



*Advocacy. Action. Answers on Aging.*

**Statement for the Record  
By Sandy Markwood, n4a CEO**

**Hearing of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development**

**“Promoting Broader Access to Public Transportation for America’s Older Adults and  
People with Disabilities”**

**June 29, 2011**

Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member DeMint and members of the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing. As Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), I am pleased to share our thoughts on ways to promote broader access to public transportation for America’s older adults and people with disabilities.

n4a represents 629 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and 246 Title VI Native American aging programs in the U.S., which have been coordinating and providing critical home and community-based services to older adults and their caregivers for more than 35 years. The supports and services provided by the Aging Network reflects and addresses how people want to age—at home and in the community. It also helps individuals avoid unnecessary and more expensive institutional care. Given that home and community-based services are estimated to cost, on average, one-third of the expense of institutional care, these services save money for federal and state governments.

n4a co-administers the National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST) in partnership with Easter Seals. The NCST was created in the “Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users” (SAFETEA-LU) to be a resource to increase mobility for older adults. The NCST is administered through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The NCST works in collaboration with the FTA to provide technical assistance, education, and outreach to the aging and transit communities and is the preeminent resource in the country for helping increase the mobility of older adults. n4a also co-chairs the Senior Transportation Task Force, a national coalition of organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that increases the mobility of older adults and people with disabilities.

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**National Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

1730 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20036 T. 202.872.0888 F. 202.872.0057 [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)

## **The Demographics**

Older Americans represent the fastest growing demographic in our nation. There is a tremendous need for transportation options for older adults and this need will grow rapidly over the next several years. While many older adults drive, the majority will lose the physical and/or financial means to do so as they age. Between 2010 and 2030, the number of older adults in the United States is expected to increase by more than 79 percent. Currently, there are approximately 40 million Americans age 65 and older. By 2020, that number is projected to grow to nearly 55 million adults age 65 and older, and by 2030, the 65+ population will be more than 70 million. As the older adult population continues to grow, n4a believes it is critical that Congress place greater emphasis on critical community transportation programs that provide a vital link between the home and community for older adults and people with disabilities.

## **The Need**

In many communities, older adults and people with disabilities find it difficult to access essential services because of lack of transportation. This is particularly true for older adults who live in suburban or rural communities where destinations are too far to walk, public transit is non-existent or poor, and private transportation is limited and prohibitively expensive. Older adults and people with disabilities have an increasing desire to participate in the workforce, to age in place, and to access social and health services. Their ability to achieve these goals largely depends on their access to transportation services.

Accessible and affordable transportation connects older adults to the places where they can fulfill their most basic needs – the doctor, pharmacy, grocery store, employment and volunteer opportunities, friends' homes and recreational sites for social interaction, and houses of worship for spiritual sustenance. However, as individuals age and lose the ability to drive, they can experience a drastic decline in their mobility. Many older adults find it difficult to access essential transportation services in their communities. Transportation limitations resulting in lost mobility increase older adults' risk of poor health, as their ability to obtain the goods and services necessary to promote good health and well-being is reduced. In addition, mobility barriers stifle independence and result in a loss of self-sufficiency that can fuel depression.

## **Key Programs**

Of critical importance are the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 Elderly and Disabled and New Freedom programs. The Section 5310 program is the major transit formula grant program helping communities serve the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities, and the New Freedom program funds services to people with disabilities that go beyond Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. With rising fuel costs and budget cutbacks, the New Freedom program provides much needed resources to help ensure that these specialized services are available. A key benefit of SAFETEA-LU was the requirement for a locally coordinated transportation plan. The coordination planning requirement has begun to produce real results in bringing key stakeholders to the table, and ensuring the needs of older adults and people with disabilities are addressed in planning transportation services.

## The Challenges

Communities face significant challenges though as they seek to make public transportation more accessible and available through transportation programs serving older adults and people with disabilities. A recently released n4a report, **Maturing of America: Communities Moving Forward for an Aging Population**<sup>1</sup>, funded by the MetLife Foundation, found that inadequate transportation options for older adults have emerged as a dominant concern for communities across the country. According to the report, transportation has risen from a mix of other concerns to the second greatest challenge identified by communities since the first survey five years ago. This suggests that communities “increasingly recognize the impact of inadequate transportation options on older adults—hobbling progress in connecting them with services as well as opportunities to contribute.” As the report notes, “this response may also reflect a growing awareness that, no matter how service-rich a community might be, if older adults cannot reach those services, it will be for naught.”

The report found that most transportation services for older adults remain available at approximately the same level as in 2005 (80% compared to 79%), despite the increased federal investment in transportation through SAFETEA-LU. Specifically, the survey found the percentages of local governments with the following programs available in their communities:

- 80% —Transportation options for older adults;
- 49% —Public transit (fixed-route buses, rail service) for older adults;
- 58% —Paratransit for older adults;
- 35% —Discounted bus or taxicab fares or vouchers for older adults;
- 58% —Door-to-door, door-through-door, and/or dial-a-ride for older adults;
- 45% —Road design and signage that meet the needs of older adults;
- 75% —Sidewalks and street crossings that are safe and accessible for older pedestrians (e.g. flashing walk signs, sidewalk bumpouts); and
- 25% —Mobility management programs (e.g. person-centered counseling on transportation alternatives to driving suited to older adults’ needs).

## Success Stories

Clearly, there is much more to be done to ensure that there is accessible transportation for older adults and people with disabilities. To this end, there are a number of best practices that can assist communities as they seek to expand access to public transportation and provide greater mobility options to older adults and people with disabilities. **For example, the NCST has collected the following program success stories:**

- ❖ Without the close working relationships between the Older Americans Act Title VI Native American Aging Program, Tribal Transit and the Community Health Representative (CHR) in Indian country, elders would be unable to get to needed medical appointments and to other essential services. One example of this is the Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico. Elders with medical appointments are encouraged to contact the Title VI Program first, which

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<sup>1</sup>“The Maturing of America—Communities Moving Forward for an Aging Population,” June 2011, Available online at: [http://www.n4a.org/files/MOA\\_FINAL\\_Rpt.pdf](http://www.n4a.org/files/MOA_FINAL_Rpt.pdf)

matches the individual's support needs to the type of transportation best suited to the situation. If the Title VI Program has reached capacity, staff coordinates with the CHR or Tribal Transit to provide a ride.

- ❖ A few years ago when the county threatened to end funding for public transportation because of low ridership, the Allegany County Office for the Aging (NY) and the Allegany/Western Steuben Rural Health Network joined forces with others, including the ARC. Their partnership led to a successful application for New Freedom funding, development of mobility management to assist older people and people with disabilities understand their transportation options and choose the ride that was right for them and creation of a new "circulator" bus route that includes stops at senior housing, grocery store and pharmacy and has led to increased ridership overall on public transit.
- ❖ Grand Gateway AAA/Economic Development Association established Pelivan Transit to provide flexible, accessible transportation to a rural, seven-county area in northeastern Oklahoma. The program serves an aging and geographically dispersed population, offering demand-response, deviated fixed route and transportation to nutrition sites, work and activities. Pelivan Transit has succeeded in creating an accessible network of rural transportation that helps link seniors to medical treatment, human services and social activities utilizing Section 5311, Section 5310, and New Freedom as well as 5311(c) Tribal Transit funding. Through a diversified approach and close coordination with health and human service providers, Grand Gateway has continued to solidify its transportation network, allowing staff to focus some of its efforts on improved coordination and scheduling of rides. This focus allows for the planning of pooled rides to special events and excursions for seniors.
- ❖ The Hyde Shuttles is a coordinated, community-based paratransit operation in King County, Washington. The Hyde Shuttles program provide affordable, accessible, user-friendly transportation to older adults and people with disabilities, providing a vital link to community services for people who otherwise might remain homebound and isolated. The project offers services beyond the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act, focusing on unserved and underserved people who fall through identified gaps in public transportation. Through the years the program has replicated Shuttles operations in different areas of King County and now has 25 vans on the road. The program received FTA New Freedom funding through a competitive grant process administered by the Puget Sound Regional Council and will be adding eight more vans over the next two years.

The Hyde Shuttles program has developed a broad base of community support including partnerships with King County Metro transit agency, the local Area Agency on Aging, King County Housing Authority, and other human services agencies. These partnerships have allowed the program to expand operations as well as customize service to meet the individual needs of the communities and populations served. The project increases mobility options, creates service efficiencies, maximizes resources and improves service quality for the special needs population. The program's success demonstrates that community-based transportation providers are an effective mobility option to meet the current and future transportation needs of many seniors and people with disabilities in King County.

- ❖ Ride Connection a Portland, Oregon-based nonprofit coordinates a network of over 30 providers. Despite having a world-class transit system, many older adults refrain from using transit because of barriers that must be identified and addressed. Ride Connection created its RideWise travel training and mobility support program to provide older adults with opportunities to learn about and experience public transportation in a relaxed, no-pressure environment and to offer information that is specific to their community and their needs. The RideWise program established as collaborative effort with the greater Porter area's transit system includes transit orientation and information about the RideWise family of services, customized informational bulletin boards for older adult residential locations with schedules of the bus lines serving the area, facility-based Riders Clubs to provide a relaxed environment for individuals to try the system with their friends, and on-site RideWise transit advocates providing information to their neighbors.
  
- ❖ FriendshipWorks is a network of trained volunteers with the mission “to decrease the social isolation, enhance the quality of life, and preserve the dignity of elders and adults with disabilities in Boston and Brookline.” The Medical Escort Program is one of several programs managed by FriendshipWorks. This door-through-door service provides a trained volunteer to accompany older adults to and from medical appointments, assist them in navigating hospitals and doctor offices, pick up prescriptions if necessary, and attend the doctor visit with the patient if requested. FriendshipWorks' La Cadena de Amista serves the Latino community by providing the appropriate Medical Escort Program services to Spanish-speaking elders, and also assisting them with accessing the healthcare system, translating medical information, and reducing language and cultural barriers.

## **The Reauthorization**

Without adequate transportation, the growing segment of our population represented by older adults and people with disabilities will either remain isolated in their homes or end up in institutions unnecessarily. While the last reauthorization provided some increased funding for senior transportation, significant new funds are needed to address the unmet transportation needs that now exist for older adults and people with disabilities—needs that will only increase over the next authorization. The reauthorization provides an excellent opportunity for Congress to improve on the planning, coordination, and administration of the Section 5310 and New Freedom programs—while staying true to the original intent to target those with specialized transportation needs—to increase the availability and accessibility of transportation services for older adults and people with disabilities.

## **Policy Recommendations**

**n4a supports the following steps to ensure that older adults and people with disabilities have adequate mobility options.**

- Increase overall transit funding for programs that enhance and support mobility options for all. n4a supports increased funding for transit programs in all areas of the country, including formula grants for urbanized and rural areas and grants that provide more targeted funding

to vulnerable populations, such as older adults and people with disabilities. It is critical that the next authorization increases investment in transit to a level that will meet the growing demand for services and allow for affordable, efficient and reliable transportation options for all Americans.

- Significantly boost funding for the Section 5310 Elderly and Disabled Formula Grant Program and New Freedom Program. Current funding is nowhere near enough to ensure needed transportation for the millions of older adults age 60 and older and the tens of millions of people with disabilities currently living in the United States, let alone the influx of aging boomers. Communities are in desperate need of assistance to address the mobility needs of their rapidly growing older adult populations.
- Expand use of 5310 funds to operating assistance making funding available for operating costs as well as capital needs. This change would make the program consistent with other federal transportation programs, including the Section 5307 urbanized program and Section 5311 rural program, and would allow non-profits to not only obtain new vans and buses but to ensure that they are operational with funding available to pay for preventive maintenance, insurance, rising fuel costs and driver compensation.
- Continue the current transfer authority or flexing to meet the needs of the designated populations between the 5310 and New Freedom programs and other formula grants, and require that states track and report on each program's funds separately.
- Undertake any program consolidation efforts cautiously and be mindful of the impact program changes will have on the vulnerable populations now being served under current programs. Efforts to streamline transportation programs to create efficiencies and minimize administrative burden are laudable and necessary in the current economic environment. However, we urge that consolidation efforts be undertaken very cautiously and that protections be put in place to ensure that needed services are not lost in the process.
- Provide incentives and support for further coordination of transit and other human services programs by increasing the accountability and transparency of planning processes. Transit planning must be more effectively coordinated with broader community planning efforts. States and metropolitan planning organizations must also do a better job of reaching out to the aging and disability communities and actively and substantively involving them when making planning decisions.
- Ensure that Section 5310 and New Freedom program information is more transparent and program data is publicly available through an integrated national database. Establish more robust and consistent reporting standards for state and local recipients under the programs to increase transparency, better evaluate that the programs are meeting their objectives, and identify and assess unmet needs.
- Support transportation initiatives that lead to livable communities for all ages. This includes planning grants that will assist communities to plan and invest in projects that are environmentally sustainable and promote livable communities for all ages, and adopt

“Complete Streets” policies that direct transportation planners to consider the needs of all users when considering and making transportation investment decisions.

- Enhance access to mobility management services to better help transit and human services systems meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities by establishing a dedicated funding source for these activities that supplement traditional services provided by transit agencies, the Aging Network and other partners. Look for ways to provide additional incentives to use capital funds for these activities and provide additional technical assistance to help transportation programs develop mobility management efforts and adapt them to the unique needs of the populations served by the program.
- Increase funding for technical assistance and education efforts such as the National Center on Senior Transportation to allow further demonstration, outreach, and training and technical assistance activities to meet the growing needs of the aging and transit communities.

Thank you for considering these ideas. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee on these issues as the reauthorization process moves forward and you develop proposals for the next surface transportation bill.