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### Models of Rural Transportation for People with Disabilities

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# Rural Practice Guideline

## Models of Rural Transportation for People with Disabilities

The most recent Transportation Act, the “Safe, Accountable, Efficient, Flexible Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users” (SAFETEA-LU), was signed into law in 2005. It guides transportation policy and funding through 2009, and provides opportunities to demonstrate innovative transportation solutions for people with disabilities living in rural areas. Section 5317, the “New Freedom Program”, allocates \$78 million to states for demonstration projects that “go beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act.” That is, transportation providers cannot use these funds to meet their existing ADA obligations. Section 5311c allocates funding for transportation on Indian reservations.

As providers begin to develop new programs in response to SAFETEA-LU, it is important that they first consider the models that have emerged over the past several years. Rural transportation models fall into several categories: (1) public transit, (2) agency-focused, (2) cooperatives, (3) volunteer/voucher, (4) public-private partnerships, and (5) personal ownership.

### Public Transportation Models

Most urban communities, many larger rural communities, and some small rural communities have public transportation systems. Often, these are funded by Section 5307 “Urbanized Area Formula Grants” or Section 5311 “Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas”. These systems serve the general public without restriction and are typically organized in one of three models:

#### Fixed-Route Services

This is the familiar “bus route” in which a vehicle, usually a bus, travels a consistent path, stopping at specific locations at scheduled times one or more days each week. This model can be efficient in communities with dense populations and large numbers of people who have easy access to routes. A fixed-route system meets the needs of people with disabilities if its: 1). vehicles, bus stops, and routes to bus stops are accessible; 2). equipment is in good working order; and 3). drivers are properly trained.

#### Demand-Response Services

Sometimes called “Dial-a-Ride”, this model resembles a taxi service. A rider calls a provider to schedule pick-up at the rider’s location

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and transportation to a destination. Rides may be convenient but riders often must call well in advance. Those who call too late may be denied a ride because the schedule for a particular day or time is already established. While this model is very flexible, it is susceptible to schedule disruptions. If a scheduled rider is delayed or takes longer to enter the vehicle than anticipated, the rest of that day's schedule is affected. Although it is flexible, this system often generates complaints.

### **Deviated Fixed-Route Services**

This model is a hybrid of fixed-route and demand-response services. A bus or van makes scheduled stops and adheres to a timetable, but can alter its course between stops to go to a specific location for a pre-scheduled request. This is often used in less densely populated communities with fewer transit vehicles. This model accommodates the distance from the individual's location or destination to the route, so may be particularly helpful for riders with disabilities. However, the overall schedule must be maintained, so such accommodations may be limited.

## **Agency-focused Models**

Agency-focused models may provide specialized services or may serve the general public, including individuals with disabilities. Agency-focused models include:

### **Specialized transit models**

Since the late 1970s, state Section 5310 "Formula Grants for Special Needs of Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities" have been available to community service agencies such as senior centers and disability service providers. Although this program continues to evolve and become more flexible, it specifically targets transportation for elderly people and people with disabilities where other transportation is unavailable, inadequate, or inappropriate. Agencies typically use Section 5310 funds to buy vehicles to transport their clients between home and agency programs and services. Implemented by states in many different ways, this approach provides limited transportation services. Many

advocates efforts have focused on increasing cooperation between agencies (See Cooperative Models).

## **Cooperative Models**

Cooperative models are specialized, agency-focused transportation programs which work together to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and scope of their services. They have properties of both the specialized transportation agency model and the public transportation model.

### **Coordinated Services**

Local human service agencies that own and operate vehicles work together to develop local plans, and may pool purchases of fuel and maintenance services. Coordinated services include:

### **Brokerages**

Local human service agencies that provide transportation to their clients coordinate schedules and rides with other agencies to maximize efficiency. For example, they may agree to transport clients of participating agencies who live near their own clients and have relatively close destinations.

### **Consolidated Services**

Local agencies with vehicles work together to form an independent entity to provide transit services. The participating agencies "give" their vehicles to the new entity and pay the new entity for transporting their clients. Consolidated services, the most advanced form of the cooperative model, may also transport the general public.

## **Volunteer and Voucher Models**

In many locations, publicly supported transportation services are insufficient or unavailable. Some communities address these gaps by organizing available local resources. Examples of volunteer and voucher models include:

### **Volunteer Systems**

These systems may be operated by a non-profit organization, a public agency (e.g., Veterans Administration), or faith communities. Volunteers with vehicles agree to provide rides, and may be reimbursed a limited amount. A volunteer corps may be a community's only source of "public" transportation, may focus on specific groups, or may supplement other existing services.

### **Community Inclusion Drivers**

This Easter Seals Project Action program matches volunteer drivers with individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is a well-structured model that provides for driver training and oversight.

### **Voucher Models**

Voucher models provide resources directly to individuals with disabilities who then purchase their own transportation. There are no restrictions on destination, but individuals must arrange their own rides. A sponsoring agency may help participants develop personalized transportation plans that identify transportation providers such as public transit, taxi services, agency providers, and volunteer drivers. Vouchers are sometimes called "user-side subsidies".

## **Public-Private Partnerships**

### **Taxi Coupon Models**

Coupon programs are a type of voucher model. Individuals receive coupons from a sponsoring agency that can be used only for a local taxi service. The traveler's destination may or may not be restricted, depending on the funding agency's policy.

### **Personal Ownership**

Most individuals in the U.S. travel in personal vehicles, regardless of the public transportation models available in their communities. For low-income individuals, buying and maintaining a vehicle can be a particularly costly way to travel.

Individuals who have mobility impairments and live in rural and remote communities may need accessible personal vehicles to get where they need to go. Some qualified individuals have bought accessible vehicles under the Social

Security Administration's "Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)" but there is no standard procedure for doing this.

Several U.S. communities have programs that make donated vehicles road-worthy and provide them to eligible individuals free or at a low cost. Disability advocates have considered this for providing accessible vehicles, but no such program has been demonstrated or evaluated yet.

## **Issues**

### **Liability**

Liability is often proposed as a major obstacle to organizing, delivering, and providing transportation services. There are several ways to address this issue. For example, in April, 2006, Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman approved LB 1069, "Change to Regulated Motor Carrier Provisions Relating to Transportation of Certain Persons" (2006, Committee on Transportation & Telecommunications). This act allows a person eligible for transportation aid from Nebraska Health and Human Services to choose a non-liable family member to provide transportation. The department reimburses transportation costs at the state employee rate.

## **Resources**

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living: <http://www.april-rural.org>

Gonzales, L., Stombaugh, D., Seekins, T. & Kasnitz, D. (2006). Toolkit for Operating a Rural Transportation Voucher Program. [Book & Disk]. Kent, OH: Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living.

Community Transportation Association of America: Public and Community Transportation Glossary. Retrieved February 28, 2007, from <http://www.ctaa.org/glossary/>

Easter Seals Project Action: <http://projectaction.easterseals.com>. Resources include:

- (2002/2001). The Community Inclusion Driver Strategy: Assisting People with

Disabilities Living in Rural Areas in Finding Personal Transportation. Developed from University of Southern Mississippi Institute for Disability Studies & Jackson State University Mississippi Center for Technology Transfer's Filling the Gap: A Strategy for Enhancing Traditional Community Transportation for People with Disabilities. Retrieved February 21, 2007, from <http://projectaction.easterseals.com/site/DocServer/01CID.pdf?docID=3425>

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Communities. Washington, DC: USDOT & USDA. Retrieved February 21, 2007, from <http://ntl.bts.gov/ruraltransport/toolbox/>

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