

Good afternoon Chairman Duncan, Ranking Member DeFazio and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to outline our recommendations for increasing mobility for people with disabilities and older adults in the reauthorization of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Act – A Legacy for Users or SAFETEA-LU. My name is Jennifer Dexter and I am the Assistant Vice President for Government Relations at Easter Seals. I also serve as the co-chair of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities' (CCD) Transportation Task Force as well as co-chair of the Senior Transportation Task Force (STTF).

Easter Seals is very proud of our long history helping to increase the mobility of people with disabilities and older adults. For many years we have operated the federally funded Project ACTION to work with the disability and transit communities to overcome barriers to accessible transportation. Project ACTION was originally created in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and has been included in every transportation authorization since. Project ACTION has evolved over the years and is now the preeminent resource for the country on access to transportation for people with disabilities including all aspects of the transportation provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, Easter Seals operates the National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST) in partnership with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A). The NCST was created in SAFETEA-LU to be a resource to increase mobility for older adults. Both Project ACTION and the NCST are administered through cooperative agreements with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The centers work in collaboration with the FTA to provide technical assistance, education, and outreach to the disability, aging and transit communities and are the preeminent resource in the country for helping increase the mobility of older adults and people with disabilities.

Access to transportation provides a vital lifeline for people with disabilities and older adults to engage in employment, education, healthcare, and community life. Yet too often, people with disabilities lack access to affordable, accessible and reliable transportation options. The 2010 Harris Poll, funded by the National Organization on Disability, established that 34% of people with disabilities report having inadequate access to transportation. This is compared with only 16% of the general public. In fact, the problem seems to be worsening, with a jump of 4% in the number of people with disabilities reporting inadequate transportation options since the last study in 1998.

The federal programs that are specifically aimed at increasing the mobility of people with disabilities and older adults are small, yet effective, and the creation of the New Freedom Program (Section 5317) in the last transportation reauthorization is a positive step. As the nation ages and more demand is put on these specialized systems, it is imperative that the Administration and Congress increase the accessibility of our nation's transportation network and the mobility of all Americans.

Today I would like to discuss five specific issues that need to be addressed in the reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU.

- Overall funding for transit.
- The potential impacts of program consolidation.
- Input and involvement into planning processes by stakeholders.
- Mobility management services.
- The continued need to targeted technical assistance and education.

Funding

People with disabilities and older adults are disproportionately reliant on public transportation. The authorization should increase funding for transit programs in all areas of the country, including formula grants for urbanized and rural areas and others that provide more targeted funding to vulnerable population groups such as people with disabilities and older adults. As the population ages, more people are going to be relying on public transportation options to maintain their mobility thereby increasing demand. Increased funding would allow more transit providers to utilize intelligent transportation systems (ITS) to create greater mobility. In addition, more flexibility in funding, particularly using 5310 funding for operating assistance would be a great help to utilizing dollars more effectively. It is critical that the next transportation authorization bill provide an increased investment in transit at a level that will meet the growing demand for services and allows for affordable, accessible, efficient and reliable transportation options for all Americans.

Consolidation

Efforts to streamline transportation programs to create efficiencies and minimize administrative burden are laudable and necessary in the current economic environment. However, we urge that consolidation efforts be undertaken very cautiously and that protections be put in place to assure that needed services are not lost in the process.

The most prominent discussions around consolidation seem to focus on programs that serve unique needs of people with disabilities, older adults and low-income individuals, particularly the 5310 program, New Freedom Program and the Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program. While there are many overlapping issues affecting all of these populations, there are also some distinct needs and competing interests that need to be taken into account in any consolidation discussion. It is critical that there be assurances that projects in consolidated programs continue to address the sometimes unique needs of these populations. Without some protections to assure that everyone's needs are represented fairly in the decision-making and priority setting process, one or more of these communities could literally be left behind. There are some specific things in the planning process that might make sense to help create these protections and I will discuss those in the next section.

Another issue to consider is the primary role that the 5310 and New Freedom programs have played in helping assure that people with disabilities and older adults have access to services. 5310 has evolved to be a real lifeline for nonprofit service providers and we should do nothing to erode that. The 5310 program is often the sole resource that service

providers have to make sure that people are able to attend their programs and participate in healthcare, respite, social and other activities. This partnership between nonprofit service providers and transit also allows 5310 dollars to go further as they are bundled with philanthropic and other private dollars to create better service. We fear that in consolidation, the balance of power in decision-making would mean that transit agencies would be less likely to pass through 5310 funding to nonprofit providers and instead create new programs of their own or support existing targeted programs, especially in these very tough fiscal times. The vital partnership between transit agencies and nonprofit service providers that 5310 has created is successful and must be protected. In addition, the New Freedom Program has been used to initiate cost-effective consumer responsive options such as dial-a-ride, taxi vouchers and volunteer driver programs, not just fixed route transit. Having resources that expand mobility options beyond fixed-route transit is something that needs to be continued in any consolidation discussions.

Planning

One of the very positive things to come out of SAFETEA-LU has been the consolidated human services planning process required for New Freedom, 5310 and JARC funding. We have seen tremendous progress in getting more people with disabilities, older adults and the people who serve them to the table to help create the priorities for spending. In this reauthorization, we would like to see this process strengthened even further.

Planning must be accountable, transparent, inclusive, and have real measures of expected outcomes so there is a reference point to define success. In addition, planning processes for different aspects of mobility, including highway planning, should be consistent. In order to do this, more direction is needed on what a truly inclusive process means and further oversight of the process of planning, not just the outcome. In order to make sure that the disability and aging communities are genuinely part of the process, it takes real outreach efforts from transit and planning agencies. Although we all know how critical transportation is to the lives of individuals, it is often not the primary area of expertise for most advocates and individuals who are most likely to be part of the planning process. Too often I hear that transit planners tried to reach out but were not able to get people to participate. This is not necessarily due to apathy, but often to competing priorities and a lack of understanding about transportation systems and other things that are often second nature to transit and planning authorities.

We recommend that designated agencies be charged with documenting how input from stakeholders was considered in the development of the coordinated transportation plan. The Department of Transportation should review those efforts to assure that they are sufficient and that every effort was made to enable input. Stakeholders should also have an opportunity to review and comment on the plan before it is finalized. We also continue to call for all plans to be quickly and easily available to the public in one central location.

Mobility Management

Mobility management is a critical concept that needs to be enhanced in this reauthorization. Mobility management focuses on the individual and identifies the best transportation options, both public and private, for that person's travel needs. Mobility management improves transportation options for those utilizing community services, workforce development centers, education, and health services and ultimately improves mobility options for everyone. Mobility management services also help to maximize the use of Intelligent Transportation Systems and other technology to enhance mobility and create one-call systems that allow greater ease-of-use for customers. In addition, mobility management includes people with disabilities and older adults in the design of transportation options.

Person-directed mobility management includes:

- identifying needed services and transportation needed to access those services;
- assessing community transportation resources;
- assessing an individual's ability to use those resources;
- filling service gaps, and;
- providing agencies and individuals with information and training on using local transportation.

SAFETEA-LU established an inclusive concept of mobility management, which is an available capital expense throughout the federal transit program, including Section 5310. Unfortunately, only minimal technical assistance is currently available to help transportation programs develop mobility management efforts and adapt them to people's unique needs. In addition, there are few incentives for local providers to adopt mobility management strategies instead of investing more in vans or buses, since all are treated equally as capital expenses. Mobility management services must be enhanced to better help transit and human services systems meet the needs of people with disabilities and older adults by establishing a dedicated funding source for these services. We also recommend that any resources available for mobility management require that human service providers be a critical part of the delivery of services.

The additional advantage to having mobility management resources in as many communities as possible is in the planning process. Once mobility management is set up in a community, there is a single entity charged with knowing the entire array of transportation resources in that community, both public and private. This will help minimize duplication and unnecessary use of federal and state dollars if there are private resources already available.

Technical Assistance and Education

While great progress has been made in the accessibility of transportation options since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990; advances in technology, changes in consumer demand, continuing changes in societal attitudes about people with disabilities, and the aging of America all speak to the continued need for targeted technical assistance and education to help people with disabilities, older adults, and communities work together to overcome barriers to mobility.

The funding level for Project ACTION has remained static since 1998. At the same time, the increasing complexity of mobility issues facing people with disabilities and transit providers, as well as the increased prominence of the work done by Project ACTION, has greatly increased demand. By any measure, Project ACTION has done an exemplary job in providing quality, needed and targeted technical assistance, training and education with limited resources and has managed to significantly expand its reach by increasing efficiency and intelligent use of technologies such as on-line training to expand their reach. Another thing that has helped Project ACTION continue to thrive has been partnerships with other federal agencies and private sector entities to undertake targeted projects. These partnerships are critical in not only expanding the reach of Project ACTION, but also in assuring that mobility for people with disabilities is addressed in a variety of venues. However, without additional resources, Project ACTION will not be able to continue to meet the broad range of need that is emerging and quality and access to services will suffer.

The NCST, originally authorized under SAFETEA-LU, has proven to be a valuable resource for helping communities meet the needs of a growing aging population. Since beginning operations in 2007, the NCST has provided necessary technical assistance on best practices for non-governmental organizations and public agencies and brought together aging and transportation professionals in order to better serve the transportation needs of older adults. Increased funding for the program would begin to help meet existing demand for technical assistance and education, and would increase the ability of the center to provide direct support to more communities who are trying to meet existing demands and help promote cost-effective and coordinated mobility solutions to meet the growing demand for services.

I am happy to provide the committee with more specific information about the activities of the projects and some basic information is included in my written testimony.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide input into this critically important process and we look forward to working with you all as we move forward.

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
Truth in Testimony Disclosure

Pursuant to clause 2(g)(5) of House Rule XI, in the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include: (1) a curriculum vitae; and (2) a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. Such statements, with appropriate redaction to protect the privacy of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness appears.

(1) Name:

Jennifer Dexter

(2) Other than yourself, name of entity you are representing:

Easter Seals, Inc.

(3) Are you testifying on behalf of an entity other than a Government (federal, state, local) entity?

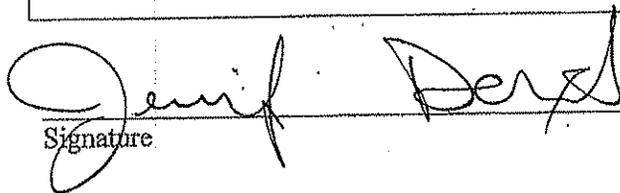
YES

If yes, please provide the information requested below and attach your curriculum vitae.

NO

(4) Please list the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by you or by the entity you are representing:

See attached


Signature

3/28/11
Date

**Grant Disclosures
Jennifer Dexter
Easter Seals, Inc.**

Fiscal Years 2008 – 2010

\$3 million per year from the Federal Transit Administration for Project ACTION
\$1 million per year from the Federal Transit Administration for the National Center on Senior Transportation

Fiscal Year 2008

Department of Labor Senior Community Service employment Program - \$18,966,670

Fiscal Year 2009

Department of Labor Senior Community Service employment Program - \$22,093,163

Fiscal Year 2010

Department of Labor Senior Community Service employment Program - \$28,259,858

Jennifer Dexter is the Assistant Vice President, Government Relations for Easter Seals headquarters' Office of Public Affairs. In that role, she leads Easter Seals' efforts with Congress annually to assure funding for all federal programs serving people with disabilities and older adults including Easter Seals' Federal programs including the National Center on Senior Transportation, and Project ACTION. She also works with Congress to create and strengthen public policy affecting older adults particularly in long-term care. Prior to joining Easter Seals in 1996, Jennifer was a research/legislative specialist for the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. She has a Bachelors Degree from Washington University in St. Louis.