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Accessible Transportation in Rural Areas: An Easter Seals Project ACTION Resource Sheet

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Lack of transportation is one of the most frequently cited problems facing people with disabilities living in rural areas. Rural residents make up 27 % of the U.S. population. In 1996, however, only 5.5 % of Federal transportation funds were allocated to serve their needs. Where there is rural public transportation for people with disabilities, it is usually provided by vans (53%) or small buses (21%) that have restricted operating times and destinations. Half of these vehicles are past their life expectancies and 60% aren't wheelchair-accessible. Per capita, rural people own more private vehicles than urban people, but more than half of poor rural families (one out of thirteen rural households) don't own a vehicle (Rural Facts in Transportation, RTC: Rural, 1998). In response to these problems, creative solutions and innovative practices are being developed to meet the need for accessible rural transportation.

Some promising rural transportation strategies include:

- **Coordinated Systems:** Coordination of transportation services among various transportation providers within a community enable and empower local officials and representatives of public transportation interests, disability and other customer interests, and others to collaboratively find ways to more effectively use limited resources. They also promote the use of previously untapped resources to increase the service capability of public transportation systems. To learn more about coordination, see:

³/₄ Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility Web Page:

<http://www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM>

³/₄ Coordinating Transportation Services: Local Collaboration and Decision-Making (Easter Seals Project ACTION, 2002)

<http://www.projectaction.org/newdlist/outreach.html>

³/₄ Innovative State and Local Planning for Coordinated Transportation (Federal Transit Administration, 2002)

<http://www.fta.dot.gov/library/policy/islptc/index.html>

³/₄ National Consortium on the Coordination of Human Services

Transportation Web Page: http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/is_coordination.asp

- **Volunteer Systems:** Volunteer drivers can be reimbursed for providing transportation to their friends, neighbors and co-workers. To learn more about volunteer systems, see:

³/₄ Community Inclusion Driver Strategy: Assisting People with Disabilities Living in Rural Areas in Finding Personal Transportation (Easter Seals Project ACTION, 2001) <http://www.projectaction.org/newdlist/other.htm>

³/₄ Volunteers in Transportation: Some Issues to Consider (Rural Transit Assistance Program, 2001)

http://www.ctaa.org/data/rtap_volunteers.pdf

- **Voucher Systems:** Low-income riders can use transportation vouchers to reimburse community and human service agency transportation providers. The U.S. Department of Education has funded the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) to investigate a rural employment transportation voucher model: the Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Voucher Program. To learn more about voucher systems, see:

¾ Rural Transportation Voucher Program for People with Disabilities: Three Case Studies (RTC: Rural, 1999) <http://www.bts.gov/programs/jts/V2N1/5bernier.pdf>

¾ Making Transportation Work for People with Disabilities in Rural America: The Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Voucher Program (RTC: Rural, 1996) <http://www.april-rural.org/docs/transman.html>

- **Flex-routes:** The definition of a flex-route is a transit hybrid of fixed route and paratransit service. Characteristics of the flex-route are: bus stops, which are open to the public, are overlaid on an existing subscription service; funded clients are assigned to routes based on where they live, not on routes exclusive to the agency that funds their trip; and drivers serve the general public at published stops according to a bus schedule, as they pick up or drop off funded clients at their doorstep. To learn more about flex-routes, see:

¾ Handbook for Rural Flex-Route Transportation: The Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority Experience (Easter Seals Project ACTION, 2000) <http://www.projectaction.org/newdlist/other.htm>

¾ A Ride through SaFIRES - Lessons Learned from SaFIRES, an APTS Operational Test in Prince William County, Virginia (US Department of Transportation, 2002) http://www.itsdocs.fhwa.dot.gov/JPODOCS/REPTS_TE//13698.html

Related Organizations:

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)

5903 Powdermill Rd. | Kent, OH 44240
Phone: 330-678-7648 (V/TTY) | www.april-rural.org

Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)

1341 G St NW, 10th Floor | Washington DC 20005
Phone: 202-628-1480 | www.ctaa.org

Easter Seals Project ACTION

700 13th Street, NW Suite 200 | Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 800-659-6428 | TTY: 202-347-7385 | www.projectaction.org

National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) - National RTAP Program

American Public Works Association
1401 K Street NW, 11th Floor | Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202- 408-9541 | www.nationalrtap.org

RTC: Rural

The University of Montana Rural Institute: Center for Excellence in Disability Education, Research and Services
52 Corbin Hall | Missoula, MT 59812-7056
Phone: 888-268-2743 or 406-243-5467 (V/TTY) | <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/>