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Rural Transportation: Using Vouchers to Improve Access

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Rural Transportation: Using Vouchers to Improve Access

Transportation is one of the most frequently cited problems of people with disabilities living in rural areas. This includes transportation to and from work, personal and social obligations in and around small communities, and transportation from home to larger communities where services are available.

Cutbacks in air, rail and bus services to rural areas have made these problems even more challenging for those with severe disabilities who often have low, fixed incomes. While many larger communities may have one or more major social service agencies, such as an aging services program, that cooperate to provide transportation services under various regulations, such services are often highly restricted and determined by the agencies' needs.

Ravalli County, Montana, provided an alternative that suggests that a voucher program for transportation access may work in rural and remote counties. The Research and Training Center on Rural Rehabilitation at The University of Montana developed this model further, and its success suggests that additional Federal policy is needed to provide transportation options to rural counties. *The following language was proposed to provide a rural transportation option as part of the Section 19 and or 16B2 of the Urban Mass Transportation Act.* This language focused on applying Section 18 programs to people with disabilities living in rural areas or expanding Section 16B2 to permit voucher systems.

- A.) Voucher program option for people with disabilities living in rural areas.
 - 1.) The agency may also set aside a portion of these funds for voucher transportation programs to serve people with disabilities living in rural counties.
 - 2.) Purpose
 - a.) Transportation is one of the most frequently cited problems

faced by people with disabilities living in rural areas, including:

- 1.) to and from work,**
 - 2.) in and around rural communities to meet personal and social responsibilities, and**
 - 3.) from their home to larger communities for medical and social services.**
- b.) Many rural areas lack access to accessible public transportation, even those provided by service agencies.**
- c.) The majority of people with severe disabilities are unemployed and live on very low and fixed incomes.**
- d.) A voucher program provides financial assistance directly to individuals with disabilities living in rural areas to help them arrange, secure, and reimburse those who can provide public transportation.**
- 1.) Emphasizes personal responsibility.**
 - 2.) Emphasizes existing community resources.**
 - 3.) Emphasizes volunteerism.**
 - 4.) Emphasizes consumer choice and control.**
 - 5.) Emphasizes market forces.**
 - 6.) Emphasizes private sector involvement in serving people with disabilities, elderly, and other transportation disadvantaged groups.**
- e.) Decrease government capital expenditures, and administrative overhead, equipment maintenance, etc.**
- 3.) A voucher program must be coordinated by an agency or governmental entity that can show it meets existing state**

requirements, including:

- a.) Approval from state agency regulating transportation services; i.e., public services commission, state transit authority, or area transportation authority.**
- b.) Insurance, consistent with state requirements, to cover liability of agency and volunteer providers.**
- c.) Identify individuals with disability in need of assistance in securing transportation.**
- d.) Manage funds by distributing vouchers and reclaiming them from those who provide transportation.**
- e.) Manage volunteer and paid drivers, including , where appropriate:**
 - 1.) Driver recruitment**
 - A.) To ensure licensees**
 - 2.) Driver training, where appropriate**

4.) Alternatives

- a.) The operators or applicants may require a match of other federal, state, or local funds for such a voucher program.**
- b.) The applicants must represent a consortium of local service providers and show that the voucher program.**
- c.) The applicants must represent a consortium of local service providers and show that the voucher program will serve people with any type of disability and not be restricted to any particular impairment group.**
- d.) Must show support by a county government.**



Rural Labor Market Areas

“...Labor Market Areas (LMAs), include both the residence and work destinations of local people. These are multi-county regions that encompass those places where relatively large numbers of people routinely move back and forth from home to work. Approximately half the nation’s LMAs are rural. Most are quite large, particularly those in the West. Rural people are sometime quite mobile in their pursuit of work.

Flora, Cornelia, Flora, Jan, Spears, J., and Swanson, L.E. (1992) *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*. Boulder, CO (Westview Press). Pp.42.

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