



**Pennsylvania State
Transportation Advisory Committee**

**Assessing the Availability of
Transportation Services for
Persons with Disabilities in
Rural Pennsylvania**

Work Order #5 Final Report
Executive Summary





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PRELIMINARY DATA ASSESSMENT REPORT

WORK ORDER # 5: AVAILABILITY OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN RURAL PENNSYLVANIA – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS STUDY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) is authorized under state law to provide independent advice to the State Transportation Commission (STC) and the Secretary of Transportation on any issue of direct or indirect importance to the mobility of people and goods in the Commonwealth. TAC chose to examine the transportation needs of persons with disabilities for two important reasons. First, to begin closing the extensive information gap on the extent and nature of this population's transportation needs in rural Pennsylvania. Second, to generate a range of recommendations that could be used to begin addressing a basic need of most people – the need for transportation. For the purpose of this study "rural" uses the Census definition, which applies to 65 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties—Allegheny (Pittsburgh) and Philadelphia counties being outside the definition.

1.1 BACKGROUND

In May 1997, the Governor's Disability Agenda included a directive that PennDOT along with representatives from other state agencies form a Rural Transportation Work Group. The Work Group was charged to:

- 1) Identify problems faced by persons with disabilities related to a lack of transportation services.
- 2) Inventory existing transportation systems in rural areas.
- 3) Develop recommendations as appropriate.

Public forums were held in August and September 1998. The problem most frequently voiced by persons with disabilities was "the limited availability of transportation services in rural areas." Based on the forum comments and the completed inventory of transportation services, the work group concluded that it still





lacked comprehensive and empirical data on the scope, nature and extent of this mobility problem.

Without comprehensive data on the number of persons affected, their geographical proximity to existing transportation services, ride patterns and additional mobility barriers, the work group could not objectively or responsibly recommend a sound policy solution. Additionally, without knowing the characteristics of this market, the work group was unable to project the cost of alternative approaches and whether the existing transit agencies could accommodate additional riders, expand routes, or take other measures in order to make transportation services more available and affordable to the disability community. Since the purpose of this study was to determine needs, the results of this report provide the Commonwealth with base information that can yield estimated ridership assumptions and estimates of associated cost for pilot design.

During the same approximate time period, the State Transportation Advisory Committee, an independent committee with statutory authority to provide advice to the State Transportation Commission, developed candidate issues to study over the ensuing 4 years. The issue of transportation for persons with disabilities in rural areas was identified and scheduled for subsequent study. This report is a direct result of the TAC Study effort.

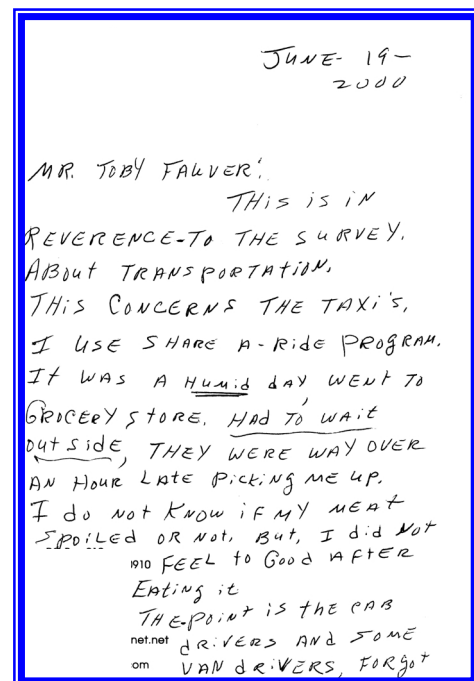
1.2 METHODOLOGY & STUDY PROCESS/ORGANIZATION

The study was carried out in a compressed time schedule to bring closure to the analytical requirements necessary to properly develop policy to address this issue. The following points summarize the study phases:

Part A—Assessment of Available Data and Study Scope Refinement:

existing sources of data—including census and program data from several agencies serving persons with disabilities—were reviewed to determine transportation needs. A map was produced depicting the locations of persons with disabilities in relation to existing transit/ADA service for Cumberland County as a test case. The mapping proved to be a valuable analytical break through and was developed statewide in later study phases.

The primary conclusion from Part A was that the existing data sources do not provide a comprehensive assessment of the transportation needs of persons with disabilities. TAC was then in a position to direct the consultants to develop a detailed study scope of work for the remaining study parts.





Part B—Consumer Survey and Other Data Collection: the centerpiece of the second study part entailed the development and distribution of a survey to over 9200 persons with disabilities in four study areas (across 8 counties in Pennsylvania). TAC selected the following study areas with input from the disability community: York/Cumberland, Washington/Greene, Schuylkill, and Elk/Jefferson/Clearfield. Given the schedule constraints, a Core Network of organizations who serve persons with disabilities assisted in distributing the survey and encouraged the targeted audience to participate. The three major statewide organizations that emerged as leaders of the Core Network were: the Statewide Independent Living Council, PA Transportation Alliance and the PA Coalition for Persons with Disabilities. By the May 31, 2000 survey deadline, 1,729 survey responses were received for a 19% response rate¹. Part B also involved collecting information on the experiences of other states and the development of transportation profiles for the four study areas.

Part C—Findings & Recommendations—using the data obtained during Parts A and B, especially the extensive survey results, TAC worked with a stakeholders group of persons with disabilities to review the data and assess it with respect to drawing conclusions, recommendations, and the implementation of a select number of recommendations

"Disability used to signal the end of active life. Now it is a common characteristic of a normal lifespan. Sooner or later it will occur in the lives of most people, surely in the life of every family." **Justin Dart.**

1.3 SUMMARY OF KEY MAJOR FINDINGS

The reader who is interested in a detailed understanding of the key findings should refer to Section A of the report. The following points summarize the overall findings:

1. There are substantial unmet transportation needs in rural areas for persons with disabilities. The majority of the survey respondents expressed such need and were largely 18 to 64 years of age, which means they cannot receive subsidized fares under, the existing shared ride program for senior citizens. The need for subsidized fares among this population is underscored by the fact that 86% of the survey respondents have incomes at or below \$16,000 a year.
2. The lack of transportation services limits or restricts a large percentage of persons with disabilities from participating in a wide range of activities including but not limited to: employment, education, social functions, medical appointments, and shopping. The lack of transportation services poses a

¹ The 19% response rate, in fact, is an understatement as hundreds of additional surveys were received after the deadline and will be provided along with the 1729 to PennDOT



significant barrier to their quality of life and also adversely impacts Pennsylvania employers, many of whom are seeking labor and larger customer bases. Fixed route service typically has limited coverage in rural areas. As a result, persons with disabilities must rely heavily on family and friends for transportation services.

3. There is great variability in the types of disabilities, including but not limited to physical disabilities (50%), mental retardation (26%), and mental health (23%). This variability poses major challenges and implications to effectively designing a program that can serve a wide variety of people while recognizing that each person has his/her individual travel preferences and needs. Training relative to the different capabilities and needs of persons with disabilities is an essential element of any local service delivery system. Educating passengers on how to best schedule and use the services is also important. Further, the reality that no program can meet all of a person's travel needs must also be reaffirmed so that the target audience's level of expectations remains reasonable.
4. Extending fixed route services and/or expanding the Shared Ride Program beyond senior citizens to persons with disabilities will not meet all of the expressed transportation needs. Additionally, other barriers exist including the need for personal aides, sidewalks, lifts and ramps. While additional public transportation services are important, a more systematic approach is necessary to address these transportation barriers. PennDOT cannot solve this issue by itself. The following organizations and resources must work with PennDOT on this issue: local communities, agencies serving persons with disabilities, social service agencies and the disability community at large.
5. The survey results show that persons with disabilities have a high demand for transportation to essential services such as the doctor, grocery store and clothing stores. However, the frequency with which these trips need to be taken is limited in number and the timing for some could be flexible. This has significant implications for first attempting to maximize the use of existing capacity—busses and vans to provide more trips in a flexible way, perhaps during current low demand periods. Conversely, many survey respondents also indicated a high demand for transportation during peak periods. This type of travel may be less flexible while coinciding with peak travel times when transit vehicles are already in service. As such, there may be the need for some new investment in capacity — equipment and operators—to serve non-discretionary travel times and trips. The key will be to optimize resources by applying existing resources where trip scheduling can be flexible and target any





new investment where capacity can't be met through existing equipment and operators.

6. The experiences of other states in serving persons with disabilities underscores a strong need for program coordination and possibly local program brokers to logically manage existing programs (e.g., transit and social services transportation) along with any new programs of funding resources.

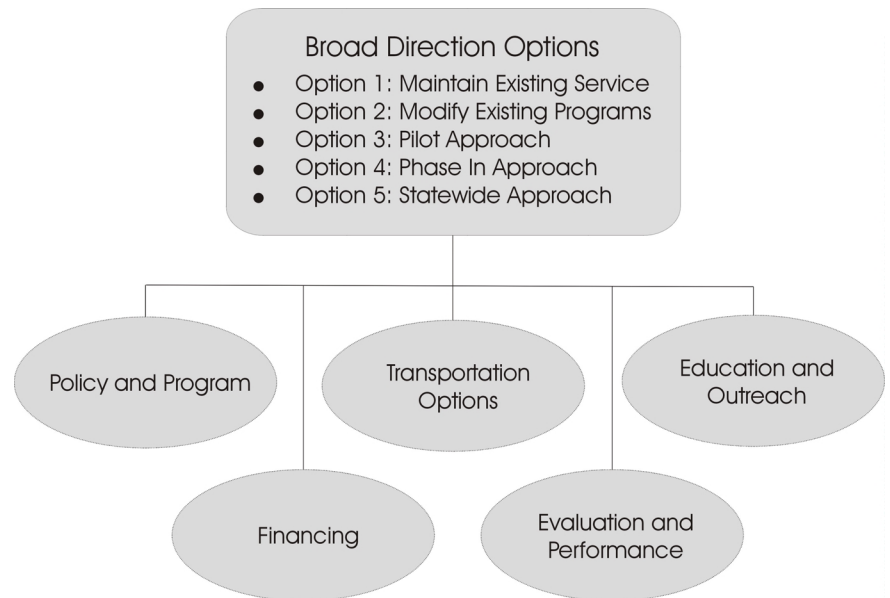
1.4 BROAD DIRECTION/OPTIONS OVERVIEW

TAC recommends that PennDOT provide a broad policy direction and technical support, while allowing many of specific program design, development and implementation issues to be addressed regionally. This section's content is intended to provide a starting point for the development of a Commonwealth implementation package that would specify state goals and provide detailed information and guidance for local implementation, while, again, not being overly prescriptive.

The following organization chart illustrates the organization or hierarchy of the broad

recommendations and the specific for implementation issues. At the highest level, five broad options for a Commonwealth direction are identified. The five "Broad Direction Options" are the major alternatives that the TAC considered in making a recommendation.

At the next level, considerations for implementation are presented in five categories that speak to the spectrum of issues regions will need to address in order to structure effective transportation programs for persons with disabilities. This effectively provides the Commonwealth with a "menu for implementation." Most of the implementation options presented in this menu are relevant regardless of the broad direction chosen by the Commonwealth.





1.5 RECOMMENDATION

Based on this study, the TAC recommends to the STC that PennDOT implement a Pilot approach. The purpose for the Pilot is to provide service in a limited geographic setting while collecting data on usage, implementation, costs, operations, customer evaluation and marketing to develop recommendations for future program planning and design.





There are five specific components for the recommended Pilot described below.

- 1. Program Planning & Design** – to effectively plan and design a service start up in a Pilot area(s) in order to effectively anticipate and address the wide range of implementation issues in a limited geographical setting.



The Pilot should be designed to provide a reasonable level of Commonwealth service to provide for core transit services and affordable fares. State funding may not be sufficient to meet the demand, so the Pilot should be designed in innovative ways (discussed in this report) to leverage other resources and participation.

In general, the Commonwealth should consider initiating pilot service through the existing transit/paratransit providers in those region(s) as a starting point. Recognizing that the need for this service may exceed the capacity of current providers, the pilot will be designed with flexibility to augment core service through additional service options that meet overall service standards such as:

-  Employers
-  Retail Shopping and Service Centers
-  Non-profit Organizations
-  Others

The pilot approach is the most prudent course of action given the many implementation issues and challenges associated with such a complex issue. The pilot approach provides an essential opportunity to improve service design and deployment during the development phase. It also provides an opportunity to validate the trip making demand as identified in this study and to determine the associated costs.











2. **Implementation Testing** – to be able to test service implementation with respect to operating, marketing, program coordination, and other issues associated with the transit agencies, customers and the administrating agency.
3. **Data Collection** – to collect various data that provides an in-depth understanding of program effectiveness, efficiency, and cost issues as well as the service usage.
4. **Evaluation** – to conduct a meaningful and broad-based evaluation of the Pilot(s) based on the data collected from actual usage of the service.
5. **Recommendations** – based on the 4 components above, develop recommendations and options to aid decision making with respect to future program expansion and implementation.



The pilot approach provides other benefits including the ability to begin service in a relatively short amount of time. The pilot option addresses the fundamental need for sound planning, design, implementation and evaluation that no other option affords.

1.5.1 IMPLEMENTATION START UP

TAC recommends an approximate 3-4 month pilot planning and design phase. The pilot provider in partnership with PennDOT would carry it out. The report presents the following items to effectively implement a Pilot approach:

-  Establish a Pilot Working Group
-  Develop a Pilot Plan
-  Provide Public Information and Two-way Communication
-  Establish Pilot Budget
-  Establish Service Hours
-  Establish Scheduling Protocol
-  Establish Registration Procedure and Database
-  Initiate Service and Monitor.