



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **STATEMENT**

Transportation is critical to maintaining the independence of people with disabilities. Everything they do begins and ends with transportation. However, many do not drive or own a vehicle because of their disability and/or limited income. When people with disabilities cannot access transportation or the transportation network does not get them where they need to go when they need to, people with disabilities are unable to work, patronize businesses, go to church or visit family and friends.

Without transit, family and caregivers may no longer be able to provide care when it is needed. Some people with disabilities need supports at all hours of the day. Nearly half of transit use is for work related purposes.

Funding transit is a smart investment. It lowers government costs by helping people with disabilities live independently and be employed. It also allows transportation-limited people to provide care for people with disabilities.

### **BACKGROUND**

Survival Coalition urges policy makers to prioritize transportation programs that assist people with disabilities and their caregivers who would otherwise have few options. This includes transit operating aids as well as specialized transportation for people with disabilities and the elderly. Over the past decade, we have seen reductions in transit services. These aids are vital to keeping people with disabilities independent and provide access to employment, education, healthcare, small businesses and large retailers, and other important places in the community (libraries, schools, churches, civic buildings, and community events). For example, in southeastern Wisconsin, transit services have been cut over 20% over the past ten years and fares have increased to some of the highest in the country. Cutbacks have taken a heavy toll on the ability of people with disabilities to work and be contributing members of the community, and also made it very difficult for the caregivers they rely on to get to work. In addition, reductions in transit aids have resulted in significant reduction of paratransit services and increases in fees.

### **RECOMENDATIONS**

The 2015 – 2017 budget should strongly support transit services, including specialized transportation. These services are key to independence and life in the community for people with disabilities.

- Keep transit in the segregated transportation fund to ensure that these funds are protected and not in competition with education, Medicaid, and other programs. The small investment in transit does so much for Wisconsin's economy and quality of life.
- Preserve the state investment in local transit by increasing Transit Operating Aids as proposed by the Department of Transportation. We support the proposal to restore \$2 Million to Transit Operating Aids cut in 2011. We also support the Department's proposal for a Supplemental Transit Expansion program. This proposal would allow the Department to fund new transit routes to increase statewide ridership, access to jobs and economic development.
- Increase funding for the *Specialized Transportation Assistance Program for older adults and people with disabilities* (Sec. 85.21). We support the Department's request for an inflationary increase to these programs. The Legislature should appropriate an additional \$5 Million to address the rapidly increasing population of older Wisconsinites and people with disabilities.
- Support development of Regional Transit Authorities as a way to increase efficiencies, improve regional connectivity, provide local communities the flexibility and tools to improve their systems and create a robust transportation network, and position Wisconsin to take advantage of federal funds for capital investment.
- Provide local governments with the ability to support transit in a sustainable way, and to designate a dedicated funding source for transit.
- Actively pursue coordination at local, regional, state level to use various funding streams more efficiently. Funds for human services transportation come from federal and state programs administered by several state departments. Counties have demonstrated that coordinating these programs can increase the rides within existing funding.
- Ensure Wisconsin's ability to enhance coordination through increased funding for mobility management programs.
- Use federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding for projects that help people with disabilities get around their communities easier and safer.

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**Contact Survival Coalition Co-Chairs for additional information**

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