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Rural Transportation

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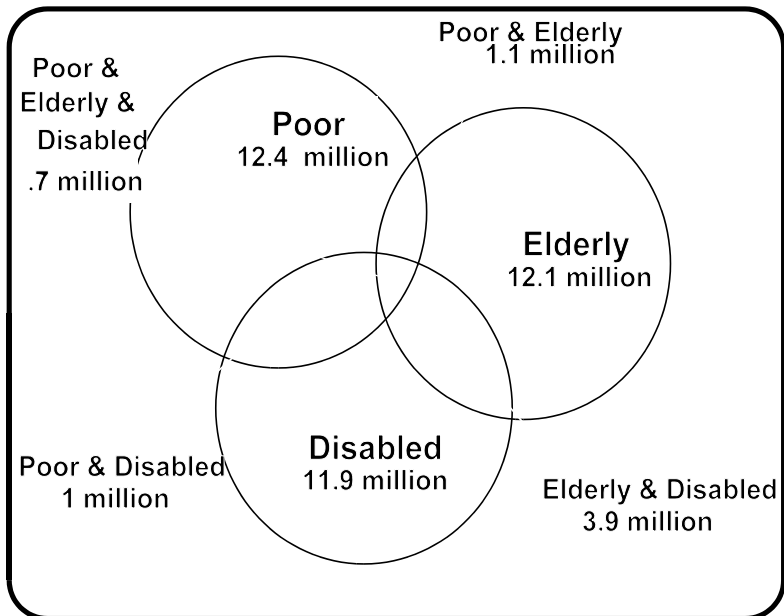
Rural Transportation

Whether we live in the city, country or small town, we all need transportation to work or school, to shop, to visit friends and family, to go to church or keep an appointment. Ideal transportation is reliable, convenient, safe, affordable, and physically-accessible.

Rural residents make up **27%** of the U.S. population. However in 1996, only **5.5%** of Federal transportation funds were allocated to serve them (Status Report on Public Transportation in Rural America). Rural sidewalks and streets may be unpaved, taxis are rare and expensive, and there are few full-size buses, commuter trains or subways. Where there is public transportation for people with disabilities, it is usually provided by vans (53%) or small buses (21%) with restricted operating times and routes. Half of these vehicles are past their life expectancies and 60% aren't wheelchair-accessible. Per capita, rural people own more private vehicles than urbanites, but more than half of **poor** rural families don't own one (one out of thirteen rural households). What is the rural person who doesn't drive or who can't afford a car to do?

Who Needs Rural Public Transportation?

Of the 91 million people living in areas eligible for *Section 5311 non-urbanized transportation services*, more than a third were classified as **transportation dependent** because they had no personal transportation.



Transportation Dependent Rural Americans

For 41% of rural residents, there's no public transportation available.

Another 25% live in areas where public transportation is extremely inadequate, providing fewer than 25 trips per year for each household without a personal vehicle. Lack of transportation is one of the most frequently cited problems facing people with disabilities living in rural areas.

Although urban residents make up **73%** of U.S. population, **94.5%** of 1996 Federal transportation funds were

allocated to serve them. Urbanites can choose from an array of transportation options: walking or wheeling on paved sidewalks, hiring taxis, using accessible public buses, commuter trains, or subways.

One out of six households in large urban areas doesn't own a car, but the availability of public transportation makes a personal vehicle unnecessary. Urban public transportation provides **955** trips annually for each household without a personal vehicle.

Who Uses Rural Public Transportation?

Rural residents who do use public transportation include disproportionate numbers of women, elderly persons and people with disabilities.

Group	% of Rural Population	% of Public Transportation Users
Women	51%	62%
Elderly	18%	36%
People with Disabilities	13%	24%

How Can We Improve Rural Transportation?

Current federal funding between urban and rural areas is inequitable. Resources allocated to rural transportation should be increased to reflect rural needs. Rural services can't and shouldn't be identical to those available in urban areas— there are creative rural solutions for rural problems. Rather, the policy goal should be to give rural citizens with disabilities equal access to opportunities.

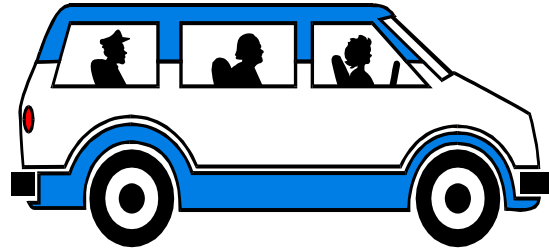
Changes in *49 U.S.C. 5311* can help accomplish this goal. Also, since a large portion of rural transportation-dependent people are elderly or have a disability, the rural appropriation under *49 U.S.C. 5310* should be reconfigured.

Although funds are allocated according to Census data, allocated funds must be spent equitably so those who need it most will have equal access to transportation. For the two-thirds of rural residents with no or few public transportation services, **things can get better.** It will take money, cooperation, and the kind of inventiveness that has always characterized rural people.

Promising Rural Transportation Strategies

Coordinated Models with Shared Vehicles:

Agencies should be encouraged and rewarded for sharing vehicles and coordinating services. A New Mexico Independent Living Center and a community church have acquired and shared an accessible van. Areas of Michigan and Tennessee are exploring ways to use school buses as public transportation. LINK, Inc. of Hayes, Kansas, helped create a multi-county project through agency cooperation.



Volunteer Systems:

The RTC: Rural's Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Voucher Program has successfully reimbursed volunteer drivers for providing transportation to their friends, neighbors and co-workers. The Community Transportation Association of America supports increased use of volunteers in rural transportation.

Voucher Systems:

Low-income riders can use transportation vouchers to reimburse community and human service agency transportation providers. Our Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Voucher Program is a successful example.

Personal/Private Enterprise:

Tennessee and Georgia are experimenting with interest-free loan programs that allow carless households to buy and maintain a vehicle. Tennessee has also allowed individuals to pool transportation allotments and lease shared vehicles. Entrepreneurs can be encouraged to start their own transportation-on-demand small businesses.

Where are Rural Transportation Users Going?

Rural riders use public transportation to accomplish basic daily tasks and to meet basic needs:

- 20% of rural riders commute to and from jobs or job training
- 17% travel to human service agencies (half of that number go to meal programs)
- 14 percent keep medical appointments
- 13% shop
- 36% do personal/family business, socialize or recreate

For more information, please contact:

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Bernier, B. & Seekins, T. (1996). *Rural transportation voucher program for people with disabilities: Three case studies.* Missoula: Montana University Affiliated Rural Institute on Disabilities.

Resources

Community Transportation Association of America, 1341 G Street, N.W., Suite 600,
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 628-1480 • (800) 527-8279 • fax: (202) 737-9197 • <http://www.ctaa.org>

Rural Transit Assistance Program, Federal Transit Administration, Department of
Transportation, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, DC 20590
<http://www.fta.dot.gov>

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