

RTAP Grant Project Minong ⇄ Hayward Wisconsin Commuter Service

TELL YOUR PROJECT'S STORY - Who, What, Where, When, Why & How

The Namekagon Transit is a public transit provider located in Hayward, Wisconsin. The Namekagon Transit RTAP grant project was to create an innovative public-private partnership to provide access to employment for Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) tribal members as well as Sawyer County inmates on the work-release program by establishing a transportation service to Jack Links, Inc in Minong, WI. Jack Links is a food manufacturer that distributes products internationally and has expressed an interest in helping individuals with criminal backgrounds and current Huber work-release inmates to gain employment within the company. Since the population of Minong, WI (population 486) is so small, the food company must look to all the surrounding counties for employees. Jack Links had openings for 75 employees, and the new transportation service would help fill that need. The original project goal was to provide transportation service between Hayward WI, and Minong, WI for employment opportunities. The goal was modified to include other unmet transportation needs within the community and surrounding areas.

Two leased 10-passenger vans were driven by volunteer Jack Link employees who were vetted and trained in defensive driving and passenger assistance by Namekagon Transit. The volunteer drivers, working two shifts, each received an incentive of \$50 per week for the responsibility of: driving, the passengers, and the proper care of the vehicles. The partners in this project were the Namekagon Transit, LCO, Sawyer County Sheriff's department, Economic Development, and Jack Links Inc. The LCO provided assistance with marketing and also insured the leased vehicles.

OUTCOMES, IMPACT & PERFORMANCE MEASURES

While the project outcome did not meet initial expectations, it did help some individuals obtain employment. During 2022, our country was still overwhelmed with the covid pandemic throughout the duration of this project. Creating the public-private partnership was straightforward, however maintaining the momentum was difficult due to administrative staff changes at Jack Links Inc. Additionally, each department within Jack Links has different start/end shifts which made it difficult to schedule the bus. We also struggled with retaining a responsible volunteer driver as the program was to reach individuals in need of transportation services because they were not legally able to drive. Finding a responsible driver was challenging, even with raising the \$50 stipend to \$75. However, in working through these issues the program opened the door for some individuals to obtain employment. The program provided access for 935 trips, even if transportation was provided for a short time.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED & PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

The Minong- Hayward Commuter Service did establish an innovative public-private partnership even though the program was not as successful as intended. However, the RTAP grant did plant the seed for a transportation service between Hayward and Minong, WI for workers to gain employment. As we move beyond the covid pandemic, Jack Link's may recognize the need, and have an incentive to offer local match funding for bus service to provide employees with reliable transportation.