



November 14, 2011

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi and Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee:

I would like to start by thanking you for the opportunity to address the HELP Committee regarding *The Americans with Disabilities Act and Accessible Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities*. My name is Billy Altom and I am the Executive Director of the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL). APRIL is a national membership organization dedicated to advancing the rights and responsibilities of people with disabilities in rural America. We provide leadership and resources through a national network of rural centers for independent living, programs and individuals concerned with the unique aspects of rural independent living. The goal of APRIL is to work with others to find solutions to common problems and to bring rural issues in independent living into focus on the national level.

The lack of available, affordable and accessible transportation is one of the most significant and persistent problems faced by people with disabilities, people who are elderly and those with low incomes. This is especially true for individuals who live and work in rural America and is why APRIL has been concerned with accessible and effective rural transportation for well over a decade.

*"It is hereby declared to be the national policy that elderly and handicapped persons have the same right as other persons to utilize mass transportation facilities and services; that special efforts shall be made in the planning and design of mass transportation facilities and services so that the availability to elderly and*

*handicapped persons of mass transportation which they can effectively utilize will be assured; and that all Federal programs offering assistance in the field of mass transportation (including the programs under this Act) should contain provisions implementing this policy.” Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1970, P.L. 91-453*

The above 1970 statutory language, establishing national transportation policy, was written 20 years before the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We need to use the 1970 Transportation Act's words as a challenge and a reminder of promises to keep.

40 years after initial national policy, and 20 years post-ADA, minimal or non-existent transit services in rural areas still create serious barriers to employment, accessible health care and full participation in society for people with disabilities. Lack of public transportation is one of the most serious, persistent problems reported by people with disabilities who live in rural America. Compared to the resources allocated to urban areas, those allocated for rural public transportation are significantly inequitable.

**APRIL's guiding principles in addressing transportation needs in rural America include:**

- “All” public transportation should be accessible to “All” users, “All” the time.
- Transportation must address the needs of all transit dependent groups, including people with disabilities, senior citizens, youth and low income individuals.
- Systems designed to meet the transit needs of people with disabilities will meet the needs of all transit users.
- Systems must be accountable for the accessibility, quality and quantity of services they provide.
- Accessible transportation includes systems, services, vehicles, routes, stops, programs and all other aspects of transportation and must at least meet or exceed the minimum requirements set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The current Transportation Act – the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) created the New

Freedom Program (sec. 5317) to support new public transportation services and public transportation alternatives beyond those required by the ADA, in order to assist individuals with disabilities with their transportation needs.

There are models that demonstrate the spirit and intent: Mobility Management and Voucher Programs.

*Mobility Management* refers to the consideration of all modes of transportation in order to meet the needs of users. In utilizing the practice of mobility management, communities rely upon a variety of transportation sources in an effort to move rural and small town residents from point A to point B as safely and efficiently as possible. This is a people-oriented approach that accounts for a rider's age, income level and accessibility needs to determine the best transportation option.

Effective mobility management ensures that residents are familiar with available resources and that communities coordinate transit programs effectively. Customer-focused coordination is essential to ensure that services create sufficient access to jobs, groceries and health care services.

Two years ago, Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA), the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) started a project in twenty states to train mobility management independent living coaches who are people with disabilities.

These coaches educate mobility managers in disability perspectives as they pertain to various forms of transportation. They also work with mobility managers to coordinate their services with disability organizations in their respective communities. In the Independent Living world we have a slogan for this... Nothing about us, without us!

But currently, many mobility plans do not take all modes into account, leaving some residents without options. A comprehensive and flexible mobility management program should include various types of mobility, from carpools and vouchers, intercity and local buses, rail, vanpools, personal vehicles, to walking and biking.

*Vouchers* are tickets or coupons that eligible riders give to participating transportation providers in exchange for rides. In general, voucher programs target those with the greatest need for transportation who cannot use existing transportation services for one or more reasons. For example, they cannot operate a private vehicle because they have a disability that prevents them from doing so, they lack insurance or a driver's license, or they do not own a vehicle. Perhaps they cannot afford to use existing taxi services or those services are not available or they live outside of the fixed-route bus service area.

So, how does this voucher system work and who's involved?

A *voucher system* involves three parties:

1. *The riders* who use public and private transportation services at a fully or partially subsidized rate and pay for those rides with the vouchers .
2. *The transportation providers* who, based on previously negotiated arrangements, agree to accept the vouchers or coupons as payment for the trips and submits the coupons to the sponsoring agency for reimbursement. The transportation provider can be a private taxi, human services transportation provider, neighbor, other volunteer or even a family member.
3. *The community*, through its local agency or agencies that support the subsidized cost of the voucher, determine customer eligibility for the voucher program, provide the vouchers to the customer and reimburse the transportation providers for trips.

### **Benefits of a Voucher Program**

A voucher program helps customers afford the cost of a trip that allows them to access essential services and destinations. The customer may pay nothing or just a small co-payment for the ride. Using vouchers means that the customer encounters little hassle in paying for a ride. For example, in some cases, the rider may have to submit only a voucher or check to the transportation provider to receive a ride.

The rider becomes more involved in the process if he or she also chooses the provider, such as when the provider is also a family member, friend or neighbor.

Being able to rely on voucher-supported services means additional independence for the customer previously dependent on the good will of family members and friends for their personal transportation.

A voucher system allows customers to choose transportation services that match their needs; from the type of vehicle, to the time and day of travel, including evenings and weekends, to the type of service (e.g., door-to-door). And from the transportation provider's perspective, participation in a voucher program allows public transportation providers to increase their ridership; taxis and human services transportation providers to expand their contract revenue; and family members, neighbors and others to receive reimbursement for trips they may have been funding out of their own pocket.

So here we are, 40 years after initial national policy, and 20 years post-ADA, and minimal or non-existent transit services in rural areas still create serious barriers to employment, accessible health care and full participation in society for people with disabilities.

I would like to highlight three programs operating in rural America that provide transportation options for people with disabilities and those with low incomes.

***Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin (CILWW)  
Regional Mobility Management/New Freedom Transportation Program***

The Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin's efforts to increase transit options for rural Western Wisconsin residents has two critical components: Regional Coordination and provision of transportation to rural communities with few or no transit resources.

The center employs a certified Regional Mobility Manager, who also serves as the center's transportation program coordinator. The center formed and staffs a seven-county transportation coordinating committee that serves to knit together the required locally-developed human service coordinated transportation plans into a truly regional approach.

The regional coordinating committee is comprised of public and private stakeholders and meets quarterly in rotating locations within the region.

The combination of the regional approach to coordination and providing transportation to those largely without access to transportation has resulted in a robust and growing program. In 2011, more than 12,000 rides were provided, and the program recently surpassed a million miles of service to a diverse population of individuals with disabilities. The center uses more than 140 volunteer drivers to serve the majority of those who use the program. The program is funded through a combination of Federal FTA New Freedom, Section 5317 funds, mobility management project funds, and monies received for delivering transit services. The rest is "local match": fee-for-service funds, rider reimbursement, agreements (cash and in-kind) from county partners, contracts and value of the driver's time (in-kind).

Those who access the program (people with disabilities of all ages) do so for a variety of reasons including medical, social, recreation and employment. Since 2008, a third of those who request transportation services are seeking education, training, employment or employment-related programs.

In addition, (largely due to the success of meeting the unmet needs of the rural counties) the center has engaged in a number of contracts with county human service and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), to coordinate and provide a portion of the transportation for those eligible under state and federal programs. Additionally, the centers' transportation program has garnered contracts to provide transportation to consumers of two regional managed care organizations (MCOs).

Due to a recent collaboration with another private non-profit center for independent living, the program now coordinates and provides transportation to residents in an 18-county area of Western and Northwestern Wisconsin. A growing segment of those served are veterans with no transportation to regional Veterans Administration centers. The program currently serves more than 130 veterans weekly.

Finally, the recognition of a growing demand for transportation options for rural Wisconsin residents with disabilities has led to an unprecedented successful collaboration. In partnership with the Eau Claire County Aging and Disability Resource Center, the center was awarded the first ever federal Veterans

Transportation Community Living Initiative grant for the next five years. The public-private collaborative was the only program in Wisconsin funded.

**Living Independence Network Corporation (LINC)  
Boise, Idaho**

Living Independence Network Corporation (LINC) is a center for independent living (CIL) with offices in Boise, Caldwell and Twin Falls, Idaho.

The LINC office in Twin Falls operates a rural transportation program that serves a 4 county area in south central Idaho that is approximately the size of the state of Connecticut. The 4 county area has a population of just over 100,000 people and 64,000 of them live in Twin Falls County.

The LINC transportation program is a “user-side subsidy” service that allows people with disabilities that prevent them from driving to defray the cost of public and private transportation. Users purchase vouchers from LINC and each dollar spent purchases 3 dollars worth of transportation. Users use the vouchers to pay for rides (for example, a \$9 ride costs the user \$3), then the transportation provider redeems the unreimbursed portion of the ride from the CIL. Users can use their vouchers to pay for rides from private providers such as taxis, from public transportation such as fixed-route and paratransit or to pay for mileage to “community inclusion drivers” implemented through contracts with private and public transportation providers.

- 1325 people use the program
- 809 of those are over 60 years of age
- 698 use the program specifically for employment

Participating transportation providers have had to increase staff to deal with increased demand as the system has grown, creating new jobs

The transportation program is funded by a combination of:

- 5310 Elderly Individuals & Individuals with Disabilities Program
- 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (JARC)
- 5317 New Freedom Initiative Program
- Older Americans Act funds through the local Area Agency on Aging

- LINC provides required matching funds from unrestricted revenues
- As described above, users pay a portion of the cost
- A link to an online news story about the program:  
<http://www.dailyonder.com/twin-falls-transportation/2011/02/01/3155>

The program works because of *cooperation and coordination* between human service agencies, public and private transportation providers, the ridership and federal, state and local funding resources.

Using *creativity* and existing programs, providers and resources, the program provides a significant link between people with disabilities and seniors in rural America and their communities and employment opportunities.

### **Good News Mountaineer Garage West Virginia**

Good News Mountaineer Garage is a West Virginia non-profit organization that takes donated cars, repairs them and provides them to families in need of transportation to get to work or training. The vehicles are matched according to the needs the recipients who are provided a warranty and training in how to care for the car and keep it running. The families are required to have insurance and budget for maintenance.

Having available transportation is crucial to economic independence. Economic independence means personal independence. Car ownership can be a solution to many transportation challenges. Research has shown that a parent with a car is more likely to be employed and to work more hours than a parent without a car. When a parent has a stable and consistent means to get back and forth to work, their chances of obtaining and maintaining better jobs with higher pay are much greater.

The Good News Mountaineer Garage, which opened its door in 2001 after having been organized by a group of concerned citizens, has helped **over 1700 West Virginia families** meet their transportation needs.



The GNMG is involved in an ongoing program to measure the outcomes of its programs. The results of this past year's respondent follow up study showed that:

- Number of cars provided to families total approximately 1,700 since it started in 2001: Most of the vehicles were provided to referred clients of the WV Works – Temporary Assistance to Needy Families – statewide.
- In 2009, GNMG entered an agreement with the Department of Rehabilitation Services to provide vehicles to referred clients. Since that time, 90 vehicles have been provided.
- In the past three years we have provided vehicles to meet the transportation needs of 829 adults and 1,107 children.
- DHHR TANF's Director reported to the USDHHS that GNMG was one of the case managers' most valuable programs to help people get off public assistance.
- WVDHHR- DRS has asked if GNMG has the capacity to increase the number of vehicles provided to their referred clientele indicating that GNMG is helping the agency move their clients to gainful employment or training.

A follow-up survey of TANF vehicle recipients conducted in FY09 showed the following:

- 87% were no longer on TANF
- 9% were on TANF but were in training or the 6 month transition stage of moving to employment
- 4% were still receiving TANF and not in training or transition
- 36% are able to attend more school activities
- 36% accessed better child care
- 21% moved to better housing
- 31% accessed improved medical care

In closing, we have to move past those *us versus them* scenarios. We need to consolidate the silo approach and give transportation providers the flexibility they need in order to serve the entire community. Not just individual segments. We should systematically encourage and fund innovative private and public sector models that can address unavailable and/or insufficient rural transportation.

Solutions might include: accessible taxi services; using private drivers, including those with disabilities; vehicle pools similar to those used by intercity bus programs and voucher models administered by community-based organizations. Allocate innovative program funds to support tribal transportation programs that are coordinated with other public transit and community transportation services.

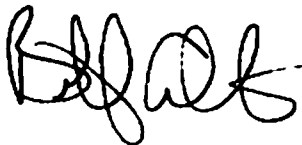
We are all in this together. We hear a lot of talk these days about the principles upon which our country was founded. I ran across this passage the other day written by John Winthrop on his voyage to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. He was preparing his shipmates and his family for their arrival in the new country and how they should live their lives to make their new home land truly a city on the hill...to be admired by all other countries.

“We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body.” John Winthrop written onboard the Arbella en route to Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630.

I think this still holds true today and we should accept it as a challenge as we move forward in the development our new transportation legislation.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Billy W. Altom', written in a cursive style.

Billy W. Altom  
Executive Director