Background
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities. Under Title II of the ADA, public transportation must be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, including wheelchair users. The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) regulations pertaining to transportation, 49 CFR Parts 27, 37 and 38, are written to ensure non-discrimination so that people with disabilities will not be excluded from, or denied participation in, using transportation systems or facilities.

The ADA applies to public and private providers of transportation regardless of whether the provider receives Federal financial assistance. For the Section 5310 (Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities) Program, providers must follow specific requirements to ensure that riders with disabilities have fair and equitable access to transportation services.

FTA Section 5310 Recipients
Private nonprofit entities that receive Section 5310 funding and provide services to their clients or members of a particular agency are subject to the ADA requirements that apply to private transportation entities. Section 5310 funding for projects that are open to the general public are to meet the ADA requirements applicable to public entities providing fixed-route or demand responsive services. ADA requirements described in this information brief apply to both private human service and public providers, including contracted service for Section 5310 grantees.
Personal Care Attendant
The ADA guarantees people with disabilities equal access to public transportation. This means that public transportation providers cannot refuse services because a person has a disability. Under U.S. DOT ADA regulations, 49 CFR Section 37 5(e), it further requires that a transit entity is prohibited from requiring an individual with disability be accompanied by a Personal Care Attendant (PCA). If a person has a PCA with them, the attendant is not expected to provide assistance related to the transportation service. PCAs are typically tasked to perform highly personal functions unrelated to transportation. Likewise, transit personnel must provide assistance with boarding and disembarking but are not required to perform tasks typically provided by the PCA.

Accessible Vehicles
Vehicles funded by Section 5310 must be accessible to all, including those who use mobility devices or have disabilities that require accessible equipment. For vehicles, examples of accessibility features include:
- Lifts and ramps
- Lighting at entry doors and steps
- Mobility aid securement areas and tie-down systems
- Public address systems and other communication equipment
- Seat belts and shoulder harnesses (where securement systems are required)
- Signage

A listing of ADA requirements for vehicles can be found at 49 CFR Part 38.

Equivalent Service
ADA regulations for DOT programs require that all vehicles acquired for use in fixed route or demand responsive service must be accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities, including wheelchair users. Non-accessible vehicles may only be acquired for use in demand responsive systems (or fixed route systems operated by private entities) if the entity can demonstrate that an equivalent service is provided for people with disabilities, including wheelchair users, using an accessible vehicle. Providers using non-accessible vehicles must provide equivalent service using an accessible vehicle to the same destinations, at the same cost, and at the same time. Services
must be provided in the most integrated setting appropriate that meets the needs of a rider with a disability and the general public.

Service provided to individuals with disabilities, including wheelchair users, must be equivalent to the service provided to other individuals in the following ways (Section 37.105):

- Response time
- Fares
- Geographic service area
- Hours and days of service
- Restrictions or priorities based on trip purpose
- Availability of information and ride reservation capability
- Any constraints on capacity or service availability

Passengers with Mobility Devices
The U.S. DOT requires that agencies provide transportation for people with disabilities, including the wheelchair and rider if the lift and vehicle can accommodate them. Transit providers must be aware of the weight and capacity of the lift/ramps for each vehicle. Lifts must have a minimum design load of 600 pounds, and lift platforms must accommodate a wheelchair measuring at least 30 inches by 48 inches. If a vehicle has a lift with a higher design load and a wider platform, the provider must accommodate the heavier and/or larger occupied mobility device.

Driver Assistance and Training
Transit providers must ensure that their personnel are trained to properly assist individuals with disabilities using the service in a respectful and courteous way. Drivers must operate vehicles safely and be trained to properly use wheelchair lifts, ramps, securement systems and related equipment. Drivers must allow adequate time for people with disabilities to board and exit from vehicles and be sensitive to individual needs and preferences, keeping in mind functional ability is unique to each individual rider.

All agency staff responsible for the provision of transit services must be trained on the organization’s accessibility policies and procedures, including ADA requirements, and is recommended to include people with various disabilities as part of any training. By providing inclusive training opportunities, staff can learn directly from people with disabilities and hear about their experiences with transportation.
Service Animals
Transportation providers must accommodate service animals, which are described as animals that are “individually trained to work or perform tasks.” Under § 37.3 of the U.S. DOT regulations, a service animal is any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, including, but not limited to, guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to intruders or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair, or fetching dropped items. There are no national certification processes for identifying service animals.

Transportation entities cannot require:

- A certificate
- An identification card
- A note from a physician
- The animal to wear a vest or other identifying gear

Transit agencies cannot have a policy requiring riders to provide documentation for their service animal before boarding a bus or train or entering a facility, but personnel may ask riders two questions: (1) is the animal a service animal required because of a disability? and (2) what work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

Agencies may have a policy that service animals do not occupy a seat. In general, service animals are trained to stay at a rider’s feet on the floor or under a seat. Service animals can ride on lifts but must be under control of the rider to protect the animal and harness away from moving parts of the lift. Furthermore, there is no limit to the number of service animals that a rider could bring onto a vehicle as each animal may provide separate types of assistance.

Accessible Communication
Transportation providers must make all communication available in accessible formats and technology such as Braille, large print, flash drive, email, Telecommunication Relay Service such as 711, etc. These formats are required to support riders and potential customers with various disabilities in getting usable information about transportation services. It is best to ask what type of accessible format that a person with a disability prefers to receive their information.

For web accessibility, it is critical to ensure that when developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic and information technology, web developers consider the needs of all end users,
including people with disabilities. This means that all presented information, along with tables and charts, is usable by screen readers including text that can be accessed through key commands. Images or drawings must also be tagged with alternative text so that a description of the image is provided for a person using a screen reader.

**Reasonable Modification to Policy**

"Reasonable Modification to Policy" is a U.S. DOT requirement that places an obligation on providers to modify their policies and practices to accommodate persons with disabilities unless those modifications would result in an undue burden or a fundamental alteration of the program.

Reasonable modification to policy examples can be found in U.S. DOT ADA Regulations at Appendix E to Part 37—Reasonable Modification Requests. The examples provided are not exhaustive, and providers should look at each individual request and make determinations. Flexibility in perspective is helpful. U.S. DOT identifies additional examples of reasonable modification, such as:

- Transportation entities allowing food or drink on a vehicle for a customer who is diabetic.
- Transit operators may be allowed to handle fare for a customer who has a disability that makes fare payment difficult or impossible.
- A driver will stop a bus away from the bus stop so a person in a wheelchair can avoid obstructions at a boarding location due to construction or snow and ice.
- Demand response service providers may need to adjust their policy of curb-to-curb service to door-to-door service for the customer that needs assistance to the door to complete their trip.

If a reasonable modification request is denied, transit providers should consider other ways to ensure the individual with a disability receives transportation services.

**Complaint Process**

For transportation providers, a solid complaint process and policy will ensure that customer complaints and concerns are resolved quickly and fairly. ADA regulations at 49 CFR Part 37.17 and 27.13 require agencies to have specific procedures in place to address complaints alleging ADA violations, also requiring a designated employee to be responsible for managing the overall process. The complaint process is the responsibility of the agency, and applies to all service provided by the agency including contracted service.
Complaints should be filed through a formal collection process and designated to a single point of contact; enabling a complaint and resolution to be easily tracked; ensuring that the agency provides appropriate due process for any actual ADA complaints received. Finally, transit agencies must clearly advertise the complaint process on websites, at in-person events, with print materials and in accessible formats. It is required that agencies maintain original copies of all ADA complaints for one year and keep a summary record of complaints for five years.

Suspension Policy
Any rider suspension policy should be time-limited, and a rider must have an opportunity to appeal a suspension. A rider must have a chance to resume service unless providing service is clearly deemed to be too dangerous to others. Service cannot be denied to individuals with disabilities because their disabilities result in appearance of or involuntary behavior that may offend or annoy others. If a rider acts to harm another person, the transit provider should consider contacting law enforcement, as local statutes may have legal bearing. Transportation entities must backup their decision to suspend service to a rider with documentation of current and prior events and any action taken, along with follow-up discussion and/or training with drivers.

As outlined in FTA’s 49 CFR Section 37.3, a “direct threat” is defined as “a significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a modification of policies, practices or procedures, or by the provision of auxiliary aids or services.” This definition is consistent with the Department of Justice’s regulations and focuses solely on whether an individual poses a significant threat to others and does not include threats of self-harm. Transit entities must demonstrate and document efforts that were made to modify practices and procedures so that the person could continue to ride – direct threat should be considered in circumstances where a rider is suspended or when service is refused.

Summary
All Section 5310 providers that operate human services transportation programs are required to provide accessible services for everyone meeting the ADA requirements without discrimination. Agencies that solely provide service to the general public must meet ADA requirements applicable to providing fixed-route or demand responsive services.

The U.S. DOT reasonable modification rule helps clarify and guide providers to ensure that people with disabilities have opportunities to use accessible transportation and be connected to their communities. Likewise, understanding service animal requirements and passenger assistance requirements under the ADA benefits both customers and providers to allow trips without undue difficulty.

A crucial element for providing quality accessible transportation is to have a solid, transit operator training program for ADA requirements and passenger assistance. The training is strongest when
guided by clearly written agency policies that promote practices which help customers make trips from their origin to destination.

References
Americans with Disabilities Act: Guidance, FTA Circular 4710.1

Topic Guides on ADA Transportation
https://dredf.org/ADAtg/index.shtml

ADA Toolkit
https://www.nationalrtap.org/Toolkits/ADA-Toolkit/Welcome

DOT Final Rule, reasonable modifications to policies, practices and procedures for public transportation providers.


Facts About Service Animals and Transportation Bookmark. NADTC.

ADA Trending Questions Requiring Clarification: Complaint Process. NADTC.
Area Agencies on Aging and Section 5310 Funding

Background
Older Americans are one of the fastest-growing demographics in the country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2030, 1 in every 5 Americans will be 65 and older. As this population grows, the demand for transportation is steadily increasing. To ensure older adults and people with disabilities are able to stay connected to their community and essential services, Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are at the forefront of community efforts to expand transportation options for older adults and people with disabilities.

What is an Area Agency on Aging?
Area Agencies on Aging are public or private non-profit agencies designated by the state to address the needs and concerns of all older persons at the regional and local levels. There are currently 622 AAAs serving older adults around the country. AAAs were established in 1973 under the federal Older Americans Act (OAA) and are charged with planning, developing, coordinating and delivering a wide range of long-term services and supports, including nutrition, health and wellness, caregiver supports, elder rights, and transportation.

AAAs and Transportation Services
Transportation is critical in connecting older adults and people with disabilities to essential services, such as medical appointments, grocery stores, and pharmacies. Viewing transportation as a key support for independent living, AAAs play an important role in the development, funding, oversight and support of transportation services in the communities they serve. AAAs address social isolation by connecting older adults to social activities and to the broader community; transportation services are essential to making such connections.

According to the 2020 AAA National Survey Report, 89% of AAAs provide transportation services, most often through contracts (72.8%) with local transportation providers. AAA transportation services are varied:

- 83% provide assisted transportation, a service that may include “door-to-door” or “door-through-door” for passengers who need someone to help them get in and out of cars or stay with them throughout the trip;
- 73% offer non-medical transportation;
• 59% provide wheelchair-accessible transportation;
• 46% provide non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT).

Area Agencies on Aging are required by the Older American Act to offer Information and Referral/Assistance on a wide range of issues that may impact older adults; many AAAs serve as the local or regional Aging and Disability Resource Center. This longstanding experience with organizing and providing information means that AAAs are typically seen as a trusted resource in the communities they serve. Thus, it is not surprising that 38% of AAAs provide transportation information and referral assistance, mobility management, one-call/one-click services and/or transportation options counseling.

- Mobility management is an approach to designing and delivering transportation services that starts and ends with the customer. Mobility management focuses on meeting individual customer needs through a wide range of transportation options and service providers.
- One-call/one-click services allow customers to make one phone call or search one website to find information about transportation services in the community.
- Transportation Options Counseling assists individuals in need of transportation services to make an informed choice about the services that best meet their needs.

**Section 5310 Funding and AAAs**

Thirty-seven percent (37%) report that they received transportation funding from federal, state or local sources. According to the NADTC National Survey of Transportation Providers, Area Agencies on Aging use multiple sources of funding to operate their transportation services. AAAs reported using eleven different funding sources to support transportation, including the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program. At 30%, Section 5310 funding was cited as the third most frequent funding source used AAAs, compared to 68% that use Older Americans Act funding, and 38% that use state funding to support their transportation programs.

FTA’s Section 5310 program provides formula funding to states to assist private nonprofit groups in enhancing mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities beyond traditional public transportation services and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit. The funds are apportioned directly to states based on their population of older adults and people with disabilities. States then distribute funds to agencies across the state. Section 5310 funds may be used to purchase vehicles, support existing services, increase service hours, create mobility management or travel training programs, and many other projects. Coordination among public transportation and human services providers is a requirement for Section 5310 grantees.

The federal share for Section 5310 funding is 80% for capital projects and 50% for operating assistance. Local match can come from state and local funds or other Federal non-DOT funds. This
can allow local communities to implement programs with 100 percent federal funding. The Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) Federal Fund Braiding Guide identifies select Federal non-DOT funds for local match.

Examples of Local AAA Programs Using Section 5310

**Bay Aging & Bay Transit, Virginia**

Bay Aging is an Area Agency on Aging serving the rural Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck (MP/NN) in Virginia. The MP/NN region covers over 2,600 square miles and encompasses ten rural counties—Essex, Gloucester, King & Queen, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland—and two planning districts.

Bay Transit, a division of Bay Aging, provides rural public transportation service to Middle Peninsula, Northern Neck, Charles City and New Kent Counties. It is the only public transportation service in the region, giving riders access to employment, medical appointments, nutrition, social activities and more. The majority of rides are demand-responsive, curb-to-curb or dial-a-ride. In 2020, Bay Transit provided 3,222 people in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula over 140,000 rides.

In 2012, Bay Transit started the New Freedom program using Section 5310 funds to provide transportation services to older adults and people with disabilities. The program gives riders access to work, shopping, social activities, health services and recreational events. Rides are also provided outside of Bay Transit’s service area and/or service hours. In FY 2020 under New Freedom, Bay Transit provided close to 3,800 rides. With Section 5310 funds, Bay Transit works with individuals to coordinate transportation options that best fit their needs through their New Freedom Mobility Management program.

**Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging, Santa Rosa, California**

Sonoma County is one of nine counties that make up the San Francisco Bay area and is located about 60 miles north of San Francisco. Under their Sonoma Access Transportation Program, Sonoma County AAA contracts with six non-profit agencies (e.g., faith-based organizations, senior centers) that provide volunteer transportation and mobility management throughout the county and runs a Rural Feeder Shuttle (West County) to people aged 60 and older who have no other viable transportation options. The rides provided are free-of-charge to medical and social appointments.
To support their volunteer transportation programs, Sonoma County AAA was awarded transportation grants from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), receiving New Freedom funds, for fiscal years 2014 to 2017, and Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program Section 5310 funds for fiscal years 2016 through 2018. Most recently, Sonoma received Section 5310 funds for fiscal years 2019 to 2020. In FY2020, over 9,200 one-way rides and 730 transportation vouchers were provided.

**Summary**

Access to adequate transportation services is critical to the health and well-being of older adults and people with disabilities. However, transportation can be a significant barrier for older adults and people with disabilities to connect to community services. Area Agencies on Aging recognize this challenge and are at the forefront of filling transportation gaps in their communities. With Section 5310 funding, AAAs are provided the opportunity to implement a variety of approaches to meet the unique mobility needs of this population because there is no one-size-fits-all solution to addressing mobility needs of older adults and people with disabilities. As the older population continues to grow, AAA’s experience in developing and managing transportation programs and providing information and referral/assistance is key to expanding transportation options that enable older adults to access essential services and live independently in their communities.

**References**


FTA Section 5310: [https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/enhanced-mobility-seniors-individuals-disabilities-section-5310](https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/enhanced-mobility-seniors-individuals-disabilities-section-5310)


Mobility Management and FTA Section 5310

Background

In 2007, an exciting concept was developed as a way to connect with transit riders on a more personal level. Mobility Management may have been part of many staff responsibilities; however, this role was never defined on its own until the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) developed and promoted the United We Ride initiative, which was an organized effort as part of the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM). This initiative is a Federal interagency council that works to coordinate funding and provide expertise on human service transportation, focused on people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals of low income. The CCAM works at the Federal level to improve Federal coordination of transportation resources and to address barriers faced by States and local communities when coordinating transportation. Transit agencies are encouraged to coordinate their services throughout the community and to understand how the various services offered can work together using CCAM principles.

Mobility Management or Coordination can be described as a person-centered approach to transportation, acting as a case manager for transit services within the community. These positions have the ability to step away from the office and connect with community providers to promote transportation services. Mobility Managers can develop a resource listing of transportation options, not just public transit, but one that includes volunteer driver services, taxi cabs, human service providers or shared ride options within the community. Other tasks for the Mobility Manager can include marketing, promotion, outreach, education, and travel training.

Mobility Management is an eligible expense under FTA Section 5310, and can support staff wages, marketing efforts, bus fares or whatever the program might need to assist in training riders. The primary focus of Mobility Management is to develop a program as a way to enhance the ability of the transit agency to network and connect with community providers, funders and riders to promote a better understanding of the transportation options available.

Photo: MetroWest Regional Transit, Framingham, MA
Mounting Horizons, Inc., Galveston County, Texas

Mounting Horizons was established in 2003 as an agency to assist persons with disabilities in Galveston, Houston and Texas City. In 2009, they were awarded a grant to develop a Center for Independent Living (CIL), which would allow them to further assist and educate young adults and persons with disabilities. Becoming a certified CIL has allowed Mounting Horizons to build community awareness and educate their clients to be independent and advocate for themselves. While developing their new programs, they quickly learned that transportation was a barrier to accessing jobs and essential medical appointments for their clients. This allowed them to develop a Travel Training program in partnership with Island Transit, Connect Transit and Metro Lift.

Travel Training clients are referred to Mounting Horizons by partner agencies, and the Mobility Manager can meet with riders, providing valuable information about the services available and planning a trip that is tailored for a specific service that fits the needs of the rider.

Mounting Horizons prides itself on making connections with the community and improving the lives of younger adults and persons with disabilities. The Transportation Collaboration Program has partnered in many community initiatives, all geared toward improving the lives of youth transitioning into adulthood, building life skills, advocating for themselves and overcoming barriers to life in the real world. Young Adult Advocates Leadership (YAAL) Program works with elected officials and community leaders to encourage advocacy and policy change. The YAAL program has trained over 250 young adults since 2017.

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA Public Transit), Urbandale, Iowa

HIRTA Public Transit has been on the leading edge of mobility management since 2012, first hiring a mobility manager to connect with local community providers in the seven-county region, surrounding the Des Moines metropolitan area. This provides a unique program delivery offering very rural trips within the seven counties, however, needing to maintain access to major medical centers for specialty appointments in the urbanized area. The mobility manager has the ability to step away from the office, connect with local communities and really assess the need of the riders. HIRTA has evolved their mobility program into an Outreach Coordinator and has a true focus on marketing and developing methods of program delivery.
A recent project has launched, promoting the idea of “Do You Have Transportation?” as a way for local business, medical facilities or human service providers to think about transportation first, rather than an afterthought. This campaign emphasizes the importance of connecting people to transportation for medical appointments and partnering with local medical providers to routinely ask clients “Do You Have Transportation?” before scheduling their next medical appointment, ultimately reducing missed appointments and no-show rates.

Mountain Ride Transportation Resource Center, Silverthorne, Colorado
Housed at the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, Mountain Ride provides Mobility Management services through a resource center serving eight rural counties: including demand response, fixed route, volunteer driver, intercity bus services and commuter rail information into the Denver metropolitan area. Mountain Ride was developed as a need for the community to learn about the best transportation solutions for the aging population and people with disabilities. Recently, their mobility manager has developed resources for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT), connecting riders with valuable information to arrange their trips, as a benefit covered under Medicaid.

Summary
Whether it is during a pandemic or operating under more traditional circumstances, Mobility Management can be a way to network with the community or enhance the knowledge and skills of the aging community, persons with disabilities, and the public -- allowing riders to travel safely and independently throughout their service area. Public transportation can be challenging for those who have not ridden a bus in their lifetime, often relying on friends or family for a ride to their vital medical appointments, essential trips, grocery shopping or social outing. Travel Training is a mobility management tool used to enhance a rider’s confidence in riding on their own and broadening their ability to independently access the services they need.
References
United We Ride
https://www.transit.dot.gov/ccam/resources/united-we-ride-brochure

Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM)
https://www.transit.dot.gov/coordinating-council-access-and-mobility

Mounting Horizons, Inc.
https://mountinghorizons.org/

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency
https://www.ridehirta.com

Mountain Ride Transportation Resource Center
https://mtnride.org/ride-resources-transportation-solutions

Resources
National Aging and Disability Transportation Center
https://www.nadtc.org/mobility-management/

National Center on Mobility Management (NCMM)
https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/
Making 5310 Funding Work for Transportation DEI Efforts

Background
Transportation plays a critical role in a person’s ability to access the services, goods and support they need to live and thrive in their communities. In order for communities to thrive, they require adequate and appropriate resources that support accessible transportation options and infrastructure. In the case of marginalized and underserved communities, often overlooked when allocating essential services like transportation, financial investments are all the more important to ensure these communities have the services they need and a voice at the decision-making table when it comes to transportation planning.

The goal of providing transportation that generally meets the needs of older adults and people with disabilities must increasingly expand to programs considering the specific challenges and needs of diverse populations to better serve their communities with greater equity. Traditionally, funding for transportation has not been specifically set aside for equity projects, but many organizations, including federal agencies, are recognizing the importance of creating equitable practices and programs and respecting the unique needs and perspectives of diverse groups.

For example, The U.S. Department of Transportation’s RAISE (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) program rewards regional and local governments who prioritize equity and sustainability in their transportation projects. Other federal funding programs like Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program support capital and operating expenses for traditional and non-traditional public transportation services that provide mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities.

About 5310 Funding
The Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program (49 U.S.C. 5310) provides formula funding for states to provide enhanced services beyond traditional public transportation and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit. This funding is used to remove barriers to transportation service and expand mobility options in urban (over 200,000), small urban (50,000-200,000), and rural (under 50,000).

Traditional uses for this funding include (but are not limited to) bus and van procurement, transit-related information technology systems including scheduling/routing/one-call systems, and mobility management programs. Less traditional
uses include (but are not limited to) travel training, volunteer driver programs and purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, rides sharing and/or vanpooling programs.

Those who are eligible for 5310 funding include private nonprofit organizations, states or local government authorities, or operators of public transportation.

The availability of 5310 funding has enabled agencies across the country to develop unique, local solutions to increase mobility for older adults and people with disabilities. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is using 5310 funding to promote innovative activities that are enhancing diverse, inclusive and equitable practices within their organization and externally with the communities they serve. This information brief spotlights the work of WSDOT and how they are making funding work for their DEI efforts.

Moving the Transportation Equity Needle using FTA Section 5310

NADTC conducted an interview with Elizabeth Safsten, Community Liaison with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Public Transportation Division. In the interview, Ms. Safsten discusses WSDOT’s transportation equity activities, as detailed below. WSDOT is based in Olympia, WA and serves the entire state of Washington. The Public Transportation Division has been in operation for over 40 years.

Q: What is your agency’s mission?
WSDOT’s agency mission statement is, “We provide safe, reliable and cost-effective transportation options to improve communities and economic vitality for people and businesses.” Our mission statement and strategic plan can be reviewed in detail on this webpage.

The Public Transportation Division’s mission statement is, “Advance public transportation and transportation demand management with partners for a safer, more equitable Washington.”

Q: What funding source(s) do you receive for your transportation program?
The Public Transportation Division administers around $250 million biennially in state and federal grant funding.

We administer grants from the following fund sources as a part of our Consolidated Grant Program:

- FTA Section 5310
- FTA Section 5311
- FTA Section 5339
• State Paratransit/Special Needs Grant Program
• State Rural Mobility Grant Program

We also administer other grants from the following fund sources:

• FTA Section 5304
• State Regional Mobility Grant Program
• State Green Transportation Capital Grant Program
• State Vanpool Investment Grant Program
• Commute Trip Reduction Grant Program
• First Mile/Last Mile Connections Grant Program

**Q: What geographic region(s) do you serve?**
The Public Transportation Division provides grant funding to transit agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and tribes in all of Washington state’s 39 counties.

**Q: What’s the demographic makeup of your community/service area?**
Please see the following maps that the Public Transportation Division used during our Title VI analysis of 2021-2023 Consolidated Grant Program subrecipient awards. These maps show the home offices of grant-funded services along with demographic indicators such as race, limited English proficiency, income, age and disability status. Please note these maps do not capture terrain (i.e., where services are not provided due to major mountain ranges or national parks).

**Q: Can you provide a summary of DEI specific work/efforts/programming?**
The Public Transportation Division is currently involved in the following DEI efforts:

**Title VI analysis:**
The Public Transportation Division conducts a biennial Title VI analysis of FTA funds administered through the division’s Consolidated Grant Program. The purpose of this analysis is to determine if there are any disparate or disproportionate effects to transportation for disadvantaged communities based on the division’s award of federal and state funds. The division uses the maps under the question *What’s the demographic makeup of your community/service area?* above as a part of its Title VI analysis.

**Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) analysis:**
Starting in 2021, the Public Transportation Division is piloting a GARE analysis of its 2021-2023 Consolidated Grant Program application process and subrecipients. The analysis consists of a series of prompts to around the purpose and desired outcomes of the division’s grant programs. We will use the results of the prompts to analyze if our grant processes are having the effects that
we intend on the disadvantaged communities. We also hope to find out if any of our grant policies intentionally or unintentionally have disproportionate negative effects on disadvantaged communities. We’ll use the GARE analysis to reduce our blind spots as a division.

**Public Transportation Division Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee:**
The Public Transportation Division recently transitioned its Inclusion Steering Committee to a Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee. In the last year, the committee has:

- Implemented new, more inclusive hiring practices.
- Hosted training opportunities for the division.
- Started establishing a norm of incorporating discussions of diversity, equity and inclusion into our work and all-staff meetings.
- Drafted an inclusive writing guide.
- Examined our current data and geographic-information-system-mapping tools to ensure they are the best option for the division and our grant subrecipients to access demographic data.

Some of the training the Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee has sponsored includes diversity/equity training sessions from Dr. Caprice Hollins, “Me and White Supremacy” book circles, lunch-and-learns, and quarterly newsletters with DEI-focused articles and training opportunities. The committee is currently organizing a DEI-focused communication training from a local university that will pair with the launch of our division’s new inclusive writing guide.

**Equity session at the 2021 Washington State Public Transportation Conference:**
The Public Transportation Division’s grants team is hosting a session on equity at the 2021 Washington State Public Transportation Conference in mid-October. The session is a way for the division to gain perspective from our external partners about how to make our programs and processes more equitable. This is a listening session aimed at finding ways to improve our programs and processes to be more inclusive and avoid institutional forms of discrimination.

**WSDOT DEI Efforts and Training:**
WSDOT issued an agency executive order in 2021 on “Anti-Racism Policy and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Planning.” It commits to updating the agency’s strategic plan to “ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism are appropriately incorporated” and “propose additional policies, procedures, and training” for staff.

In 2021, WSDOT added a new 30-minute, mandatory, self-paced training for staff called “Bridging the Diversity Gap.” The training highlights the value of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The training also addresses barriers to diversity and inclusion, such as unconscious bias.

**Q: Are you working with any community partners? If yes, who?**
The Public Transportation Division works with partners including government agencies, tribes, nonprofits, regional planning organizations, and statewide and national organizations.
These organizations include:

- Washington State Transit Association
- Washington State Transit Insurance Pool
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations
  - In particular: Puget Sound Regional Council
- The Washington State Tribal Transportation Planning Organization
  - In particular: Muckleshoot Tribe
- Organizations on transportation demand management boards
- American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and Western Association of State Highway Transportation Officials
- Washington State agencies (various)
- Community Transportation Association of the Northwest
- Commute Seattle
- Riders’ associations
- Human services agency stakeholders (various)

The Public Transportation Division also contracts with regional transportation planning organizations to complete coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans for projects to be eligible for the division’s grants. This planning process includes extensive outreach to riders and social service agencies.

**Q: Are 5310 dollars being allocated specifically to DEI efforts? If yes, how?**

The Public Transportation Division uses Section 5310 in combination with Section 5311 administration funds to complete coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans. Section 5310 funds also pay for the work of our Race, Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee and, potentially, for trainings. Additionally, we use the funds for our Title VI and GARE analysis.

On another level, the Section 5310 Program is, by definition, allocated to enhanced mobility of seniors and individuals with disabilities. As such, 100 percent of the division’s Section 5310 funds are allocated to DEI efforts through our Consolidated Grant Program process. For the grant program, we score applicants’ projects and assign Section 5310 funds as appropriate to projects that meet federal requirements/eligibility criteria for funds. We also use our Title VI analysis and the information from local coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning efforts to ensure inclusion of traditionally disadvantaged communities in our planning efforts. Factors such as race, income, limited English proficiency and others are considered when scoping projects to improve services and provide better access to the transportation system. As an example of DEI focus, one awarded project will sustain a bilingual mobility coordinator/travel trainer position that informs the community how to use transportation services in three Washington state counties.
**Q: What’s been the greatest impact of your DEI focus?**

As a result of the Public Transportation Division’s 2021-2023 biennium Title VI analysis, division management decided to fund an additional project that was originally low on the priority list. The management team made this decision after an analysis of the demographic data around the unfunded project area revealed that there were limited transportation options compared to the high amount of need. The focus on DEI and transportation-dependent populations in the context of grant awards allowed our division to focus on the outcomes of the Consolidated Grant Program.

In terms of refocusing our public transit work to incorporate DEI, we are in the process of making grant program modifications. We conducted research for internal land acknowledgement practices, which resulted in new information about tribal federal recognition dates. This in turn allowed us to revise grant scopes to better serve a tribal grant subrecipient.

Establishing our division’s Racial Equity and Inclusion Steering Committee has led to strong staff engagement and leadership on DEI issues. Voluntary DEI events (i.e., lunch-and-lears, book circles) are well attended. Staff capacity to apply a racial equity and inclusion lens to our work has improved.

**Q: In doing this work, what have been the biggest lessons learned?**

- **Our work in the Public Transportation Division has great potential to address historical discrimination in transportation issues.** We also need to keep analyzing our programs and processes to ensure that we haven’t institutionalized practices that lead to poor outcomes for disadvantaged populations.
- **Approach DEI work with an attitude of starting where we are and setting realistic goals.** It’s important to understand our organization’s staff and their ability and willingness to engage with this work and go from there.
- **Prioritize ensuring that ADA, Title VI and other federal requirements, which are intended to produce equitable outcomes, are more than administrative “boxes to be checked.”** Ensuring our organization’s subrecipient technical assistance, monitoring and compliance work reflects the true intentions of these civil rights protections. This alone can result in better outcomes and realizing DEI goals.
- **Invest in staff training.**

To learn more about WSDOT’s mission statement and strategic plan visit this [webpage](https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/about/mission).

This information brief was developed as a resource on Section 5310 funding and transportation efforts to address diversity, equity and inclusion. To learn more about NADTC’s DEI Initiative, please visit our website: [https://www.nadtc.org/diversity-equity-inclusion-initiative/](https://www.nadtc.org/diversity-equity-inclusion-initiative/)
References

Section 5310 and Cycling Without Age Program

Background
Lutheran Social Services (LSS) Make the Ride Happen program helps older adults and people with disabilities in the communities of Appleton, Neenah, Menasha, Hortonville, Little Chute, and Kaukauna, in East Central WI find the best transportation options for their needs. Trained staff help identify public bus, paratransit, rural and meal site transportation, or volunteer driver programs to fit the needs of the customer.

LSS receives a combination of state specialized transportation program funding and Federal Section 5310 funding from both the designated recipient Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for services in the MPO area and through the state Department of Transportation for their service area outside the MPO. They also have local funding sources to provide the required match for the state and Federal funding. LSS has received Section 5310 allocations for about 11 years to fund their mobility management services to manage and deliver coordination transportation services in their service area, including information and referral and now the Cycling Without Age Program.

Cycling Without Age Programs in the U.S.
Cycling Without Age (CWA) is a worldwide movement that started in Copenhagen in 2012 to bring joy and vitality to older adults and those with differing abilities through trishaw rides in the community. The trishaws used for CWA are three-wheeled bicycles with pedals and electric assist motors. There is a seat and footrest in front of the pilot where passengers sit to enjoy the ride. The pilot is the person pedaling and operating the trishaw. There are over 2,500 CWA chapter locations worldwide with hundreds across the U.S. which are identified on the interactive map found on the CWA website. There is at least one chapter in most states either currently active or in the planning stages. Many CWA programs operate out of long-term care facilities and nursing homes using facility staff and volunteers. Other CWA programs are entirely volunteer organized and operated and provide rides to older adults and people with disabilities living in the community.
New Partnerships, New Program

In 2019, Make the Ride Happen was approached by Fox Cities Greenways about the possibility of beginning a Cycling Without Age program. Fox Cities Greenways is a nonprofit trail advocacy group that seeks to provide safe travel routes for bikes and pedestrians and expand recreational opportunities in the Fox Cities.

LSS explored the CWA program and determined it fit the vision, mission, and values of LSS and would positively impact individuals in their service area. They convened partners from the Wisconsin Bike Federation, Volunteer Fox Cities, and East Central WI Regional Planning Commission to start this community-based program in August 2020. The CWA program is advertised on the LSS and Fox Cities Greenways websites, through word of mouth and flyers and to existing users of the LSS Make the Ride Happen program.

The program currently operates two trishaws with 9 volunteers who provide rides monthly, with the goal of offering rides every week for a total of 125 rides per trishaw for the 2021 season. There is no cost to participants to get a ride; although participants are offered a chance to give a donation. Rides are requested by calling the LSS office, and then the trishaw is brought to the rider’s location on a trailer. Rides can be taken anywhere including parks and trails.

Funding

The trishaws and trailer to transport them were purchased by Fox Cities Greenway. The major investment to start CWA is the trishaw. Depending on the model of trishaw, they can range from $7,500 to $11,000 each, plus delivery charge which can be $2,000 or more. LSS is the insurance holder and scheduler of the rides. Volunteer Fox Cities, which houses the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), recruits, screens, and trains volunteer pilots who pedal the bikes. Volunteers go through classroom training on passenger sensitivity, rules of the road, trishaw safety and maintenance, plus skills practice on the road. Initial training is 3.5 hours with an annual refresher. LSS uses Section 5310 funding from the state DOT to pay for operational costs such as staff time, fuel for the van that transports the trishaws and drug testing of volunteers who drive the van. State funding for specialized transportation and other local grants from the United Way are used to provide the match for the Section 5310 funding.

While the program started slowly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they are looking forward to future biking seasons to connect even more older adults and people with disabilities to events and
locations throughout the community via trishaw.

Summary
Cycling without Age is a grassroots change-making movement that brings the joy of cycling and personal interactions to riders and pilots. Cycling Without Age has an affiliate application process and provides support to begin the planning and promotion of a new chapter. The guiding principles of CWA include: Generosity, Slowness, Storytelling, Relationships, Without Age. Trishaw rides through CWA expands the mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities. CWA can be part of a comprehensive mobility program, enabling older adults and people with disabilities to engage in the community in a unique way.

Resources
Cycling Without Age - https://cyclingwithoutage.org/
Cycling Without Age USA - https://cyclingwithoutage.com/
East Central Regional Planning Committion - https://www.ecwrpc.org/
Fox Cities Greenways - https://www.foxcitiesgreenways.org/?fbclid=IwAR0EMvkijdCwM3N2zd1AxdfusrJTemX7GrNOAJAMF70buLhxgP_Qm_Vuv
Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Make the Ride Happen - https://www.lsswis.org/service/disabilities/make-the-ride-happen/?parent_id=266
Volunteer Fox Cities - https://www.volunteerfoxcities.org/
Wisconsin Bike Fed – Cycling Without Age - https://wisconsinbikefed.org/what-we-do/programs/cycling-without-age/
Travel Training Instruction using FTA Section 5310

Introduction
Across the country, transportation agencies are approaching services in unique ways, one of these methods of delivery is Travel Training. This service is often developed by a Mobility Manager or operational staff and used as an educational tool to assist passengers individually or group. This type of service is an eligible expense under FTA Section 5310, and can support staff time, marketing efforts, bus fare or whatever the program might need to assist in training riders. The primary focus of Travel Training is to implement a training program or curriculum to assist riders, including older adults and persons with disabilities, with the end goal being that your riders can travel independently within your community.

In a Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP, Report 168), Travel Training for Older Adults, it was indicated that the main reason for not riding the bus was an unfamiliarity with public transportation or available options, and a general lack of confidence in using its services. Navigating transportation can be intimidating to new customers, especially for the aging and disability community. Riders may have trouble understanding and navigating system route maps and schedules and may be overwhelmed by transit options – this is where adopting a formal Travel Training program can be beneficial for your riders.

There are several opportunities to assist transit staff in the implementation of a Travel Training program, one of the primary options is the Certified Travel Training Instructor program managed by Easterseals Project Action Consulting. This is a 60-credit hour course, to be completed within 2 years, and certified through the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida. Skills developed during this coursework include knowledge of human development and behavior, an understanding of transportation systems and services, and the ability to teach the concepts of interaction with both the natural and built environment along paths of travel. As a way to continue learning and gain additional resources, Travel Trainers can become members of the Association of Travel Instruction (ATI), as a way to connect with their peers across the country and further develop their skills.

GoDakota, Dakota County, Minnesota
Dakota County has a population of about 425,000 and situated within the Twin Cities Metropolitan area of Minnesota and maintains a mixture of urban, suburban and rural. Between 1990 and 2000, the county area grew by nearly 30 percent and continues to expand and grow outward from the urban core of Minneapolis and St. Paul into suburban cities and townships. In 2014, a Human Service Transportation Study determined there were plenty of options for transportation, however, each of those options came with different eligibility criteria, service areas or hours of operation.
GoDakota was developed as a group of stakeholders dedicated to reducing transportation barriers to individuals with disabilities and older adults in Dakota County utilizing mobility management strategies. The ultimate goal of GoDakota is that transportation would no longer be a barrier to people with disabilities and older adults and to educate the public about available transportation services.

In 2015, GoDakota hired dedicated staff to manage the Travel Training program to promote independence by helping riders understand the available transportation options and teach them how to navigate where they need to go. Travel Training works one-on-one or in a group setting, allowing GoDakota to assess a riders’ ability to navigate the transit system, then design a curriculum for a rider to understand exactly how to travel from one location to another. Travel Training allows riders to independently navigate to work, school, medical or social outings, eliminating the need for a reliance on friends or family.

In 2018, within its first year of travel training, 45 individuals and 957 groups successfully completed travel training through GoDakota. During the pandemic in 2020, however, training continued but dropped to about 6 individuals, proving this type of service is greatly needed, even though at reduced levels.

A partnership with Lyft was recently developed for an additional on-demand option, allowing riders to travel quickly around the metro. This service is currently operating for about $15 per trip and has offered over 750 rides to-date. GoDakota has incorporated Lyft as part of their travel training curriculum, adding in the need for cell phone navigation for using the Lyft application.

As a way to provide access to all available services within Dakota County and the Twin Cities Metro Area, each option has been incorporated into the online Transportation Finder using a Google Maps platform, and includes fixed route, on-demand, volunteer driver options, non-emergency transportation, ADA Complementary Paratransit and Lyft. This free service allows users to plan their trip from the comfort of their home and travel throughout the community independently.
**TripLink, New Hampshire**

TripLink is Southeastern New Hampshire's regional transportation call center, providing information and referrals, and takes trip requests on behalf of COAST, Ready Rides, Rockingham Nutrition & Meals on Wheels, and the Community Rides non-emergency medical transportation service. TripLink is funded through the work of the Alliance for Community Transportation (ACT), and represents 38 towns and cities within the region, and incorporating all of the available information into the TripLink call center.

Given the vast amount of information and services available, Travel Training was developed at COAST (Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation) as another way to assist riders navigate the various options within TripLink’s service area. Riders have the ability to access TripLink on their own, filling out applicable information and schedule their trip directly through the website. The trip request is then processed and assigned to an appropriate transit provider for that trip. The mobility manager has the ability to coach existing and new riders through the application process and schedule the rider’s initial trip, as well as assisting with on-board navigation to where they need to go.

**Denver Regional Mobility & Access Council, Denver, Colorado**

Denver Regional Mobility & Access Council (DRMAC), serves as the Regional Coordinating Council for the Denver Colorado metropolitan region, with a focus on older adults and people with disabilities capability to go where they need and want to go safely, efficiently and within budget. The governing Board of Directors advises the Local Coordinating Councils and participate in various regional work groups, task forces and committees to enhance the experience and needs of the transit dependent population.

To assist in education and informing new and existing riders, DRMAC has developed the Getting There Travel Training program to guide customers around the metro area. Initial training is offered through four online modules and ends with a ‘graduation trip' as a group to a desired location. Riders have the ability to learn at their own pace, or with a Travel Trainer, about bus safety, locating a bus or train, purchasing fares and planning their trip.
Summary
Travel Training Instruction can be a method to enhance the knowledge and skills of the aging community, persons with disabilities, and the public, allowing riders to travel safely and independently throughout their service area. Programs developed by the mobility manager or travel trainer are eligible under the FTA Section 5310 program, as a way to enhance services for the aging and disability community, but remain open to general riders, too. Public transportation can be challenging for those who have not ridden a bus in their lifetime, often relying on friends or family for a ride to their vital medical appointments, essential trips, grocery shopping or social outing. Travel Training can enhance a rider’s confidence in riding on their own and broadening their ability to access the services they need independently.

References
Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP, Report 168), Travel Training for Older Adults
https://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/171323.aspx

Certified Travel Training Instructor (CTTI)

Association of Travel Instruction (ATI)
https://www.travelinstruction.org/about-us

GoDakota
https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/Transportation/GettingAround/Pages/default.aspx

GoDakota, Transportation Finder
https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6db787033e92477f83ea6a9ca03ff2bc&extent=-10401507.9608%2C5561925.5642%2C-10322930.6957%2C5611456.7586%2C102100

TripLink, TripLink

Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation, COAST

Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council (DRMAC)
https://drmac-co.org/
Volunteer Driver Programs and the Use of Section 5310 Funding

Introduction
Volunteer Driver Programs (VDPs) are an integral part of many transportation systems throughout the nation; sometimes, they are the only transportation option available. VDPs are efficient transportation programs, using volunteer’s time and resources to operate. Volunteer driver programs are not a panacea and they aren’t free; however, they offer flexibility, affordability, and options for those who do not drive.

Funding
Despite the use of private resources like volunteer time and vehicles, VDPs have costs involved with operating safely and effectively. These programs use a variety of funds that can include Federal Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Section 5310 funding, as well as state, and local funds, foundation funding, and even fundraising events. The funding used to support these programs differs based on where the program is housed, and if it is an eligible entity for Section 5310 among other factors. Section 5310 funding can be used for capital and operating expenses for new public transportation services and alternatives beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is designed to assist individuals with disabilities and older adults.

Since many volunteer driver programs are housed in human or social service agencies, Section 5310 funding can be critical for sustaining VDPs. Section 5310 funding is available to private nonprofit organizations, state or local government authorities, or operators of public transportation. The FTA guidance defines eligible activities as traditional Section 5310 projects like purchasing vehicles, information technology, and mobility management. Nontraditional projects, like travel training, improving way-finding technology and volunteer driver programs are also eligible activities. Section 5310 funds can be used to reimburse volunteer drivers for their mileage, among other operating expenses. Some programs, like Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) in Tennessee, use Section 5310 funding for obtaining vehicles that volunteers drive, as well as salaries and other operating expenses for their VDP. (See Program Example below for more information on VAT) Many programs also use Section 5310 operating funds to reimburse volunteers for the mileage they drive for the program.
The Federal share for projects using Section 5310 may not exceed 80% for capital costs and 50% for operating costs. The remaining 20-50% local match requirement can come from a variety of local and state funding sources, as well as select Federal (non-DOT) funding sources identified in the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) Federal Fund Braiding Guide. The use of in-kind contributions as match, which for VDPs can include the dollar equivalent of volunteer time, contributes to the ability of VDPs to access this funding source. The VAT program uses volunteer time as part of their in-kind match for Section 5310 funds.

**Volunteer Driver Program Attributes**

VDPs all use volunteers to provide transportation for individuals; however, they can look very different in the way they operate. Variations include:

- How it is funded, as discussed above
- Agency operating the program
- Number of volunteers
- Service area
- Trip purpose
- Program eligibility
- Trip payment
- Level of service
- Volunteer reimbursement
- Additional services offered

**Agency Operating the Program**

Different organizations operate VDP programs. VDPs are found in local or county governments, social or human services organizations like Community Action Programs, Aging and Disability Resource Centers or Independent Living Centers, as well as other non-profit agencies. Placement of these programs sometimes depends on eligibility for Section 5310 funding, but sometimes simply depends on what organization steps up to fill the transportation gaps.

**Number of Volunteers**

The number of volunteers in the VDP can depend on the community or area served, recruiting efforts and community support. Larger metropolitan areas can have hundreds of volunteers, while some of the smallest programs may rely on just a handful of volunteers. Recruiting volunteers can be challenging. The most successful recruiting method is still word of mouth, so some VDPs train volunteers to be ambassadors for the program or offer incentives for volunteer drivers who recruit other drivers.
Service Area
Depending on the program, VDPs may serve a limited area or can provide transportation to destinations outside a county or across the state. In many areas, VDPs may operate across municipal and county boundaries, or state lines to enable their residents to get to services outside their immediate community.

Trip Purpose
The type of trip VDPs provide is often dependent on funding the program receives as well as the agency in which the program operates. For those programs receiving Section 5310 funds, the target audience is older adults and people with disabilities. If a VDP receives funding from an economic development entity, the type of allowable trip may be for paid and volunteer work trips. Other programs allow all types of trips, but only to individuals eligible for the program. The allowable trip purpose is often determined locally.

Program Eligibility
While trip purpose may depend on the funding source, it is more likely that the funding restricts the program eligibility to a specific target population, such as older adults and people with disabilities for the Section 5310 funding. The age of eligibility for an older adult can sometimes be determined locally to anywhere between 55 to 65 years old and older. Eligibility can also depend on the mission of the organization.

Trip Payment
Many VDPs offer rides that are subsidized by Federal, state or local funding, and therefore, the customer only pays a fraction of the cost of the ride or nothing at all. Some programs charge a set rate or a rate based on mileage. Most of these programs also offer assistance if the fee is unaffordable for the rider. Other programs allow riders to donate towards the cost of the ride. If there are Older Americans Act Title IIIB funds supporting the VDP, no fee can be charged, but rather an opportunity to give a donation is required.

Level of Service
VDPs provide a higher level of service than many other transportation services. Most rides by VDPs are not shared, which allows the volunteer to provide door-through-door or hand-to-hand service. This is particularly important for some individuals with cognitive impairment or physical
disabilities who otherwise would not be able to travel from the vehicle into a building on their own. Programs should always specify the level of service they provide and train their volunteers to provide it and not exceed the scope of their responsibilities. Many VDPs have policies indicating the level of service expected to be provided which lends clarity to the volunteer and is part of the risk management plan for the agency.

Volunteer Reimbursement
One of the costs often associated with VDPs is reimbursement for mileage for volunteers when they drive their own vehicles for the program. Reimbursement can vary among programs from zero, to the charitable rate of $0.14/mile, to the IRS business rate or more. For many programs, particularly those that provide long-distance trips, mileage reimbursement is critical to finding and keeping volunteers. For the VDP administrator, it is important to always check with their accountants as to the required processes that must be followed if mileage reimbursement is given to volunteers.

Additional Services Offered
VDPs can offer door through door service and personal connection between rider and driver that benefits both individuals. Some programs train their volunteers to provide additional services like assistance with mobility devices, navigation within a facility, help with communication or filling out paperwork. TrustedRide Certified Chaperone Program was designed specifically to provide the extra help riders may need after a procedure or during a trip. Read about their program in the sidebar.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer driver programs offered a number of additional services like grocery or prescription delivery, telephone wellness checks and assistance scheduling appointments and getting to vaccine clinics. See the 2020 Trends Spotlight: Volunteer Driver Programs in the Age of COVID-19 for more information.
Program Examples

Volunteer Assisted Transportation: Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, Tennessee

Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee provides programs for older adults and people with disabilities including 1:1 assistance with transportation, through the Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) program. The VAT program volunteers assist riders with mobility devices, navigation within a facility, and help with paperwork. They also offer transportation counseling which is free to the public. They advise callers as to the transportation services that meet their needs and provide them with information about their options and referrals if needed.

Volunteers for VAT are trained to use one of the agency’s 21 vehicles to provide trips. These vehicles are funded by Section 5310 as are some salary and operating expenses. Since 2009, over 228 volunteers have served 1,100 people, taking over 60,000 trips. Fifteen percent (15%) of their riders use the wheelchair accessible vehicles with lifts; however, VAT indicates this is a growing need.

In 2021, there were 26 active volunteers for VAT. Volunteers must pass a background check, motor vehicle check, drug and alcohol screening, fingerprinting as well as random drug testing. Free training is provided to drivers which includes First Aid, CPR, safe driving, and passenger assistance and sensitivity training.

Most trips are provided in the county; however, volunteers will travel outside the county on a case by case basis for rides for essential errands, groceries, prescriptions or social and recreational trips. Rides can be paid on a sliding fee scale. Money can also be put into an account to use for future trips. Donations are always welcome. Scheduling by the volunteer is completed online through a shared Google calendar link. This system helps to document and track hours and generate compliance reports.

By offering the high level of service and one-on-one transportation, VAT has enabled people to stay in their homes longer.

New Hampshire Volunteer Driver Program: Overview and Impacts of COVID 19

To get a handle on the extent of Volunteer Driver Programs in New Hampshire, the Southern NH Planning Commission partnered with the Alliance for Healthy Aging in NH to conduct a survey of all VDPs. Twenty out of 25 programs responded to the survey. The resulting map of VDPs can be found on this Interactive Map. In New Hampshire, there are 25 VDP’s covering 197 of their 230 communities. Of these communities, 87% have populations below 10,000.
Most of the VDPs in NH serve older adults and people with disabilities and provide rides to medical and dental appointments, grocery shopping, banking, general errands, and an increasing number are requesting rides to the veterinarian and for recreational and social purposes. About half of these programs serve people who use wheelchairs; however, the wheelchair must be collapsible and the individual needs to be able to self-transfer to the volunteer’s vehicle. The survey results indicate that most VDPs would expand their services if they had the drivers and additional funding to support the expansion.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, many programs are still providing rides to dialysis or crucial appointments with precautions like wearing masks and sanitizing vehicles. Some VDP volunteers are calling clients to check-in or offering delivery services. Overall, during COVID, ride requests decreased except in the Manchester area, and the number of drivers available were reduced due to concern over their own safety.

To aid in recruiting volunteers, three Virtual Volunteer Fairs were held with support from the NH Dept. of Transportation and AARP NH. Up to three agencies seeking volunteers in a variety of programs, not just transportation, were invited to participate. Interestingly, all volunteers who attended were recently retired and looking for ways to spend their time.

Creating partnerships for this work has been key. Not only in creating and conducting the survey, but in recruiting and promoting these programs throughout the state.

Summary
Volunteer Driver Program offer flexibility and high levels of service to riders who often do not have any other transportation options. While the backbone of all VDPs are the volunteers, the funding, operations, and services can differ among VDPs based on where they are operated and by what agency. Regardless of these differences, VDPs continue to provide an essential transportation option in many communities across the country.

References
Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities - Section 5310
Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) Federal Fund Braiding Guide
Older Americans Act Authorizing Statutes
Resources

2020 Trends Report Spotlight Volunteer Driver Programs in the Age of COVID-19

TrustedRide: A New Approach to Providing Transportation Assistance NADTC recorded webinar

TrustedRides White Paper

Volunteer Assisted Transportation: Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, TN

Publicly-Accessible Volunteer Driver Programs – Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission

interactive map