

Getting to Work: Addressing the Transportation Challenge

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Introduction

Even the best job matches won't succeed if there's no way for people to get to work. However, transportation doesn't need to be an insurmountable barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities, and should not deter active job development.

Many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities aren't able to own or drive their own vehicles, so transportation is often a challenge. This is especially true for those living in places where public transportation is lacking, such as rural areas. While there are no magic answers for transportation issues, there are options—and often more than we may realize. With a little research and creativity, you can find transportation solutions for the individuals you support.

Transportation: One Person at a Time

It is best practice to use a person-centered approach to career planning, and this is also a good way to approach transportation. Each person has specific needs, preferences, and networks that should be guiding transportation development ideas.

Be expansive in your thinking, and don't focus on disability-specific transportation. Start with generic options available to everyone in your area. Not only does this promote independence, integration, and inclusion, but it also tends to be less costly and complicated than using disability-specific services. Here are some further tips:

- ❖ Brainstorm with family members, the professional team, the employer, and all other networks for creative ideas.
- ❖ Focus the job match close to home. Could the employee walk to work?
- ❖ Find out if public transportation is available. (See the sidebar on travel-training resources.)
- ❖ Explore all transportation services in your area: para-transit, elder services, and medical or college shuttles.
- ❖ How do coworkers get to work? Seek out carpooling and employer resources.
- ❖ Does the person have access to a vehicle or could they purchase one? If so, perhaps they could find a driver.
- ❖ Consider employment with larger corporations who provide transportation for employees.
- ❖ Use Social Security Work Incentives (PASS, IRWE, Blind Work Expenses) to cover transportation expenses. For more information, consult your local
 - **WIPA benefits planner** (<http://1.usa.gov/Al6abN>) or
 - **PASS cadre** (<http://1.usa.gov/y2dj4K>)
- ❖ Consider options for moving closer to the job site, especially for a stable job with high pay and benefits.

Creative Solutions: Natural Supports

Sally began a job as a student café attendant at a college in the suburb where she lived. She was able to catch the college shuttle from her neighborhood bus stop in the morning, but the shuttle stopped running by mid-afternoon when she finished her shift.

Sally's job coach assisted her in consulting with campus security to investigate whether they could help with her predicament. It was arranged that Sally would check in with the security office once she had clocked out, and someone would gladly give her a lift to the bus stop.

Creative Solutions: Keeping SSDI

José receives \$790 per month from SSDI. He just began a new job, and now grosses monthly earnings of \$1080. He has a significant physical disability, and uses a wheelchair. José has negotiated an arrangement with a nearby cab company to transport him back and forth to work for \$150 each month. He has gotten this expense approved as an Impairment Related Work Expense by his local Social Security office.

Social Security will now deduct this \$150 from the amount of income that will be counted in adjusting José's SSDI check. This means that his countable income will remain below Substantial Gainful Activity (\$1010 per month in 2012). José will be able to continue receiving his full SSDI check, along with his new work earnings. Otherwise, his SSDI cash payment would be suspended for exceeding SGA.

José now has reliable and stable transportation to and from work, and he has preserved his cash benefit while he transitions into his new job.

Individual Planning Tool

The Community Transportation Association of America has designed an Individual Transportation Planning process, along with forms and worksheets. These can be downloaded from the website below (see “Documents You Can Use” midway down the right side of the page): www.ctaa.org/transportation_solutions

Travel Training

People with significant disabilities can learn to travel independently. However, this often requires systematic instruction and supports. In many areas, transportation training is available through transit systems, transportation service providers, independent living centers, and other disability programs. The widespread use of cell phones and broad availability of GPS technology are helping to allay many concerns about independent travel.

Easter Seals Project Action has a variety of information on travel training, including training curriculums, and an array of travel training publications. Additionally, Easter Seals regularly holds travel instructor training around the country. For more information, check out <http://bit.ly/gSaMXJ>.

Link Up With the Experts!

Human service staff are not the experts on transportation. We need to connect with those experts, learn from them, and collaborate. Here’s how to start:

- ❖ Link with national organizations, and with state and local transportation officials.
- ❖ Identify all the transportation resources in your area, and focus on local capacity building.
- ❖ Link with other groups with transportation needs.
- ❖ Use national resources, such as these:

[Community Transportation Association of America
www.ctaa.org](http://www.ctaa.org)

[Joblinks Employment Transportation Initiative
www.solutionstogetthere.org](http://www.solutionstogetthere.org)

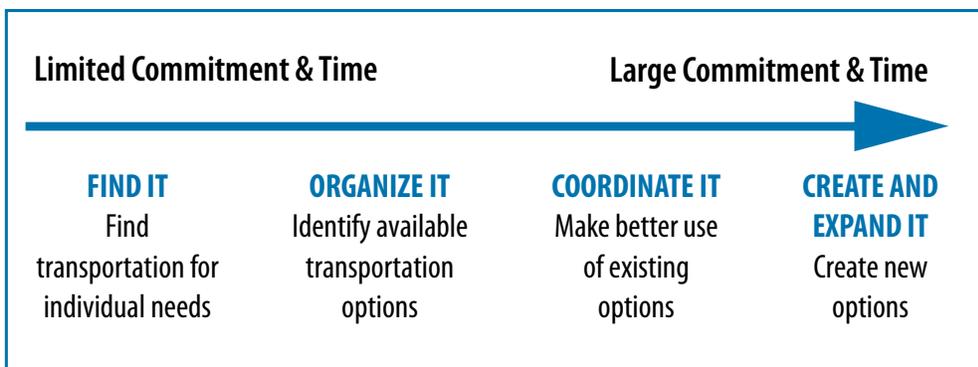
[Easter Seals Project Action
\(check out their creative and innovative activities\)
http://connectpro97884399.na6.acrobat.com/p10238798/](http://connectpro97884399.na6.acrobat.com/p10238798/)

[United We Ride
www.unitedweride.gov](http://www.unitedweride.gov)

How Involved Should You Be?

The level of involvement you will have with transportation is going to be dependent on the availability of transportation options, and the level of time you are willing to commit on an individual basis. In areas with an array of options, you can probably find solutions through identifying what’s on hand, and matching that with an individual’s needs. Depending on the needs and your time, you may want to take a more global approach and identify transportation resources by creating a listing, such as in an online directory or database.

A more intensive level of involvement, if necessary, is to coordinate the existing resources to be better connected and to identify potential gaps. In areas with more limited options, you may need to create your own solution (e.g., developing a volunteer driver program, creating a shuttle system). As the level of involvement increases, use national and local resources, band with others experiencing transportation challenges, and advocate with local officials to create transportation solutions.



Strategies from a Systems Perspective

Public systems that support individuals with disabilities should consider these strategies:

- ❖ **Re-purpose existing funding and transportation services to get people to their community jobs.** Many systems have transportation structures that were set up to support travel to facility-based day services, which are often resource intensive. Determine if there are ways of reconfiguring these resources to support employment in the community.
- ❖ **Examine integration of transportation within rates.** Service systems often integrate transportation within the cost of services for individuals. Service systems should examine if and how transportation is being funded on an individual basis and ensure that if transportation funding is being provided, it is being done so in a way that creates incentives for individuals to use generic transportation resources independently rather than promoting reliance on a service provider for transportation needs.
- ❖ **Bridge the gap to public transportation.** Examine the financial resources currently being used for transportation. Determine if there are ways those dollars could be used differently to support transportation to jobs. One option might be using those dollars to assist individuals to access “generic” (non-disability-specific) transportation options, possibly at lower cost.
- ❖ **Ride the bus/light rail/train/ferry!** Teach everyone how to use public transportation.
- ❖ **Make independent travel a core component of goals, and maximize the number of individuals who are travel trained.** Ensure that travel training is systematically available to as many individuals as possible, and that this training is of high quality.
- ❖ **Provide transportation training to staff.** Ensure that system staff and service providers are well aware of the various national and local resources available. Encourage participation in the various trainings that are made available by Easter Seals Project Action, CTAA, and other groups.
- ❖ **Get involved in the solution.** Become engaged and involved in transportation planning groups at the state and local level. Meet with transportation officials to discuss employment transportation needs and challenges—and offer to work in partnership to address those challenges.
- ❖ **Get more resources.** Look for opportunities for planning and technical assistance grants and projects that can assist with addressing transportation needs.
- ❖ **Remove the barriers.** Provide ideas, resources, and guidelines (such as those outlined in this publication) to staff. This can help create transportation solutions and remove the outdated notion that people with significant disabilities can’t figure out how to get to work.

Creative Solutions: Coming Together to Resolve the Challenge

#1 - In a New England state where public transit options are lacking, a coalition of entities representing people with disabilities, elders, and those in economic need developed a vanpool service. A small grant was obtained to serve as seed money. Service providers pay a membership fee to have access to the vanpool, and individuals with and without disabilities use the vanpool to get to work and meet other transportation needs.

#2 - In a rural area in the northern Midwest, a local anti-poverty agency brought together an alliance of community agencies, including those serving individuals with disabilities. The concept of a volunteer driver service was developed, and funding was applied for via a federal transportation initiative. The volunteer driver service was implemented, meeting the employment transportation needs of individuals with and without disabilities. Funding for system management, mileage reimbursement, and other costs comes from a combination of federal grants, county funds, and user fees.

CTAA is a great resource for more information on funding options. (See page 2)

Transportation: A National Priority

Feeling frustrated by transportation challenges? Take heart—there are reasons for optimism!

- ❖ There is increasing recognition that lack of access to transportation is an issue for many individuals, not just those with disabilities.
- ❖ Our aging society and the growing “green movement” are creating increased demand for transportation alternatives.
- ❖ Technology and social media are creating many new solutions.

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube offer online networking and resource-sharing potential. <http://bit.ly/H7RAIL> is a blog offering information on using social media to arrange for transportation.

Smart phones and GPS technology are creating new options in terms of transportation management and addressing safety issues.

Technology is making ridesharing increasingly easy. Here is a sampling of national websites that can link people together to share rides. Local and regional sites also exist, so do an online search for “rideshare” and the name of your town or region.

www.nuride.com

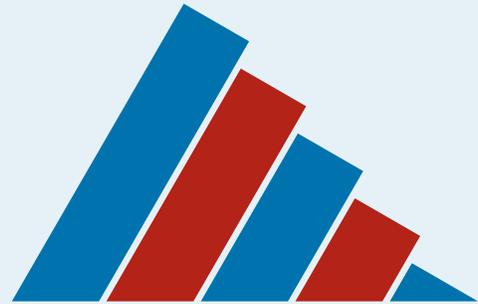
www.erideshare.com

www.pickuppal.com

Conclusion

Solving transportation takes some initiative and creativity, but it is doable! And it's worth the effort. Well-matched job options will become more plentiful. Plus, the individuals you support will benefit from becoming independent and self-directed in their travel habits.

“While there are no magic answers for transportation issues, there are options—and often more than we may realize.”



The State Employment Leadership Network is a network of 25 state intellectual and developmental disability agencies working together to improve employment outcomes for individuals. The SELN is a joint program of the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

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