



---

**Easter Seals**

Office of Public Affairs  
1425 K Street, N.W.  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20005  
202.347.3066 phone  
202.347.7385 tty  
202.737.7914 fax  
[www.easterseals.com](http://www.easterseals.com)

Transportation and Livable Communities as Essential Enablers of Quality of Life and  
Independent Living for Older Adults and People with Disabilities

Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing  
and Urban Development

Mary A. Leary, PhD  
Senior Director, Easter Seals Project ACTION  
The National Center on Senior Transportation  
& other Transportation Options

Good Morning Chairman Olver, Ranking Member Latham, and distinguished sub-committee members and Committee Chairman Obey. It is an honor and privilege to have time this morning to share why livable communities with seamless access to accessible transportation is such an essential element of long-term health, wellness and quality of life for older adults and people with disabilities. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said during the celebration of his ninetieth birthday: to live is to function.

That is the essence of what we seek to achieve in our work at Easter Seals Project ACTION and the National Center on Senior Transportation – furthering the development of accessible transportation choices so that everyone can live independent lives.

Easter Seals Project ACTION is honored to have been assisting the transportation community and disability community to assure effective implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We have learned the value of eliminating institutional bias, the importance of empowerment and ensuring that everyone can live, work, play and worship where they choose to do so.

Now, we are striving to take best practices in accessible transportation and apply them to our work with the National Center on Senior Transportation, a partnership between Easter Seals and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, we have issued over \$ 700K in community grants ranging from \$ 10,000 to \$ 90,000 to facilitate transportation coordination and the development of innovative transportation options for older adults.

Together, these two centers and their dedicated team members provide training, technical assistance, applied research and outreach to further accessible transportation and transportation options for people with disabilities and older adults. We partner with many other organizations in our work and strive to shine a light on people, projects and perspectives that can enhance access to transportation for people with disabilities and older adults. Over the next few minutes, I will share information gleaned from our centers' activities including what information and resources communities need to be inclusive of people with disabilities and older adults, what resources communities are already accessing, and some best practice examples.

The need to address better ways to help older adults and people with disabilities remain active and mobile is critical to our nation. It is well documented that our country and the world are facing a tremendous aging of our populations. The ADA and other legislation that ensures the civil rights of people with disabilities may prove to be some of the most essential tools we have as we face the new demographics of aging and the market expansion of transportation with new target populations such as people with disabilities, older adults and persons of limited income.

These are the groups that the Federal Transit Administration's United We Ride program has been striving to benefit through community based coordination efforts and reducing barriers to states' leverage of federal funding streams that support programs for all of these groups.

But, the age wave has some potential great advantages for us as a nation. Some of us believe that the older adult age-wave may be one more element of energy that our country needs today – both in supporting their communities and as a catalyst for innovations that entrepreneurs will discover as the need to assist a growing population of older adults increases. Across the transportation modes of paratransit, public transit, fixed route, demand response, taxis, volunteer driver programs, caregiver programs and public/private partnerships, service providers are experimenting with intermodal and innovative ways to connect people with services to meet the needs of new riders.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and no country is better at entrepreneurship than the United States. In fact, if we look at what our grantees, the aging network, the community independent living centers, the local Area Agencies on Aging and local transportation providers are doing, we see them reaching out, collaborating, innovating and stimulating a host of new ways to streamline access to services, increase efficiencies, increase effectiveness and maintain high levels of customer satisfaction. Now with movements such as livable communities, we are gaining even more insight into how all of these organizations and activities enhance the health and wellness of Americans as well as the greening of America. There is an army of new players and people mobilizing around the country, and civically engaged older adults are helping to fuel these trends.

Here are a few facts about older adults:

They volunteer – a good example is a John Eberhard. John Eberhard was at the Federal Transit Administration for many years and after retirement, you would think he would rest and enjoy some well deserved time off. But, I just returned from one of our major aging conferences, and John Eberhard is just as engaged as ever! In fact, after forty years in transportation, he is still trying to find ways to improve our system. I was so moved when John said, I'm 75, and I have one more project in my soul.

Many seniors are helping raise grandchildren and are helping their children stay employed by looking after the next generation. In many communities intergenerational programs are continuing to grow. Many assisted living facilities are finding their residents enjoy helping with childcare centers. Both of these trends point towards older adults playing a more active role in children's lives.

Older adults are often caregivers to a spouse or family member who needs extra assistance to live in the community. I'm sure many of us have experience of a mother or father taking care of the other. Caregivers are one of our most precious resources. One AARP study suggests caregivers represent an informal care network of over \$ 375B. And, almost all of us someday will be a caregiver, if we have not become one already.

After they retire, many older adults take on lower paying jobs in order to reduce work hours and give back to their communities. In many communities, older adults are driving other older adults with mobility limitations to the grocery store, to spiritual functions, to social, recreational activities, and, of course, to the doctor.

But, in order to capitalize on these roles for older adults, we need to expand sustainable and livable communities where everyone, including older adults, can remain at home if they have or acquire a mobility impairment, and given the difference in cost between aging in place vs. aging in an institution (many suggest this difference is 2-3x less for aging at home) this is absolute necessity.

The liveable community discussion provides an important opportunity to showcase the role of transportation to further the health and wellness of Americans. Evidence based research has produced much discussion about managing chronic diseases. In the area of aging, transportation and long-term care, three well documented realities have emerged:

- When people lose the ability to drive they become depressed;
- When people are depressed they have reduced health status; and,
- Reduced health status equates to higher healthcare costs.

Thus, if we can keep people safely mobile through livable communities with transportation options that ensure NO ONE is “stranded without options” (as the study by AARP and the Surface Transportation Project of the same name noted), we can increase their quality of life and lower healthcare costs.

At a time when the country is mobilizing to reshape our healthcare system equity, equal access and a greater focus on wellness, transportation as a part of livable communities might just be the essential enabler.

I’ve talked about needs and benefits to society for addressing these needs, and I’d like to now turn attention to some promising approaches we are seeing across the US.

One of the most promising practices we see is mobility management. Mobility management involves helping communities and individuals to:

- Identify needed services,
- Identify the transportation required to access them,
- Assess community transportation resources,
- Assess the functional ability of client to use available transportation services,
- Fill service gaps, and
- Provide people access to and training on how to use local transportation services.

We believe that an investment in mobility management is one of the single most effective things that Congress can do to help communities assure that the mobility needs of people with disabilities and older adults are met, and thus make their communities “liveable”. This has been exemplified in several local communities that have implemented some form of mobility management.

Wisconsin has funded 42 Mobility Managers with New Freedom Initiative funding – mobility management activities were included in SAFETEA-LU as allowable short term management costs. They are like the ‘Marines’ of community intersection, connecting people with resources and often finding where service gaps exist so that additional programs can be developed to expand transportation so that a seamless system exists across the employment, education, social services, healthcare, veteran, retail and recreation sectors that all people can access and utilize whether or not they have mobility limitations.

Many other communities are implementing other promising practices.

North Carolina is participating in a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration grant working with departments of motor vehicles and medical providers to assist medically at risk drivers and create access to strategies and resources for maintaining safe mobility through a cohesive and comprehensive educational framework. In our work, we see the need to ensure that every DMV has linkage to information on mobility options so that if someone is deemed ineligible to continue driving, they have a friendly and knowledgeable person to talk with so they don’t leave feeling isolated, depressed and suicidal – we were told in one of our events of an older man who said that if he could not longer drive, he would not want to live. And, when that happened, he went home and shot himself.

We have communities in Ohio that have worked hard to expand new transit systems such as Laketrans in Lake County. Donna McNamee, our National Steering Committee Chair for Easter Seals Project ACTION and a long-time disability advocate tells us that Laketrans was created by the county commission with a resolution nearly 35 years ago. They had one fixed route and their primary mission was to move the clients of various non-profit "social service" agencies. Daily, a significant number of their 350,000 annual Dial-a-Ride trips are "above and beyond the ADA" moving passengers throughout a 227 square mile county, regardless of where the fixed routes are located. They now have 6 fixed routes and commuter service to Cleveland. In Dayton Ohio, one of our NCST grantees is Goodwill Easter Seals Miami Valley and they are using their grant to start a volunteer based transportation program for seniors.

Volunteer driver programs are effective and popular ways to expand services for older adults in the community, and many of our grantees are experimenting with novel approaches to address issues associated with volunteer driver programs such as insurance challenges, recruiting/maintaining volunteers, mileage reimbursement issues and using agency leased or owned vehicles. In Texas, the **Alamo Area Council of Governments** (San Antonio, TX) is working in partnership with the Northeast Senior Assistance Co-op, the Well-Med Foundation, Catholic Charities and the San Antonio Senior Transportation Committee to create infrastructure to start a volunteer driver program. They plan on serving 10-15 older adults during the grant period.

We have three grantees in California. One is the **Jewish Family Services of San Diego** (San Diego, CA) who will utilize staff time and new marketing materials to promote and increase service areas for existing transportation programs that serve seniors. These services include a shuttle service and a large volunteer-based transportation service. The other is **Monterey-Salinas Transit** (Monterey, CA) who will operate a pilot program using a taxi voucher program to connect seniors to fixed bus routes. Group and individual travel training will be provided to seniors participating in the program. Finally, the **Sonoma County Human Services** (Santa Rosa, CA) will coordinate the efforts of community based agencies to recruit, train, and manage volunteer driver programs in underserved rural areas. They will develop and implement a marketing plan, protocols and enrollment forms, and a scheduling system to recruit, and utilize volunteer drivers.

Technology is an emerging area of great potential and we have grantees and leaders around the country through the Department of Transportation's Mobility Services for All Americans Project that the American Public Transportation Association leads for them. Some of our NCST grantees are experimenting with technology to improve scheduling, communication, services delivery and streamline access. Grantees in Pennsylvania and Michigan are addressing technology innovations including the use of cell phones and the web to enhance service.

We also do targeted research to develop tools and resources for communities, and one of our partners in these efforts is Transystems of Massachusetts. Their researchers have completed projects for us in bus rapid transit, approaches to stop announcements and **transportation Service for Persons with Disabilities: Alternatives for Rural and Small Urban Communities**.

Just as the recent FTA/HUD Action Plan on better coordination of transportation and housing programs suggests, in our activities we have found that coalition building and coordination is not only essential but highly effective in increasing mobility.

Our experience reflects the sentiments that the National Governors Association Best Practices organization espoused as three key factors for success in establishing comprehensive coordinated

systems for transportation planning: leadership, participation, and continuity (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2002). Expanded through SAFETEA-LU and codified in requirements such as the Older Americans Act guidance for the last several years, states increased progress in transportation coordination by joint planning. The establishment of formal coordination organizations through legislative mandates, executive orders, or memorandums of understanding is now pervasive across almost all states. Coordinated transportation through formal planning systems interweaves the perspectives of key stakeholders and integrates the spectrum of policy approaches to increasing transportation access.

Finally, safe transportation for older adults is important and necessary for them to stay connected and engaged in civic, social, and community life. Livable community and transit oriented development improvements in roadway design, walk/roll/stroll and scooter walkways, signage to support people with hearing and visual impairments, and advanced technologies for streamlined access and better scheduling/dispatching systems will benefit everyone.

Our experience and research has led us to conclude that opportunities associated with safe, accessible transportation for people with disabilities and older adults have many facets and require an intermodal and interdisciplinary approach.

In closing, implementation of the ADA is not yet perfect, but we are leagues better than we were in 1988 when Project ACTION was founded. The National Council on Disabilities found in 2007 that:

- People with disabilities perceive greater quality of life;
- People with disabilities perceive significant improvements in public facility access and public attitudes;
- Public transit has made significant progress in becoming accessible;
- More curb ramps and accessible sidewalks; and,
- And, now, almost all buses are ramp or lift equipped.

And, due to the development of more accessible fixed route systems, more people with disabilities can ride without having to utilize ADA complementary paratransit, and have new found freedom. In one of our publications called, “Stories of Changed Lives” a woman who for years relied on paratransit was found eligible to use the regular system. She was very concerned about her ability to navigate the community by herself; however, she found a new sense of empowerment when she did! That is what we all hope will be achieved in livable communities:

- Communities where housing is located adjacent to transportation choices;
- Where people can be healthier;
- Where cars are not the only means of transportation;
- Where older adults, people with disabilities and able bodied people all have access to walking/rolling paths, safe street crossings with appropriate signage and signals for people with various hearing/visual impairments, with curb cuts and public rights of way that are easily navigable whether one is walking, rolling in a mobility device, in a senior scooter, biking or running;
- Where bus stops are safe, well lit and plentiful;
- Where light rail and major bus routes have neighborhood feeder systems with plentiful on-demand transportation whether taxis, volunteer driver programs, dial-a-ride, van pools and other transportation services are used; and,

- Where all of these services are affordable, well advertised, available and planned/reviewed regularly with user involvement across rural, urban, suburban and frontier environments.

Transportation infrastructure to enable livable communities with mobility managers as local catalysts and connectors will help integrate with civic planning and coordination efforts across state agencies in highway, aging, vocational rehabilitation, healthcare, Medicaid, social services, education, transit, law enforcement and department of motor vehicle testing centers arenas.

These mobility managers will help those who need a ride, get a ride, at the right time so people can get to work, get to the doctor, participate in social/recreational activities, engage in their communities, go to school, go to the grocery, worship, play and live with dignity and independence in their homes and communities.

The American Dream cannot be realized without a viable and sustainable transportation infrastructure that is an essential part of livable communities. We have watched the evolution of accessible transportation transform life for many people with disabilities, and the next 'BIG THING' is ensuring that the environment surrounding transportation systems adhere to universal design standards so that communities are safe, people are mobile, and there are more opportunities to walk/roll as well as access to transportation resources that everyone can use whether or not they have a mobility impairment.

We have many groups that will benefit from this focus on the greening and health/wellness movement that is livable communities: older adults, people with disabilities, veterans with disabilities, caregivers, businesses, our healthcare system, our educational system and our nation's younger generations. All generations benefit from the experiences and wisdom of our forefathers. As the earlier part of Justice Wendell Holmes quote says: "There is a time to hear the kind voices of friends and say to oneself, 'The Work is done'...the race is over, but the work never is done while the power to work remains. The canter that brings you to a standstill need not be only coming to rest. It cannot be, while you still live. For to live is to function. That is all there is to living."

Thank you for your time, your support and your vision. We need your guidance and leadership to help our country be a place where everyone can live inclusive, independent lives and where our communities can continue to benefit from the wisdom and experience of older generations.

## Witness Disclosure Form

**Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives requires non-governmental witnesses to disclose to the Committee the following information.**

**A non-governmental witness is any witness appearing on behalf of himself/herself or on behalf of an organization other than a federal agency, or a state, local or tribal government.**

Your Name, Business Address, and Telephone Number:

Mary A. Leary  
Easter Seals  
1425 K Street, N.W. , Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-347-3066

1. Are you appearing on behalf of yourself or a non-governmental organization?

Please

list organization(s) you are representing.

Easter Seals, Inc.

2. Have you or any organization you are representing received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants or subcontracts) since October 1, 2006?

Yes X No

3. If your response to question #2 is "Yes", please list the amount and source (by agency

and program) of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant or contract was you or the organization(s) you are representing.

Easter Seals Project ACTION - \$3 Million  
National Center on Senior Transportation - \$ 1 million  
Senior Community Service Employment Program – Approximately \$17 million

Signature:

Date:

Please attach a copy of this form, along with your curriculum vitae (resume) to your written testimony.



**Mary A. Leary, Ph.D.**

Senior Director

Easter Seals Project ACTION, the National Center on Senior Transportation  
& other Transportation Initiatives

[mleary@easterseals.com](mailto:mleary@easterseals.com)

Mary Leary joined the Easter Seals, Inc., Office of Public Affairs in November of 2007 as Senior Director of Project ACTION, the National Center on Senior Transportation and other transportation initiatives. These centers are cooperative agreements with the Federal Transit Administration and assist communities to expand accessible transportation for people living with disabilities and older adults. The training and technical assistance teams at Easter Seals advance the Federal Transit Administration mission to increase transit ridership and ensure implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act by increasing accessible transportation and transportation options for people with disabilities and older adults. Mary has over twenty-five years of experience in federal government programs from the private sector and public sector. She has worked to expand transportation options as an integral element of inclusive living for all at the federal level since 2004 as a member of the United We Ride interagency initiative. Since leaving her private sector information technology career to enter public service in 2001, Mary has also assisted in community education programs, driven research initiatives in various public policy areas, volunteered in her community and taught as an Adjunct Professor at George Mason University. Her public service spans local, federal and academic roles, and she participates in many national forums and advisory committees.

Before joining Easter Seals, Mary was the Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Aging, and her other activities at the Administration on Aging included management of several major program evaluation projects, the development of the transportation toolkit through WESTAT and other transportation projects with key partners including n4a and APTA. Mary served as a member of the United We Ride (UWR) initiative for the Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging. She co-chaired the UWR Consolidated Access Workgroup where she helped drive the development of the United We Ride outcomes and goals for mobility including assisting in the development of the United We Ride logic model. Some of Mary's previous research activities are analyzing transportation coordination policy and practice, state systems change in transportation and community based long-term care, universal healthcare, the growth of the hospice Medicare benefit as well as assessing key elements of successful change management in public sector enterprise technology solutions.

Mary holds a Doctorate in Public Policy from George Mason University's School of Public Policy and a Gerontology Masters Certificate from George Mason University's College of Health and Human Services. She also earned a Masters Degree in Administrative Science from Johns Hopkins University and a Bachelor of Science Degree from James Madison University. She was a recipient of George Mason University's University Transportation Center 2008 Student of the Year scholar award. Mary also received a recognition award from the US Department of Transportation for her work with the United We Ride program. Mary is active in Northern Virginia civic activities where she and many of her large extended family still live.