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The New Freedom Initiative Transportation Program

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The New Freedom Initiative Transportation Program

Rural advocates frequently cite the lack of public transportation as one of the most significant problems faced by rural Americans with disabilities (Gonzales, Stombaugh, Seekins & Kasnitz, 2006). Transportation is often critical both to accessing health care, and to becoming and staying employed (Johnson & Shaw, 2001).

Section 5317, the *New Freedom Initiative for Transportation*, a program created by the 2005 federal transportation act (SAFETEA-LU, P.L. 109-59), is designed to “go beyond the ADA” and find new ways to provide transportation for people with disabilities. In each state, local providers compete for funding from the program. Funding may not be used to supplant existing services; twenty percent must go to rural (non-urbanized) areas.

Understanding how this program has been used so far may help explain how to use it in the future. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recently commissioned a study of the uses of the §5317 program (Bergman, Berendes, Gerty & Miller, 2009). This fact sheet summarizes some of the more relevant findings for rural disability advocates, highlighting the role that trip vouchers have played so far.

Status of Section 5317

The first *New Freedom* grants to local providers were awarded in 2007. Three types of services received funding: trip-based (such as providing rides), information-based (training or information about public transit), and capital purchases of buses, vans, software, etc. The FTA review covered the years 2007 and 2008, finding 60 services funded in 2007 and 203 in 2008.

Table 1 shows the distribution of §5317 services during the first two years. Overall, 767,275 one-way trips were supported in 2007 and 1.27 million in 2008. Trip-based services provided 711,414 one-way trips in 2007 and 721,143 in 2008. Vouchers were used to provide 34,699 trips in 2007 and 52,359 in 2008 -- for more information about vouchers, see the Resource section below.

The New Freedom Initiative presents an opportunity to improve transportation in your community.

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TABLE 1 5317 Transportation services by type

	2007	2008
Trip-based	58%	54%
Information	25%	28%
Capital purchases	17%	18%

Table 2 shows the distribution of \$5317 services by population density. About half of the trip services took place in rural areas, 51% in 2007 and 50% in 2008. Information services tended to be concentrated in the large urbanized areas where mass transit exists, 60% in 2007 and 42% in 2008.

TABLE 2 5317 Transportation services by population density

	2007	2008
Large urbanized areas	28%	35%
Small urbanized areas	33%	23%
Rural (non-urbanized)	38%	42%

Note: Large urbanized areas = more than 200,000; Small urbanized areas = from 50,000 to 200,000; Rural or non-urbanized areas = less than 50,000

The *New Freedom Initiative* presents an opportunity to fund transportation improvements for people with disabilities. If your community needs more or better accessible transportation, contact your state's 5317 coordinator, found in the resource section below.

Resources

Find state 5317 coordinators in the *MTAP Technical Assistance Directory* at:

<http://scopt.transportation.org/Documents/MTAP-2.pdf>

Find information about vouchers at:

<http://sites.google.com/site/voucherprogram/home/introduction-to-the-voucher-system>

Find the FTA 5317 evaluation report and profiles of state projects linked from:

www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/grants_financing_7188.html

Find reporting information from *FTA JARC 5316 & the New Freedom 5317 Reporting Support Center* at:

<http://ftajarcnf.cesnn.com/>

Find the kinds of projects eligible for funding in the *Notice of Policy Statement for Eligible New Freedom Projects* at:

www.fta.dot.gov/documents/NF_Final_Notice.pdf

Find 2007 GAO report *Transportation Disadvantaged: Progress in Implementing the New Freedom Program Has Been Limited, and Better Monitoring Procedures Would Help Ensure Program Funds Are Used as Intended* can be found at:

www.gao.gov/new.items/d07999r.pdf

Find more details about definitions of rural (non-urbanized), large and small urbanized at:

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/RuDis/Comparison.htm>

Find this factsheet online at:

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/Trn/NewFreedomInitiative.htm>

References

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