

Improving Transportation for Ohioans with Disabilities: Local Coordination

Gaining access to community activities is crucial to everyone's sense of belonging. Transportation is the key to access—access to a job, to family and friends, to adequate health care, to shopping, to fun. It is as true for people with significant disabilities as it is for anyone else, regardless of whether the disability is cognitive, physical, sensory, psychiatric, behavioral, neurological, or aging-related.

THE PROBLEM

The lack of reliable, accessible, affordable transportation has been and continues to be the most often cited barrier to independent living for people with disabilities and seniors. Transportation for Ohioans with disabilities has historically been fairly limited, especially in rural and small urban areas. For those persons who require wheelchair-accessible transportation (vehicles with lifts, ramps, low floors, and/or adapted seating areas), choices are even more limited, even in the urban environment.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

In most counties in Ohio, even those that do not have a public transit system, there are many different public and private agencies that provide transportation services—senior centers, taxicab companies, human services departments, hospitals, county boards of MR/DD, youth programs, and others. These services vary significantly in terms of eligibility requirements, scope, and duration. Coverage also varies greatly—almost wildly—by geographic location, not only from county to county but often within a single county.

In other words, getting from Point A to Point B often depends on who is traveling, what vehicles are available, when the person needs to go, where the origin and destination are located, why the trip is necessary, and how the ride will be paid for.

A COURSE OF ACTION

The single most effective means of improving transportation for all Ohio residents, including those with disabilities, is local coordination of transportation resources. Coordination can take many different forms—from small projects in which several agencies reduce their individual costs by sharing a fuel source and maintenance personnel to full-fledged interagency consolidation of vehicle use, dispatching, driver assignment, and consumer eligibility determination.

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council (ODDC) recommends that funds be increased for local coordination efforts. In particular:

- The budget for the Ohio Coordination Program of the Ohio Department of Transportation's Office of Public Transportation should be significantly increased.
- Other state-level entities should be encouraged to pool resources, especially for demonstration projects that promote coordination.

"Specialized" programs targeted at certain segments of the population are inherently limited. Those resources (and more) should be devoted to local coordination efforts, and other stakeholders (including employers) should be encouraged to participate as well.



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