



The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority



Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education

Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse



Alaska Mental Health Board

## Funding for Coordinated Community Transportation Systems

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Alaska Mental Health Board, Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse and the Alaska Commission on Aging, in collaboration with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska Brain Injury Network, have identified taking the steps necessary to ensure a statewide coordinated transportation plan, including supporting adequate funding for community transportation systems across the state, as one of their top priorities for 2010.

Highlights of the recommendation include:

- 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.

### Overview

The lack of accessible, affordable transportation is a major barrier to the employment and community participation of Alaskans with disabilities, seniors, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority beneficiaries, youth, low-income Alaskans and the general public. Even with an adequate infrastructure of roads and bridges, many of these individuals still won't have affordable, accessible community transportation.

There are generally two ways community transportation is provided in Alaska: 1) public transit systems (buses and Americans with Disabilities Act paratransit services) and 2) coordinated transportation systems operated by local nonprofits. However, in many communities in Alaska, there are no community transportation systems. Some non-profit organizations, churches, senior centers and civic groups may help their community members get a few rides, but the need far exceeds the availability. Some seniors and persons with disabilities are forced to move to communities that can support their transportation needs. It is no surprise that transportation is one of the top statewide needs identified in surveys of seniors, people with disabilities and beneficiaries of the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

**Governor's Coordinated Transportation Task Force:** 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 the task force members have met either face to face or by teleconference since that time. The task force has met with local decision makers, transit providers and transit advocates in Juneau, Anchorage and Bethel. The Task Force's final recommendations are due to the Governor and Alaska Legislature in January 2010, at which point their commission ends. While we recognize the hard work put forth by members of the Governor's Task Force, they have only just begun the difficult job of coordinating state sponsored transportation programs across multiple state departments and agencies.

**Coordinated Transportation Funding:** Most funding for public transportation comes from federal formula grants, which provide anywhere from 50% to 91% 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 increases in the number of rides, fuel and vehicle costs in recent years.

Alaska is one of 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 Engineer 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 parity level with other federal and state "partnerships" which provide transportation for Alaskans. According to a recent Dittman survey conducted by the Alaska Mobility Coalition, 94% of Alaskans surveyed thought public transportation was important, and 88% said that government should provide a local match.

**Recommendation: Extend the sunset provision for the Governor's Coordinated Transportation Task Force to June 30, 2011.**

**Recommendation: Support a \$3 million request in the FY11 operating budget to provide State Transit Matching Funds to leverage the maximum level of federal transit assistance and \$1.1 million in capital funds to support public transportation systems;**