

STRANDED IN NEW JERSEY

Community Transportation...A Service in Financial Crisis

**Finding Alternative Community Transportation Funding
in a Time of Declining Revenues**



**New Jersey
Council on Special Transportation**

www.njcost.com

This report was written and information compiled by the



New Jersey Council on Special Transportation

The New Jersey Council on Special Transportation is a not-for-profit statewide advocacy organization that for over 30 years has been dedicated to promoting, supporting and providing information about New Jersey's paratransit and community transportation services.

The membership of NJ COST includes each of the 21 county coordinated transportation systems, municipalities, community based not-for-profit and private agencies, New Jersey Transit as well as other government agencies, state officials and business's that provide transportation products and services.

NJ COST provides education and training not only to our members but also to those who are not familiar with New Jersey paratransit and community transportation issues.

NJ COST is a key contact and resource for state government and legislative officials seeking community transportation information and guidance.

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This report can be accessed online at:

<http://www.njcost.com/strandedride.htm>

I. Executive Summary

"New Jersey's Human Services Community Transportation is in a serious financial crisis which is negatively impacting New Jersey's older adult population, persons with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, veterans and other transportation dependent persons as well as affecting every county, municipality and social service agency in the State."

- New Jersey Council on Special Transportation

Over the past four years, there have been dramatic reductions in the funding sources supporting community transit systems in New Jersey. Atlantic City's casinos, a major contributor to community transportation funding, through the state Casino Revenue Fund, has seen its revenue drop precipitously year after year. Declining revenues have forced officials at county, municipal and social service agencies to evaluate and, in some instances, reduce their operating levels. There have been far-reaching reductions in both the types and levels of service provided to this state's most vulnerable populations.

Across New Jersey, community transportation and paratransit systems provide critical services to some of this state's most vulnerable residents - senior citizens, people with disabilities and those with low income. These agencies provide access to crucial and life-sustaining measures including; medical appointments, hemodialysis, chemotherapy, radiation treatment, physical and mental therapies, employment and education, non-competitive workshops, nutrition sites, meals on wheels, food shopping, veterans services, recreational activities and other trip purposes which serve to both enhance the quality of life and ensure access to life's necessities.

New Jersey's community transportation providers – the 21 designated County Coordinated Systems, municipalities and the hundreds of not-for profit human and social services agencies – are the backbone of transportation throughout the state. Whether it's in an urban, suburban or rural area, there are large sections of the state that have no access to public transit: community transportation is often the only option for older residents and the disabled. Community transportation and paratransit providers are also able to provide subsidized transportation for persons with physical disabilities - a trip they would likely not be able to afford if forced to turn to more expensive cab or hired-car, if those services are available in their community.

New Jersey's senior population continues to grow. People are living longer and richer lives. As they do so, they are often choosing to age in place, remaining in their homes and remaining in their communities. However, they often turn toward community transportation for help. People with disabilities are winning their battles to live independently but often to succeed, they too must rely on paratransit and community transportation services.

To place further strain on New Jersey community transportation systems, Atlantic City casinos continue to face increased gambling competition from neighboring states; fuel costs continue to increase; and reductions in local tax revenues combined with an extended recession have negatively impacted economic growth. Some transportation systems were also directly and immediately impacted by a reduction in state Post TANF transportation funds to welfare-to-work riders in 2010. Those essential funds were used as match monies to Federal Transportation Administration grants.

Since 2006, transportation funds derived from Casino Revenues have decreased by nearly 32%. This has already translated into fewer rides year after year, the prioritization of trip purposes, reductions in night and weekend services and, for some agencies, complete elimination of specific services.

In 2012 and into the unforeseeable future, the situation will only continue to get worse. The county systems have already been advised of another 14% decrease (a reduction of over \$4 million) in Casino Revenue transportation funds compared to the 2011 allocation. There are sure to be other funding stream reductions due to limited county dollars, state social service dollars, and declining tax revenues. In 2012, we can expect more municipalities to cease providing transportation programs and tell their residents that they need to rely on the county services, further straining those systems. We expect more social service agencies to shut down, or at the very least stop providing transportation services.

This report will make recommendations to the New Jersey Legislature and Governor, as well as to New Jersey Transit and the agencies that operate their own community transportation and paratransit systems.

Just a few of the several suggestions highlighted in this report include:

- Introduction – by legislation - of a mandatory fare policy for all rides provided by services subsidized with Casino Revenue Funds.
- Introduce and support legislation to designate a portion of NJ Lottery proceeds or any additional gaming revenues such as Race-inos into a special Community Transportation Fund.
- Explore the option of designated funding from a portion of the New Jersey motor vehicle registrations and renewals.
- Relax the New Jersey Department of Transportation/Motor Vehicle Commission rules and guidelines that require special vehicle inspections, license plates and equipment on vehicles providing community transportation which collect fares.
- Request the state to restore the NJ Department of Human Service's Transportation Post TANF Funding which was eliminated and no longer available to fund and support community transportation systems. These monies were used to match federal dollars.
- Encourage the State of New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services/Division on Aging to permit fares, donations or co-pays to be charged for transportation services under the federal Title IIIB of the Older Americans Act.
- Encourage transportation agencies to use discounted rail and bus passes and teach riders how to use public transportation systems.

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Finding Alternative Community Transportation Funding in a Time of Declining Revenues

II. Background

Community transportation and paratransit systems throughout New Jersey are the public transportation for areas that are either underserved or not served at all by either New Jersey Transit and/or private bus companies. Whether they serve urban, suburban or rural areas, community transportation and paratransit systems are often the only viable transportation option for many passengers.

New Jersey's Community Transportation providers – the 21 designated County agencies¹, municipalities and the hundreds of not-for profit human and social services agencies – are the backbone of transportation throughout the state for residents in need. They provide crucial services to some of New Jersey's most vulnerable citizens - senior citizens, people with disabilities and those of low income. Community transportation allows the older adult and disabled community to live much more independently and in some cases prevents and/or delays institutionalization.

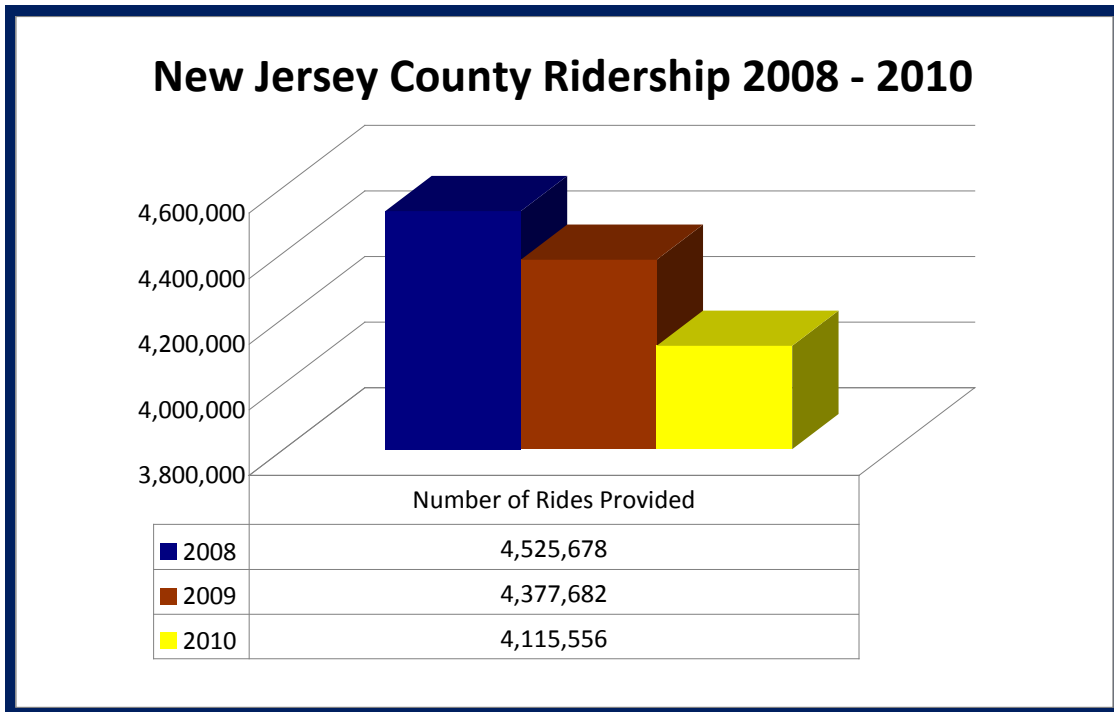
Transportation services provided may include but are not limited to non-emergency medical appointments, hemodialysis, physical and mental therapies, chemotherapy, radiation treatment, non-competitive workshops, employment, education, nutrition sites, meals on wheels, food shopping, veterans services, recreational activities and much more.

For individuals who use mobility aids, such as wheelchairs and/or power chairs, community transportation is often the only way for them to get anywhere at all. Even for those rare few who may be able to afford expensive cab or hired-car services, these vehicles are rarely accessible for mobility devices. Community transportation systems provide lift-equipped and specialized vehicles for those who cannot use standard vehicles.

In addition, for many people community transportation is the only available option that makes it possible for them to find and retain employment and earn their own living. Community transportation can provide a person a “jump start” to a new future by allowing these people to become more independent and less reliant upon government support.

¹ Each County in New Jersey has one designated lead community transportation/paratransit agency that is recognized by New Jersey Transit.

In 2010, New Jersey’s 21 designated county transportation agencies provided 4,115,556 rides primarily to senior citizens, people with disabilities, and low income individuals. This is less than the peak year of 2008, at which time the county systems provided 4,525,678 rides. This demonstrates the preliminary effects of funding cuts that became significant in 2009 and 2010. In addition to the 21 county systems, it is estimated that New Jersey’s municipalities, and not-for-profit human and social service agencies that provide community transportation and paratransit services provided an additional 4.5 million rides. This figure is also estimated to have decreased by about 15% based on less funding available, and the elimination of some transportation services.



The current census shows that New Jersey’s senior citizen population continues to grow. People are living much longer and richer lives. As they do so, they are often choosing to age in place, remaining in their homes and remaining in their communities. However, they often turn toward community transportation for assistance. Similarly, people with disabilities are winning their battles to live independently – but often to succeed, they too must rely on paratransit and community transportation services.

III. Current Funding Crisis

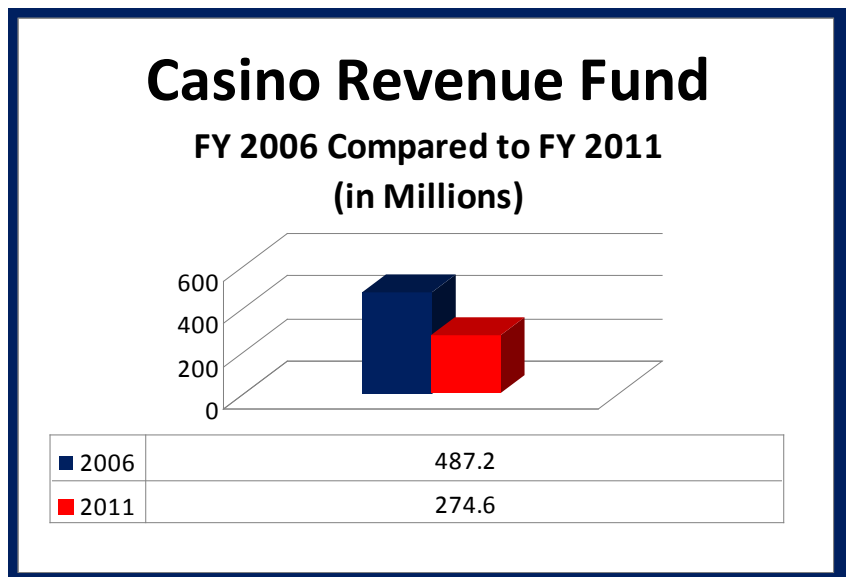
In New Jersey, there are a variety of funding sources used to provide community and paratransit services. Since 1985, the main source of funding for the 21 county systems is the Casino Revenue Fund’s “Senior Citizens and Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program” grant. (hereinafter referred to as SCDRTAP). On a local level, other sources of funds may include; county tax dollars, Title IIIB Older Americans Act, Social Service Block Grant (Title XX), NJ Department of Military and Veteran Affairs transportation grants as well as agency contributions and/or other smaller (or one-time) grant allocations.

Sources of funding from the USDOT/Federal Transit Administration (FTA) include Section 5310 Capital Funding, Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation, Section 5316 Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), Section 5317 New Freedom and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). All of these funds require matching funds ranging from 20% to 50%.

Ironically, as the statewide demand and need for paratransit and community transportation continues to grow year after year, state, federal, and local funding for these vital services has been quickly diminishing. Given the uncertainty surrounding the funding situation, it makes it extremely difficult for community transportation systems to do any kind of planning for the future let alone maintain current operations.

Since 2006, funds in the Casino Revenue Fund have decreased by nearly 44%. These losses have negatively affected the SCDRTAP Program by millions of dollars each year. This has already translated into fewer rides year over year, prioritization of trip purposes, reductions in night and weekend services and, for some agencies, complete elimination of services.

In 2012, the situation will only get worse. The county systems have been advised of another 14% decrease (a reduction of over \$4 million) in Casino Revenue SCDRTAP compared to the previous year’s funding allocation. In addition, there will be other reductions in county and municipal contributions, state social service dollars, and declining tax revenues. In 2012, New Jersey can expect to see more municipalities cease providing transportation programs and advising their residents that they need to rely on the county services, placing a further strain on those systems. There are expectations that more social service agencies will shut down, or at the very least stop providing transportation services.



Description of Funding Sources used by New Jersey Community Transportation and Paratransit Agencies

Casino Revenue Fund imposes an 8% annual tax on the gross revenues for each Atlantic City Casino as defined by state statute. The Casino Revenue Fund pays for programs that benefit senior citizens and people with disabilities.

Senior Citizens and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program (SCDRTAP) is a program within the Casino Revenue Fund established to provide community transportation and paratransit services through the 21 county coordinated transportation programs as recognized by New Jersey Transit.

Title IIIB Older Americans Act is a federal grant program that authorizes expenditures for nutrition and transportation programs that serve older persons.

Title XX is also referred to as the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) and is a federal formula program to help each state achieve a wide range of social policy goals, which include preventing child abuse, increasing the availability of child care, and providing community-based care for the elderly and disabled.

Veterans Administration Funds are made available by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and are grant allocated to agencies to provide community transportation and paratransit services for military veterans seeking medical appointments.

Job Access Reverse Commute (Section 5316) is a part of the Federal Transit Act that authorizes Job Access grants to provide new transportation services to welfare recipients and other low-income individuals for the purposes of attaining jobs, training and childcare.

New Freedom (Section 5317) is a federal program created in 2005 designed to support improvements to services and facilities for the transportation needs of people with disabilities that exceed those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Funds are provided to each state using a formula based upon the population of persons with disabilities.

Transportation for Elderly Person and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310) is a federal funding formula program that provides capital assistance to each state for transportation programs that serve the elderly and people with disabilities.

Rural Public Transportation Program (Section 5311) is a federal formula program that provides capital and operating assistance grants to public transit systems in rural and small urban areas with populations of less than 50,000.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) is a federal program to fund transportation projects or programs that will contribute to attainment or maintenance of the national ambient air quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter.

To further increase concerns on New Jersey community transportation systems, Atlantic City casinos continue to face increased gambling competition from neighboring states; fuel costs continue to increase; and reductions in local tax revenues combined with an extended recession have negatively impacted economic growth.

In January 2010, outgoing Governor Jon Corzine signed legislative bills A2046/S1830² which changed existing legislation and increased the percentage of the Casino Revenue Fund's contribution to SCDRTAP from 7.5% to 8.5%. The original intent of these bills when first introduced was to increase transportation funding so the 21 county coordinated systems could expand, reduce waiting lists and continue operating their services efficiently and effectively. However, by the time the bill took effect, the country was in a national recession and Atlantic City was not only feeling the effects from the economy but also from aggressive competition from neighboring state gambling facilities. The Casino Revenue Fund dropped from \$496.6 million in FY 2008 to \$363.9 million in FY 2011. Even with the additional 1% funding increase, funding through the SCDRTAP grant program still decreased - and continues to do so.



In a 2009 report, "Stranded at the Station,"³ it states that the use of public transportation systems is growing at 3 times the rate of the population and twice as fast as the number of miles driven. Statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Census show that 26.6% of households are at or below poverty level and 15.6% of those over the age of 65 do not have a vehicle. It becomes obvious that the most vulnerable and needy residents are the most reliant on public transportation. Further statistics show that 72% of all transit riders are employed and 11% are students.

While these statistics reflect the overall national need for public transit, they do not reflect the experience of community transportation systems when it comes to serving vulnerable populations.

The lack of access to transportation services is one of the foremost challenges confronting individuals transitioning from welfare to work. Many available entry-level and service sector jobs are not located in areas where most welfare recipients and low income individuals live. Often, the majority of entry level jobs are located in suburban areas and are usually not adequately served by existing mass transit routes. Research has shown many low income individuals reside in urban communities. Additionally, many job positions are only available during the evening, early morning and/or weekend. Mass transit service is least available during the hours coinciding with that type of shift work.

² NJ Legislative Bills A2046/S1830 were introduced by the 213th Legislature Session and proposed to increase the annual appropriation requirement for "The Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation Program" from 7.5% to 8.5% of the revenues deposited in the Casino Revenue Fund.

³ "Stranded at the Station" a report distributed by the National Not for Profit Organization Transportation for America.

The Work First New Jersey Act (WFNJ) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Public Law 1997, built and expanded upon the basic principles of self sufficiency as set forth in the Federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Regulation requires county and/or municipal agencies to make reasonable efforts to secure transportation services for WFNJ and TANF recipients who are working, looking for work, engaged in a work activity or taking their children to child care in conjunction with work or a work activity.



From 1997 through 2010, New Jersey's WFNJ/TANF Program served as a catalyst for increasing statewide coordination efforts to address mobility challenges faced by those they serve. At the state level, the Departments of Human Services, Labor, Transportation, NJ Transit and the State Employment and Training Commission met and established an inter-departmental committee. The Committee's challenge was to facilitate inter-departmental planning and assist counties in the development of innovative solutions to local mobility issues.

The Federal Transportation Administration introduced the Job Access Reverse Commute and the New Freedom Programs. The Programs require a dollar for dollar match. Since most of the target population of riders were recipients of support services from the Department of Human Services (DHS), it was prudent for DHS to provide the dollar match from their TANF (unemployed individuals in work activities) and Post-TANF (employed individuals who's wages are below 250% poverty level) federal allocation.

Both Programs mandate the development of new and/or expanded transportation services such as shuttles, van pools, bus routes, connector services to mass transit, employer supported transportation and guaranteed emergency ride home programs for low income persons, senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Reverse commute projects provide transportation services from suburban employment centers to individuals residing in urban, rural and suburban locations. All projects funded



under these programs must be part of a collaborative planning process that includes; transportation providers, human services agencies, employers, metropolitan planning organizations, state and local governments and state agencies.

On a local level, interagency steering committees were established and began to identify local transportation gaps and strategies for addressing the gaps and opportunities for increased coordination between existing local transit services. Each county developed a Community Transportation Plan that reflects these issues; each Plan provided a framework for the planning and development of new local projects to improve mobility for low income individuals, senior citizens, persons with disabilities and other transit dependent populations.

The state monies used to match these much needed services were eliminated. Unfortunately, state Post TANF, specifically, the transportation section or “Special Initiatives” that were contractually allocated to the counties were cut by one quarter in state Fiscal Year 2009. In Fiscal Year 2010 this funding was eliminated completely. These were the funds that most counties utilized to match their FTA JARC and New Freedom Grants. As a result, it is expected that the agencies that provide JARC and New Freedom rides will begin to reduce services or totally eliminate their programs.

Historically, it has been easier for community transportation systems to obtain dollars for vehicles and other capital needs. Match requirements for capital expenses are less (20%) than the match for operating costs (50%), and the State of New Jersey, through New Jersey Transit provides matching dollars for the Federal Transit Administration’s Section 5310 grant that provides a limited number of new or replacement vehicles each year. However, it is in the area of operating costs that community transportation systems have been hardest hit by funding cuts.

It should come as no surprise, compared to 5 years ago, that operating costs continue to rise, especially with the dramatic increase in the cost of fuel. Another area is vehicle maintenance where operating costs continue to increase as a result of aging fleets. Funding which in the past was allocated for new and/or replacement vehicles has been used to cover operating expenses thus, resulting in older and potentially unsafe vehicles continuing to be used to transport riders.



“With all of these factors, New Jersey’s community transportation and paratransit systems are in a crisis situation. It will remain in this state of decline for the unforeseeable future unless alternative approaches can be found and implemented.”

- NJ Council on Special Transportation

IV. Local Response

Most of New Jersey's community transportation systems have responded to cuts in funding with cuts in services and routes. Driver and employee positions have been eliminated, service hours have been reduced, routes have been merged, and fewer vehicles are being used as well as other cost saving measures that were implemented. As a result, fewer trips were provided in 2010 than in previous years and higher losses in 2011 and future years are anticipated.

A small number of counties slowed the losses in ridership by implementing systemic and operational changes. Some shuttle and/or fixed routes were established in lieu of demand response services which did not generate additional operating costs, new scheduling software was installed allowing more rides to be grouped, and reducing out of county transportation services and limiting service hours for specific trip purposes were implemented to reduce overtime expenses.

"It is abundantly clear that the community transportation systems will continue to reduce staff, routes and services to its most vulnerable residents unless additional financial support can be found."

- NJ Council on Special Transportation

All 21 of New Jersey's County Coordinated Transportation Systems as well as most of the municipal and not-for profit human and social services agencies have embraced the United We Ride⁴ concept, and work closely with other transportation providers to coordinate services to avoid duplication and maximize the use of all available resources. This coordination has become even more vital as funding shrinks.

One area of duplication that should be reviewed is the duplication of services provided through New Jersey Transit Access Link⁵ and the community transportation systems. Both often serve the same ridership base. Elimination of duplicative services would not only meet Federal United We Ride mandates but would also free up other resources and funds now being wasted by duplication.

⁴ United We Ride is a Federal Transit Administration initiative that supports the federal Interagency Transportation Coordination Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM), implements coordination grants to states and communities, develops tools (such as the Framework for Action community self-assessment guide) to facilitate the transportation coordination process, recognizes exemplary work in transportation coordination by states and communities, and provides technical assistance to states and communities through the United We Ride Ambassador program, a website of best practices, and other resources.

⁵ NJ Transit Access Link was created to meet the requirements of The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which requires public transportation systems to provide comparable paratransit service for passengers who cannot use traditional transit vehicles. NJ TRANSIT operates Access Link, as a "shadow" service to NJ TRANSIT's fixed-route buses and serves origins and destinations located within a 3/4 mile buffer of existing bus routes. The system operates on a paid basis, with routes, hours of operation, and fares comparable to the standard bus network.

V. Potential and Existing State Revenue Sources and Opportunities

While the current financial picture is bleak, there are some alternative approaches which could be considered for accessing existing funding sources within the state.

- The state should address the adverse effects which have been placed on the county transportation systems with the elimination of the state's "Special Initiatives" Post TANF funding. As a result, services are either being reduced or eliminated. The state should reconsider their decision to eliminate these funds. These essential funds were used as match monies for at least two major US Department of Transportation and Federal Transportation Administration grants in particular, the JARC and New Freedom programs.
- Requiring state department programs that contract for specialized transportation to first identify if a coordinated county system could meet these needs through their existing services.

In the current funding atmosphere, duplication of services and redundancies in funding present opportunities for cost containment if addressed. A potential means of supporting the mission and funding of community transportation providers might be derived from looking at transportation funding in specific government agencies that support the same ridership base.

On a limited basis, this is already happening. Rather than establishing a separate transportation operating unit for their riders and providing the service directly, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) has contracted with county operated transportation systems in three counties. Similarly, the Department of Human Services – Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) has explored similar arrangements, on a limited basis.

- In addition to SCDRTAP, the Casino Revenue Fund also provides a small amount of transportation funds for DVRS. Unfortunately, funding availability has limited the expansion beyond the three county systems currently funded under the program. Expanding the eligibility to all county transportation systems would likely result in a reduced cost per trip rather than the current reimbursement rate DVRS currently pays under existing contracts to other for profit transportation companies. DVRS needs to consider a preferred contracting arrangement with county transportation systems where the transportation can be provided at a lower cost than a private contract service.
- The New Jersey Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (DMVA) have provided funding to counties for veteran transportation to VA clinics and hospitals. In many counties, the level of annual reimbursement represents less than 50% of the actual cost to provide these services and has not increased in the last five years. Increased transportation funding from the DMVA for these transportation services would assist counties in meeting this growing demand for veteran transportation.

VI. Legislative and Systemic Changes (State Recommendations)

There are a number of changes that the State of New Jersey could make that would help New Jersey's community transportation and paratransit systems be both more effective and better funded.

- Designate a portion of the New Jersey Lottery proceeds to a fund created for community transportation services. Even if a small percent was allocated, it would help replace the funds lost in Atlantic City. This may require legislation to expand the allowed purposes of lottery proceeds.
- Add a small convenience fee (possibly \$1.00) to every vehicle registration and renewal throughout the state. This would amount to a very small increase in costs to New Jersey residents but would potentially yield a significant amount of funds available for community transportation.
- The use of fares, suggested fares or donation policies varies widely from county to county and between agencies. In some counties there is resistance to compel its riders to contribute to the costs of the transportation program. In light of the current economic climate, revisions should be considered to the Casino Revenue Guidelines requiring mandatory customer co-pays roughly equal to the fares NJ Transit local bus riders currently pay. Any funds received could be used to extend the operating funds received by the county agencies. Counties could retain the right to develop user subsidy programs for low income residents so as not to make transportation services prohibitive to the poor.
- New Jersey residents using community transportation and paratransit systems have grown accustomed to the mind-set of "free" transportation. Even County Board of Chosen Freeholders and other elected representatives are reluctant to challenge this idea. The belief that seniors and people with disabilities should not have to pay for transportation services is simply no longer valid, and it will take mandates at the state and local government levels to require fares, fees and co-pays in order to begin the process of changing this attitude.
- Should additional gaming revenues such as Race-inos or legalized sports betting become a reality, it is recommended that a fund be created to subsidize any losses that the racinos may cause to Atlantic City and the Casino Revenue/SCDRTAP program. Current legislation does not address the adverse impact of further revenue decreases in the Casino Revenue Fund, resulting from alternative, in-state gaming.

- In 1992, Senate Bill S-1131 and Assembly Bill A-1764 were introduced and passed into law, providing an exemption for County and municipal operators of transportation services for senior citizens and persons with disabilities from NJDOT/MVC vehicle licensing, regulation and inspections. This also enabled these transportation operators to charge a fare for these services without having to retrofit their small transit vehicles to meet NJDOT autobus specifications. Over the past two decades, the introduction of FTA funding sources to include JARC and New Freedom resulted in County and not for profit systems operating services open to the general public but using the same type of small transit vehicles that would need to be retrofitted to meet NJDOT specifications. Because these services were open to the general public and not restricted to just senior citizens and persons with disabilities, the 1992 exemption from NJDOT regulations does not apply to these services.

Given the reductions in community transit funding sources, an extension of the 1992 exemption to include all services provided through designated county coordinated systems is currently being proposed. This extension will require legislative support allowing for community transit systems to charge a fare on services provided to the general public without requiring costly and extensive retrofits to existing fleets.

- The legislative exemption from the NJDOT regulation for county transportation systems transporting senior citizens and people with disabilities should be extended to include services funded by federal grants requiring transportation that is open to the general public.
- Currently, even though federal Title IIIB of the Older Americans Act does allow for a co-pay to be charged to senior citizens for transportation funded by state and local Area Office's on Aging, the State of New Jersey does not allow this. A change in these regulations would offer counties the option of adding this revenue to its diminished funds to help offset the actual cost of providing each ride, whether the co-pay was paid by the passenger or the Office on Aging.
- With the increasing trend to plan new housing around public transportation, a portion of Title XX Community Block Grants and housing funds should also be designated for community transportation. In other locations, the state might consider dedicating a portion of the affordable housing fees collected from developers toward local, community transportation services.
- The State Department of Human Services has, in recent years, moved Medicaid transportation from county Board of Social Services to a statewide private broker. The potential for additional coordination still may exist between the broker, New Jersey Transit and the 21 County Coordinated Transportation Systems. It is recommend that a formal mandate either through Executive Order or Legislative request require that the Department of Human Services, New Jersey Transit and representatives from the County Coordinated Systems continue to explore opportunities for better coordination of services and report to the State any possible actions that could be taken to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided.

- Under the United We Ride initiatives, there has been an increased emphasis placed on transportation agencies' finding better ways to coordinate their services with those provided by neighboring agencies (neighboring counties, not-for-profit, and/or municipalities). With the award of the statewide brokerage for Medicaid funded transportation, there has been a near abandonment of the general principle of greater coordination between various providers of non-traditional transit services - the opposite of the intent of the United We Ride initiatives. New Jersey Transit Access Link provides services to many of the same medical destinations and should explore providing some level of Medicaid service delivery. While the missions and the populations served through these programs may vary slightly, there is more overlap than not.
- Discounted rail and bus pass purchases and "final mile" delivery would benefit both the transportation systems and their customers. Avoiding duplication of service in those areas served by Access Link would also free up community transportation system vehicles for other passengers.
- Community transit has been recognized as a feeder and provider of last mile connections to traditional bus and rail, in both urban and rural counties. If coordination with public transit systems were mandated at the state level, it would assist community systems in serving their passengers while not duplicating traditional bus and rail services.
- As part of any future expansion of a dedicated gas tax or other revenue source dedicated to transportation, although not currently under legislative review, setting aside of a designated percentage for community transit services would facilitate transfers to traditional bus and rail transit modes and promote overall transit network efficiency. Introducing this type of service could reduce the use of advance reservation services where traditional transit could now be accessed by community transportation and paratransit users.
- All agencies should be required to partner with one another, and identify duplicative and complementary transportation services. The greatest barrier to bringing all parties together remains the disparate functions and potential impacts/threats that each agency might see to its funding. Any changes in funding, whether they be legislative, systemic, new funding sources or reallocation of existing ones, must be managed in such a way that transportation providers are not financially penalized for coordinating their services with each other.

“Community transportation systems provide essential transportation services to those most in need. If they are allowed to fail because of lack of funds, the impact on the lives of New Jersey’s senior citizens, people with disabilities, low income individuals and families as well as the general public will be irrevocably damaged.”

- NJ Council on Special Transportation

VII. Legislative and Systemic Changes (Federal Recommendations)

Beside state funding sources, there are also federal sources that are used to provide New Jersey paratransit and community transportation services; both operating and capital. Federal FTA JARC, New Freedom, Sections 5310 and 5311 and CMAQ are the primary funds used in New Jersey to support community transportation. These funds are distributed through one of the three New Jersey Metropolitan Planning Organizations and New Jersey Transit.

- Just as state funding is beginning to diminish, there are fears that federal monies will follow. Currently, there are discussions of consolidating federal funding sources and should this occur, it is recommended that the integrity of the funding for community transportation be protected and fairness in the distribution formula be upheld.

Federal funds being used have matching requirements. Both JARC and New Freedom have a dollar for dollar match, while CMAQ requires a 25% match. Match monies has become a central concern - Where does the match money come from?

Historically, it has been much easier for community transportation systems to obtain dollars for vehicles and other capital needs. Match requirements for capital are less than the match for operating costs. Also, the State of New Jersey, through New Jersey Transit, provides matching dollars for Section 5310 grant vehicles.

- If the match requirements for operating costs were lowered to the same 20% required for capital costs, it would encourage all counties to use their full federal funding allocations.
- Since the Section 5310 program is designated to assist senior citizens and people with disabilities, it could be amended to allow it to be used for access to operating funds through the NJ Transportation Trust Fund and used to provide the 20% match in the same way it currently does for capital equipment. This would allow Section 5310 to not only provide the vehicles, but also ensure that the cost of operating these vehicles will also be supported.

Today, many county transportation systems are experiencing waiting lists for services, particularly for dialysis transportation. Unlike 15 -20 years ago, when a person on dialysis reserved a seat on the vehicle, the person's life expectancy was short and seats frequently became available. With today's medical technology, a person who receives dialysis treatment is now living a normal and much longer life. Seats on the vehicles are no longer being freed up as quickly for the next new rider.

- Transportation to and from a dialysis center in a vehicle other than an ambulance is not covered under Medicare. This policy needs to be changed to allow community transportation systems to be funded by Medicare for the trips they are currently providing for dialysis – in most instances, free of charge. If a passenger does not require an ambulance, it would be more cost-effective for community transportation to provide this service than for Medicare to pay the higher costs of transportation via an ambulance.
- A determination from the US Office of the Inspector General is needed on whether transportation to and from dialysis centers could be recognized as a "Safe Harbor," which would eliminate some of the current discussion on whether or not receiving funds in a form of a donation from dialysis centers to support transportation services constitutes a "kick-back."

VIII. Rider Stories

“Simply put, county transportation allows me to live my life. Since I am blind, have no remaining family, and reside in a rural area of southern New Jersey. County transportation is my only link to the world outside of my 4 walls. I am dependent on their travel services for all of my medical, shopping, training, and social requirements, since there is no public transportation service within 2 miles of my home. This service allows me to remain in my home of 30 years and maintain my independence.”

“My name is Ruth and at one time was able to drive. I was a good driver and never had an accident. As I got older my body began to fail me. I needed dialysis to keep me alive. For 2 years, I drove myself back and forth to the dialysis center. I was so weak after the treatments but needed to get home to rest. One day as I was driving home I fainted from being too weak. I crashed my car into a telephone pole and nearly died. I had to stop driving. I was afraid that my driving would hurt someone...but I needed to get to the dialysis center to live. My son was able to arrange for a county paratransit van pick me up and take me to and from dialysis. What a blessing. I now also use the service to go to my other doctor appointments and food shopping. Without this transportation, I know I would end up in a nursing home.”

“My husband and I have been married over 45 years and lived in East Brunswick. We used an MCAT fixed route shuttle which took us from our home in East Brunswick to shopping, medical and other destinations. In 2006, my husband was hospitalized and when released was placed in a nursing home in neighboring Old Bridge Township. I had no way of seeing him. I then learned that I could make a transfer to a second shuttle route at the regional shopping mall in East Brunswick which stopped in front of the nursing home. This enabled me to spend time with my husband every day except Sunday. There was no New Jersey Transit bus available to make this particular connection- without the county community shuttle route service, I would have been unable to afford the taxi fare to spend time with my husband each day.”

“I am a disabled Korean War veteran who uses the Union County Paratransit System to go to doctor appointments at both the East Orange and Lyons Veterans Hospitals in addition to weekly shopping trips and occasional errands. I have used the system for over 10 years and life without UCPS would be horrendous. I have no family in the area and there is virtually no public transportation I can access. Should services be reduced I would lose my independence and possibly even my ability to stay in my home.”

“My daughter wanted to put me in a nursing home. I said no. I called my county Office on Aging and they provided me so much information including phone numbers for transportation services. These transportation agencies help me remain independent”

“Transportation to senior centers, doctors and food shopping is literally a life-line for us who are no longer able to drive. The result of this isolation stress can cause dire results. It is well documented that stress can cause many tragic illnesses, particularly to the elderly. This certainly will cause a drain on the already poor economics of our government. It’s only common sense that eliminating senior transportation is “penny wise and dollar foolish”.

“Thank you for such a wonderful, friendly service. Your kindness is outstanding. Without your service I would not be able to keep any medical appointments. I no longer drive and am not eligible for Access Link; nor do I have the finances to take a cab. Thank you all and may you always be available to help those in need.”

“As a person with multiple disabilities, I depend upon paratransit services in order to remain employed. The progression of my disabilities has made it impossible for me to continue using the over-crowded mass transit system in my urban environment. Paratransit is what makes the difference between my remaining a tax payer and my becoming a tax dependent. There are many other individuals who are productive citizens because, in part, of the availability of paratransit services.”

“I am confined to a wheelchair after having a stroke several years ago. Without paratransit, I would not be able to survive. I also sit on my county’s Transportation Advisory Council and without transportation I would not be able to participate. I am so grateful for the Cumberland Area Transportation System.”

“I am a 90 year old Hunterdon County resident and has never driven. I need transportation for medical appointments and shopping, but more importantly, I need a ride to the Hunterdon Hospice center where I volunteer and make a positive impact on lives. I can always count on the bus service. The days I need it it’s there...friends can’t always be counted on to take me places. I would be lost without my county transportation system.”

“Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. I don’t know what else to say to my transportation service that makes my life enjoyable. I use it to go to the nutrition site, food shopping and my doctors appointments. Thank you.”

“I received government support for many years. I really felt that I was a burden on society. I can’t express how I feel today, working at a job I love so much and paying my own bills. I use county transportation to take me to work every day and without it, I wouldn’t have been able to take this job. I have saved enough money and am about to buy my first car. What a feeling of freedom I will have. Although I really appreciated the ride on the van, I am ready to give my seat up to another person in need and I hope they will also have the good fortunes that I have had. Thank you to my transportation and to the drivers who work for them. I credit you with my rebirth into society.”

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