

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**OF**

## **GETTING ON BOARD:**

**A Review of Transportation Options  
for Ohioans with Disabilities  
and Recommendations for Systems Change**

**The Final Report  
to the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council  
on Grant Project 98-4, Transportation**



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**“The American concept of freedom is strongly tied to mobility.”**

**— Administrator for an Ohio nonprofit disability organization**

## OVERVIEW

Transportation is not so much a disability issue that has implications for the general community as it is a general issue that has unique implications for the disability community. Access to transportation, on the other hand, is to some extent an issue of disability, but it is much more an issue of money (or lack thereof).

The principles that guided the development of our recommendations are based, in large part, on more general value statements previously adopted by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council (ODDC) and the disability advocacy community. These principles emphasize the use of generic transportation services to gain access to employment, housing, and other resources in the larger community.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

A host of state-level and local agencies are involved in the funding and provision of transportation.

**PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.** The situation is improving to some extent in urban areas. Transit authorities and transit systems have quietly moved to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Paratransit programs have been revised to meet ADA guidelines. But paratransit service cannot meet all the transportation needs of persons with disabilities. In addition, paratransit is a separate-but-equal solution that may unnecessarily perpetuate the “special” treatment of people with disabilities.

**AGENCY TRANSPORTATION.** Many social service agencies have developed their own transportation systems to serve their specific clientele. Eligibility criteria vary widely among these agencies, leaving large segments of the population unserved. These systems usually provide trips only to work placements or medical appointments.

**MEDICAID-FUNDED TRANSPORTATION.** Medicaid-funded transportation is simply existing transportation that is paid for with Medicaid money. It displays many of the shortcomings of the existing service, the most notable of which are restrictions placed on the purpose of a trip and limited eligibility.

**RECENT STATE AND LOCAL INITIATIVES.** Several recent cooperative efforts show great promise, including:

**Local Coordination.** The Ohio Department of Transportation’s Office of Public Transportation has published a coordination handbook and a companion volume of best practices. ODOT continues to fund coordination projects, sponsors monthly coordination roundtable meetings, and has conducted several Ohio Coordination Conferences.

**State-Level Coordination.** The Statewide Transportation Coordination Task Force, formed in 1996, studies policies of state-level agencies and seeks to eliminate barriers posed by out-to-date or incorrectly perceived regulations.

**Ohio Works First.** Transportation provisions that are being added to welfare reform legislation may benefit Ohioans with disabilities even though they, as a group, are not directly targeted.

**Workforce Development.** The federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) requires states to implement coordination of most federally-funded job training programs. Even if individuals with disabilities are not targeted by this legislation, they can still benefit by increased attention paid to coordinated transportation.

**RECENT FEDERAL INITIATIVES.** Although they have a less direct impact on Ohioans with disabilities, federal legislation, appropriations, and policies that support and encourage local coordination and innovation are critical.

**ISTEA/TEA-21.** Several important provisions contained in Section 3000 of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) are relevant to people with disabilities. In general, TEA-21 does much to promote state and local partnerships, innovative practices, and relatively stable transit funding.

**Over-The-Road Bus (OTRB) Regulations.** The U.S. Department of Transportation recently adopted rules requiring every new OTRB (such as Greyhound uses) to be equipped for wheelchair-accessibility. Although retrofitting is not required, all OTRB fleets (with a few exceptions) must be accessible within twelve years.

**ADVOCACY AND THE USER PERSPECTIVE.** Equally important to meaningful change is the existence of a strong advocacy and user movement.

**Disability Advocacy Groups.** The lack of transportation is the most often cited barrier to independent living for people with disabilities and seniors, and many advocacy organizations rate transportation high among their priorities. Yet no single advocacy organization in Ohio focuses *primarily* on transportation nor is able to maintain *ongoing* and *consistent* contact with policymakers. And advocates generally do not collaborate on any single issue, including transportation.

**Individual Users.** Transportation users with disabilities have many different, and sometimes conflicting, feelings and ideas about transportation services.

## CONCLUSIONS

- **Transportation continues to be an issue of vital importance for people with disabilities, especially as they take their rightful place in their communities.** The lack of affordable, reliable transportation accounts for many of the “failures” of community-based services. Even for individuals who do live in the community, transportation can mean the difference between participation and isolation. Although many counties still provide segregated transportation services, others are considering a wide range of options.
- **There is a lot going on of value in the transportation arena at all levels.** Transportation is increasingly seen as critical to the success of many federal, state, and local efforts to increase employment and reduce dependency on government programs. Although most transportation-related activities are not directed at people with disabilities, they do not exclude them either, and the potential benefit for the disability community is great.
- **Many of the recent federal and state initiatives related to transportation will benefit people with disabilities, particularly if advocates are involved in the implementation.** Because transportation is a critical need for so many people, a host of organizations, most of which have little to do with disability-related matters, are already working on this issue. (The most progressive transportation initiatives over the last few years, in fact, have generally come from within, rather than outside, the service system.) Although some groups have more to contribute initially, all groups that have a stake in transportation need to be involved in transportation-related matters.
- **The disability advocacy movement in Ohio is not particularly well organized or funded and cannot at this time provide ongoing, meaningful input on transportation issues.** No single advocacy organization in Ohio currently has the capacity to have a significant impact on legislation and policy. Such efforts need to be shared.

- **The current political situation in Ohio presents both opportunities and limitations to significant change.** Legislation that is not expressly intended to improve transportation for persons with disabilities will provide the best opportunity to advocate for such improvements. So it is critical to act now to stake a place on the gubernatorial agenda.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations (1) are process-oriented rather than content-oriented, (2) are purposefully limited in number, and (3) indicate which organizations would be the most appropriately involved in addressing them.

1. **THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY NEEDS TO MAINTAIN AN ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AS A “HANGER ON.”**
  - **Disability groups, for the most part, will not be a driving force for change but can play a valuable “me, too!” role.** It is important for the disability community (1) to maintain a *presence* in efforts to make transportation more accessible and (2) to forge alliances with those groups that will be more involved in the development and monitoring of transportation policy.
  - **The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council (ODDC) should devote staff time, and possibly funding, to this function.** The ODDC, because of its unique role as representative of many different perspectives and experiences and because of the resources at its disposal, is in a position to serve as a resource for policymakers to draw on in the development of transportation policy.
  - **The ODDC should devote some resources toward public awareness of transportation.** The ODDC could provide funds, possibly on a matching basis, for public awareness efforts such as brochures, PSAs, and press releases.
  - **The ODDC and other agencies should support, with both money and staff time, the efforts of advocacy organizations that are attempting to influence transportation policy on behalf of people with disabilities.** A consortium of advocacy organizations is currently being formed in Ohio. Support for this Ohio consortium, or for any other viable collaboration or coalition, should come from appropriate organizations and agencies, such as the ODDC, and from private corporations and foundations.
2. **THE ODDC SHOULD ADHERE TO AND PROMOTE THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES IN ALL COUNCIL LITERATURE AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION:**
  - **JUST AS COMMUNITY LIFE AND EMPLOYMENT ARE PREFERABLE TO SEGREGATED LIVING AND WORK OPTIONS, SO ARE GENERIC PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES PREFERABLE TO SPECIALIZED SERVICES.**
  - **TRANSPORTATION SHOULD PROVIDE INCREASED ACCESS FOR ALL ASPECTS OF A PERSON'S LIFE—SOCIAL AS WELL AS EMPLOYMENT-RELATED OR MEDICAL.**
  - **EFFORTS TO EXPAND THE AVAILABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND AFFORDABILITY OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES SHOULD CUT ACROSS AGE AND DISABILITY BOUNDARIES AND SHOULD FIND COMMONALITY WITH NON-DISABILITY-SPECIFIC GROUPS, SUCH AS PERSONS OF LOWER INCOME.**
  - **USER INPUT INTO THE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES, INCLUDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF RULES AND REGULATIONS, SHOULD BE INCREASED.**

**3. FUNDS SHOULD BE INCREASED FOR LOCAL COORDINATION EFFORTS.**

- **The budget for the Ohio Coordination Program of the Ohio Department of Transportation's Office of Public Transportation should be increased.** There needs to be a substantial increase both in the amount of funding awarded to counties and in the number of ODOT staff members to assist counties in local coordination efforts.
- **Other state-level entities should be encouraged to pool resources, especially for demonstration projects.** Each of the state agencies on the Statewide Transportation Coordination Task Force in particular should recognize the need to work across age, disability, and income boundaries and "ante up" in a cross-disciplinary effort. If there is a single issue that cuts across all service areas, it is clearly transportation.

**4. THE STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION TASK FORCE SHOULD BE FORMALIZED AND EXPANDED.** The Task Force is currently a voluntary association. An interagency agreement signed by the directors of each of the state agencies would provide this group with a greater degree of attention and clout.

- **The Task Force should include user representation.** At least two user representatives should be added—one from the disability community and one from the aging community. Each user representative on the Task Force should (1) provide input from the perspective of someone who actually uses the services and (2) act as a conduit for information to advocacy organizations.
- **The Task Force should consider convening a state-level advisory committee on transportation issues.** Once the Task Force is more formalized, an advisory committee should be created to provide a sounding board for the Task Force on specific proposals it has developed, to bring proposals to the Task Force that committee members would like to see addressed, and to act as the first step in information dissemination.
- **Each agency of the Task Force should have a written transportation policy that accords to a joint vision; each should devote at least one full-time staff person to the effort.** General principles—such as the ones listed in the second recommendation—should be adopted, as well as a number of objectives for the coming year or biennium. Each agency should invest at least one full-time staff position with responsibilities solely related to transportation.

**5. THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY SHOULD ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN SHAPING THE OHIO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT LEGISLATION.**

- **A work group should be formed immediately to try to influence the content of the upcoming workforce development legislation.** The ODDC, together with its Transportation Project grantees, should join with other relevant organizations in drafting, on behalf of the disability community, a transportation component for the state legislation that is required by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) to implement the coordination of most federally-funded job training programs.
- **The disability community should support a legislative approach that would ensure greater local attention to transportation issues by funding staff positions under the county commissions.** Each county commission should be given separate funding, through the workforce development legislation, for at least one full-time staff person to act as liaison in matters of local transportation coordination, to assist other local agencies wherever possible, and to provide leadership when it is lacking.