

Alaska Commission on Aging Priority:

Community Coordinated Transportation

- **\$3,000,000 State Transit Matching Fund**
- **\$1,100,000 Capital Funding**
- **Extension of Governor's Transportation Task Force**

February, 2010

Issue:

Transportation provides the key to ensuring that the system of home- and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities functions smoothly and efficiently. People must be able to get to medical and dental appointments, shopping, social engagements, and other necessary destinations with a minimum of uncertainty and frustration. A well-designed and well-functioning system of community coordinated transportation supports the entire system of care and the well-being of all those who depend upon it. Seniors in particular become very upset by the transit snafus (delays, missed pick-ups, scheduling problems, et al) that can result from inadequate system capacity.

As the number of seniors in Alaska grows at a pace four times the national average, the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) would like to see the State of Alaska step up to ensure the stability and capitalization of community transit systems for special needs populations. A statewide coordinated transportation plan, including adequate funding for community transportation systems across the state, is a top priority for the ACoA for 2010.

Background:

The lack of accessible, affordable transportation is a major barrier to the health care, employment, and community participation of seniors, Alaskans with disabilities, and others with special needs. Even many who live in areas with adequate infrastructure of roads and bridges still don't have reliable access to transportation services that meet their needs.

Many communities in Alaska have no community transportation systems. Sometimes non-profit organizations, church groups, senior centers, and other agencies may help their members get rides, but the overall need far exceeds the availability of these small operations. Some seniors and people with disabilities may be forced to move to communities that can support their transportation needs, when they would prefer to remain at home near loved ones and the social and cultural environment they know. Transportation is consistently one of the top needs

identified in statewide surveys of seniors, people with disabilities, and beneficiaries of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Most funding for public transportation comes from federal formula grants, which provide anywhere from 50% to 91% of costs, depending on the program. Despite increased levels of federal funding, Alaska's community transportation systems are under constant financial pressure to keep up with the demand for services, particularly given the increases in the number of rides, and fuel and vehicle costs in recent years.

Alaska is one of only three states that do not provide financial support to operate public and community transportation systems. However, the State of Alaska currently provides direct general fund matching assistance for other modes of transportation, including highways, aviation, harbors, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects. Annual federal funding available to Alaska for transit assistance varies from year to year, but averages \$9 million or more. In many cases, Alaska is not capturing all these federal funds due to the lack of adequate funding to cover the match requirements. State funds to help meet the match requirements for both operating and capital expenditures would put public and community transportation providers on a par with other federal and state "partnerships" which provide transportation for Alaskans.

In October 2008, Governor Palin signed an administrative order creating the Governor's Coordinated Transportation Task Force. Governor Palin appointed the Task Force in March 2009 and its members have met with local decision makers, transit providers, and transit advocates in several communities. With submission of a final set of recommendations to Governor Parnell and the Legislature in January 2010, the commission was slated to end. Its substantial efforts have only just begun the difficult job of coordinating State-sponsored transportation programs across multiple State departments and agencies.

Recommendation:

The Alaska Commission on Aging recommends that the Legislature:

- Extend the sunset provision for the Governor's Coordinated Transportation Task Force to June 30, 2011;
- Provide \$3 million in State operating funds for a State Transit Matching Fund program in order to leverage maximum federal financial assistance for public transportation operations; and
- Provide \$1.1 million in State capital funds (\$800,000 GF and \$300,000 MHTAAR) to leverage maximum federal financial assistance for public transportation capital expenses.