



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

MATTHEW O. TUCKER  
Director


DEPARTMENT OF RAIL AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION  
1313 EAST MAIN STREET, SUITE 300  
P.O. BOX 590  
RICHMOND, VA 23218-0590

(804) 786-4440  
FAX (804) 786-7286  
VIRGINIA RELAY CENTER  
1-800-828-1120 (TDD)

October 1, 2006

## Memorandum

To: The Honorable Marilyn Tavenner, Secretary of Health and Human Resources

From: Matthew O. Tucker 

Subject: Annual Report on DRPT's Progress in Addressing the Needs of the Aging

In accordance with HB110, the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has prepared the following response on the Department's progress for addressing the impact of the aging of the population.

### **DRPT Programs**

DRPT's programs are implemented through public transportation providers, health and human service transportation providers, commuter assistance agencies, Class 1 freight railroads and shortline railroads. DRPT does not have any programs that place it in a direct role as a service provider to the general public. However, about 80% of Virginia's 7.5 million residents and especially the 1.0 million people who are 65 or more years old have access to one or more of the services supported by DRPT.

#### *Section 5310*

The program that DRPT administers that most affects senior citizens is a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) program called "*The Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities Program (Section 5310)*." Section 5310 makes funds available to meet the special transportation needs of elderly persons and persons with disabilities. These funds are apportioned to the states annually by a formula that is based on the number of elderly persons and persons with disabilities in each state. Specific funding decisions are made at the state level.

Capital assistance is provided on an 80 percent federal, 20 percent local matching basis. Those eligible to receive Section 5310 funding include private nonprofit agencies, public bodies approved by the state to coordinate services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, or public bodies which certify to the Governor that no nonprofit corporations or associations are readily available in an area to provide the service.

*The Smartest Distance Between Two Points*  
[www.drpt.virginia.gov](http://www.drpt.virginia.gov)

In FY07 DRPT received \$2,462,012 in federal funding for the Section 5310 program. DRPT awarded grants to 41 recipients to purchase 66 vehicles for the transportation of elderly person or persons with disabilities. From FY02 to FY06 the Section 5310 program purchased over 225 vehicles for human service agencies that provided an estimated 3,000,000 passenger trips over the four year period for elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

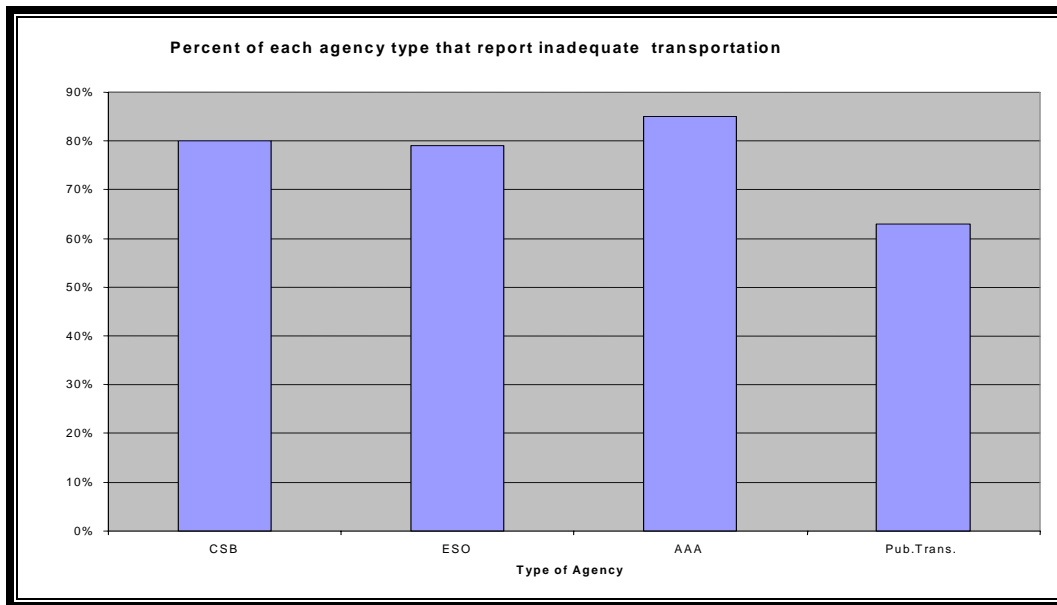
*Executive Order 13330 / Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council*

In addition to administering the Section 5310 Program, DRPT is also one of the lead agencies for the Commonwealth to help guide compliance with the Federal Executive Order 13330 on Human Service Transportation Coordination. Federal Executive Order (EO) 13330 on Human Service Transportation Coordination was issued in 2004 to promote interagency cooperation of some 75 federal programs and services in order that transportation-disadvantaged persons throughout the country will have improved access to critical transportation services. This EO clarifies the federal government's vision that "comprehensive and coordinated community transportation systems are essential for persons with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and older adults who rely on such transportation to fully participate in their communities."

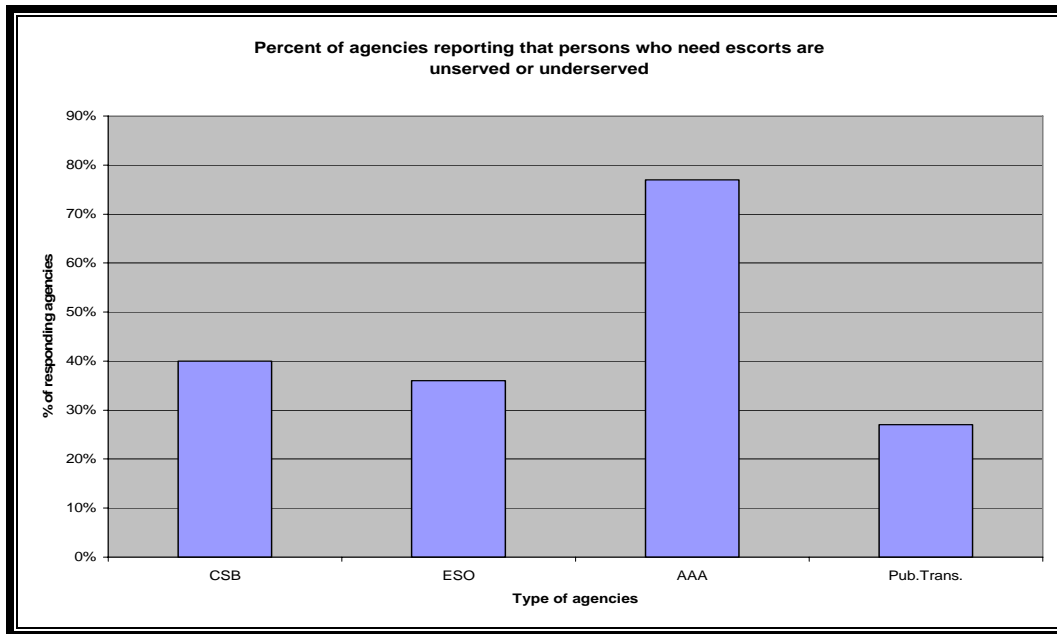
DRPT was well positioned to advance the EO because it had already been working on the issue since 2003 when it established the Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council to promote interagency cooperation at the state level. The goal of the Council is to allow state agencies to actively work together to identify and recommend state policy changes needed to eliminate duplication and to improve transportation coordination and services to key populations. The Interagency Coordinating Council consists of agencies under the Secretaries of Health and Human Resources and Transportation including DRPT, DMAS, VBPD, DRS, the Departments for the Aging, Blind and Vision Impaired, Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS), Social Services, and Health. The Council is also closely aligned with the Commonwealth's Olmstead Initiative ("Community Integration") in order to raise the profile of transportation as a primary service needed to bring the state in compliance with the Olmstead Supreme Court Decision.

Last year, with the Council's involvement, DRPT applied for and received a federally funded United We Ride (UWR) State Coordination Grant for \$35,000. The grant funds were used to conduct a statewide inventory of the state's human service transportation resources. The inventory, not only requested information about equipment, but also asked about unmet needs and current levels of coordination, or lack thereof, in communities. A few of the key findings regarding unmet needs are provided below:

- About 80% of Community Services Boards (CSBs), Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), Employment Support Organizations (ESOs) and over 70% of public transportation operators report that there are geographic areas within their jurisdiction where inadequate transportation services for people with special needs exist.



- Over 90% of ESOs and AAAs and over 70% and 60% of CSBs and public transportation operators respectively responded that there are “high need” populations (i.e., elderly, low income and people with disabilities on waiting lists) within jurisdictions without transportation.
- Over 45% of AAAs and about 35% of CSBs and ESOs report that wheelchair users are unserved or underserved. In fact, over one fourth of responding public transportation operators also reported unmet needs for wheelchair users.
- Between 55% and 70% across all four types of organizations reported that persons who need “off hours/weekend” transportation (e.g., for shopping, social events, church or synagogue) are unserved or underserved.
- Many agencies across all organization types report that there are unserved or underserved persons because they need escorts while being transported or during pick up or drop off. The highest number of agencies reporting this need was AAAs (nearly 80%) and CSBs (40%).



Nearly all organizations including public transit operators reported significant unmet needs. Even though, after 1990 with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a public entity operating a demand responsive system for public use is required either to ensure that vehicles are readily accessible to and useable by individuals who use wheelchairs or to provide “equivalent services,” a large percentage of agencies report that the needs of some wheelchair users are unmet. Nearly half the AAAs and over a third of the CSBs and ESOs report that some wheelchair users are unserved or underserved. In fact, over one fourth of responding public transit operators also report that they cannot meet the needs of all persons who use wheelchairs.

These findings indicate that organizations need more wheelchair-accessible vehicles to meet the needs of wheelchair users. In Virginia, DRPT is the state administering agency of the federally funded vehicle purchase program for public entities providing transportation. DRPT’s first priority in its capital (vehicle purchase) program is to assist public organizations in replacing older vehicles with new, fully accessible ones. The Inventory results indicate that older vehicles, not equipped with wheelchair lifts, are still operating in many communities in Virginia. Organizations may also be opting to procure inaccessible vehicles to maximize seating space for typical riders but cannot accommodate wheelchair users. However, the fact that wheelchair users have unmet needs in Virginia shows that all funding agencies must work harder to educate organizations/transportation providers that more accessible vehicles should be purchased to accommodate waiting lists and/or that equivalent services are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Starting this coming year, all passenger carrying vehicles purchased under the DRPT program for human service transportation must be accessible for persons with disabilities. If there is any hope that Virginia human service organizations will one day be able to coordinate and eliminate redundant transportation systems in individual

communities, the great majority of vehicles purchased by all organizations must be accessible to meet the needs of all potential riders in the future, coordinated system. Other state agencies and funding sources should follow DRPT's lead in requiring all organizations to purchase accessible vehicles now (with removable regular seating that will help maximize space to meet the needs of currently served persons).

### *Public Transportation*

Public transportation services are critical to Virginia's elderly population. The American Public Transit Association estimates that 1 in 5 Americans over 65 do not drive and that on any given day more than 50% of non-drivers age 65 or older stay home partially because they lack transportation options. More and more we are seeing that older non-drivers have a decreased ability to participate in the community and the economy. Public transportation services provide mobility to older Americans and can reverse this trend.

DRPT administers grant programs which provide funding assistance to public transportation providers whose services benefit Virginia's elderly population. For example, in some rural and small urban areas of the state, small transit systems exist that are open to serve the public, however, from conception were designed more to serve the elderly populations in that area. In urban areas, where public transportation systems are much larger and more prevalent, some fixed-route providers offer deviated-route services to meet the transportation needs of their elderly and/or disabled customers who are unable to directly access a bus stop. Therefore, the grant programs administered by DRPT that provide funding assistance to public transportation providers benefit all of Virginia's citizens, including the elderly and disabled.

In urban areas of the Commonwealth, elderly and disabled citizens and visitors have several public transportation options available to them to meet their transportation or travel needs. However, in rural and small urban areas, most of the public transportation options available are provided by human service organizations and low income programs, and are available primarily to program eligible clientele. Furthermore, in both urban and rural areas, for the elderly and disabled populations who cannot or choose not to drive, accessing or getting to available public transportation can be difficult, if not impossible, forcing many to rely on neighbors and family members, and sometimes, perhaps prematurely, on social service programs to meet their transportation needs.

With the rising population of Virginians aged 60 or older, the demand for transportation services by older Virginians to meet their basic needs is expected to increase substantially over the next 5 to 10 years, and even more so 20 years from now when the number of seniors is expected to double. However, it is important to note that unlike the average transit user whose travel peaks in the morning and evening, most elderly persons use transit services in the middle of the day. The need is growing for providers to adjust their transit services to serve the elderly and the market for these services will increase among the elderly population in the future. As this need grows, it

is expected that DRPT will see an increase in the number of funding applications for increased mid-day services by providers, in addition to expansions of service areas and new start-up applications for services that cater solely to this market. It should be noted, however, that this mid-day service is less efficient and in most cases will not be operated unless additional state assistance is provided.

Another transportation request that is growing among the elderly and disabled populations is the ability to attend recreational or leisure activities. While most appreciate being able to find transportation alternatives to meet doctor or dental appointments during regular service provider business hours, many would also like to attend community and recreational events. These events are usually scheduled outside of normal business hours, or on weekends, and fall outside of the operating schedule of local providers. Again, as this need grows, it is expected that DRPT will see an increase in the number of funding applications for increased off-day and off-hour services by providers, in addition to expansions of service areas and new start-up applications for services that cater to this market.

DRPT strongly encourages that federal and state investment in public transportation must increase. Regional funding sources also should be provided to help support local costs of public transportation. Planners should pay particular attention to the needs of seniors in the design of regional and local transportation programs and services.

#### *Commuter Assistance Agencies*

DRPT provides financial and technical assistance to commuter assistance agencies across the Commonwealth. These agencies are involved in a number of activities and programs that help the elderly take advantage of transportation options that are available in their community. Examples of these programs include:

- Arlington Transportation Partners (ATP) – works with social service coordinators to supply information for the elderly on transportation program eligibility requirements, phone numbers and web addresses. ATP also provides presentations at transportation fairs and conferences that target groups such as the Retirement Housing Foundation.
- Fairfax County Department of Transportation – has a “Seniors-on-the-Go!” taxicab voucher program that offers qualifying seniors \$30 worth of fares for \$10. They also have a Travel Training program that provides seniors with hands-on, in the field training on how to ride bus and rail transit.

## **DRPT Studies**

In the fall of 2004, DRPT provided a grant to the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) to study the transportation needs of seniors in Northern Virginia and develop recommended strategies to enhance their mobility options. This was the first phase of a two phase study. Over the next 25 years, the United States will witness phenomenal demographic change. The number of older residents is expected to more than double. A similar pattern of demographic change is expected in Northern Virginia. By 2030 the ratio of seniors age 65 and older is expected to increase from one in 13 residents to one in seven—an increase of more than 240,000 seniors in Northern Virginia.

The study included an analysis of changing demographic trends, an inventory of existing transportation services available to seniors in Northern Virginia, a telephone survey with more than 1,600 seniors age 75 and older, four focus groups with seniors 75 and older, one focus group with professionals and volunteers who serve seniors and have a understanding of their transportation challenges, and 20 one-on-one telephone interviews with seniors.

The recommendations of the study focus efforts in three areas:

1. Encourage and support increased use of fixed route transit by seniors.
2. Encourage supplemental specialized services for seniors unable to use fixed-route service
3. Address land use and community design

The effort is being further expanded upon by NVTC in phase 2 of their project through a pilot program this fall that will use qualified trainers to teach senior citizens, age 75 or older, how to use public buses and trains in Northern Virginia for independent travel.

## **Summary**

DRPT recognizes the important mobility needs of Virginia's aging population and works to incorporate elderly mobility improvements in all of our programs and projects. This is our first report under the provisions of HB110 and we recognize that additional review of our programs and how they serve Virginia's elderly population is needed. We intend to perform additional study and to develop plans and programs that enhance service to the elderly. Working with Virginia's service providers, we are committed to ensuring that the special needs of the elderly are addressed in all rail, public transportation, commuter assistance, and human service transportation programs.