

Tilley Drive Action Research Report

Good evening! My name is Stan Baker. I am a Deacon at St. Paul's Cathedral and a leader with Vermont Interfaith Action.

When faced with going to a doctor's appointment, most of us don't give it much thought. We just hop in the car and drive. But for the many low income, disabled and elderly Chittenden County residents who either don't own cars or cannot drive, finding transportation to a medical appointment is not that simple.

Tonight, we are here to discuss transportation to medical facilities at Tilley Drive in South Burlington, with over 150,000 square feet of office space that house multiple specialty clinics and employ over 600 people. By way of orientation, Tilley Drive is located south of the intersection of Hinesburg Road and Kennedy Drive, about 3.5 miles from Fletcher Allen's main campus in Burlington. The property is owned and was developed by Pizzagalli Properties, which has plans to double the amount of square footage over the next few years.

What is the problem?

The location of the FAHC clinics at Tilley Drive is not equally accessible to all members of the greater Burlington community, impacting the quality of care provided to those who have limited transportation access.

In 2002 Fletcher Allen Health Care began moving outpatient medical clinics to Tilley Drive from the main campus. Several specialty clinics at Tilley Drive, including cardiac rehab, the pain clinic, and certain orthopedic clinics, are now accessible only by car. Plans to move more clinics to this site are underway, requiring individuals without cars to use the following means:

- Patients can walk from the bus stop, over ½ mile away and not linked by a sidewalk, making the walk unsafe. Additionally, for those with cardiac problems, physical disabilities, and for those with chronic pain or spine problems (all of which are treated at Tilley Drive) walking is usually not an option.
- Patients can apply for SSTA shuttle services if eligible (this is restricted to eligible seniors or individuals with a diagnosed disability)
- Patients can use a Medicaid cab voucher if eligible
- Patients can find a relative or friend with a car who can drive them
- Patients can pay for a cab out of pocket

Additionally, at a time when cities and states across the country are making efforts to become "greener," and when Fletcher Allen itself has recently been the recipient of an award for its commitment to being "green," the lack of public transportation to the Tilley Drive site contradicts this goal.

After becoming aware of the problem through conversations with fellow parishioners and community members we conducted research.

We found that the UVM College of Medicine, Safe Harbor Clinic, and the Committee on Temporary Shelter did a cooperative study of the impact on low-income individuals of moving health care services to suburban satellites.

They conducted a survey which highlighted the following:

- “Transportation was an almost unanimous problem” noted by patients in accessing Tilley Drive offices. Distance from the bus stop was cited as the main limiting factor.
- o More than half of the providers reported decreasing the number of referrals they make to services since their relocation to Tilley Drive. And all of them agreed that the services on Tilley Drive were either “not very accessible” or “not at all accessible” for their low income patients.
- o 95% of providers believe that moving services to Tilley Drive has had a “moderate” or “large impact” on their patient’s health.
- o Physicians and administrators said that their uninsured and Medicaid patients had increased difficulty with transportation since the offices moved to Tilley Drive.
- o Physicians reported reduced access to health care as one of the reasons for worse health outcomes in this population.

Our interviews with staff from Safe Harbor, which serves homeless persons, and the Community Health Center on Riverside Drive, confirm the study’s findings.

- Their patients report serious challenges getting to Tilley Drive when they are referred there, often asking providers or social workers for assistance.
- These facilities currently provide vouchers for about 6 people a month at \$23 each way for cab fare. This is a non-line item expense that is not sustainable in the long run. State-paid Medicaid vouchers for cab fare to the location, too, were over \$800 last year.

Refugee Resettlement staff also report that many refugees have difficulty in traveling to Fletcher Allen facilities or to private practices like Maitri located at Tilley Drive. For some refugee women, access to Maitri, the all-women midwife practice, is culturally very important. Many choose not to go to the doctor at all rather than risk being seen by a male physician.

Conversations with providers at Tilley Drive reveal their belief that the number of no-shows for appointments and the number of people who simply do not *make* appointments when referred to these facilities is increasing. However, there is currently no mechanism to document this.

Who can help solve the problem?

There are three entities with the power and the responsibility to solve this problem. They are Fletcher Allen Health Care (FAHC), Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA), and the city of South Burlington.

The developer of the property, Pizzagalli, may also have a role to play in this issue. However, while they corresponded with us by email and spoke with one of our leaders over the phone,

Pizzagalli was unwilling to set a meeting with VIA and stated that they have no interest in subsidizing a transportation solution.

Fletcher Allen Health Care

Fletcher Allen Health Care has adopted laudable statements about their mission, values, and strategic initiatives:

The mission:

... to improve the health of the people in the communities we serve by integrating patient care, education, and research in a caring environment.

Values:

We respect the dignity of all individuals and are responsive to their physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs, and cultural diversity.

- *We acknowledge a partnership with the community to ensure the best possible care at the right time, in the right place, and by the right provider.*

Strategic Initiatives:

- *We need to improve access...*

VIA commends FAHC for these statements but does not believe the existing clinics and the plan to move more clinics to Tilley Drive are consistent with them.

VIA members were told by Fletcher Allen that the plan for the Tilley Drive location was implemented by the “previous leadership” at FAHC and did not fall in all respects within their current guidelines for a “successful site.” Those guidelines include:

- ✓ Right spot for the market
- ✓ Transportation accessibility
- ✓ Environmental and neighborhood compatibility

At the time the decision was made, the FAHC leaders assumed that public transportation to Tilley Drive would be forthcoming. That turned out not to be the case.

Fletcher Allen received full accreditation by The Joint Commission (commonly call JACHO) in 2005. This is an honor that Fletcher Allen and we as a community can be proud of. It is a voluntary recognition of quality. As part of our research we have reviewed the JACHO standards and believe that the access issues at Tilley Drive are not consistent with some of these standards.

For example:

One of the Leadership Standards (LD 04.03.07) states that “patients with comparable needs receive the same standard of care, treatment and services throughout the organization.” This standard is not being met if persons with private transportation have greater access than those who depend on public transportation.

Another leadership standard (03.02.01) requires that Fletcher Allen use data and information as a guide to decisions and to understand any variation in the performance of processes supporting safety and quality. Data regarding transportation access has not been collected and did not

apparently influence the decision to move facilities to Tilley Drive. VIA's concern is that this lack of data will persist and that future decisions will be made without adequate information about patients' transportation access, only exacerbating the existing problem.

CCTA

The Chittenden County Transit Authority (CCTA) is a Special Government Unit and was chartered by the Vermont General Assembly in 1973. It serves the communities of Burlington, Essex, South Burlington, Shelburne, Williston, Winooski, Milton and a portion of Colchester.

CCTA's mission is *"to promote and operate safe, convenient, accessible, innovative and sustainable public transportation services in the Chittenden County region that reduce congestion and pollution, encourage transit oriented development and enhance the quality of life for all."* Their slogan is *"Getting you where you need to go."* Consumers of CCTA's bus transport services – in order of usage - are the elderly, disabled, working poor, non-working poor and the so-called "green" riders - those people who prefer to ride the bus for environmental reasons.

CCTA is funded primarily by state and federal funds and local taxes. 20 % of its revenue comes from rider fares, and the balance comes from service contracts and advertising. One of CCTA's service contracts is with CATMA, the Campus Area Transportation Management Association, which is a partnership of Fletcher Allen Health Care, the University of Vermont, Champlain College, and the American Red Cross. CATMA is a private, non-profit planning and management entity that provides transportation for employees and students of the four partners from outlying parking lots. CATMA is funded by the four partners and pays CCTA \$83,000 per month to run the service. CCTA and CATMA have joint Board meetings and have raised the Tilley Drive transportation problem at their meetings but without resolution.

To determine new routes and make changes to existing routes, CCTA works from a 5 year strategic plan developed by its board, which consists of volunteer representatives from each member town. New routes are evaluated in terms of return on investment, the goal being the greatest number of riders for each route. Potential "trip generators" are housing sites, employment sites, and pedestrian-rich environments.

In the case of Tilley Drive specifically, CCTA told us that:

1. A re-design of the South Burlington route is anticipated within the next three years. There is a possibility that a South Burlington connector would be added "if enough need is demonstrated."
2. Also under consideration is the creation of a Route 2 bus that would go from Burlington through South Burlington, via the airport, directly to Williston.

All new routes must meet the state's performance criteria, including percentage of population who tend to drive, rider estimates, and trip-generators. Then there are financial considerations. Route changes are expensive - usually costing around \$750,000 - and are dependent on government funding. Ultimately, CCTA's leadership does not believe that adding a bus route to Tilley Drive would meet their return on investment test.

The Special Services Transportation Agency, better known as SSTA, is a private nonprofit agency that provides transportation services for people who are elderly, disabled or on Medicaid. SSTA is a “demand response” system, operating under the umbrella of the Vermont Public Transportation Association. The federal Americans with Disabilities Act requires that a fixed route bus service be provided for elderly and disabled persons who live within ¾ mile of a bus stop. If bus service is not available – as is the case with Tilley Drive - these individuals are entitled to reimbursement for a demand response vehicle - like an SSTA shuttle or a private taxicab. The SSTA service costs \$27 per ride. The state legislature uses a formula to determine the amount of funds they contribute for this purpose. In 2009 that amount was over \$300,000.

While SSTA provides assistance to those who are eligible, it does not help those who fall outside the eligibility requirements and is less than optimal when there are doctor’s office delays or other complications.

South Burlington

The City of South Burlington has a population of about 16,500 people. The Tilley Drive development in South Burlington is zoned for office use, including medical offices. South Burlington’s zoning regulations for medical facilities require that there be more parking than usual as well as adequate turnaround for emergency vehicles.

In the bylaws for the city of South Burlington, there are zoning requirements for sidewalks, bike paths and handicap parking, but there are no regulations specifically related to transit service or public transportation. South Burlington officials maintain that building a sidewalk along Hinesburg Road would be the state’s responsibility since it is a state road. Nevertheless, the City of South Burlington can request the state to prioritize this stretch of Hinesburg Road for sidewalk construction.

There have been conversations between CCTA and the South Burlington City Council about changing routes to better serve South Burlington in general and Tilley Drive in particular. One such meeting was held last night. [Add last minute info from Monday night’s SB Council meeting here if it is relevant.]

Like all municipalities the city of South Burlington has to determine how best to spend its tax revenues. Last year, South Burlington received over \$200,000 in property taxes from the current properties on Tilley Drive, revenue that will only increase as more offices are developed in that area. The city currently uses \$300,000 of its annual property tax revenue to pay for special transportation services through SSTA and for regular bus service through CCTA. According to the city manager, providing for transportation to Tilley Drive is not one of South Burlington’s stated priorities. They would have to do a study to determine how many people are being affected by the lack of transportation. VIA hopes that what they learn here tonight will help South Burlington’s leaders understand how much of a problem it really is. A municipality has an obligation to all of its citizens, and when they house facilities that are used by people all over the county, they also have a responsibility to serve the greater public good. It should also be noted that South Burlington is a member of CCTA, whereas the other parties in this situation are not.

Some Common Themes

In our research we observed several areas of commonality among Fletcher Allen, South Burlington and CCTA:

- All agree that the lack of transportation to Tilley Drive is a problem, although they differ in their understanding of the *degree* to which it's a problem. Fletcher Allen sees it as an issue that needs to be addressed but would prefer to share the responsibility with others rather than shoulder the burden alone.
- All three suffer from expense pressures, funding problems and competing priorities.
- They all cited the current way that Vermont pays for bus service as a significant detriment to easily changing routes and meeting the true needs of residents in Chittenden County and throughout the state. This needs to be changed at the state level. The Metropolitan Planning Organization recently appointed a Blue Ribbon Panel to make recommendations about funding state transportation. Their recommendations centered largely on using revenue from a statewide gasoline tax to pay for public transportation. This proposal in the past has received little support in the state legislature.
- Leaders of the various entities have been in conversation and meetings about the issue with at least one of the other parties involved.
- And, perhaps most importantly, all of these entities have similar missions. Each one has publicly declared its commitment to provide quality service to the citizens of the communities they serve:
 - Fletcher Allen has pledged to “continuously improve the quality, cost and ‘accessibility’ of health care” in the region and is proud of its JACHO accreditation.
 - CCTA prides itself on frequent, clean, safe, and courteous transportation services that “get you where you want to go.”
 - The City of South Burlington is proud to be recognized for the quality of its schools, parks and city services.

Some Potential Solutions

VIA has confidence that, given these common themes and missions, a creative short and long term solution to the Tilley Drive transportation issue can be found. Some ideas include using data to collect information about patients' transportation needs, exploring various shuttle bus options, considering using CATMA as a model for transportation to Tilley Drive, or expanding public bus services.

Conclusion

Ultimately solving the Tilley Drive transportation problem will take *commitment* on the part of *all three* of the responsible parties. Each party has acknowledged that it is a problem but to date none of the parties has been willing to take the lead in finding a solution. For the benefit of the citizens in our communities whose health care access needs are not being met, it is time for Fletcher Allen Health Care, CCTA and the city of South Burlington to sit down together and take responsibility for being part of the solution.

Now is the time for *action*!