

Legislative Commission to End Poverty by 2020
Group 2 – Building Financial and Developmental Assets

Working Group on Transportation
Recommendations
September 11, 2008

Transportation is essential for individual and family success, alongside food, clothing, housing, healthcare, social connections, and access to resources and education. In fact, eliminating transportation creates insurmountable barriers to accessing other basic needs. As such, transportation can be viewed in an “eliminating barriers” light as easily as it is seen as “building assets”.

In all of the tours and public discussions the Commission participated in, whether in rural areas, regional centers, or the metropolitan area, transportation was articulated time and again as a key problem, to the surprise of many.

When transportation is unreliable, problematic, or worse, non-existent, the prospect of becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty increases greatly. The Commission heard numerous stories of families forced to devote significant portions of their budget to fixing and fueling old cars, or worse, being disqualified from assistance programs when they earned extra money to make a repair. Others spoke of untold hours waiting for rides from fixed route transit and paratransit services, being unable to cross county lines, severe restrictions on hours and days of service, and confusion about how to even access which form of transportation for a particular type of trip. Many simply were not able to get to jobs, appointments, social engagements, or were forced to endure severe isolation. Service providers reported on the expense of purchasing vehicles to augment a lack of transportation service in their communities. Seven counties in Minnesota completely lack transit service.

As is easily expected, the modes of transportation that works best for a given individual a particular community, or a specific type of trip can vary widely.

The Transportation subgroup of the Building Assets Working Group recommends the following:

1. Minnesota should give a priority to insuring access to transportation by its low-income, senior and disabled residents. Other states and metropolitan areas have successfully tackled this problem and offer best practice models. State agencies have begun to examine this problem. In areas where there are transit options this might mean:
 - a. Keep transit fares at an affordable level (with subsidies if needed).
 - b. Elimination of service gaps and service overlaps, inefficient use of resources, and inferior or inconsistent quality of service.
 - c. Some states have created state level commissions that have sufficient power and resources to mandate better planning, integration and coordination of the transportation needs of low-income, disabled and senior citizens. The State of Minnesota should consider creating such a commission.
 - d. When transportation systems function optimally for the larger community, the transportation disadvantaged benefit as well. Minnesota should strive to align its

economic development strategies, land use policies, and transportation investment planning to achieve this goal.

2. In rural areas Minnesota faces a more difficult task. The lack of density in rural areas makes some regular route transit services impractical. However, the Commission has been impressed with the value of programs such as:
 - a. Non-profit programs that sell cars to low-income households for minimal cost. Many of these programs also provide low cost car repairs. These programs when coupled with access to financial services and insurance, gas cards or discounted fuel, and driver training and licensing can be very successful in giving rural resident access to jobs and services
 - b. Expansion and coordination of human services transportation, fleets and dispatching, whether from private or public agencies should be expanded and coordinated to provide alternatives to rural residents.
 - c. Those areas of Minnesota where some form of regular route transit service would be a benefit but is now absent, barriers to its establishment should be eliminated.
3. Innovations in cooperative ownership of automobiles (occasional access to a vehicle without having to pay full ownership) such as ZipCar and HourCar should be explored. This idea works best when individuals have access to other means of mobility for most purposes.
4. Engage employers and the business community to:
 - a. Support better public transportation
 - b. Locate workplaces in proximity to housing and transit and other important community resources.
 - c. Provide special transportation to worksites where needed.
 - d. Support telecommuting or other programs to enable employees to work at home