

Transportation Landscape in Virginia

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities serves as Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council. In this capacity the Board advises the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, federal and state legislators, and other constituent groups on issues important to people with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The following summarizes the Board's most recent assessment of transportation services and outcomes and is intended to serve as a guide for policymakers who are interested in improving the transportation outlook for Virginians with disabilities. To see the Board's full 2018 Transportation assessment, please visit <https://vaboard.org/assessment.htm>

Leading by Values

The Board's work in this area is driven by its vision, values, and the following core beliefs and principles:



Inherent Dignity

All people possess inherent dignity, regardless of gender, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or disability status.



Presumed Capacity

All people should be presumed capable of obtaining a level of independence and making informed choices.



Self-Determination

People with disabilities and their families are experts in their own needs and desires. They must be included in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. This includes decisions about their own transportation needs and supports.



Integration

People with disabilities have a civil right to receive services and supports in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs and desires, consistent with the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. Transportation systems must be designed so as to afford people with all abilities to access those systems whenever possible.



Diversity

Diversity is a core value. All people, including people with disabilities, should be valued for contributing to the diversity of our neighborhoods and of the Commonwealth.



Freedom from Abuse & Neglect

People with disabilities must be protected from abuse, neglect, and exploitation in all settings where services and supports are provided.



Fiscal Responsibility

Fiscally responsible policies are beneficial for the Commonwealth, and they are beneficial for people with disabilities.

Reliable, physically accessible, and affordable transportation is a prerequisite for living a fully integrated life in America's dispersed communities. America's transportation infrastructure has prioritized travel by personal automobile, but many people with disabilities cannot own or operate a personal automobile due to limited income and/or physical or cognitive limitations. Virginia will face even more transportation challenges and opportunities in the years ahead.

Key Transportation Recommendations



The Board offers 13 recommendations to improve the availability of accessible transportation options to individuals with disabilities. The recommendations are mostly directed towards state policymakers, but local decision-makers should also receive input from people with disabilities and other constituents about their transportation needs.

The Board's 13 recommendations are grouped into four main goals:

- 1 Provide stable long-term funding for public transportation and special needs transportation capital investments that accounts for projected increases in demand and need for expanded availability.
- 2 Improve transportation coordination and planning efforts in the Commonwealth.
- 3 Ensure that transportation network companies (TNCs) and other non-traditional transportation companies offer services that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- 4 Improve accessible bus stops and pedestrian infrastructure.

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Outpacing Available Resources

An aging population and increasing community engagement of people with disabilities are straining Virginia's already stressed human services transportation infrastructure.



Demand for accessible transportation options is out-pacing growth in available transportation resources. In 2017, the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation conducted a survey to obtain insight into the transportation challenges that people with disabilities and the elderly face in Virginia today.

Survey results highlighted what many in the disability and elderly community already know: *the growth in accessible transportation demand is out-pacing the growth in available funding and resources.*

Types of Challenges Reported



Challenges unique to rural areas



Demands of meeting new community engagement and employment goals



Growth in demand outpacing available resources



Funding challenges



Accessibility challenges

Survey respondents included Community Services Boards, Area Agencies on Aging, public transit providers, taxi service providers, adult day care providers, senior centers, non-emergency medical transportation providers, employment services providers, local governments, and other human services and transportation providers.

Prioritization of Transportation Projects in VA



The General Assembly directed the Commonwealth Transportation Board to begin using a new prioritization process in 2016 for the approval of transportation projects. The process, called SMART SCALE, rates projects based on five objective, quantifiable criteria. Although accessibility is one of the prioritization factors, the SMART SCALE process does not consider people with disabilities.

VA's Fragmented Public Transportation System



Efforts to address transportation barriers at the local, state, and federal level are often piecemeal, geographically limited, and insufficiently informed by the individuals who confront them. Reconvening a state transportation coordinating council, which Virginia previously utilized, and including people with disabilities in all planning processes could improve coordination.

Approaches to Improving Transportation Coordination



The rapid emergence of TNCs, such as Lyft and Uber, presents both challenges and opportunities for the delivery of transportation services to people with disabilities. Some individuals have had difficulty using these services due to a lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles. To address this challenge, other states have funded accessibility pilot programs, required minimum levels of accessible vehicles, and established accessibility task forces to recommend further improvements.

Approaches to Improving Accessible Infrastructure



Despite ongoing state investments in bus stop and pedestrian infrastructure, additional investments are needed to widen sidewalks, add appropriate curb cuts, and ensure that walk signals are accessible. These investments will not only improve accessibility for people with disabilities, but they may also yield a return on investment by increasing ridership and diverting individuals from more expensive paratransit services.



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