that “missing our clients is probably the biggest issue. I have clients that I see every day or every couple of days, and I'm just sitting around wondering how my clients are.”

We began this project on Middlebury's Vermont campus. As we spent this spring spread out, some of us in our own homes and others remaining in Middlebury, far from our friends and the normal routine of our lives, we understood a little better what it means to be physically isolated and increasingly reliant on community systems. What seems strange and extraordinary for us right now is the everyday reality of many folks.

The words of both Tanner and Orvis demonstrate just how important Dial-A-Ride is. It is not just a transportation service, it is also a way to stay connected. In a time when we are all struggling a little more with loneliness, ACTR is continuing to evolve to meet community needs as best it can.