

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND TRANSIT PROVIDERS



Proceedings Report on the Forum “Working the Partnership”

Prepared by

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Foreword

This report presents the results of a regional forum designed to address the role of advisory committees in providing transit services to people with disabilities (see agenda in Appendix A). Held on May 9, 2003, at Deerfield Golf & Tennis Club, Newark, Delaware, the forum was facilitated by Dr. Carol R. Denson and sponsored by the following organizations:

- Delaware Transit Advisory Committee (EDTAC)
- Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC)
- Department of Consumer Studies & Center for Disabilities Studies, University of Delaware
- Independent Resources, Inc.
- United Cerebral Palsy of Delaware (UCP)

Kathleen McCool (Chair of EDTAC) served as Chair of the Forum Planning Committee. Other members were as follows:

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Participants of the forum (see listing in Appendix B of this report) are thanked for their contributions throughout the day. University of Delaware undergraduate students, Erin Lauinger, Alison Pace, Justin Vettori, Todd Gehling, Laura Knight, Laura Megali, Jennifer Mack, Jessica Seitchik, Megan Murray, Lauren Coakley, Tracy Pendleton, and Stephanie Mathe are also acknowledged for their positive contributions as recorders and facilitators. The following organizations are also acknowledged for support of this forum: Federal Transit Administration, Project ACTION, and the American Public Transportation Association.

Background and Purpose

Ms. Kathleen McCool initiated the development of this forum when she was awarded the MBNA Foundation's Francis X. Norton Community Service Award in 2001. Funds were directed from that award to United Cerebral Palsy of Delaware for the specific purpose of conducting a transit workshop that would focus on the role of advisory committees in providing transit services to people with disabilities. The overriding question driving the concept of a forum was to determine "How much political punch do we [advisory committees] have in affecting public policy when it comes to transportation for people with disabilities in the US?" Her vision includes the establishment of a national transit professional advisory organization. The first step was to hold a regional forum-workshop with a focus on advisory committees.¹

The goal of the forum was to bring together interested stakeholders in an effort to gather input and create a dialogue among consumers, transit providers, agency personnel, academics, and others interested in improving mobility options for people with disabilities within our communities. A planning committee consisting of consumers, transit advisory committee members, transit providers, and academics met numerous times over a year and a half to design the daylong event. The goal of the forum was to *bring together representatives from various transit advisory committees in the Department of Transportation's Region III to identify the role of advisory committees in addressing transit issues, solutions, and services for people with disabilities.*

The Delaware Transit Corporation publicized the forum via direct mail to a list of about 180 people and organizations. A copy of the original survey, designed to gather information about the nature and structure of advisory committees and to seek input into shaping the content of the forum from potential participants, was included along with the forum announcement.



Bill McCool, Executive Director of United Cerebral Palsy takes notes during the forum.

¹ Advisory committees is an all-encompassing term as used in this report and includes reference to all advisory bodies and councils.

Opening Remarks

by Kathleen McCool

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

It has always been a dream of mine to have a transit workshop of this kind where regional transit advisory committees for people with disabilities and transit properties could get together to talk about consistency and inconsistency in paratransit and fixed-route bus systems for people. I wanted a workshop of this kind to dialog about how state advisory transit committees for people with disabilities are structured.

As many of you know, some states do not have transit advisory councils or committees.



Kathy McCool delivers opening remarks.

I also wanted to identify this as a gap in transit services for people with disabilities, along with other gaps in service. I wanted the group to explore and talk about how to effect change in public policy in transportation for people with disabilities in this country. It is my feeling, and I think the feeling of EDTAC, that a coming together of this magnitude has taken too long a time.

Now more than ever, people with disabilities need reliable transportation—transportation that is not exclusive, but inclusive, for all in our communities. People need choice.

Hopefully in the future we can include other transit regions to have a bigger working partnership.

The name of this workshop is *Working the Partnership*. “Working the partnership” can mean different things to different people in this room. So let’s all be mindful of the work ahead of us today and speak out and most of all listen intently to all ideas and issues presented to us and try to come up with solutions that will benefit all who ride.

I also want to say how proud and pleased I am to be serving as Chair of the Delaware EDTAC committee. I think our committee is one of the finest around. I want to also thank the transit forum committee for all their hard work and determination for making this day possible for all of us.

Finally, I want to thank the Deerfield Golf and Tennis Club for letting us have this magnificent place for holding our transit workshop today. I can also assure you all that you will not go hungry.

Enjoy your day, and let's hear all the voices and put our ideas and passions to work.

Thank you all.

Forum Format

Following Ms. McCool's remarks, Mr. Nathan Hayward, III, Transportation Secretary for the State of Delaware, welcomed the forum participants. An overview of the day's activities and a discussion of the survey results followed the Secretary's welcome. Participants then formed teams for three separate round-table discussions scheduled throughout the remainder of the day. A set of questions was presented around the topics of transit advisory committees, constraints, and challenges. The top priorities from each roundtable were presented to the entire group at the conclusion of each discussion activity. Flipcharts were used to record the information, and during the final session of the day participants voted for their top five priorities from among all items listed. More than 70 people attended the forum, and six separate discussion teams participated. University of Delaware undergraduate students, trained for the forum, were assigned in teams of two as facilitators and recorders at individual roundtables.



Secretary of Transportation Nathan Hayward III welcomes the forum participants.

Roundtable Discussion Topics

Roundtable Discussion # 1: Transit Advisory Committees:

- Describe the characteristics of an advisory committee.
- How does (or would) the advisory committee function?

Roundtable Discussion # 2: Constraints:

- What are the constraints of your current transit system(s)?
- What would you do to remove these constraints?

Roundtable Discussion # 3: Challenges:

- How do we increase the resources to meet the increased needs (demands)?
- How do we reduce or control the demand for a fixed resource?
- How can transit systems meet these challenges—develop recommendations?
- What is the role of advisory committees in meeting these challenges?

Summary of Roundtable Discussions

Forum participants included consumers, parents of consumers, transit and service agency administrators, educators, and advocates from four different states plus Washington, D.C. Advisory committee experience and structures varied widely among participants. Some participants were from communities that lack transit advisory committees but function through county councils or other local governmental bodies on a regular basis; others have independent advisory committees; and, some have committees that are appointed and governed by transit providers. With these divergent perceptions and experiences relative to advisory committees, the initial questions were framed to broaden a discussion about the nature and function of advisory committees in general.

Transit Advisory Committees

- 1). Describe the characteristics of an advisory committee.
- 2). How does (or would) the advisory committee function?

Independent organizations, mandated by law with defined roles, guidelines, and established procedures were the primary characteristics that emerged from the discussions. Recognition of the advisory committee by policy-makers was included as an essential part of the characteristics. To ensure diverse representation of views, the membership must be inclusive and consist of

transit users, both with and without disabilities; front-line transit personnel such as drivers, dispatchers, policymakers, as well as others. It was expressed that diversity in membership helps to maintain a balanced perspective and that an important part of membership includes mechanisms for active and ongoing recruitment, rotation, and election of new members for the purpose of maintaining a dynamic organization. Many participants indicated that membership should not be controlled by the transit provider. However, creating an atmosphere of dual respect between consumers and transit providers was considered essential. A debate emerged over the whether advisory committees should be policy-setting and decision-making authorities or strictly advisory organizations. While no resolution was forthcoming at this forum, the majority of participants supported a policy-setting, decision-making model—one that can influence and set transit policies.



A group of forum participants joins in a roundtable discussion.

The functions of advisory committees identified include broad representation of community interest to increase transit options and services for people with disabilities through education and information; the ability to create new legislation, regulations, and policies; and advocacy roles. Functions are to be established and governed with clear goals and objectives; timeliness in handling issues and concerns must also be a fundamental quality of committees. Education of the committee membership is to be primary—where current members are educated about transit decision-making processes, legislative policies, and procedures in addition to understanding consumer concerns and needs. Members must know how to effectively have input into the decision-making process. Input into budget planning and monitoring was identified as a primary function. Education also extends to direct communication and interaction with the public. Open communication among advisory groups, the public, transit riders, service providers, front-line employees, (i.e., bus drivers, dispatchers, schedulers, etc.) is a necessary function of the committees.

Functions concerning consumer complaints, also considered a primary function of advisory committees, should be to document and analyze complaints in a systematic way so that root

causes can be identified and addressed. Individual complaints, if handled by a committee, must be completed in an objective, confidential, and timely manner through established procedures. A regular meeting schedule should be established and communicated through outlets such as newsletters. Representation at open hearings was also viewed as a primary function of the committee.

Constraints

What are the constraints of your current transit system(s)?

What would you do to remove these constraints?

Expectation versus reality, funding and resource issues, land use and transit needs, and regulatory environments, emerged as the external constraints facing current systems. Issues within transit systems—including operational details associated with paratransit such as limited hours of service, scheduling, communication, and lack of transit options in rural areas, accessibility of bus stops, and driver training—were also identified as systemic constraints.



Ray Miller Executive Director, DTC, introducing luncheon panel on Paratransit: A National Perspective. l to r. David Rishael, Delta Services Group and Vice Chair of American Public Transit Association - Access Committee; Donna Smith, Project Action; and Michael Winters, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Federal Transit Administration.

Several participants expressed that one of the most difficult issues confronting transit providers is the dilemma created by the gap that exists between consumer (and the general public) expectations of public sector transit services and the realities of what transit systems can provide. Consequently, systems are unable to satisfy riders' needs, and negative perceptions of public transit become pervasive. Furthermore, expectations for paratransit services are greater than

those for fixed-route services. Related constraints, but ones listed as separate items, are those of insufficient funding and the allocation of scarce resources. Comments about these constraints as experienced by certain systems have resulted in the limitation of services to people with disabilities—i.e., limiting service areas that are in strict compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In many communities, this has resulted in a reduction of transit options for people with disabilities. Inadequate coordination and planning of land use relative to community transit were other major constraints discussed. Another generalized constraint is the lack of education and understanding on the part of consumers about transit providers, and on the part of transit providers about consumer needs.

Constraints within the control and responsibilities of transit providers as identified by the participants include the lack of accessible bus stops, poor scheduling of paratransit trips, deficient communication, limited hours of operation, and a lack of rural transportation. The scheduling problems apply primarily to paratransit riders, when the buses are late and consumers are faced with unintended consequences of missed meetings/appointments. Further, it was reported that poor scheduling often stems from the lack of communication between drivers and dispatchers and that it is not uncommon for drivers to fail to regularly call into the dispatcher; therefore when trips are canceled, drivers are unaware of it and they proceed to pick up the individual. This results in inefficient service. In terms of hours of operation, one team cited the example of lack of service on Sundays. A few teams also indicated that many complaints are related to the lack of service on evenings and weekends and in rural areas as well.

Consumer-oriented constraints include lack of willingness to consider alternative modes of transportation, perhaps due to fear of change or comfort level issues due to inexperience in use of fixed-route systems. Finally, it was stated that drivers do not undergo sufficient training and therefore create another constraint. For example, with the variety of wheelchairs in use today, many drivers are unfamiliar with the proper security techniques and devices to ensure basic safety on buses. Another limitation is that some fixed-route bus drivers are non-compliant and fail to stop for people with wheelchairs at bus stops.

The second part of this discussion addressed solutions for removing the constraints. Creating political climates whereby legislatures are influenced to make transit issues a priority and to reallocate funds was mentioned by several participants; it was suggested that the New Freedom Initiative be used to aid public transportation projects more effectively. Another strongly supported solution is to develop a wide variety of transit education programs starting with high school and younger school-aged children (under the IDEA legislation, it is required that students with disabilities in public school special education programs be provided with transit training; however, this is not universally applied in schools). Education must extend to the general public and elected officials as well. Education programs should inform the public how to use transit services, include travel instruction, and provide knowledge about the nature and realities of providing public sector transit services. Coordination of transit services between public transit providers and the private non-profit community health and human service sector is essential to providing transit options within communities. These resources have been underutilized and are important to creating viable accessibility and mobility options for people with disabilities.

Solutions such as using technology to improve communication between riders, dispatchers, and offering a system of incentives to drivers were suggested. Efforts to increase bus stop

accessibility and general pathways to and from bus stops should be monitored and enforced. Advisory committees should become knowledgeable about who is responsible for ensuring accessibility of a given bus stop location and pathway. In addition, suggested ways to increase revenues were to increase taxes, reallocate funds from other state agencies, or increase fares.

Challenges

- How do we increase the resources to meet the increased needs (demands)?
- How do we reduce or control the demand for a fixed resource?
- How can transit systems meet these challenges—develop recommendations?
- What is the role of advisory committees in meeting these challenges?

Participants responded to the four questions above in their discussion about the challenges of providing transit services to people with disabilities. The primary way identified to increase resources to meet today’s demands for transit is through the coordination of transportation. Providing incentives to increase coordination was also listed as a priority. As reported in the discussion above about removing constraints, reallocation of resources—including use of the transportation trust fund revenues, increasing fare, and using sliding fare fee schedules for non-ADA paratransit riders—were suggested as possible ways of increasing resources.

Suggestions to address the demand-side of the equation include planned accessible environments for people with disabilities in new developments and communities along with regional coordination of transit services. Recommendations included encouraging greater use of fixed-route service over paratransit; incentives, along with increased frequency of buses, would encourage riders to switch services. Another recommendation was to make paratransit and fixed route comparable—as based on the perception that there are advantages of using paratransit over fixed route. One team also recommended the elimination of subscription trips so that paratransit would be less convenient. One team recommended limiting public sector paratransit to only those who are strictly determined ADA eligible. Education about the advantages and disadvantages of paratransit versus fixed route use and identification of other transit options available through the health and human service organizations (i.e., 5310 programs) should be promoted. Coordination of transit at state and national levels was also recommended as a priority.

In response to the question “How can transit systems meet these challenges—develop recommendations,” one team affirmed that consumers need to be educated on legislation and encouraged to advocate change. Others recommended greater use of carpooling within communities. This includes having people volunteer to drive neighbors to their destination and arranging recreational trips for seniors in the community. Another recommendation is to offer fare incentives and travel training of fixed route service, so that people are more comfortable riding the fixed route buses. One team recommended efficiently utilizing existing resources before attempting to add new resources. Another team revisited the benefit of using technology for scheduling and operating a more efficient system. To meet the challenges of the paratransit system, it was recommended that incentives such as traveling outside the three-quarter mile

radius be introduced to encourage riding during off-peak hours and that a two-tiered service be created—one for ADA eligible riders and the other for community off-peak travel.

The final question of the afternoon was to determine the role of advisory committees in meeting the previously discussed challenges. Education of the public, again, emerged as one of the most important responsibilities of advisory committees. Education is essential and must include the entire community. Advisory committees should be politically appointed and sufficiently funded, and they should provide oversight and influence accountability in transit policy-making. All modes of transportation should be included. Advisory committees should continue to recognize and advocate for consumer needs and be a catalyst for system change. A national advisory transit committee should also be established.



Forum participants review flipcharts and vote to prioritize issues.

Priority Review and Recommendations

During the final activity of the day, participants were each given the opportunity to vote for the five (5) items that they deemed most important among those recorded on the flipcharts. The flipcharts with summarized responses from the eight questions discussed over the course of the forum were placed in accessible common areas for the voting process. A total of 177 individual votes were cast. Interestingly, the distribution of votes was fairly even across aspects of each major question. The distribution of responses is shown in the following table.

Transit Advisory Committees	Percentage Response (N=177)
Describe the characteristics of an advisory committee.	15%
How does (or would) the advisory committee function?	16%
Constraints	Percentage Response (N=177)
What are the constraints of your current transit system(s)?	12%
What would you do to remove these constraints?	11%
Challenges	Percentage Response (N=177)
How do we increase the resources to meet the increased needs (demands)?	10%
How do we reduce or control the demand for a fixed resource?	11%
How can transit systems meet these challenges—develop recommendations?	7%
What is the role of advisory committees in meeting these challenges?	18%

On closer examination of the content or priorities identified, it was clear that the most desirable characteristic of advisory committees is that it be mandated by law. Almost 7 percent of the entire votes cast supported this characteristic as a major priority. Another 8 percent indicated that clear goals and objectives along with timeliness of actions are the essential functions of such committees, and over 10 percent voted for education as the primary role of advisory committees. Six votes (3 percent) indicated that perceptions about expectations versus reality constituted a major constraint; this was followed closely by constraints associated with funding (3 percent) and land use planning (3 percent). Education and training are viewed as important in the ability to remove constraints (5 percent). Over 5 percent of the votes were dedicated to the coordination of community transportation options, 8 percent to planned accessible community environments, with recommendations for car pooling, fare incentives, consumer solutions, and better uses of technology (7 percent) to address supply and demand challenges.

Priorities set by the participants, based on voting patterns across the responses, indicate that advisory committees should develop strategic initiatives to influence policy makers about transit needs for people with disabilities, using education and advocacy. A major recommendation is that advisory committees be mandated by law and that they function under a set of clearly defined goals and objectives. A further recommendation is that a national consortium consisting of local advisory committees be established and that this consortium be involved in policy-setting discussions that involve transit issues and services for people with disabilities.

Evaluation

An evaluation survey administered at the end of the day indicated an overall rating of 3.7 on a scale of 4, where 4 is the highest and 1 the lowest rating. Items evaluated were as follows: accomplished forum objectives (3.52), roundtable discussions (3.78), productivity of team process (3.79), accessibility of accommodations (3.80), and did forum meet expectations (3.67). Twenty-eight participants completed the evaluation of which 11 percent were advocates, 21 percent consumers, 18 percent service providers, 32 percent transit personnel, and 18 percent other, which included students and volunteers.

Comments from participants reported on the excellence of the forum and the use of the luncheon panel of experts. Recommendations included establishing the forum on a regular, perhaps annual basis.



UD students and Dr. Carol Denson (l to r) Lauren Coakley, Tracy Pendleton, Jennifer Mack, Laura Megali, Jessica Seitchik, Justin Vettori, Carol Denson, Todd Gehling, Erin Lauinger, Allison Pace, Megan Murray, and Laura Knight. Stephanie Mathe is missing from the photo.

Appendix A: Agenda

Time	Activity
8:30 – 9:00	Registration
9:00 – 9:15	Welcome and Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kathy McCool, Chairperson, Delaware’s Transit Advisory Committee (EDTAC) • Nathan Hayward III, Secretary for the Delaware Department of Transportation • Carol Denson, Department of Consumer Studies & Center for Disabilities Studies, University of Delaware
9:15 – 9:45	Survey Results – Bill McCool, Executive Director, United Cerebral Palsy of Delaware, Inc.
9:45 – 10:15	Roundtable Discussion – Transit Advisory Committees
10:15 – 10:30	Break
10:30 – 11:00	Report Back
11:00 – 11:40	Roundtable Discussion – Constraints
11:40 to 12:00	Presentation – Paratransit Services Study: A Delaware Perspective (Douglas F. Tuttle, Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware)
12:00 – 1:30	Lunch – Panel Discussion Introduction of Presenters – Ray Miller, Executive Director, Delaware Transit Corporation. Panel Presentation – Para-Transit: A National Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michael Winters, Director, Office of Civil Rights • Donna Smith, Project Action • David Rishael, Delta Services Group and Vice Chair of American Public Transit Association - Access Committee
1:30 – 1:45	Break
1:45 – 2:30	Roundtable Discussion – Challenges
2:30 to 3:15	Report Back
3:15 – 3:30	Voting & Break
3:30 – 4:00	Review of Priorities, Recommendations, Next Steps – Bill McCool
4:00	Closing – Kathy McCool

Appendix B: Participants

Name	Affiliation	Address
Adams, Debra	MTA	6 St. Paul St., Baltimore, MD 21202
Barnett, Carol	DSAAPD	1901 N. DuPont Hwy., New Castle, DE 19720
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McCool, Kathleen	EDTAC Chair	
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Smith, Donna	Project ACTION Washington	700 13th St. N.W., Ste. 200, Wash., DC 20005
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Sterne, Deborah	Philadelphia Shared Ride Advisory Council	100 N. 17th St., 6th floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tate, Joann	EDTAC Co-Chair	404 S. Bancroft Pkwy., Wilmington, DE 19805

Name	Affiliation	Address
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Gehling, Todd		
Knight, Laura		
Lauinger, Erin		
Mack, Jennifer		
Mathe, Stephanie		
Megali, Laura		
Murray, Megan		
Pace, Allison		
Pendleton, Tracy		
Seitchik, Jessica		
Vettori, Justin		