TRANSPORTATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Summary and Recommendations from Transportation Forum
Hosted by Services for Independent Living
and Disability Rights Ohio

APRIL 2015

Disability Rights OHIO

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SERVICES FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING, INC.
SIL
EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

BACKGROUND

One in five Ohioans is a person with a disability. Like many other minority groups, people with disabilities have been stigmatized and this has resulted in fewer opportunities for economic advancement and have left many with disabilities in poverty. In 2013, 24.4% of Ohioans with disabilities live in households with incomes below the federal poverty level compared to 14.8% of people who do not have disabilities[1]. Like many other minority communities, people with disabilities, especially visible disabilities, are often thought of as lesser human beings than people without disabilities. Further, people with disabilities are treated as if they are unable to make decisions about their lives and well-being for themselves. Historically, people with disabilities were segregated away from mainstream society and were often sent to asylums and institutions, "for their own safety." living in horrific conditions for their entire lives.

It was not until the civil rights movement in the 1960s where people with disabilities and their advocates followed the example of women, persons of color and other minority groups to demand equal treatment, access, and opportunity. The Independent Living Movement was borne out of the broader civil rights movement, and emphasizes that people with disabilities do not have problems that need to be solved or fixed. Rather, people with disabilities ask only for the same civil rights that are guaranteed to others. The Independent Living Movement sees disability as a construct of society and a part of the natural life process. It is not the person who falls outside the norm that has a problem, but it is the way that society is structured that does not allow them to fully participate. There are purposefully constructed and maintained physical, programmatic and attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities[2].

The movement for civil rights continues today, as people with disabilities continue to battle an established medical model that believes that people with disabilities need to be helped or fixed, and do not need or deserve equal access to opportunity as people without disabilities. These attitudes are perpetuated as the prevalence of disability among Ohio adults is considerably higher for other populations which have been historically excluded and denied civil rights, including African American adults where prevalence of reported disabilities is 26.7%, or Hispanic adults where prevalence of reported disability is 19% compared 17.1% for whites[3]. Please note that many in the disability community consider these numbers low as many disabilities, e.g., behavioral health, hearing loss and learning disabilities, are unreported or under-reported.

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau; American Fact Finder, United States Census 2013, 3-Year Estimates, B18130 **factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml**

[2] National Council on Independent Living. *About Independent Living* **ncil.org/about/aboutil/**

[3] Ashmead, Robert and Tim Sahr, *2013 Ohio Disability Data Report*, Ohio Disability and Health Program, Ohio State University, 2013

Transportation systems and services funded by public dollars are one area where social constructs that create barriers to full participation in community are most prevalent. Transportation is an essential component of building healthy, safe and sustainable communities; it is the glue of daily life. For those with access to affordable transportation, it is rarely thought of or discussed outside of conversations about traffic congestion or speculation about gas prices. However, for many low-income people and people with disabilities a lack of affordable transportation limits their activities and possibilities. According to the Transportation Equity Caucus, the average cost of owning a car is about $9,500[4], which is 42% of the income for a family of four living at the federal poverty level. One-third of low-income African American and one quarter of low-income Latino households do not have access to a car[5]. Adults with disabilities are more than twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation[6]. At the same time, less than 1% of Ohio's multi-billion dollar transportation budget is dedicated to the public transit system[7] that many low-income people and people with disabilities rely on to access health care, education, employment, and community life.

In addition to this disproportionate funding, many modes of transportation including buses[8], trains[9], and taxi cabs[10] remain inaccessible to people with disabilities. Instead of creating a universal system that works for all, the focus has been on developing alternative transport systems, including para-transit or specialized cab services[11] or adapting other programs to provide transportation services to specific places, such as Medicaid transportation for

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[4] Leadership Conference Education Fund. *Where we Need to Go: A Civil Rights Roadmap for Transportation Equity*. March 2011 **protectcivilrights.org/pdf/docs/transportation/52846576-Where-We-Need-to-Go-A-Civil-Rights-Roadmap-for-Transportation-Equity.pdf**

[5] See footnote 4.

[6] American Association of People with Disabilities and The Leadership Conference Education Fund *Equity in Transportation for People with Disabilities*. **aapd.com/resources/publications/transportation-disabilities.pdf**

[7] Ohio Department of Transportation. *Ohio Statewide Transit Needs Study*. December 2014. **dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Planning/Transit/TransitNeedsStudy/Pages/StudyReports.aspx**

[8] Hine, Julian and Fiona Mitchell. "Better for Everyone? Travel Experiences and Transit Exclusion" *Urban Studies*. Feb. 2001.

[9] National Disability Rights Network *All Aboard (Except People with Disabilities): Amtrak's 23 Years of ADA Compliance Failure*. October 2013 **dadsupport.ndrn.org/pub/NDRN_Amtrak_Report.pdf**

[10] United Spinal Association *Access to Taxis in New York City*. **unitedspinal.org/access-to-taxis-in-new-york-city/**

[11] See footnote 8.

medical appointments or transportation to schools through education funding. These services not only segregate people with disabilities, but they have often been demonstrated to be inferior to general transportation services[12]. Research has demonstrated that even with civil rights protections and the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) nearly 25 years ago, inclusion is still not a priority in design of the built environment. Designers concede that the ADA and universal design have benefits, and they seek to comply with the law, but the majorities have not adopted the underlying spirit of the landmark civil rights law[13]. If those who design systems ignore the spirit and essence of the ADA, it will be impossible to embed the principles of equity for all in our transportation systems.

Since 2013 Services for Independent Living Inc. (SIL) has been building a coalition of stakeholders in the Northeast Ohio area to identify and address issues impacting participation in and access to community for persons with disabilities. Stakeholders representing people with disabilities, aging, long-term care, housing, faith communities, and youth organizations all provided input. Transportation was one of four major issue areas identified by the stakeholder workgroup.

At the same time, Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) was also performing outreach and engagement with community members to learn what issues and topics were most important to increasing access to community life for people with disabilities. Of a list of community integration topics, over 40% of disability community members identified transportation as the most important issue related to community access. During listening sessions, Disability Rights Ohio heard from many people that transportation should be an issue that DRO work to address on a systemic level.

Both SIL and DRO heard from community members that transportation was identified as an issue to be addressed, not only because it directly impacts the daily lives of individuals with disabilities, but also because an equitable transportation system will increase visibility and participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life and have a greater impact on overall community inclusion for people with disabilities. In addition, there is recognition that transportation is a broader civil rights issue, where a smaller proportion of the funding is used to fund the transportation options that are relied on most by minority or low-income communities and people with disabilities. There is an opportunity build relationships outside the disability community with other groups who have similar goals and interests in establishing equity for all, including low-income, minority and faith-based groups.

In response to these identified priorities of the disability community, Services for Independent Living and Disability Rights Ohio partnered with PolicyLink and the Leadership Conference Education Fund to perform activities that

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[12] See footnote 8.

[13] Sherman, Sarah and Jean Sherman, "Design Professionals and the built environment: encountering boundaries 20 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act" *Disability and Society*, 2012, 27:1

educate about and lift up the principles and impact of transportation equity. The primary activity was to host a Transportation Forum in Parma, Ohio on March 31, 2015. The purpose of the forum was to serve as a catalyst to educate the wider community about transportation, begin to create a vision of what an equitable transportation system would look like, and identify barriers to equity and begin to identify ways to address those barriers.

Additional activities will include the establishment of a formal workgroup. The formal workgroup will work together to develop a plan to continue to lift up the principles of transportation equity, identify opportunities to educate decision makers about transportation, and raise awareness about the need for change within the local community. The intent is that the workgroup will represent the spectrum of transportation stakeholders.

This report seeks to summarize the events of the March 31, 2015, Transportation Forum and to serve as a resource for the continued advocacy and efforts of the transportation workgroup

SUMMARY OF EVENT

Services for Independent Living and Disability Rights Ohio hosted a transportation forum at the Parma-Snow branch of the Cuyahoga County public library on March 31, 2014 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. One-hundred-twenty-five attendees were present representing, local and regional transportation providers, aging and disability professionals, vocational rehabilitation, mental health advocates, other health and human services, civil rights, legal advocacy, researchers, legislators and policy makers. In addition, also at the table were self-advocates representing the mental and behavioral health, aging, intellectual disability, vision disability, deaf and hard of hearing, physical disability communities. The fact that all major disability and aging groups came together speaks to the dire need to transportation issues to be addressed. Individuals attended the event from across the state of Ohio, including representation from Toledo, Cincinnati, Columbus, eastern Ohio, and other areas of the state.

Services for Independent Living ensured full participation of people with disabilities, including providing transportation and other accommodations to help people with disabilities attend the event in person. CART services and sign language interpretation services were provided for participants who were deaf or hard of hearing. Sighted guides and large print materials were provided for individuals with visual impairments. In addition, individuals with known intellectual disabilities were places at tables with participants sensitive to their learning needs, who were able to ensure all voices were heard. Materials provided (agenda and exercise questions) were written in plain language so all could understand.

The forum was designed so participants could interact and share their thoughts and ideas. In the morning, attendees heard from speakers on two panels. The first panel provided information on what we know today regarding equitable

transportation. Jim Thompson from the Northeast Ohio Coordinating Agency spoke about the recent publication of the Ohio Transit Needs Study – which detailed how current demand exceeds capacity in Ohio's transportation system. The report details that Ohio under invests in transit operations by about $97 million or by over 13%[14]. Jason Boylan from Disability Rights Ohio gave an overview about the transportation and the Americans with Disabilities Act and shared stories of how inequitable transportation was blocking full access to communities for people with disabilities. Tim Grealis from United Way 2-1-1 spoke about current community health and human service needs, and the increase in number of calls that the help line was receiving from community members who needed transportation services to get to work, school, and other needed appointments. Katie Hunt Thomas from the Ability Center also gave an overview of the work of the Ability Center in advocating for systems change in the Northwest Ohio area when a local community wanted to stop providing public transportation services to their area.

The second panel focused on strategies used by several communities throughout the state of Ohio. Kat Lyons provided an overview of the opportunities available for Universally Designed Taxi Cab systems. Jeremy Morris from the Western Reserve Independent Living Center provided information on the broader community impact of transportation issues for people with disabilities. The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority provided details on the current paratransit services system in the area. State Representative Nicki Antonio provided comments on the lack of transportation equity within Ohio as compared to neighboring states, work of the state legislators and what they could do to address transportation inequity.

The afternoon was designed as a working session where all participants had an opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts. Participants were split into small groups of 4-6 individuals representing different organizations and populations and were asked to identify issues, solutions and barriers around four themes. The themes were: Promotion of Safe and Healthy Lifestyles, Access to Quality Jobs, Integration and Participation in Community Life, and General Transportation Equity.

After the small groups had an opportunity to discuss these issues, there was an opportunity for the groups to report out on their responses, and to have a larger discussion with all of the participants. Transportation is a large issue to address – and the forum was not intended to be the entire conversation, but to serve as the catalyst and begin the process of convening individuals who cared about the issue, and to start to create a picture of what transportation equity would look like in the future.

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[14] See footnote 7.

DISCUSSION

During the afternoon discussion, SIL and DRO staff took notes, and participants were also asked to write their responses on provided worksheets. The responses were evaluated in an effort to identify common issues and solutions. These identified issues and solutions will serve as a starting point and provide a guide for the potential workgroup's establishment.

Dream Big

Participants were encouraged to dream big about the future of transportation in the area, looking past obvious barriers of funding. Therefore it is no surprise that participants participated in discussions with broad themes and it was difficult to determine specific solutions for these overarching themes. Instead, these broader dreams are useful for helping the workgroup to identify core principles that will help drive the overall strategy of the workgroup. The following core principles will be presented to the workgroup for discussion and potential adoption.

PERSON CENTERED FOCUS

Throughout the day, stakeholders mentioned the need for a person-centered focus to transportation. Stakeholders felt that often the focus was placed on creating a system and maintaining a system – and adjusting people to fit within the system. This viewpoint leads to inequity in transportation.

Any action of the workgroup should increase the use of a person-centered focus to transportation and respecting individual rights and needs.

MEASURE AND REWARD EQUITY

Stakeholders also mentioned that there were often times transportation providers, decision makers, or community organizations were rewarded for establishing systems and programs that were not equitable. For example, bus drivers are rewarded if their routes run on time, so they do not stop to help a person in a wheelchair use the ramp and become secured in the bus. Medical transportation providers are rewarded for providing services at the lowest cost. There is a perception that people with disabilities will need additional time when using an accessible taxi, and taxi cab drivers do not want to spend the extra time. Additionally, many taxi cab drivers do not understand the role of service animals and fear that they will be like other pets and create a mess that they need to clean. As such, people with disabilities have been left stranded as they are refused services once the cab driver realizes a service animal is present.

Any action of the workgroup should focus on building a system that measures and rewards equity - not just cost savings and efficiency.

AFFORDABLE AND INCLUSIVE FOR ALL PEOPLE

Advocates noted that many of the issues discussed impacted other populations

– including communities of color and low income communities. Additionally, there are many with limited English proficiency who are not included in the transportation conversation. An effective and inclusive transportation system truly benefits everyone.

Any work that is done by the workgroup should drive policies that advance a system that is affordable and inclusive for all people.

A VOICE FOR CONSUMERS

Stakeholders noted that currently, actual consumers, including those with disabilities and those who do not have disabilities, do not have a voice. They feel that decisions are being made that best serve the interests of private companies, the government, and politicians and not the people who use the transportation systems.

Any work that is undertaken by the workgroup should advance the ability of consumers to have a voice in the wider conversation.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Stakeholders often noted the importance of informal networks. These informal networks included things like ridesharing, depending on friends, family members, church groups, volunteer organizations and neighbors for transportation instead of paid providers. Stakeholders mentioned the importance of a broad spectrum of transportation supports to enable individuals to actively participate in their family and community life. In addition, stakeholders mentioned the importance of thinking about other systems that are important to the community, including housing, food systems, education and employment opportunities. Also, stakeholders mentioned the importance of caring for the environment when discussing transportation issues. The importance of building healthy, safe communities where all people can fully participate and not be segregated or isolated cannot be understated in this conversation.

Any work by the workgroup must encourage building relationships between community members and coordinating all systems to create equity in our community.

BUILD POSITIVE IMAGE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Many stakeholders mentioned that people with disabilities were often seen as a problem, or an obstacle to overcome, rather than a valued and contributing member of the community. Many mentioned that there needed to be additional provider sensitivity training, activities to increase awareness, and methods implemented to increase visibility of people with disabilities. There still exists a very medical model, where people with disabilities are viewed as people must be "fixed" and who need someone to take care of them, instead of a person who is independent and able to care for themselves with the correct services and supports. This image needs to change.

Any activities of the workgroup should work to build the positive image of people with disabilities.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED AND SOLUTIONS PROPOSED

While encouraged to dream big in order to establish guiding principles, stakeholders were also asked more specific questions to help in the identification of specific issues and solutions to those specific issues which might be ripe for action.

There were many issues and comments that were very general. For example, many commented on their worksheets that transportation was "inaccessible" and a solution was "make transportation accessible." Another issue that came up in every dialog was funding. The common issue identified was "not enough money" and the solution was "increase funding." While these are certainly important, and issues that we do not want to get lost, what are identified below are specific issues and solutions that have been identified that can be used to assist the workgroup in establishing priorities and action plans to address

Healthy and Safe Communities

Issue Identified	Comments Made	Solutions Identified
No services in their own community	• People with disabilities often live in low-income areas, where there are no services • If services, recreation, and healthy activities were available in their own community, they would not need as many transportation resources to travel to them • Programs are designed for people without disabilities	• Work with stakeholders to increase access to local resources • Mental health and dental health services were specifically mentioned
Access to healthy food	• Healthy food not available in community • Difficult to grocery shop on public transit	• Work with stakeholders to increase presence of healthful food in communities

Safety	• Public transit not safe • Bus stops are not well lit, major hubs are in neighborhoods with high crime rates • Risk of injury • Maintain snow-free access to bus stops	• Improve training for transit providers • Install cameras at stops and on transit • Provide personal safety information to riders • Ensure that customer feedback to providers is heard and tracked • Providers should be rewarded for safety • Work with appropriate community stakeholders to ensure bus stops are fully accessible
Housing	• Accessible/ Affordable Housing not available in communities with resources • Neighborhoods do not want to the type of person who does not have own car to be there	• Increase access to affordable/ accessible housing in areas of opportunity • Increase presence of resources in different communities • Increase concepts of aging in place
Built Environment	• The environment is not structured to increase healthy lifestyles. For example, sidewalks are broken, there are missing ramps, and public parks may not be well kept or easy to get to	• Determine best strategies to fix built environment
Isolation	• People with disabilities are often isolated - Leads to health problems • People with disabilities are not welcomed • People with disabilities may not use the same communication methods and therefore not be included in conversation or denied services	• Increase awareness of people with disabilities in community • Increase number of communication formats • Training on communication to people with cognitive and other disabilities impacting communication.

Access to Quality Jobs

Issue Identified	Description	Solutions Identified
No access to employment	• Employers not located by public transit • No funding for specialized transportation for work purposes • Employers not wanting to hire people with disabilities because of poor perceptions of people with disabilities • No jobs in communities	• Encourage businesses to think about transportation options for employees when relocating • Encourage businesses to partner with transportation providers to provide transit/car-pooling services
Lack of flexibility	• The way transit systems are structured are designed to meet the needs of the typical able-bodied person who works 9-5. • Many people with disabilities work at low-wage jobs where they need access to transportation at various times, including during the evening and weekends. • Participants expressed that paratransit and other services were not designed for the purposes of employment	• Encourage providers to provide transit not only during rush hour • Educate providers about needs of workers with disabilities • Work with employers to identify transportation solutions • Work with paratransit to educate about transit for employment • Take a look at policies that make crossing county lines difficult
Reliability	• Unreliable transportation leads to the employee being unreliable, and difficult to get or keep jobs	• Measure reliability and provide funding based on reliability and consumer reviews
Lack of understanding of rights and needs	• Transportation providers did not understand the needs or rights of individuals with disabilities. • This may stem from an underrepresentation of people with disabilities on their staff.	• Educate providers on rights of people with disabilities • Encourage transportation providers to hire people with disabilities to be on their staff • Educate consumers on their rights and responsibilities

Housing	• People with disabilities are often placed in institutions or provided with housing that is not near jobs.	• Increase access to affordable/accessible housing in areas of opportunity • Increase presence of resources in community
Affordability	• Many rely on public programs to pay for services • Public transit is not affordable • When people with disabilities rely on a program to meet needs, they are meeting the needs of the program, not of the person	• Increased funding to lower cost for public transit • More participation of people with disabilities in policy process • Increase understanding of what programs are available to pay for transportation • Look at policies that prevent cheaper transportation • Change policy that requires that any transportation for a wheelchair the provider must have certain training

Access to Community Life

Issue Identified	Description	Solutions Identified
Poverty	• Many people with disabilities are living in poverty • Transportation is just one barriers of many to people with disabilities struggling in poverty	• Address poverty issue – think more broadly how transportation can be used to revitalize communities
Inclusion/ Isolation	• People with disabilities are often invisible. • Programs and services are designed for people who do not have disabilities and then attempted to be retrofitted for people with disabilities. • People with disabilities are seen as potential problems, not active, included members of the community	• Include people with disabilities in advertisements • Community organizations and providers should hire people with disabilities • Advocates should change the conversation about people with disabilities in general • Advocates should design actions – such as having policy makers live as a person with a disability on public transit for one day
Convenience	• Hours are not convenient for last-minute trips • Scheduling restrictions • Transportation services are only provided to places where others think that people with disabilities should be going • Transit services not available during certain hours • Community events are not held at places where transit is considered	• Expand transit hours • Expand on-demand services • Raise awareness of need for access to community life

General Transportation Equity

Issue Identified	Description	Solutions Identified
Lack of leadership	• People with disabilities are not being heard, felt like they did not have a real voice in the conversation • Need to coordinate voice of the community • Need to work with others who are not currently in the room – for example the faith community	• Build a strong coalition • Determine key principles and speak with one voice • Build relationships with decision makers
Information	• Do not know all of the resources that are available • Resources that are available do not know enough about each other to coordinate well • Lack of knowledge of specific policies and the complicated nature of funding	• Perform Asset Mapping to identify current resources • Perform Needs Assessment • Develop understanding of complex transportation policy to be better advocates
Inclusion	• Many participants mentioned that people with disabilities were often not included in initial phases of projects, and were often afterthoughts – and usually in terms of presenting problems or having to change programs or services. • Many times people with disabilities are provided separate services, instead of being included in planning	• Raise awareness of civil rights of people with Disability Rights • Campaign for inclusion of all people • Have decision makers live as people with disabilities for a day

Establish a common language	• Other civil rights groups are addressing the same issue – but we often seem to be talking past each other	• Work to build relationships with non-disability related groups • Work to establish common principles/language
Improve image of public transit	• Public transit is seen as unsafe and unreliable • Public transit is seen as something only poor people use	• Work with providers to discuss positive impact of public transit on communities • Work with providers to market public transit

MOVING FORWARD

The work completed at the convening was only the beginning of a broader discussion and movement towards equitable transportation. Next steps towards addressing the above topics are listed below.

Establish a Workgroup

At the conclusion of the day, participants were asked if they would like to continue the conversation with SIL and DRO as they establish a workgroup of advocates to examine possibilities to influence local, state and federal policies that impact transportation. Seventy individuals indicated that they were interested in continuing the conversation and potentially joining a workgroup that would continue these efforts.

In May of 2015, these individuals will be invited to an initial workgroup meeting, where they will examine the results from the convening, establishing principles to work towards, and examine short and long term goals.

Identify Additional Partners

During the convening in March, individuals identified other partners who also needed to be involved in the conversation. These including minority groups and faith based groups. Additional representation and participation from providers is also needed. SIL will reach out to identified groups for participation in the workgroup.

Strategies for Issues/Solutions

The above list of issues and solutions will be presented to the workgroup. The workgroup will work to determine priorities of addressing issues as well as what level certain goals need to be addressed at, local, regional, state or federal.

Educate decision makers, policy makers and the general public

The workgroup will also identify opportunities to educate decision makers, policy makers, and the general public. The workgroup will work together to identify opportunities to participate in any town halls or other venues for public comment, providing comments or concerns to federal and state legislators about transportation policy, and educating and informing the general public about transportation as a civil rights issue for people with disabilities and minority communities.

CONCLUSION

Transportation is a critical issue for people with disabilities and is an essential component of equitable communities. People with disabilities have identified transportation equity as a systemic issue that should be addressed, not only to increase community access for people with disabilities, but to increase the visibility and participation of people with disabilities in many other community systems and programs. The convening of stakeholders on March 31st served as a catalyst to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in a critical thought exercise to identify specific issues and topics that needed to be addressed to build transportation equity. The draft principles and issues outlined above can serve as a starting point as the workgroup continues their efforts to prioritize issues and create action steps towards change.

ABOUT SIL

Founded in 1980, Services for Independent Living, Inc (SIL) was Ohio's first established Center for Independent Living (CIL), in the Greater Cleveland service area which includes both urban and rural areas in northeast Ohio. As a federally designated CIL, SIL is consumer driven and controlled, working to assist individuals with disabilities to remain in their community of choice. As such, the majority of SIL staff and board of directors are persons with disabilities. SIL staff live and breathe the independent living philosophy of consumer choice, control and full participation in the community.

All services and supports support the agency's mission of empowering people to lead self-directed and inclusive lives in the community. Examples of services include: nursing home transition supports to ensure a smooth and safe transition from facility back to an individual's own home, community support coaching, teaching skills needed to live in the community, helping with home modifications/ ramps, durable equipment loans, peer and group support systems, community and professional education, information and referral, and advocacy. Individual and information/referral systems assist individuals in gaining knowledge or access to services in order make informed decisions regarding life issues. Lack of relevant, accurate information often impedes meaningful community participation or access to services and supports and leads to isolation.

Data collected shows that 26% of consumers receiving individual services

requested assistance with transportation. Of these, 36% received services leaving 64% without transportation options. This is of great concern and also demonstrates the need for increased transportation options and resources. Data also shows that 70% of individuals served are between the ages of 29-59 and 23% are 60 years of age or more. The agency is evenly split between male and female, African-American and Caucasian. The majority of SIL consumers are at or below poverty level and rely on public benefits.

SIL views advocacy as a multi-tiered support ranging from teaching an individual to become a self-advocate to systems change. SIL is heavily involved in systems change issues on the local and state levels, most recently around housing, health care and long-term services and supports.

SIL staff have a long history of working to increase transportation options in the community. We were actively involved with the successful advocacy efforts to ensure accessible mainline bus systems throughout the county. Most recently, more than 60 stakeholders were brought together to identify issues impacting community participation. Not surprising, transportation was one of the top issues identified. It is recognized that having an accessible mainline transit system (in addition to paratransit services) is not enough. SIL understands the need to work with community partners to think "outside the box" when determining solutions to transit issues. SIL is committed to bringing community stakeholders to the" table" in order to identify proactive solutions to transit issues whether through measures to increase access and/or public policy/ systems change initiatives.

ABOUT DRO

The Ohio Disability Law and Policy Center dba Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) is a non-profit corporation and the federal and state designated Protection and Advocacy organization and Client Assistance Program for the state of Ohio. The mission of DRO is to advocate for the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio. DRO is the only organization of its kind in Ohio and is mandated to pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies and approaches to ensure the protection of, and advocacy for, the rights of individuals with disabilities.

DRO offers direct legal advocacy for individuals with disabilities in defined priority areas, including advocating for individuals with disabilities who request reasonable accommodations for private or public services, such as transportation. DRO also helps individuals with disabilities understand and connect to resources that they need to return to work with, including offering benefits analysis. DRO has developed strong partnerships with other organizations to collaborate on solutions to the intractable problems that face individuals with disabilities, including discrimination, abuse and neglect, and lack of employment opportunities and community integration. DRO has developed policy expertise in issue areas that are critical for people with disabilities, including community integration, education, employment, and abuse and neglect. DRO educates and informs policy makers and the public about the

rights of individuals with disabilities, and provides information and resources to individuals with disabilities so they can be effective self-advocates. .

DRO envisions a society where people with disabilities are full and equal members; enjoy the rights and opportunities available to all people; are self-directed; make decisions about where, how, and with whom they will live, learn, work, and play; have access to needed services and support; and are free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and discrimination.

ABOUT TRANSPORTATION EQUITY CAUCUS

The Equity Caucus at Transportation for America is a caucus formed by the nation's leading civil rights, community development, disability, racial justice, economic justice, faith-based, health, housing, labor, environmental justice, tribal, public interest, women's groups and transportation organizations that drives transportation policies that advance economic and social equity in America. The transportation equity caucus is built on principles of creating affordable transportation options for all people, ensuring fair access to quality jobs, workforce development, and contracting opportunities, promoting healthy, safe, and inclusive communities, and investing equitably and focusing on results.

The Transportation Equity Caucus is co-chaired by PolicyLink and the Leadership Conference Education Fund. PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity that connects the work of people on the ground to the creation of sustainable communities of opportunity that allow everyone to participate and prosper. The Leadership Conference Education Fund is a part of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference Education Fund is the education and research arm of the Leadership Conference and works to build public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

In January of 2015, as co-chairs of the Transportation Equity Caucus, PolicyLink and the Leadership Conference Education fund award Services for Independent Living, Inc. one of 6 $25,000 grants to work to partner with Disability Rights Ohio to host a convening to gather community leaders, individuals with disabilities, providers, legislators, members of the aging and faith communities, and other community stakeholders to identify local, state and federal targets for transportation advocacy.

Disability Rights OHIO

We have the legal right of way.