

# **REPORT on the Transportation Forums**

**Held in  
Jacksonville, Orlando,  
Palm Beach, Tallahassee  
and Tampa**

**July 2006**



**Funded by  
The Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)**



**Organized and Prepared by Wilson Resources, Inc. (WRI)**

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of the Transportation Forums**

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## **Introduction**

Between May 11 and June 21, 2006, Wilson Resources held five 90 minute transportation forums to determine how transportation issues affected the employment of Floridians with disabilities. Every effort was made to create awareness of the sessions among people with disabilities and their families so the opinions expressed were those of people who had first hand experience with transportation or lack thereof in their communities.

The forums were held in Jacksonville, Orlando, Palm Beach, Tallahassee and Tampa, and were funded by the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities and Florida's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, which began in January 2006.

According to the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council 2002 *Survey of the Employment Needs and Goals of Individuals with Disabilities*, the number one impediment to the employment of Floridians with disabilities was lack of transportation. The survey was conducted by WRI and included interviews with 522 people with developmental disabilities from across the state on their employment goals and hurdles.

The purpose of the Florida Transportation Forums was threefold:

- The forums were designed to document what transportation services currently existed and successfully served Floridians with disabilities in getting to and from their current or prospective paid, community jobs;
- The forums identified transportation problems people with disabilities encountered that kept them from working in paid, community jobs, and explored issues related to public and specialized transportation systems; and
- The forums asked people with disabilities and their families to make recommendations that would improve or create accessible, reliable, safe transportation for people with disabilities to get to and from their jobs.

The sessions were facilitated by Leslie Wilson. Notes were taken during the discussion, the forums were digitally recorded and later transcribed by a legal transcriptionist.

## **Methodology**

Respondents were able to participate in the Transportation Forums in one of two ways. The first method was to attend one of the five 90-minute sessions. If prospective respondents wanted to voice their opinions and concerns but could not attend the forums due to scheduling conflicts or lack of transportation, respondents returned a brief survey that allowed them to answer the same questions they would have answered in person.

The goal was to ensure that 75 percent of the respondents were people with disabilities and their family members, a quota that was successfully met through

a combination of forum attendance and written comments, and by exclusion of the state agency and provider observers.

To encourage people with disabilities and their families to participate in the forums, WRI offered \$10 grocery store gift certificates and a light dinner to those who attended.

### **Frequently Noted Overall Problems and Recommendations**

Below are the problems and recommendations that were universal to all five Transportation Forums. 229 individuals participated in the forums.

#### **Problem #1. The Transportation Disadvantaged Program is not reliable enough for people with disabilities to travel to and from their jobs.**

DISCUSSION: According to The Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged January 1, 2006 *Annual Performance Report*, in FY 2005, a total of 53,033,782 trips were provided statewide; however, 749,308 trip requests were denied “due to lack of funding, lack of vehicle availability or for some other reason.” The number of unmet trip requests statewide increased by 10 percent between FY 2004 and 2005.

The Center for Urban Transportation Research has estimated that by the year 2015, 8.25 million Floridians may fall under the Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) definition. Based on this projection, “the unmet needs for this population will be 15.7 million trips annually.”

Other data from this report reflect a limited use of the TD system for “employment” as compared to other “trip purposes.” (See Table 1)

Approximately 12 percent of the trips statewide were for “employment,” while 37 percent were for “medical.” However, it must be noted that the demand for “employment” trips rose by 17 percent between FY 2004 and 2005; it was the only “trip purpose” category that reflected an increase.

During the Transportation Forums, people with disabilities repeatedly noted that they could not use the TD system to get to and from work because it was frequently late, arrived before the end of their work days or stopped running too early for them to return home at the end of their shifts. Others noted that they spent a minimum of two hours getting to work when they lived 15 minutes from their jobs.

One participant requested some type of a seminar for employers on transportation for people with disabilities so they would have a better understanding of why she and others who were similarly situated were always late for work.

Transportation providers noted that it is very difficult to provide timely service in the morning when so many people are trying to get to work. Since the program is door-to-door, if one person is late or there is a traffic jam, the entire system falls behind. The providers who attended the Transportation Forums stated that the TD system is overwhelmed and the supply cannot meet the demand.

**Table 1: Statewide Passenger Trips by Trip Purpose  
Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005  
(Source: Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged  
January 1, 2006 Annual Performance Report)**

<b>Trip Purpose</b>	<b>FY 2004</b>	<b>FY 2005</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Medical	21,254,527	19,479,287	-8%
Employment	5,340,556	6,234,694	17%
Education/Training/Daycare	11,127,807	9,689,364	-13%
Nutritional	8,012,081	7,105,861	-11%
Life Sustaining/Other	11,101,231	10,524,576	-5%
<b>TOTAL TRIPS</b>	<b>56,836,202</b>	<b>53,033,782</b>	<b>-7%</b>

**Problem #1 Recommendations:**

1.A. Additional funding is needed to expand the Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Program so that more vehicles and drivers can be placed into service, reducing the stress on an overworked system and improving reliability and safety. Recommended ways to raise additional funding are:

1. Use the interior and exterior of the paratransit vehicles for advertising. The proceeds would be used to fund TD services;
2. Use volunteers to give tickets to people who illegally park in parking spots reserved for people with disabilities. The ticket money would be used for TD and other forms of transportation for people with disabilities;
3. Assess a two-dollar tax on every rental car in the state of Florida that can be used for TD and public transportation;
4. Include a transportation tax on all new construction, residential and commercial, in Florida. The tax would pay for TD and public transportation services. It is projected that by the year 2015, Florida will face an unmet transportation disadvantaged need of 15.7

million trips annually. This tax would help meet the projected demand.

1.B. Riders who are not trying to get to work should be encouraged to schedule appointments and other trips, when possible, when there is less demand on the system, i.e., between 11:00 AM and 2:00 PM.

1.C. An accessible shuttle service should be created in various sections of each city. The shuttle would move through the area every 15 or 30 minutes, pick up people with disabilities and others, and take them to fixed route bus stops or the main terminal. The number of regional shuttles in each city would depend on its geographic size and population. This would improve the reliability of the transportation service so that people with disabilities could get to and from work on time.

**Problem #2: Fixed route systems, i.e., city buses, are restricted to limited areas and inaccessible to people with disabilities due to busy intersecting streets and no sidewalks. In some communities, the buses are not physically accessible to people with disabilities. Furthermore, city buses do not have expanded hours that permit people to use them when they work second and third shifts.**

DISCUSSION: Several of the Transportation Forum participants attempted to use fixed route transportation services to get to and from work, but many found that bus stops were not easily accessed. Many of them had to travel long distances to reach a bus stop on dangerous streets without sidewalks or they had to cross very busy intersections. In addition, some cities are opposed to bus shelters, which leave people with disabilities and others exposed to elements like rain and severe heat. Public transportation systems also have limited hours on weekends, evenings and in the early morning, making it difficult for people with disabilities to work shifts other than on weekdays from 8-5.

The Transportation Forum participants recommended improvements in fixed route public transportation systems so that they would not have to depend on unreliable Transportation Disadvantaged services to get to work.

### **Problem #2 Recommendations:**

2.A. Bus shelters should be available at all stops. One of the main reasons cities are opposed to them is that they do not have the resources needed to maintain them. One solution is to create an "Adopt a Shelter" program, similar to the "Adopt a Road" program used to keep roadways clean. Local individuals, companies and service organizations could adopt a shelter

and be responsible for maintaining it either by volunteering time or paying someone to keep the shelter clean and neat.

2.B. Public transportation should not be limited to large city buses. Other types of accessible vehicles could be employed that would not be as costly to purchase and operate, and could easily move in and out of narrow city and suburban streets. This could expand the number of bus stops in local communities.

2.C. Public transportation systems should include routes that go directly to areas where there are large numbers of employers. As an example, Orlando tourist attractions such as Walt Disney World, Universal, SeaWorld and others that hire thousands of employees each year are in close proximity. There should be a specific public transportation route with extended hours that goes directly to these attractions so that people with disabilities and others can get to work on time and work past 11:00 PM each night, including weekends, without being stranded. Local transportation providers should request large employers' assistance in solving their current and prospective workers' transportation problems.

2.D. It was estimated by one of the transportation providers that adding one public bus route costs more than \$1 million. Recommendations for increased funding noted in 1.A., items number three and four above, could also be used to expand bus routes and the length of service available.

2.E. The State of Florida should launch a campaign to encourage local communities to build sidewalks so that Floridians can safely walk to and from local destinations, including their jobs.

**Problem #3: Transportation providers' customer service departments are inaccessible and their reservation services are cumbersome and inefficient.**

DISCUSSION: Many of the Transportation Forum participants talked at length about the number of hours they remained on hold when attempting to make a reservation or lodge a complaint.

**Problem #3 Recommendations:**

3.A. Transportation providers should adopt online reservations' systems for those who have access to computers. When the reservation is received, an email confirmation should be sent to the person making the reservation. Online reservations technology and scheduling is readily available.

3.B. Currently, every transportation disadvantaged ride must be scheduled 24 hours in advance, even if the ride occurs every day at the same time

each week. Providers should accept weekly reservations in cases where there is no alteration to the individual transportation schedule. Cancellations would be required based on the local providers' rules.

3.C. Complaints could also be handled online for customers with computer access. Copies of such complaints could be directly routed to the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged. This would help the Commission evaluate the number and types of local transportation provider complaints to determine how well the contractors are meeting their contract obligations.

**Problem #4: Bus drivers are sometimes rude and insensitive to people with disabilities, and some drive recklessly. Drivers often ask passengers for directions to their destinations and there are discrepancies in “no-shows.”**

DISCUSSION: Many of the forum participants complained of rude and condescending bus drivers. There were also stories of personal assaults and verbal abuse, especially in the larger cities. Transportation providers noted that drivers are required to attend many hours of training. In addition, passengers with disabilities are often asked for directions or drivers have difficulty locating pickup sites, which compound problems with timeliness. There also were situations where the bus driver said the passenger was a “no-show” but the passenger said the driver never arrived.

**Problem #4 Recommendations:**

4.A. Driver training curricula and other issues related to drivers should be reviewed by a committee of people assembled by the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged. The review committee should make recommendations for improvements in the driver training curriculum and driver accountability so that people with disabilities receive the highest quality transportation services. Individuals serving on the committee should be people with disabilities who use TD or public transportation, their family members, transportation providers, bus drivers and other interested parties.

4.B. All buses and vans should be equipped with global positioning systems so that drivers can easily locate addresses for passenger pickups and deliveries.

4.C. All buses and vans should have tracking systems so that they can be located at all times, ending the debate about whether or not they arrived at a specific destination.

**Problem #5: Eligibility requirements force people with disabilities to not work or suppress their earnings because if they earn too much they lose their transportation services and have to quit their jobs.**

DISCUSSION: This is a major problem for people with disabilities who want to earn a living wage and seek career promotions. One of the examples during the forums was that of a young woman who had to turn down her dream job because it paid too much. If she took it, she would lose her transportation services and without transportation she could not get to work. With the added earnings over time it might have been possible for her to save the money needed to purchase her own car or hire a driver. Assisting people to earn more, rather than punishing them, could reduce the burden on the transportation system as people with disabilities become more independent.

**Problem #5 Recommendation:**

5.A. Eligibility requirements should be reviewed at the federal, state and local levels to assure they are not punitive and a disincentive to work and gain independence. The projected monthly cost of the transportation services should be deducted from the individual's earnings before eligibility is determined.

5.B. The cost of TD services is high; some individuals pay \$5 each way, \$10/day and up to \$200/month. The cost is prohibitive for someone with a part-time or low paying job. The cost should be reviewed.

**Problem #6: There are not enough personal transportation options for people with disabilities.**

DISCUSSION: During the forums, participants were urged to dream about solutions to their transportation problems. Their recommendations are listed below.

**Problem #6 Recommendations:**

6.A. Vouchers for transportation services to get people to and from work should be pilot tested in several Florida communities to determine how such a program might work. Vouchers would be very helpful in Florida's rural communities. The vouchers would permit people with disabilities to hire their own transportation providers, e.g., neighbors, relatives, retired persons and others who would be willing to assist.

6.B. Peachtree City, Georgia has paths on the sides of its road for golfcarts or Segways. These vehicles are more affordable and easier to drive than an automobile and would be excellent solutions for many

people with disabilities. More golfcart paths are needed across the state of Florida.

6.C. There should be a wider array of transportation options like a paid mini-bus service, contracts with limo services, subsidized cab rides and organized, private carpooling. Families of young people with disabilities frequently said they would help pay for such services since they would have bought cars and paid the costs of gas and insurance if their sons and daughters could drive themselves to and from work. A wider array of transportation services would also provide competition to existing transportation providers.

6.D. Many people with disabilities are not aware of personal transportation options, like purchasing their own vans, that are available through grants and other funding sources. More education is needed in this area.

**Problem #7: People with disabilities and their families need more information on transportation options available to them in their communities, eligibility requirements, travel training services, cost and other transportation information.**

DISCUSSION: People with disabilities and their families were confused by the transportation terms and needed more information on the services available to them.

**Problem #7 Recommendation:**

7.A. Each local transportation provider should have an information hotline and website that explain what transportation services are available to people with disabilities, the eligibility requirements and cost. The application process could begin online for those with computer access. The local hotlines and websites should be accessible and understandable to people with disabilities and their families.

**Problem #8: Local officials, policymakers, legislators and the general public are unaware of the obstacles people with disabilities experience using public transportation services to get to and from work.**

DISCUSSION: People with disabilities are frustrated by the lack of reliable, safe transportation needed to get them to and from work. They feel that policy-makers and the general public are indifferent to their transportation problems.

**Problem #8 Recommendation:**

8.A. Local government officials, policy-makers and state legislators should experience first-hand the difficulties people with disabilities encounter in trying to get to work on time. For one day, each of them should follow someone who uses TD or public transportation.

8.B. The Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged should launch a statewide public awareness campaign to encourage the general public to support and advocate for increases in funding for transportation. The campaign should educate the public about the difficulties people with disabilities experience in moving about their communities.

*I recommend that the report from this Transportation Forum and other meetings go to the governor's office, to all of the legislative delegations, and our local county and city commissioners. There is a stereotype that keeps us from having a good transportation system. The common myth is that people with disabilities just go to the doctor; that is all we do. You can see people's jaws dropping when you tell them you are employed. You have children, you went to college, you go out to happy hour, and you go to the library, whatever. It amazes people that you have a full life. This is not to say that medical appointments are not important; preventative medical care is more important than anything else. But transportation for people with disabilities is needed for so much more. Medical care alone does not make you a whole person, anymore than it does for people who do not have disabilities. We need to emphasize to the governor and policy makers that this is a quality of life issue. This is about becoming a taxpayer and a consumer. They need to hear that we have money, and we have a vote.*

An Orlando Transportation Forum Participant  
June 21, 2006

