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**ACL Transportation Listening Session Summary Report**

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ACL Transportation Listening Session

# Executive Summary

The Administration for Community Living (ACL)’s mission is to maximize the independence, well-being, and health of older adults, people with disabilities across the lifespan, and their families and caregivers. Transportation is a necessary component of carrying out this mission. ACL recognizes that Transportation is a vital component in our lives. We use it to get to and from work, grocery stores, health care appointments, engage in education, attend and or participate in social and sporting activities, and to visit with family and friends. People who are reliant on public transportation services experience challenges in accessing and or participating in these activities.

ACL partners with the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Agency, states, community organizations, technical assistance centers, national organizations, and others to ensure that the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers are explicitly understood and addressed as it relates to transportation services and systems. To that end, ACL conducted a virtual one-hour listening session on Tuesday, December 14, 2021. The purpose of this session was to hear needs and experiences, barriers and solutions, and the most impactful strategies ACL can take to improve transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and their caregivers over the next 5 years and to learn more about how to reach and serve historically marginalized communities and underserved populations.

The listening session attendees participated in a facilitator-led conversation on the topic of transportation systems and services, innovations in transportation, and improvements needed. Five pre-determined questions were used for the conversation. The questions were shared with participants in advance of the meeting. Each question was asked one at a time by the facilitator. For the first two questions the participants used the Menti App setup by the SIDEM staff to submit their responses and for the remaining three questions, the participants could respond by raising their virtual hand or using the chat box.

The invitation to participate in the listening session was sent to fifty-six individuals from 31 organizations. The individuals that attended included representatives from the following agencies: Consortium for Citizen with Disabilities Transportation Taskforce(CCD); the Taskforce is made up of the American Foundation; Paralyzed Veterans of America; National Disability Rights Network; and the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF); American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR); Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE); Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN); Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL); National Council on Independent Living (NCIL); National Association of State Independent Living Councils (NASILC); Easter Seals; The Arc; US Aging; National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC); National Council on Aging (NCOA); AdvancingStates; Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD); Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA); Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI); Bay Aging Transportation; Capital Area/Rabbit Transit; Seattle Transit Systems; Mountain Line Transportation System; Ride Connection; Atlanta Regional Commission; National Rural Transit Assistance Program (NRTAP); National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM); Shared Use Mobility Center (SUMC); National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT); AT3; ADA PARC; AARP Public Policy Institute; DJB Evaluation; and National Association of Council and Development Disabilities (NACDD). Fifty-one individuals attended the listening session with twenty-six individuals not able to attend. Those unable to attend the virtual session had the opportunity to provide their responses to the same pre-determined questions post-webinar via an electronic survey. The survey was sent via email on December 16, 2021. Nine individuals responded to the electronic survey. SIDEM collected the responses and included the results in the data presented below.

# What is working in transportation services and systems?

## Accessibility Improvements

* + Accessibility for wheelchair users.
  + In most metro cities there are good light rail and bus services.
  + Participation in transit planning at state local and regional levels is effective.
  + Adding wheelchair access to all aspect of local transit.
  + Accessibility
  + Since our lawsuit to enforce the wheelchair-accessible provisions of public transportation here in Jackson, MS, we have an all-accessible FIXED ROUTE system.
  + Most Fixed Route Systems I've sampled across the country have wheelchair accessible service...but NOT ALL train stations have working elevators.
  + Public transportation is becoming ever more accessible.
  + More transportation access to accommodations needed when riding.
  + What's working - bus rapid transit, dedicated bus lanes, rail, ADA required accessibility features
  + Most of the vehicles being used in public transit are accessible (with lifts or ramps). Increased emphasis on health and safety.
  + Accessibility for wheelchair use.

## Technology and Information Access

* + New technologies and promising pilots, for scheduling, micro transit, Electric Vehicles, etc.
  + Automatic Vehicle Locators (AVL) are helping ensure accountability and timelines, but at least here in Jackson MS, the fixed route riders DO NOT have access to that kind of real-time information (yet). That hinders ridership.
  + Seconding AVL, apps that allow riders to see vehicle locations.
  + Agencies can put access to transit trip planners on their sites.
  + Technology can make trip planning easier and rides more predictable, but not available everywhere.
  + Technology is improving wayfinding.
  + More ways to find services: phone and internets.
  + Technology can make trip planning easier and rides more predictable.

## Costs

* + Making free transportation services available during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  + Availability of accessible and affordable transportation in certain areas.
  + Making free transportation available and seeing how it benefits the community.
  + Availability of affordable and accessible transportation in certain areas.

## On-demand and Ride Sharing

* + Lyft and Uber can be helpful (but there are accessibility issues with the apps and with consistent treatment of those with service dogs).
  + Volunteer transportation offers a good model for demand responsive, is a more personalized service and can be designed to fit community needs.
  + The availability of demand response services for those without access to private transportation in rural areas.
  + Private ridesharing provides convenient and independent transportation options.

## Transportation Increased Availability and Routes

* + What is working is in metro cities that most transit systems have good light rail or bus services.
  + In Michigan, a growing number of accessible public transit appears to be spreading over the last few years.
  + Availability in every county.
  + Pretty broad, slightly nebulous, question. I am chair of a paratransit advisory committee (small NC town). The system is working well, though we would like to be able to have same-day trips and maybe a single stop within a ride.
  + In Seattle - accessible light rail, bus, and paratransit service, plus a geographically limited on-demand ride to transit operated by Via.
  + Coordinated transportation systems.
  + Some bus service.
  + Accessible and continued fixed-route bus service.
  + Alternate and active transportation.
  + I live in a small town. When I first moved here, paratransit worked well. Due to a loss of funds, it no longer works well. I think there is a bus that makes certain stops, but I do not know where they are.

## Planning and Collaboration

* + Inclusive planning where the needs and wishes of all riders can be given primary consideration and can guide decisions about transportation that reflect actual need. Where it is available, and it is effective in bringing about positive change.
  + Increased focus on equity and transportation justice-Systems have proved that they are resilient during the pandemic and natural disasters.
  + New models of paratransit whereby partnerships between public transit and TNCs offer riders more personal service, choice and predictability of rides have potential and have improved paratransit in some places.
  + Great emerging partnerships with health care providers.
  + Inclusive advisory committees for addressing passenger needs and concerns and seeking input on new projects or designs.
  + Increased focus on equity.
  + Participation in transit planning at state local and regional levels is effective.
  + Being flexible and designing transportation systems with the needs of people with disabilities in mind.
  + What is working in one location is not working everywhere; rural areas especially are challenged, have fewer options and less funding. Public transit works well if there is robust travel training; mobility management is essential; volunteer transport.
  + Orientation and mobility specialists provide strong introductory skills.
  + Transportation strategies are more flexible.
  + Use of mobility managers to facilitate coordination.
  + Universal accessibility approaches.

# What could be improved in transportation services and systems?

## Planning, Communication, Training, and Collaboration

* + Communication and coordination with agencies and transit programs could be better.
  + More transportation programs connected to employers.
  + Better information access so people know what's available in their communities, more travel training and mobility managers.
  + The pandemic has clearly changed trip types, trip patterns, and path of travel. Agencies need to be flexible and respond to these new conditions.
  + Agencies could work at the state level to build bridges with state transit programs.
  + Increased opportunities for riders to weigh in on their needs and wishes, better coordination among providers.
  + Strict regulations and reporting are a strain on smaller transport agencies.
  + Learning to use transit as an older adult requires a complete reshaping of expectations about transportation as well as a certain level of skill, courage, and physical endurance. Fears are largely related to safety.
  + Although vehicles themselves tend to be accessible, many cities lack a sidewalk network and do not plan fully accessible routes from residences and businesses to the stops, even on busy roads.
  + Coordination could make us more efficient and effective. More training on diversity, equity, inclusion, public engagement.
  + It could speed up more and just do it.
  + More training for van operators.

## Access to Transportation in Underserved Communities

* + Better INTER-CITY connectivity for people with disabilities. Many rural providers do not cross boundaries.
  + Access to reliable transportation in rural areas.
  + Rural areas still have greater need for accessible transportation.
  + On time and reliable long-term transportation to employment in rural areas, transportation services for those with I/DD.
  + Ability of transportation providers to cross city/county lines (especially for those moving between rural & urbanized areas).
  + Transportation resources that reach rural communities.
  + More attention paid to the needs of currently underserved communities, rural, diverse populations.
  + Increased and reliable, convenient fixed-route bus services in all neighborhoods, especially disadvantaged communities.
  + Rural transportation services continue to keep our state separated and causes a large amount of people without access to services.
  + Driver shortages and supply chain issues.
  + Shortage of drivers.
  + Increased access to accessible buses.
  + While coordination is certainly not a new concept, it is more important today than ever before if we are going to address gaps in transportation service that exist. This is especially true in the rural and suburban parts of our country where there often are limited options and restricted schedules for public transportation.

## Scheduling and Route Access

* + The availability of weekend and off-hours accessible transportation.
  + Availability of services during evening and night hours.
  + Times and frequency of services, rural routes, vehicle availability.
  + Local match is a problem especially in rural areas.
  + extended routes
  + Don't force people with disabilities to have to transfer from one bus to another simply because they are crossing municipality lines.
  + Evening and Sunday services are lacking, even in the Capitol of Mississippi.
  + Increased hours on fixed routes. When something runs 8-5, it eliminated a lot of people that can use services.
  + Local jurisdictional barriers that don't allow agencies to coordinate regional trips.
  + Cross-boundary solutions to enable riders to get where they need to go.
  + Connectivity between modes and path of travel.
  + More flexible transportation options in suburban land use contexts.
  + Transportation problems connected to vocational rehabilitation programs.
  + Consistency of elevators and route expansion.

## On-demand and Ride Share Issues

* + On-demand services that are accessible for all (including TNCs and AVs).
  + Work more closely with ride-share companies like UZURV to ensure affordable access to transportation on demand for people with disabilities to have more options about where to go and when.
  + There is a lack of on-demand services that provide curb-to-curb service on a convenient, immediate scheduling basis (unlike paratransit) that are more equivalent to the experience of driving a car. Need for affordable TNC partnerships.
  + UBER and LYFT have thus far refused to provide accessible service in MOST areas.

## Accessibility and Safety Concerns

* + Better sidewalk and bus stop access for fixed routes.
  + Safer and more comfortable places to wait for the bus, especially on infrequent routes.
  + More electric rail, which is far easier to use and more accessible for many.
  + Navigating unpredictable barriers: Construction sites are often poorly marked. They often lack a clear detour, unnecessarily block sidewalks, and are left up longer than necessary. Snow and ice are frequent concerns for pedestrians.
  + Audible stop and station announcements on public transit are often garbled or turned off. Other access issues include hard-to-find information about service changes, broken signs, and lack of tactile maps or other wayfinding devices.
  + Safer pickup and drop-off locations on every block for on demand/point-to-point service.
  + Where it's not happening, accessible bus stops, sidewalks, curb ramps and audible pedestrian signals.
  + Sidewalks and safe pedestrian crossings.
  + Better elevator access to light rail stations (and limiting elevator use to those who need it). More reliable escalator access (they are ALWAYS down in Seattle).
  + Wheelchair accessibility of aircraft is IMPORTANT ... we must be able to travel IN OUR Wheelchairs.
  + Improved/safer pedestrian access around light rail stations.
  + Need for more accessible pedestrian signals.
  + Curb ramps are still lacking in Seattle.
  + More benches at transit stops.
  + Better sidewalk maintenance.
  + Many stops lack a safe, accessible bench or cover.
  + Reliable access to transportation.

## Financial and Cost Services

* + Financial Assistance.
  + Cost sharing between the agencies and transit programs could be better understood.
  + Need more funding.
  + Financial assist chair chargers’ affordable services and also more benefits for drivers and training.
  + Cost for transportation tickets.
  + I think more funding is needed so that there is transportation that will go wherever you need it to go.

## Technology Needs

* + Chair charging stations need to be on vehicles, in doctors’ offices, and public buildings like libraries and government buildings.
  + Employ proven technologies to provide on demand paratransit services.
  + More real time information.

# What are the persistent gaps/challenges in transportation services that are not being addressed?

## Rural and Underserved Communities

* + We do have our own transportation system here; it's run by the county. However, it's only limited to five days a week, able to go to your doctor you able to go shopping. No station access after local paratransit goes out of business, it's not operational for example on weekends. We have of course options like Uber and Lyft, but those are privately owned companies, Uber and Lyft unfortunately here is very hard to get. Set up an express bus in the future from where I live to Charlotte, or back, say once in the morning and even to get you home. There needs to be some sort of fixed system in place, aside from Uber and Lyft and other rideshare organizations.
  + Accessible public rights of way (sidewalks, curb ramps, bus stops), especially in disadvantaged communities, and full accessibility of legacy and even newer transit stations.
  + Urban to rural is a huge gap in smaller cities and rural area, the service hours are extremely limited.
  + Many RURAL areas have minimal service for people with disabilities.
  + Disparities in minority, immigrant, and low-income communities. Lack of service in many rural, low-density locations.

## Accessible Transportation Training

* + We've heard that there's a real need for driver training, improved driver training for serving older adults and people with disabilities in particular. So, something that we could really use and benefit from is any type of funding or programming or support to make that type of training available.
  + Mobility management and coordination.
  + National RTAP has trainings online and downloadable for free that can support driver training for anyone.

## Funding and Benefits

* + A lot of times you could use Medicaid or Medicare. Medicaid really don't pay people a lot. And that really turns a lot of companies off and keep them from transporting people as well to and from the hospitals and anywhere else they need to go.
  + Many people need night and weekend service and the ability to quickly schedule a ride. But without additional long-term and sustainable operating funds, many agencies are already at capacity and are not able to expand service within their current budget.
  + Affordability of all transportation options. Lack of local match for federal funding.
  + Some people can’t afford the transportation costs.

## Transportation Routes and Scheduling

* + We have found that travelling from county to county is very difficult and, in most cases, not possible due to restrictions of public transit.
  + Off hours and weekend availability.
  + Scheduling limitations and antiquated practices have left many persons with disabilities stranded.
  + Artificially created barriers: 24 hours in advance scheduling, or 72 hours in advance.
  + Coordination of transportation demand with hours and service of transit availability, negotiated, and developed with necessary trips including employment in mind.
  + Total mobility needs not just medical, shopping, and work.
  + Express services can work and there is funding to do so.
  + Inaccessibility of transfer points, local buses, etc. Wait and ride times in paratransit systems.
  + I think that they need to have transportation that goes wherever. If it is a paratransit, it should not be limited and if not a paratransit, it is important that people are told what it is or what it does. I also think that it would be good if you could just call the same day to get transportation.

## Technology

* + My overriding concern about Autonomous vehicles is their inability to respond to unusual situations and correctly identify pedestrians and bicyclists and THEIR behavior. Not an easy problem to solve.
  + We do not have a shared platform for sharing transit capacity on shuttles and other vehicles, and we do not have a way of allocating the costs for trips easily.

## Ride Sharing

* + Uber and Lyft are good for people in the blind community, but mostly DON’T serve wheelchair-users. Not acceptable.
  + KC has to deal with Uber and Lyft, and I believe they do serve wheelchair

## Other Accessible Needs

* + Wheelchair accessible aircraft. Inter-City Accessible Service. Capacity Constraints.
  + Need for business plans for transit agencies -- planning for the future instead of operating year-by-year instead of year-to-year.
  + Getting a DSP is right now a challenge because it is taking a while because of the pandemic.
  + Shortage in drivers and more transportation findings.

# What is the most impactful thing we can do to serve historically marginalized and underserved communities?

## Cost, Funding, and Benefits

* + More transit fares to get to services. Lower cost or greater equity in the cost of transportation.
  + Adding funds to different programs like WIC or SNAP or if they receive TANF. So, looking at programs like Women, Infants and Children's, the nutrition SNAP benefit. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs and what might be available through those programs.
  + Maybe thinking about subsidized transportation, because I heard a young man talk about how the cost of transportation is different, depending on the type of equipment you need to use and things like that so some of the transportation programs are costly.
  + Free transit - if not for all, at least for low- and moderate-income people.
  + A fare pricing that allows all to have access to transit. For example, in Missouri, KC has fare free. It has helped a lot.
  + Alexandria, VA is fare free and Portland, OR has had a rider revolution and are not able to collect fares regularly.
  + We need a transit benefit on EBT cards.
  + Anyone who is receiving SNAP needs help with transit too.
  + I was thinking instead of vouchers for those that get snap or TANF should get extra funds for transportation. This could also be added to the WIC program.
  + Miami allows Paratransit Eligible customers to ride the FIXED ROUTE for free…very helpful to encourage FIXED ROUTE usage when it is possible…for some trips if not all.
  + Many people who use transit by choice receive commuter benefits but if you are looking for work you don't get a benefit.
  + I love the idea of connecting transit benefits to WIC and SNAP. Could make a huge difference especially for those travelling with children and paying many fares at once even for a simple grocery trip.
  + Forget about the transportation, SAMHSA and HRSA need to have transit benefits.
  + I think zoned fare pricing. Therefore, these areas would be very low or at zero cost.
  + Recognition of it is a real issue and a willingness to fund solutions.
  + Lower the cost for riders.
  + Provide more rides for free.

## Planning and Collaboration

* + Recognize the communities and incorporate in to planning and visioning going forward. Invest in areas to build access
  + Be flexible in meeting the needs of these communities. Find out why these communities are underserved - is it due to lack of service, mistrust of systems, previous intentional disregard for the community, etc.
  + More program for those that are disabled veterans is an issue we still see with the housing being developed for veterans. They forget about the transportation part.
  + Even if the benefit is just scheduling people who are transit dependent, so their appointments are possible.
  + Engage directly with members of historically marginalized communities and letting them lead, hiring/paying them for their time - responding to needs vs best practice and assumptions
  + It is important that the services that are available to the customers be easily understood by the customers.
  + Building community coalitions of agencies working together in underserved communities.
  + Speed things up this year and get to work.
  + Increase communication between the vendors and riders.
  + Have regular transportation and see that people know what exists, when to get it and where to get it.

## Other Accessibility Needs

* + We do not have consistent access to safe paths of travel.
  + I would like for you all to work with the American Council, or the blind to continue to push for automated audible rather than pedestrian signals, APS for short.
  + Prioritizing access to transit and all transportation modes during emergencies in marginalized and undeserved communities (Title VI obligations get a pass during state of emergencies currently, though ADA obligations do not).
  + Red Cross does not have to have accessible shelters.
  + Audible Pedestrian Signals….pushing for them here in Jackson, MS…they are starting to deploy them, but it will take a long time to complete.
  + Broad route expansion w/frequent and rapid loops, good security and lighting, robust pathways, simplified ticketing.

# What are new approaches or ideas that would create better transportation?

## Accessible Technology

* + I'm not really an advocate for Autonomous Vehicles (AVs), I think that the use of them in all modes of transportation to me is dangerous. Because you know how quiet these things are. So, if we can continue to push, if these are going to be the standard, we need to have emit audible tones to let people know.
  + The Sandler network framework and Foundation for the Blind and we definitely think that there's a lot of potential for autonomous vehicles, it has the potential to pedal, a lot of vehicles on the road and overcome driver shortages and move us closer to having that more on demand system that a lot of people really want and need for convenience and the ability to get around when and where you want to go but there's certainly a lot of challenges built into that. We're particularly concerned about the accessibility of the human user interface. Navigating defined the vehicle. The loading and boarding zones where you get dropped off making sure you get dropped off in the right place.
  + A new app called NaviLens. It can encode all sorts of information and can do a lot of things but in the context of transportation. These codes can be attached to bus stops and with an app on your phone you can get by pointing at the code and keep in mind that the app can find the code from 20 or 30 feet away with a range of about 140 degrees so you don't have to exactly know where the thing is the apple find it and the point is it will give you the bus schedules.
  + Having chargers on the bus.
  + Have Wi Fi, charging ports at every single seat.
  + Agree, employ on demand technology.
  + Better booking technology.
  + Echo on-demand technology.
  + Real time information is a way of showing respect to your customers.
  + Darren Umbarger, a person with a disability and an advocate makes chargers for buses and buildings.
  + Charging networks so people can use their chairs to get around and not worry about losing power.
  + Easy to use wayfinding technology throughout a transportation system.
  + A new technology called NaviLens is well worth considering. See the pilot project in San Antonio, TX.
  + Absolutely, AVs would be a game changer.
  + Also, adaptive micro mobility, strong requirements for accessibility in all new modes, including AVs.
  + You need to promote AV Accessibility.
  + Transitioning to ELECTRIC RAIL as soon as possible, because it is accessible AND HELPS END Carbon Fuel Dependency (addresses Climate Crisis).
  + The problem with Autonomous Vehicles is that they still rely on CARBON-EXPENSIVE roadways and utilize a lot of resources (materials). A train car lasts longer and is cheaper to maintain.
  + A way to track your ride similar to Uber.

## Routes and Scheduling

* + Same-day paratransit
  + 24/7 paratransit services.
  + Same day services are possible now if there are enough vehicles. I know of rural systems that have a goal of 15 min headways for people who call in the same day.
  + Seeing required paratransit expanded to include the entire UZA and that the funding is apportioned for rather than 3/4 mile of fixed route.
  + Agree on expanding Paratransit Access to the wider community…not just based on the MINIMUM 3/4 Mile limit.
  + Accessible paratransit circular system. The concept is a little different. But it is a constant service that people can depend on.
  + Having better transportation where you can call the same day and get it and not have to schedule transportation in advance.

## Other Accessibility Needs

* + Resources would be so valuable.
  + "Road usage" fees rather than gas taxes.
  + More regional call centers to request services.
  + A willingness to take risks and do what the agency has never tried before instead of "rinsing and repeating" the same program of services over and over again. Ask the people to tell you what they need instead of making assumptions/involve them in planning and decision-making when it comes to services offered. Greater linkage between health outcome and transportation.
  + Get DSPs to respond to fill in the blanks for doing a better job with getting clients to trust them to get started on doing the work.
  + Subsidies for wheelchair accessible Uber/Lyft.
  + More collaboration between transportation provider and businesses.