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Washington County Transportation Collaborative Releases Regional Transportation Study

July 9, 2008 – Stillwater, Minnesota - A recent survey of Washington County residents using social services reveals a mixed picture of the situation for transportation in our county. While many people are satisfied with and knowledgeable about their transportation assistance options, a larger group continues to struggle with the serious negative consequences brought about by a lack of transportation.

Transportation has long been an issue for residents of Washington County. As Dan Stack, a senior social worker with Washington County Social Services explains, "Transportation directly affects the quality of life and health of our Washington County residents, especially those with special needs."

One of the positive findings was that a full 25% of respondents report having no problems accessing transportation. At the same time, more than half of respondents reported being dependent on busy friends and family to give them rides to medical appointments, errands and social gatherings.

"We often overlook the critical role that caregivers, family and friends play in providing transportation," remarked Martha Naegeli, executive director of the United Way of Washington County –East. "For individuals who lack these familial and social networks, there are serious consequences."

The survey helped illustrate some of these serious consequences. More than 17% of respondents report going without a medication because they couldn't get to a pharmacy, and more than 25% report missing a medical appointment because they lacked transportation. Further, more than a quarter (26.7%) missed an important social event because they didn't have a ride, and 34% reported feeling isolated or depressed due to a lack of transportation.

"Information like this is helpful to agencies like H.S.I., as we plan for future services," explains Roxanne Emerson, H.S.I.'s director of services to seniors and persons with special needs. "We want to move forward in developing a more comprehensive transit plan."

More than 500 people completed the survey during April and May of this year, providing their feedback on key obstacles and issues surrounding transportation. The survey was designed and conducted by a collaborative of local government and social service agencies.

"This collaborative effort is a great first step to better understand conditions in our community," remarks Valerie Jones, executive director of Community Volunteer Service and Senior Centers. "The issue of transportation is one that won't be solved with any single approach. Instead it will take the many resources and a public willingness to create the transportation options that meet all the needs."