

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Overhauling Paratransit Practices

10/30/2020

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation (S2517) establishing a program to adopt paratransit best practices, requiring greater coordination among paratransit service providers, and establishing regional paratransit coordinating councils.

“Streamlining our paratransit services will finally guarantee our seniors and those with disabilities the safety, ease, reliability, and affordability they have long expected from NJ TRANSIT,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Seniors, and those living with disabilities deserve transportation services that accommodate their needs, and this program will be committed to doing exactly that.”

“Since 2018, NJ TRANSIT has been working aggressively to improve service to customers with disabilities through our indispensable Access Link service,” **said NJ TRANSIT President & CEO Kevin Corbett**. “These efforts include the introduction last year of Access Link Online, which now allows customers to schedule rides, pre-pay fares electronically with EZ-Wallet, and check trip status and the estimated time of arrival of pick-up vehicles. This important legislation will help NJ TRANSIT build on our many efforts to improve mobility and modernize service for our paratransit service, and we’re grateful for Governor Murphy’s commitment to our Access Link customers.”

“Access to transportation is key to the ability of individuals with disabilities to live as independently as possible in the community,” **said Department of Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson**. “This is about access to jobs, health care and everything that comes with being able to travel around our state. Learning from best practices and improving coordination will help make paratransit a better option for the individuals who rely on it.”

“The importance of transportation to people with disabilities – many of whom do not drive themselves -- cannot be overstated,” **said Paul S. Aronsohn, State Ombudsman for Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities and Their Families**. “For them, the shortage of accessible and affordable transportation options makes their involvement in the community – particularly through employment or day programs -- difficult, if not impossible. For them, planning even basic trips to doctors and grocery stores can often be an ordeal. That is why this common-sense piece of legislation is so important.”

Primary sponsors for S2517 include Senators Stephen M. Sweeney and Loretta Weinberg, and Assemblymembers Daniel R. Benson, Carol A. Murphy, and Valerie Vainieri Huttle.

“This will help update and improve New Jersey’s paratransit services for physically and developmentally disabled people who cannot use regular bus and rail services,” **said Senate President Steve Sweeney**. “We need to bring ‘best practices’ to our paratransit network to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. These reforms are especially important in the wake of the coronavirus crisis, which will put new demands on all mass transit services.”

“We were gratified that NJ Transit from the start showed strong support for reforms that will deliver paratransit services more efficiently for our most vulnerable riders,” **said Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg**. “This law will bring together NJ Transit, the county transportation departments and service

providers to develop a coordinated, responsive and cost-effective paratransit network.”

“A person who is elderly or disabled shouldn’t receive lower quality service than others who use public transportation. There needs to be equity in our transit system for all riders,” **said Assemblymembers Daniel Benson, Carol Murphy, and Valerie Vainieri Huttie in a joint statement.** “This new law will improve the reliability of paratransit service by increasing coordination between state paratransit providers, county agencies, and the developmental disability community to improve efficiency, as well as reducing costs and creating best practices for providers to follow. With these investments, we can ensure riders have a safer and smoother trip.”

The bill requires NJ TRANSIT to ensure that all paratransit services managed, administered, or provided directly through NJ TRANSIT’s operating budget utilize routing, scheduling, and dispatch software that will be compatible with the software used by other paratransit providers. The bill also requires NJ TRANSIT to begin identifying regular and recurring trips under the Access Link program, and to develop a system where other paratransit providers can complete those trips on behalf of NJ TRANSIT if the provider can meet applicable federal standards, provide the trip at a lower cost, and protect customer safety. The bill additionally requires NJ TRANSIT to develop an Access Link program structure that allows NJ TRANSIT to realize cost savings by reducing Access Link trip volumes, and to share those savings with paratransit providers that meet minimum federal standards and successfully compete for regular and routine trips under this new system.

The bill further requires the establishment of a three-phase, best practices pilot training program for paratransit providers. Under the first phase of the program, a qualified community organization and NJ TRANSIT will develop a paratransit best practices training module. Under the second phase, NJ TRANSIT will select five paratransit providers, upon application, to receive training in paratransit best practices under the pilot program. Depending upon the success of Phase Two of the pilot, Phase Three will commence and involve revising the training module into a training program that other paratransit providers can adopt without direct training from the qualified community organization.

Phase Three also involves the establishment of regional paratransit coordinating councils. The coordinating councils are to meet at least quarterly and share best practices among paratransit providers within the State. They are also required to establish a system to exchange information between paratransit providers and share budget information, and may eventually develop a single platform or place for paratransit users to request a trip to optimize consumer experience. Finally, the coordinating councils are to serve as a resource and develop materials to assist other paratransit providers in achieving the integration objectives in the first part of Phase Three of the pilot program, either through the revised training module or the alternate solution developed.

“To be a fully integrated member of any community, transportation is absolutely essential and that is why we are so pleased to see S2517/A4208 signed into law,” **said Thomas Baffuto, Executive Director for the Arc of New Jersey.** “It is imperative that we reduce transportation hurdles for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) so they can fully participate in employment, access social opportunities and engage with peers. It is challenging for people with I/DD to navigate and utilize the current methods of transportation, and we believe this law will enable best practices and get people where they need to go with more direct routes, reduced travel times and fewer roadblocks when scheduling rides. We are immensely proud of The Arc Mercer for their role in thinking outside the box when it comes to transportation best practices and we thank the Senate and Assembly sponsors and the Governor for their support of this critical legislation.”

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