
Committee Meeting

of

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON NEW JERSEY TRANSIT

*“The Committee will take testimony from invited guests
on best practices of transit agencies for providing service to persons with disabilities”*

LOCATION: Committee Room 4
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: January 16, 2020
11:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Stephen M. Sweeney, Chair
Senator Joseph Cryan
Senator Sandra B. Cunningham
Senator Patrick J. Diegnan, Jr.
Senator Kristin M. Corrado
Senator Thomas H. Kean, Jr.



ALSO PRESENT:

Patrick Brennan
Philip M. Mersinger
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aides*

Mark Magyar
*Senate Majority
Committee Aide*

Theodore Conrad
*Senate Republican
Committee Aide*

*Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey*



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Chair

LORETTA WEINBERG
Vice-Chair

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SANDRA E. CUNNINGHAM
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New Jersey State Legislature

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COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON NEW JERSEY TRANSIT
FROM: SENATOR STEPHEN M. SWEENEY, CHAIRMAN
SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING – JANUARY 16, 2020

The public may address comments and questions to Patrick Brennan, Philip M. Mersinger, Committee Aides, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Kimberly Johnson, Secretary, at (609)847-3840, fax (609)292-0561, or e-mail: OLSAideSNJT@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Senate Select Committee on New Jersey Transit will meet on Thursday, January 16, 2020 at 11:00 AM in Committee Room 4, 1st Floor, State House Annex, Trenton, New Jersey.

The committee will take testimony from invited guests on best practices of transit agencies for providing service to persons with disabilities.

Issued 1/9/20

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SENATOR STEPHEN M. SWEENEY (Chair): We're going to get started, if that's okay.

And I want to thank everyone who is here, and my colleagues on this Committee.

As we look to fix New Jersey Transit, and we look at the problems with New Jersey Transit, one of the issues that can't be ignored -- they're all important issues -- is access for the disabled to have reliable transportation, get to employment, and to live full lives.

And what we know is, just like the buses and the trains don't work well right now, well, Access Link doesn't work real well either.

So it's not about pointing blame or finding that someone did something wrong; it's about fixing it.

So with that, I'm going to dive right into this.

I'm sorry; roll call first.

MR. BRENNAN (Committee Aide): Senator Kean.

SENATOR KEAN: Here.

MR. BRENNAN: Senator Corrado.

SENATOR CORRADO: Here.

MR. BRENNAN: Senator Diegnan.

SENATOR DIEGNAN: Here.

MR. BRENNAN: Senator Cunningham.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Here.

MR. BRENNAN: Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Here.

MR. BRENNAN: Senator Weinberg--

SENATOR SWEENEY: --is not here.

MR. BRENNAN: And Chair Sweeney.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Here.

MR. BRENNAN: Present; we have a quorum.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Before I start, does anyone from the panel want to address, or do you just want to get into the testimony? (no response)

Okay, thank you.

Our first panel is going to be Karen Alexander, the Managing Director of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center from Rutgers University; Cecilia Feeley, Transportation Autism Project Manager from Rutgers' Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation; and Dennie Todd, Health and Transportation Coordinator for the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities.

If you can come up to the table here.

And whoever wants to go first, can go first.

K A R E N A L E X A N D E R: I'm Karen Alexander from Rutgers University.

I have to apologize. My colleague Cecilia has been delayed; she is en route, and she will be here as quickly she can. I'm sorry.

D E N N I E T O D D: But I'm here.

MS. ALEXANDER: But you're here; okay.

So since I started talking, I guess I'll continue, if that's all right.

Thank you very much for the invitation to join you today.

My name is Karen Alexander; I'm the Managing Director of the New Jersey Travel Independence Program, NJTIP @ Rutgers.

Since 2013, NJTIP has been part of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, a unit at Rutgers University in the Bloustein School.

NJTIP @ Rutgers' mission is to increase the independence of seniors and people with disabilities by teaching them how to travel safely using fixed-route transit services and other mobility options in New Jersey.

In 2016 to 2017, I led the Rutgers team that produced *Go Farther: Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan* for NJTPA, the 13 northern counties of New Jersey. *Go Farther* presents recommendations for improving mobility for almost one million transportation-disadvantaged people living in northern New Jersey.

I've worked in New Jersey, in various capacities, for almost 20 years at New Jersey Transit, at the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest, and now at Rutgers University. Currently, I also serve as an instructor for the National Transit Institute's Advancing Mobility Management course, and I'm developing a course for transit providers around the country on providing more elder-friendly fixed-route transit service.

My comments come from my experience working with collaborative teams of travel instructors, researchers, community-based organizations, colleagues, and NJTIP graduates and their families.

My testimony will be divided into three parts. I will first describe variable accessible fixed-route Transit options and how they deliver inclusive mobility for people with disabilities. I'll then describe the current transportation systems and options available to transportation-disadvantaged persons in New Jersey. And I'll conclude my remarks by identifying opportunities for leveraging our existing public transit assets with strategies

to improve our transportation network and make it more accessible, inclusive, and available to riders of all abilities.

In 1990, with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, access to public transportation became a civil right. Transit properties across the nation were required to start a multi-year process to plan and then provide accessible transportation to all customers on all modes of transportation.

Before 1990, under Section 504 of the Rehab Act, public transit services for people with disabilities could be provided either through fixed-route transit or paratransit. This often resulted in transit buses with non-operable lifts and paratransit services without the capacity to meet demand. Seeking to reform these conditions, disability advocacy focused on advancing three key elements: accessible lift-equipped buses, accessible train stations, and paratransit.

A court settlement in the mid-1980s between disability rights organizations and the City of New York incorporated these three components. In that agreement, New York City agreed to make 54 key subway stations and all buses accessible, and to appoint a committee to set up a paratransit system in New York City, now known as Access-A-Ride. This three-legged stool served as the framework for the ADA.

With the adoption of the ADA in 1990, the accessibility requirements for public transit were further articulated, expanded, and codified nationally. In addition to the three elements above, new construction in stations and stops would be accessible, significant repairs completed so that rehabilitated areas would become accessible, timelines established for fleet accessibility, and deadlines for retrofitting key stations

would be determined. Paratransit would be available to eligible riders who could not use the fixed-route system, with no built-in caps on service. And transit information would be made in accessible formats.

As a civil rights law, the ADA was incorporated into the provision of public transportation with penalties levied for non-compliance.

Mobility for all in New Jersey, 2020: Almost 30 years after the adoption of the ADA, through the ongoing efforts of New Jersey Transit, NJDOT, and many others, we now have a 100 percent fully accessible local fixed-route bus system; two fully accessible light rail systems built since the ADA; and much of the Newark light rail system is accessible as well.

New Jersey Transit's key station plan for rail is complete. There is an accessible car on every train, and new rail stations are all accessible.

Fifty-six thousand people -- more than that -- 56,495 people are registered on Access Link as of November 2019. New Jersey has also maintained a county-based elderly and disabled transportation service, supported through casino revenue funds. And these county systems provide mobility to transportation-disadvantage riders, and are especially important in areas of the state with limited or no New Jersey Transit fixed-route service.

Every county operation is unique, but they all coordinate with New Jersey Transit local program staff and the NJ Council on Special Transportation. In addition, many municipalities provide Dial-A-Ride services. In the *Go Farther* plan for NJTPA, we found that 47 percent of municipalities within the NJTPA region provided municipal transportation services, most often senior shuttles, senior vans, or dial-a-ride services for people with disabilities.

Lastly, there are significant human service transportation resources provided in New Jersey, often through alternate Federal funding streams such as Medicaid, the Older Americans Act, Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Development/Community Services block grants, and the Veterans Administration, to name just a few.

Frequently connected to a specific service provider or agency site, these transportation programs take riders to fixed destinations, such as medical appointments, congregate meal sites, work, or school. Older adults, people with disabilities, and other transportation-disadvantaged people often rely on these programs.

In a December 2016 report prepared for NJDOT, *Reducing Costs of Purchased Transportation for State Agencies*, a Rutgers research team from the Voorhees Transportation Center documented levels of accessibility for human service consumer origins and destinations. Using trip data that was provided by Aging Services, Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Voc Rehab, the team found that about half of all consumer origins and destinations were located within one-eighth of a mile of a public transit stop or a community transportation route. They also found that most consumers -- 86 percent -- were located within three-quarters of a mile of a Transit stop or a community transportation route.

This finding holds tremendous promise for serving human service consumers with traditional fixed-route and community transit systems and services.

The context now and in the near future: The context of our current transportation network, demographic forecasts, and rapidly evolving

technologies presents both challenges and opportunities to meet the mobility needs of New Jersey's transportation-disadvantaged populations.

Consider the following: Since the ADA was signed into law, New Jersey has made great strides towards improving the physical accessibility of its transit systems. There is more to do, and we need to do a better job of making sure that all riders are aware of accessibility features; and have the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to make the most out of the system we have.

Accessibility is important, not only to customers with physical mobility limitations, but also passengers with other types of disabilities, such as developmental disabilities, cognitive impairments, and emotional or mental health challenges.

With an aging population, there will be significantly more adults, age 65-plus, in New Jersey. Many will no longer be able to drive safely, but they will require mobility to stay independent in their homes and in their communities. Current population forecasts from the Department of Labor and Workforce Development estimate that we will have 20 percent of the population -- more than 1.8 million residents -- aged 65 and above by 2030.

With increases in technology, there are new and rapidly evolving opportunities to create more flexible and customer-centric mobility services. For example, Uber has been in New Jersey five years, and now it's a verb. There are transit agencies all over the United States rethinking how they provide service, and experimenting with new approaches. As highlighted in *Forbes* magazine, innovative new mobility startups are promulgating rapidly. For example, one startup, targeting older adults and people with disabilities,

called *Mobility for All*, will vet and certify drivers from other transportation companies through its app.

Recommendations: The recommendations I'd like to share with you come from looking at both sides of this equation. What do customers need, and what resources are potentially available to meet those needs?

First, New Jersey Transit should capitalize on the investments it has made since the passage of the ADA in 1990 by better communicating current accessibility features to all potential riders. Nationally, 12.6 percent of the population has a disability, and the most common type of disability involves difficulties with walking or independent living.

Current projections show that there are over 820,000 adults with disabilities in New Jersey; 57,000 people on Access Link, and 820,000 people with disabilities in New Jersey. We have a big audience to be talking to.

One thing that can and should be done is to integrate information on all accessible services -- including private carriers, contract carriers, county services, and dial-a-rides -- within a centralized Transit Information Center or portal, so that more passengers, and their families, and support networks can envision using the complete range of accessible services in our state.

State leaders can and should reauthorize the New Jersey Council for Access and Mobility, and charge the Council with figuring out ways to maximize the flow of Federal funding resources coming to New Jersey from the 130 Federal funding programs that can pay for human service transportation and mobility management.

An interdepartmental approach would encourage coordination with New Jersey Transit across diverse areas, such as special education, the Department of Education, supportive housing through DCA, divisions on aging, disability services and developmental disabilities through DHS, active living community and workforce wellness through DOH, and vocational rehabilitation through Labor and Workforce Development. All of these agencies have an interest in the mobility of people with disabilities.

The State should also create and fund an innovative transportation services pilot program, building on those collaborations that can capitalize on emerging technologies and our existing accessible fixed-route network.

Transit operators in the state should provide focused customer service and sensitivity training for managers and operators of fixed-route services of both New Jersey Transit and other carriers, so that they are better prepared to interact not only with customers with disabilities, as required by the ADA, but also with an increasingly older and more diverse population in New Jersey.

Fourth: The State should also increase targeted marketing and education on accessible fixed-route services to locations focused on transportation-disadvantaged populations, such as schools serving transition-aged students with disabilities, supportive housing communities, community-based agencies with frequent paratransit pickups, and senior-serving agencies and housing sites.

For example, classes and/or video training should be more readily available with on-vehicle travel training for groups or individuals. NJTIP @ Rutgers, the program I direct -- our team has provided this kind of

training for over a decade with significant success. Four hundred and fifty-three people have completed individual NJTIP travel instruction, all of whom would otherwise be on Access Link, with over 87 percent reporting using fixed-route Transit after training.

Another strategy should be to promote Transit not only for work trips, but for off-peak trips to cultural events, recreational sites, social and leisure destinations. Riverside, California's RTA service and Eugene, Oregon's Lane Transit District both deploy these kinds of strategies especially well, taking advantage of capacity during the off-peak period.

Transit operators should also examine fare strategies to attract riders with disabilities and seniors to fixed-route through better promotion of reduced fare programs, to encourage convenient and cost-effective Transit use for transportation-disadvantaged people traveling to work, school, or other routine destinations.

Transit operators should also work towards integrating fare structures with adjacent systems in New York and Pennsylvania, and facilitating single ticketing. These approaches have been successfully implemented in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Finally, operators should consider providing fare incentives to promote accessible fixed-route Transit use. For example, in Las Vegas, on the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada, ADA paratransit users ride on fixed-route buses for free. On SEPTA in Philadelphia, passengers age 65-plus can ride on buses, trolleys, and subways for free. This creates a tremendous incentive for people to use the fixed-route system.

Lastly, Transit operators, working with local governments throughout the State, should undertake a coordinated effort to enhance rider

comfort and convenience by improving bus stops -- with clearly marked and designated locations; protection from the weather, sun, snow, rain; lighting and seating where possible. Operators and municipalities should strive to locate bus stops as close as possible to sites with high concentrations of people with disabilities and older adults, and ensure a clear path of travel to and from those stops.

Additional recommendations regarding customer enhancements to fixed-route services, designed to meet the needs of all riders, are included in *Go Farther: Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan* for NJTPA; and there are similar plans available for the Delaware Valley RPC and South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization. They all make recommendations, and all three plans are available online.

One of the comments we often hear from NJTIP travel training graduates and their families is an appreciation for the opportunities and independence that mobility offers. As one young adult graduate's mother put it, "T. is quiet and dependent on me to drive her to work and social activities. The fact that she will be able to ride the bus unassisted to work or school will give her confidence, decision-making, independence and life skills."

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

MS. ALEXANDER: We do have video that may be available -- I'm not sure -- that shows two of our graduates traveling from Wayne, New Jersey, to Pfizer headquarters in New York City together, on accessible fixed-route Transit. If we have an opportunity to screen it, I'd love to share it with

you. If not, I can certainly give you the link, in terms of YouTube, in terms of time, because I want to be respectful.

Now that we have the AV -- but I've given testimony.

SENATOR SWEENEY: You can share it; share it with us, please.

MS. ALEXANDER: Okay; can we make it work? Do we have audio?

(video is unable to be played)

Okay; I'll be happy to provide the Committee with the YouTube link.

MR. MAGYAR (Committee Aide): Provide us with the link.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

MS. ALEXANDER: Thanks.

MS. TODD: Good morning.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to come here to present.

I'm in place of Mercedes Witowsky, who is our Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities.

First of all, I'm not only here to represent the New Jersey Council on Development Disabilities -- because we appreciate this opportunity -- I'm also testifying as a person with a brain injury, since I'm post-brain-injured 35 years, when I was involved in a near-fatal car accident.

And I'm here today; and Senator Sweeney, I thank you very much for everything you've done for us in the past, too.

And Karen did an incredible presentation; and that's why I wanted to go second, because she's actually saying everything that I wanted to say, all right? (laughter) So it's just duplicated; just a little consolidated version.

I also brought with me what's called a publication that we had sponsored -- Rutgers, Cecilia Feeley -- they had done this, comprised it. I have copies for all of you; I'll be happy to get -- make sure you get a copy. And it's called *In Their Own Words*. We have some of the most phenomenal advocates sitting behind me who were part of this process of being interviewed regarding the transportation system.

I'm going to just highlight, basically, that the needs of the people with intellectual and developmental disabilities concerning transportation are individualized, complex, and diverse, and there are no single models that address the many issues.

The Council's mission, as stated in its current five-year plan, is to advocate statewide for clear policies, based on the principle that transportation should be available to accommodate the lives of people with disabilities.

The implementation targets you heard from my colleague Karen, so I'm not going to repeat it. And you have the printed version in front of you. The specific target goals are actually the same thing; and I'm going to be duplicating them -- just sort of a consolidated version.

I would like to specify -- for far too long people with developmental disabilities, especially those with mobility issues and those who live in less populated areas -- and you know where we're at; down in the southern part of the state -- have been shut out from the ability to utilize the New Jersey Transit system. In light of newly initiated services, such as Lyft and Uber -- thank you, Karen -- it is time for New Jersey to get serious about ensuring that all people with disabilities have access to their community. A comprehensive statewide plan is required for individuals to access

transportation that meets his or her needs. Stable funding will be a step toward realization of this goal.

Transportation issues are well documented. Ironically enough, the implementation targets are the exact targets that were developed by NJCDD, under Ethan Ellis' leadership, over 30 years ago. Action is needed.

Kudos to Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg for recommending Janna Chernetz to serve on the Select Committee on New Jersey Transit under Senator Sweeney's leadership. She is a woman who tells you the reality of the program. Less talk, more action is what we're looking for.

And if I can just defer behind me. As I said earlier, I used to be the PIP coordinator, many years ago, for the Council, for 14 years; which was a leadership training program to partner with you guys and girls to make sure that you know who we are, to help. We're going to partner with you to help make system changes easier. If you would rely on your experts back here, they're passionate, passionate people who really need and want to work with you to get a stronger transportation system in our state.

I know we have the most diverse state, probably in the country -- one of the most diverse -- and I know it's difficult, what you guys have to deal with. When I say *you guys*, you know, I'm from Jersey, okay? All right -- you guys; girls are automatically included with that. I'm just saying -- my mother's like -- her ashes are jumping up in the air. But you need to really utilize the people who are out here, and please listen to what they're saying. And if we can get rid of the minutiae, where everybody's fighting with each other up here, regarding this funding mechanism-- The money's there. We need to know how to utilize the money to make sure the services are getting

out there to us, to all of us, you guys included. We're all going to be disabled one day in our life; a person with a disability as we get older. It's an aging population.

And thank God for Karen Alexander, because she described the specifics, the logistics, and the facts as to what's happening out there in the system; and I didn't want to duplicate what she was saying, because I didn't know exactly what she was saying.

But I'm really expressing a need to listen to your constituents, and to really work with each other in the systems up here. Like I said, the money's up here; we can work with each other to see how we can make sure that they're getting the services.

Thank you for the time that you afforded me.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Are there any questions from anyone up here?

Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks; I appreciate that.

Thank you; thank you both.

Karen, I have a couple of questions for you that I just wanted to follow up on.

So I apologize; the lady who spoke for Mercedes. I didn't get your first name; I apologize.

MS. TODD: Dennie.

SENATOR CRYAN: Debbie?

MS. TODD: Dennie.

SENATOR CRYAN: Dennie; I apologize.

You indicated it's not a funding issue, which I was surprised at. Because I know, from looking at the research materials here, the funding mechanisms here, because it's funded off CRDA-- It basically went from \$36 million in 2008 to \$18 million last year, which is half.

Have you, at the Transportation Center, encountered funding issues in this area?

MS. ALEXANDER: Can you clarify-- You used an acronym, *CRDA*?

SENATOR CRYAN: CRDA; I'm sorry. The Casino-- I should point to my right; yes.

MS. ALEXANDER: Oh, SCDRTAP.

MS. TODD: Casino revenue.

MS. ALEXANDER: Okay; different acronyms.

So the casino revenue-- I should clarify something, in terms of--

The casino revenue funding was much higher a number of years ago. It has fallen precipitously over the last seven, eight years. And my understanding is, because of some of the benefit from Internet gaming, it's beginning to tick back up. But it has had a significant hit over a number of years.

The casino revenue funding -- 85 percent of that goes to the county-based programs that are providing paratransit and some fixed-routes in each of the 21 counties.

SENATOR CRYAN: Right.

MS. ALEXANDER: And then 15 percent of that money is held in reserve for New Jersey Transit to administer those programs, and for accessibility programming that New Jersey Transit pursues.

The program that I direct actually gets some funding through that SCDRTAP fund to teach people how to use the fixed-route system.

So it *was* more; it *is* less; and there is some hope with Internet gaming. My colleague Michael Vieira, who runs COST, is an expert on that whole range of funding and the trends on it. And I think one of the things to be cognizant of, in terms of looking at the casino revenue funding, is that Internet gaming will be something we do in New Jersey, but it will probably also get generalized to lots of other geographies. And when that begins to happen, we'll probably see the same sort of change.

SENATOR CRYAN: All right; but let me just follow up on that.

So I was struck by your comments about how Transit opportunities are so close. And I was listening, trying to take notes; and I apologize.

MS. ALEXANDER: You have it in the testimony.

SENATOR CRYAN: Essentially, the routes, basically, are available -- for lack of a better way to put it, they're in parallel with each other. Is that correct?

MS. ALEXANDER: So what that study found -- the 2016 reducing-cost study looked at the proximity of those human service agency locations to some sort of Transit. And about half of those locations that people were trying to get to, as human service transportation customers, were within an eighth of a mile of some sort of either community Transit or fixed Transit opportunity. Which tells us that's a walkable distance for many people, depending on what their disability is. You might be able to use that system for some of those clients to get to those locations.

SENATOR CRYAN: So just a couple of other quick questions for you.

MS. ALEXANDER: Sure.

SENATOR CRYAN: So you run the TIP program, right?

MS. ALEXANDER: Correct.

SENATOR CRYAN: The independence program. So it's my understanding that that program-- I thought you said 453; did I write that down correctly?

MS. ALEXANDER: You did. We've actually-- Yes, we have--

SENATOR CRYAN: But I thought -- and again, just from Google and research -- you guys had a program where you had to cut back on this, did you not? I show numbers, between FY 2014 and 2017 -- if I got it right -- that we did 151 graduates, and they were about \$8,500 each? And there were some cost issues; is that right?

MS. ALEXANDER: So the 453 number that I quoted is the life of the program, from its initial pilot--

SENATOR CRYAN: Okay; so it was just different periods of time.

MS. ALEXANDER: Right. Our largest single class was Calendar Year 2017, where we had 54 or 55 graduates in that one year. We also provide training in group settings and classroom settings; and if I include those customers--

SENATOR CRYAN: Okay.

MS. ALEXANDER: --the number grows to over 12,700 who we have provided some sort of Transit orientation, travel education, a group trip, in terms of the program that we have done--

SENATOR CRYAN: So Karen, does it actually become cost feasible? That's really my question; I was just trying to lead into it. Is it feasible for the TIP program, given the way the routes overlap; is that a part of a manageable solution here?

MS. ALEXANDER: I believe so, yes. There is a portion of people who would otherwise be on door-to-door services. New Jersey Transit staff, years ago, theorized that there were some people who would be able to make the switch for at least some of their trips if they had the right training and they had the right education. NJTIP has been doing that work since 2007; and since 2013, at the Voorhees Transportation Center.

SENATOR CRYAN: Two other quick questions, if that's all right?

SENATOR SWEENEY: Sure.

SENATOR CRYAN: So it's my understanding that -- and we've had chats here about the Uber technology -- the *verb*, as you say.

MS. ALEXANDER: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: And the fact that it's way different from waiting for a cab late at night -- that you can see where your Uber car is and all those things.

MS. ALEXANDER: Absolutely.

SENATOR CRYAN: It's my understanding that Transit is working on that, and that it's going to be available some time summer-ish. Is that your understanding as well? Are you part of that?

MS. ALEXANDER: So NJTIP @ Rutgers lives at the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers. We work with New Jersey Transit, and

they're our funding source for the work we do and a source of our clients, in terms of the people who we work with.

My understanding of that particular program is -- it's in a pilot stage right now, and there are two counties that are currently engaged in that pilot with Uber and Lyft. I know one is Essex; I think the other may be Sussex, but I'm not certain of that.

SENATOR CRYAN: Okay. Are you part of the evaluation of that? I'm just curious.

MS. ALEXANDER: No.

SENATOR CRYAN: Okay.

MS. ALEXANDER: No.

SENATOR CRYAN: And then last thing for me -- because I'm taking too much time -- is, on the software piece. There's no mobile app, right? It's only desktop at the moment; the mobile app needs work for Access Link?

MS. ALEXANDER: The mobile app for New Jersey Transit?

SENATOR CRYAN: No, no, no; for the Access Link portion of it. Is that correct?

MS. ALEXANDER: Oh--

SENATOR CRYAN: You don't-- Am I not talking to the right person?

MS. ALEXANDER: I'm going to defer to Dennie, because--

MS. TODD: Thank you.

I was at a public hearing back in -- a couple months ago; and everything and all-- Access Link had given a public hearing to the advocates at the Library for the Blind, or whatever, in Ewing. And there were over 60-

some advocates in the audience. They had New Jersey Transit staff surrounded through the whole room. They have been working on a mobility app, for it's easy -- it's easier access for them to get the Access Link, as far as getting on time. Because they always had a 30-minute window before and after, so they're working on that. It's an ongoing working app.

SENATOR CRYAN: Yes, I think we're going to have a lot of conversations about the definition of *on time* today. (laughter) All right -- 40 or 30.

MS. TODD: All right; but I mean, Access Link-- Michele Stiehler is the new Director of that program right now, and she's really working on it, getting more staff.

SENATOR CRYAN: Chair, thank you. Sorry; thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: I have a couple of questions, then I'll give it to Senator Cunningham.

One, back to funding. You know, one of the big problems with New Jersey Transit, as an entity, is the lack of reliable funding for the entity. So as we're going through this, when I hear, "We have the money," I don't have to look at increasing funding for Access Link, because that's what you're telling me? I want clarity on that comment. You know, Senator Cryan started it; I want clarity. Is there enough funding to deal with the transportation needs, in your opinion, for the community that travels? Because you said it: there is.

Just clear it up. And listen, if there is, that makes me ecstatic. (laughter) This would be the first time we ever had enough funding for anything.

MS. ALEXANDER: So what I said, and what's in my testimony that I think we're talking about is, there's 130 different Federal funding streams that can be drawn upon to support human service transportation and/or mobility management, which is the coordination of transportation. And what I proposed as a recommendation was, the New Jersey Council for Access and Mobility be reinvigorated so that all of those agencies that have the ability to get those dollars are in the conversation together. There are opportunities to draw those funds in, and I don't believe that we're seeing all of them.

SENATOR SWEENEY: I was going to say, though, how are we doing in gathering those funding sources? Obviously, it's a broad spectrum of opportunities; but are we maximizing, in New Jersey, the opportunity to bring the Federal dollars here?

MS. ALEXANDER: I think we're doing-- I think what's been very interesting, in the last year or so, is that New Jersey Transit has begun to pursue some of the Federal grants that the Federal Transit Administration is putting in these areas; and secured one, in particular, that I'm aware of, that is going to be doing some travel education videos to teach people about the accessible fixed-route service. And they got Federal dollars to support the development of that.

There's some larger asks that are out right now, related to some of the new technologies and coordinating mobility. So they're throwing their hat in the ring to get those Federal FTA dollars, and I think that's a very positive thing. As to what the FTA does in those grant processes, I can't comment. But I think the other question is, there are these other resources

through Federal funding streams that we could also be strategically trying to figure out how we leverage those dollars into a transportation mix.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Well, that answers my question. We need to do more there, right?

MS. ALEXANDER: And I think creating the New Jersey Council for Access and Mobility brings those agencies that have access to those transportation dollars into a conversation, in terms of all of us working together on this.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Now, did we do away with that Council?

MS. ALEXANDER: It sunset, and it was not re--

SENATOR SWEENEY: Well, we have to bring it back then.

MS. ALEXANDER: Yes, it was a place that the State agencies could talk about these issues.

SENATOR SWEENEY: You can bet it's coming back then.
(laughter)

MS. ALEXANDER: I beg your pardon?

SENATOR SWEENEY: You can bet that it is coming back.

MS. ALEXANDER: Terrific.

SENATOR SWEENEY: One more question from me, because I want the other members of the panel to have-- I don't want to monopolize the time.

Are we doing a good enough job of coordination between Access Link and county transportation programs? I think I got my answer already.
(laughter)

MS. TODD: Yes, I--

SENATOR SWEENEY: I mean, you know, one of the things is -- and I was talking to some of my colleagues before we came out here -- you know, county governments do have systems. You have nonprofits that have systems. And are we engaging enough locally to-- Are those communications going on to where we're strengthening the system of county and nonprofits with Access Link? Because, one, it's cheaper; and two, they're closer to the community, like--

MS. TODD: I'm sorry, Senator Sweeney; I don't mean to interrupt. But with my brain injury, I lose my thought really quickly, and I'm going to forget what I was going to say.

And Karen, I love you to death, and everything and all, but we get a lot of issues from the consumers; and the people behind me are the ones you really want to talk to regarding this issue specifically.

But I hear all the time, as Transportation Coordinator of the Council, individuals -- because of the boundary lines, or whatever; the county lines -- they can't cross lines, they can't go-- We need a seamless, seamless transportation system out there, and I don't see why we can't get one.

Thank you, Senator Sweeney, because I think if we can get the county to work with the State better, and collaborate with each other-- If you're working with each other, we will have a seamless, seamless system, and it'll be easier for everybody all around. Less headaches, you know? And it will probably be less expensive, ultimately, down the road.

But no; it's not working as effectively as it could.

Do you want to comment?

MS. ALEXANDER: Yes--

SENATOR SWEENEY: Go ahead, Karen.

MS. ALEXANDER: Thank you, Dennie.

I think one of the pieces that's missing -- or, in addition to this, you know, New Jersey Council on Access and Mobility and getting folks around a table, talking together-- We don't have a single place in New Jersey where a person, or a family, or a support coordinator, or anybody can say, "I have somebody who wants to go from point *A* to point *B*, and what are the transportation systems that can help me go from point *A* to point *B* that is an inclusive directory of everything?" It's electronic. And those kinds of integrated systems help see those opportunities, like, "I could take the county system to someplace that Access Link would pick me up; or I could take Access Link to the train, and then it would take me the rest of the way if I had the skills to use fixed-route."

But if you can't get the solution to that question in an integrated way, it's very hard to envision, "How do I make that trip." And so people, I think, end up constrained by the mobility of the one system they know best. And that becomes an opportunity, but it also becomes a parameter.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Is there a plan to integrate it?

MS. ALEXANDER: Is there a plan to integrate? I know that there is an ongoing conversation about the need for coordination.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Conversations don't work; actions matter. So I mean, at some point you go beyond the conversation to the plan.

MS. ALEXANDER: Well, I think-- I'm going to answer your question with a suggestion, which is, the opportunity to coordinate is clearly there, because the coordination isn't there. But I also feel very strongly that any sort of an attempt of coordination should really also include human

service agencies and other State agencies that have an interest in this issue, in terms of the mobility of the people who they serve.

New Jersey Transit is the provider -- the largest single provider; but there are all these other people who should have skin in the game, in terms of that conversation. And I can give a specific example that I think is an easy one. The Division on Aging has created an award-winning screening tool that helps older adults connect to benefits that they may be eligible for. And it includes, in the screening tool, I believe, information about vehicle registration; what it doesn't include is information about reduced fare. That would be the kind of integration -- or Access Link or County paratransit. So bringing together those kinds of opportunities. You know, the Department of Education does a lot of work with special education students who would benefit from learning about transportation in an IEP. Those things come together, and I think that's how we get there.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Well, Karen, one, for the Committee, if you could identify the different organizations that you think-- Again, we should all be working together; that would be good.

MS. ALEXANDER: So the ones that are included in my testimony, and I think that are the most obvious, include the Division on Aging, the Division on Disability Services, the Division of Developmental Disabilities.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Okay.

MS. ALEXANDER: Certainly DCA, in terms of where we put housing for people, supportive housing, and how that connects to the Transit opportunity. The Department of Education, in terms of the special education linkage. All of these -- and there are more. We're working closely with Labor

and Workforce Development. We have clients of voc rehab that we're now training through a fee-for-service arrangement with them, which is great.

So there are opportunities to think about mobility in all of these spheres. And we lose the opportunity to make a good statewide strategy when we don't think about it broadly. This isn't other people; this is all of us.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Senator Cunningham.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Karen, I just-- You know, when you were talking about training that you're giving-- I wanted to know if you could elaborate a little bit more on who was being trained and what that training entails.

MS. ALEXANDER: Sure.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: And let me tell you why. Many years ago, I used to operate a nonprofit transportation company, or program, for the Essex County American Red Cross. And I learned, very early on, when you're helping people, when you're helping people who have disabilities, or health issues, or elderly people, there is more than just putting them in a car or putting them on a bus.

MS. ALEXANDER: Yes.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: There's more that is included in that.

MS. ALEXANDER: Yes.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: There is something called respect, and dignity, and purpose that we need to be involved in.

And occasionally, if I'm at a church, I'll have a senior or someone come up to me and say, "Well, you know, I had that driver, and he was very

rude to me. He wasn't nice to me." And I just think that at a certain age in life we deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, all of us.

So I was just wondering what kind of training are we really doing, and who are these people who are being trained?

Thank you.

MS. ALEXANDER: Sure; I'd be happy to answer the question.

So our program initially started out of a theory, at Access Link, that there were some people who were going through the Access Link eligibility process who, with the right training and coaching, might be able to use the fixed-route system. And that pilot program was conducted in 2005 to 2007, and 49 people were successfully transitioned. That's not to say that every trip they went on fixed-route, but they developed the skills to be able to use the fixed-route system independently, with the understanding that Access Link was still there if they needed it for some trips.

We became a nonprofit, and continued to do that work as NJTIP, Inc. before we became part of Rutgers. And that initial curriculum -- which is still the curriculum that we use -- is based on 27 different skills that you need to have competency with to be able to use public transit safely. When we train people individually, we start with an initial assessment in person, generally at the client's home or community location, to assess what strengths they have starting.

We will then work with people one-on-one. My travel trainers all have bachelor's degrees; many of them have master's degrees. Some of them have been with the program for over a decade. They are intimately familiar with New Jersey Transit in the counties that we provide service. And we also work with families, in terms of making sure parents are on board in

terms of what we're doing. This is -- you know, if somebody has a family member who is their guardian, that person signs off on the training; all of that is done. And then we take people out individually. We define a destination that is going to be something they go to routinely, so that it's self-reinforcing.

And the curriculum is, you know, how to pay your fare, how to board, how to talk to an operator, how to stay oriented on a vehicle. But it also includes what happens when something goes wrong: when the train doesn't come, when the bus doesn't come.

It also includes basics on ADA rights, so that if a person who has a mobility device is waiting for a bus and the bus blows by, they know what to do in terms of making a complaint to New Jersey Transit, and how to do that properly. And they know what their rights are, in terms of that bus being accessible and stopping for them.

We also follow up with our graduates at one, three, six, nine months, to check in with them and see, "Are you still using Transit, and do you have any questions? Has anything changed?" Sometimes people move, and they need some retraining from a new destination or to a new job.

At those follow-up intervals we find, routinely, that two-thirds of the people we're contacting at any interval say that they're using Transit for some of their trips. Across the whole horizon, 87 percent report using Transit after being trained, which is a number we're very proud of. And the curriculum has not really changed since that first -- the pilot. We developed it carefully, and tested it, and we've held true to it.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Okay, thank you.

I'd like to get a copy of that curriculum (laughter).

Yes?

MS. TODD: I was going to say, Senator, if I could add on to what Karen was just sharing with you, and you saying your experience with Red Cross and with the church.

You can do all the training in the world, you just have to pray to God you're dealing with good people.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: That's true.

MS. TODD: Okay? I'm short and sweet; just to the point. I mean, I have had-- My mother, who passed away in 2015 -- I was fortunate to be her primary caregiver, thank God. And if you're on top of the care, you're making sure they're seen. People who don't have loved ones -- then you're overseeing their care. You just pray that that the person is a loving person.

SENATOR CUNNINGHAM: Thank you very much.

Oh, and I have a question, for our Senator.

You don't need it? Okay, all right.

Thank you.

MS. TODD: Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Any other members? (no response)

Okay, thank you both.

MS. ALEXANDER: Thank you.

MS. TODD: Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: The next panel is going to be Tom Baffuto, the President of the Arc of New Jersey; Colleen Jennings, self-advocate, Arc of New Jersey; Peggy Englebert, Executive Director of the Arc

of Camden; and Barbara Coppens, Advocate Assistant, Disability Rights New Jersey.

THOMAS BAFFUTO: Thank you, Senator Sweeney and members of the Committee.

I'm Tom Baffuto, the Executive Director of The Arc of New Jersey.

Clearly, you've heard from some great transportation experts -- and I know you'll hear from more -- with outstanding recommendations. I bring to you today concerns and recommendations from family members and self-advocates through The Arc of New Jersey family.

It's our hope that after today's hearing that the Legislature and New Jersey Transit can work together to ensure public transportation is adequately funded, accessible, and reliable to meet the needs of people with developmental disabilities.

So from where I sit, transportation and the DSP workforce crisis are the two issues I hear about all the time from families and self-advocates. And that makes sense, because people with intellectual and developmental disabilities need both in order to live an integrated life in the community. Living independently, finding and maintaining competitive employment, or socializing with friends and family are only possible with reliable transportation.

Family members and DSPs must fill gaps when New Jersey Transit can't provide the accessible services that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities need. The majority of those we represent rely on paratransit services or mass transit services delivered by New Jersey Transit.

As one mom pointed out to me, “In New Jersey, we’re good at giving New Jersey a designation as an *employment-first state*. We’re good at proclamations declaring Employment for People with Disabilities Month.” But as she said, “All the designations, declarations, and proclamations do not mean a thing if people with developmental disabilities can’t get reliable transportation.”

So from that, we have heard -- we believe New Jersey Transit must conduct a comprehensive, county-by-county assessment of services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, analyzing current usage trends and gaps in services. Examples of successful utilization that they find as models must be shared statewide.

Additionally, we believe there must be a considerable increase in resources and funding to accommodate route expansion and hours of services so the system is more nimble to better fit the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.

We recognize that any expansion comes at a cost. The State must make this investment to better serve its residents with disabilities. On the topic of funding, New Jersey Transit administers the Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program, which receives money through an annual allocation of the Casino Revenue Fund. The funding for this program has dropped significantly since 2008, and we’re concerned about how this has and will continue to impact services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We urge New Jersey Transit to ensure transportation services for people with disabilities are maintained; and if needed, are funded through other parts of the Agency’s budget.

The availability of New Jersey Transit services is very limited to those living in rural parts of New Jersey. We heard from many family members and self-advocates about this. The agency should not and cannot ignore residents who live in these areas of the state. Telling people with disabilities in rural areas that they are, essentially, “cut off from transportation options” is not an acceptable answer. More must be done to create adequate infrastructure and a realistic plan to expand those services in those regions. Increasing transportation possibilities into the less urban portions of New Jersey would open up the connections that people with developmental disabilities and their families both want and need.

We would also urge New Jersey Transit to expand technological advancements to better serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We’re hearing changes in that front have occurred in the past year, but we ask that the Agency that continue along those lines in order to stay on pace with new and improved assistive technologies and apps to make transportation easier for riders with disabilities.

New Jersey Transit must think creatively about unused and underutilized resources that could benefit this population, and consider creative contracting to augment existing options.

One possibility: Partnering with community service providers that frequently maintain a large fleet of vehicles and vans to transport people with intellectual and development disabilities to day programs. Staff operating these vehicles are already trained and screened to work with this population, and vehicles that sit idle during the day could serve as a resource to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities seeking access

to the community. Partnerships like this could expand the current offerings and benefits for all involved.

In addition, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, for the most part, are very asset limited. To become and remain eligible for vital Medicaid-funded services, the majority of people with intellectual and development disabilities are forced to impoverish themselves and remain poor for a lifetime. New Jersey Transit should make the cost of their fixed-route services and their paratransit services as affordable as possible for this population, so that cost is not among the transportation obstacles facing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We believe New Jersey Transit must hear first-hand experiences from those with intellectual and development disabilities using their services, and we urge them to increase engagement with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the state.

We also urge New Jersey Transit to create a new position within their Agency that can serve as a point person for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This would increase the Agency's accessibility, while at the same time offering riders a hub for feedback.

New Jersey Transit should also improve their accessibility by forming a partnership with the Department of Human Services; a collaborative effort between these two entities could produce beneficial transportation solutions.

New Jersey Transit must place an increased emphasis on training for their employees, as we've heard, who interact and serve people in the community. A better understanding of people with disabilities -- specifically

relating to their needs, and challenges, and the equipment -- would go a long way in improving their services.

And finally, all transportation services offered by New Jersey Transit, whether they be fixed-route or Access Link, must be accessible to all, regardless of a person's physical or cognitive challenges.

New Jersey Transit must do a full appraisal of their fleet to ensure it is maintained appropriately, and that all disability-specific features are in working order. We hear from families, anecdotally, that people with intellectual and development disabilities spend a long time waiting for transportation, only to find out that a chairlift on the van doesn't work and their wheelchair cannot be safely moved on board. This is not acceptable, and we urge the Agency to regularly maintain vans and vehicles to prevent this kind of scenario from occurring.

In closing, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of families and self-advocates. We're grateful to you, Senate President Sweeney, and this Committee, for your interest in transportation issues impacting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you, Tom.

Who's next; who wants to go next?

P E G G Y E N G L E B E R T: We'll go down the line.

SENATOR SWEENEY: That's fine.

MS. ENGLEBERT: Good morning.

I'm Peggy Englebert, the Executive Director of The Arc of Camden County. We have provided services to individuals with all kinds of

disabilities since 1956. We currently serve about 900 people a day in residential, day, and employment programs.

We serve people throughout Camden County and parts of surrounding counties as well. Our mission is to collaborate with and enrich the lives of the individuals in our community.

So we're grateful to have been invited to speak today on the issue of public transportation for people with disabilities. This is a topic that's very near and dear to our agency because we've been in the business of job placement for over 40 years. Imagine, if you could, what you would do if you were hired into a position and you could not get there because you don't own and cannot drive a car? You cannot access public transportation. You can't ride a bike, or a bike ride is too far away. Imagine the frustration, the sense of hopelessness, and the sense of unfairness that these are barriers that, through no fault of your own, you cannot overcome. This is the world that people with disabilities often face.

Transportation for employment is just a piece of the puzzle -- arguably, the largest piece -- but the greater vision for transportation is engagement in your community to be able to go to the doctor, to be able to go shopping, to be able to engage in religious practices, to become a fully participating and contributing member of your community. All of those things are things that those of us who are still mobile take for granted, but are often unattainable for our citizens with disabilities.

Things have changed dramatically in 30 years since Access Link was enacted. New Jersey Transit -- their Access Link has become a vital part of the transportation network; and over this past year, we have seen Access Link become more responsive to the needs of its passengers. That said -- as

you have heard, and you'll hear numerous times today -- Access Link is severely limited, with that three-quarter mile distance that they will pick up. If they can pick you up at your home, if your destination is outside of that three-quarter mile distance, they will not take you to that destination.

The 20-minute window -- I won't go into describing that; that's in my testimony -- we all know that it could be a 40-minute time period, and that often stretches to an hour, if not more. And there are no employers, except for a human service agencies like ours, that will tolerate that kind of variation in the arrival and departure. And doctors' offices do not tolerate such late arrivals; and you can imagine, on and on, the effects.

For these reasons, and numerous others that you will hear today, we urge New Jersey Transit to, as Tom said, conduct an assessment in each county to form a plan to address this critical, chronic lack of access to transportation for people with disabilities, in order to the expand services.

So we recognize that this assessment will require additional funding, as will an expansion of services. But think about what additional funding might do for the people of New Jersey and for the State of New Jersey; people with disabilities and the State. More employment creates more tax revenues, potentially leading to a win-win for all.

In the current state of our economy, we know employers can't find workers. As one who administers an employment program, I can assure you there is no dearth of people willing and waiting to be employed, if only they could get there.

Without this plan for expansion, we are telling a significant portion of our population that their involvement in the world around us is not worth planning for. Roads are built, highways are maintained, railroads

are subsidized, all to keep the wheels of prosperity turning. Our citizens with disabilities deserve no less of an infrastructure of opportunity to work and to prove their worth in our community.

In closing, Senator Sweeney, I thank you for allowing The Arc of Camden County -- we thank all the members of this Committee for allowing us to add our voice to those who have gathered here, to highlight for the Committee the grave importance of finding a way for the Legislature and New Jersey Transit to work together to establish transportation that is adequately funded and fully accessible to meet the varied needs of all of the people of the great State of New Jersey.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Who's up next?

BARBARA COPPENS: I want to thank you, Senator Sweeney, for this opportunity to testify.

I'm Barbara Coppens, first of all; and I work right here in Trenton.

And I take public transportation every day, going to and from work; because I ride my bike to Palmyra station to get on the River Line all the time. I ride, like, 12 -- about 12-and-a-half miles, altogether, a day, going to and from Cherry Hill. And so I take the River Line to work. And I wanted to say one other thing about the transportation. When I receive e-mails being invited somewhere, I say, "I can't get there. There's no transportation." For example, The Arc of Middlesex -- they're out in the middle of nowhere; you can't even get there. So even some other places, you can't get to.

And we really need more transportation and more buses to be put on. Like Route 73 in Mount Laurel or Maple Shade -- there's no transportation out that way either. Even going to New Lisbon -- there's no transportation; it's out in the middle of nowhere.

So that's why we need more transportation around the southern region area, because we have a lot of open land also down in the southern region; like through Columbus, New Jersey, and Jamestown -- like that. So it's hard; it's not easy to get transportation. You have to figure out how to get to these places; you have to find your own way to get there.

So I say, "Well, if I can't get anywhere like that, I just can't do it." So that's why I'm not just advocating for me; I advocate for other self-advocates throughout the state, in New Jersey.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify because we really need--

And another thing I want to mention about -- on these city buses, when I'm with my roommate or something, and she's having a hard time getting on and off the bus, they don't even pull up close to the curb, or they don't lower the buses. The same way with those big buses. And you can't -- it's hard to get up and down the steps on the buses there, because they don't lower the buses; not all the time, they don't. So we need to do that -- work on that.

Same goes for the big buses and the city ones. Because a lot of the times they don't pull up close to the curb. So I figured-- I've seen other people having a hard time getting on the buses, too, like that. They can't walk -- you know, get up on it or off it. So that's why I wanted to mention

that, and speak up about that. So that's why I'm speaking up, or forever hold my peace. (laughter) So I just wanted to let you know.

And I'm glad that you are the Chair of this Committee, because we need to work with New Jersey Transit to put more bus lines out, or something like that. Even more trains, because I-295 -- sometimes I get a ride into work with my coworker, when I can't-- For example, today was too windy to ride my bike, so I got a ride with him. Traffic is constantly cluttered on I-295, going up and going home -- both. There's too much traffic, and that's why I'm speaking up for that. So we really need more lines to be put out there.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Barbara, you never have a problem speaking up. (laughter)

COLLEEN JENNINGS: Hi; my name is Colleen Jennings. I'm with The Arc of Monmouth.

I've been at Seabrook for 12 years. I take Access Link and New Jersey Transit; and I take them occasionally to doctor's appointments -- up and down with Access Link.

The drivers are friendly and nice. Sometimes they're (indiscernible), especially when they pick me up at night at Seabrook; they can't find me. And Uber does call, as the drivers can do that.

When they drop me off at the wrong building, it's not safe for me to walk. When I tell them that they're in the wrong place, they always tell me to, "Get off the bus." It's dangerous for me.

Most of my problems are at night, when I get picked up from work. Access Link will go to the wrong location; and I hope they find me.

Services like Uber provide a telephone number; I wish Access Link would do that. It would also be helpful if there were signal lights outside, so we could find Access Link at night.

Thank you for your time, and I hope we can work together.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you; that was excellent.

Anyone else? (no response)

Any questions from the panel?

Please.

SENATOR CRYAN: I'm sorry; thanks.

Tom, I was struck that you opened with a county-by-county assessment, when we've had chats here, just earlier on, about an integrated statewide plan. And I was hopeful you could comment on that for a moment.

Do some counties do it better than others? Is there a gold standard? And I also wanted to ask the same question about -- are there states that do it better than us that you folks would be aware of?

MR. BAFFUTO: Well, thank you, Senator Cryan.

So certainly I think there are experts to better answer the question on other states doing it better.

But I think what we want to do is be responsible-- When we're requesting additional resources for New Jersey Transit, you know, we just don't want to say, across-the-board, increase the-- We need to know what the need is, and each county is so different.

Now, many of the counties -- perhaps all -- have county transportation committees for aged and folks with disabilities. And I understand some counties are better at gathering information than others. But I think if we're going out and really trying to impact transportation for

people with intellectual and developmental disabilities we need to have a much clearer understanding of what's needed. We have to have a clear understanding of what type of transportation services people need, right? We could easily just say, "Expand routes," and maybe that's not what people need in that county.

So I think gathering that data, taking a good hard look at it, county-by-county, and sharing resources among counties would be a good thing for the folks who we represent.

SENATOR CRYAN: Do counties share resources now, or is it a little more, we're all -- not that we're on our own in a bunker, but just by the definition of the work, tend to be more insular?

MR. BAFFUTO: You know, I don't know the answer to that, Senator Cryan. I think there might be some folks with more transportation experience who would know that. But I would hope they're sharing information.

SENATOR CRYAN: A couple other quick ones for you.

I know I was astounded to learn this morning -- or at least we had a discussion about -- that services stop at the county border. And that was mentioned here; Colleen-- Is that accurate, the way--

MR. BAFFUTO: It is, and it's terribly frustrating for folks -- that there is this imaginary line when there's a county break, that county transportation, paratransit, and Access Link at times, will not cross those county lines. And again, this is something that we need to look at. And, I mean, I'm not suggesting it's an arbitrary rule, but it just feels that way -- that the county line is the barrier that you can't cross. That would be something I would highly recommend this Committee look at.

SENATOR CRYAN: Okay.

I was struck by Colleen-- And by the way, Colleen and Barbara, thank you, especially. They both talked about their stories -- about going to work. Do you guys have -- does anyone have any data? How many of these trips are associated with work, versus medical, versus recreational, or other categories? Do you folks have any sort of sense of that data?

MR. BAFFUTO: So I don't have that data. I suspect we could find that out, and I would be happy to look into that for this Committee.

SENATOR CRYAN: Okay; thanks, Tom.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Any other member? (no response)

We would like to work with The Arc to find solutions and be part of this as we go forward. And I do appreciate your testimony.

And to the two advocates -- you've done a very good job today; thank you.

MS. COPPENS: Thanks.

MS. JENNINGS: Thank you.

SENATOR CRYAN: And Barbara, tell Steve Sweeney to get that 295 problem fixed immediately for you, all right? (laughter)

SENATOR SWEENEY: Don't worry, she tells me on a regular basis.

The next panel is going to be Cecilia Feeley, Transportation Autism Project Manager, Rutgers Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation; Floyd Nesse, Vice President of Government Affairs, ACCSES New Jersey; Steve Cook, Executive Director, The Arc of Mercer; and Walter X. Kalman, Honorary Board Member, Advocate for Families and Communities, Community Access Unlimited in Elizabeth.

Senator, this is somebody from your neck of the woods.

Okay, who wants to go first?

All right, how about if we do Cecilia first, because she was supposed to be on the previous panel; and then we'll go to Floyd, Steve, and Walter.

C E C I L I A F E E L E Y, Ph.D.: Hi; first, I'd like to thank Senate President Sweeney and the distinguished members of the Select Committee on New Jersey Transit for inviting me today.

I'm Cecilia Feeley from Rutgers University. And I'd like to state, as a beginning, that I do not receive funding from New Jersey Transit. The funding that I have received from State agencies has been primarily from the New Jersey Department of Health, which really sees transit and mobility as a quality of life issue.

But I do want to put that out there, so my testimony and some of the things I'm going to say-- Because I think there are a lot of positive things with Access Link and New Jersey Transit. But I'm not funded, so it's completely impartial.

I am also the mother of a 20-year-old young man on the autism spectrum, which I'm going to talk about in a moment.

I have a Ph.D. in Transportation Engineering from NJIT, up in Newark. I manage the Transportation Autism Project at Rutgers, and we're going to be celebrating our 10th year this October. And I'm also the Chair -- and I just arrived late last night, back from Washington, D.C. We have a -- the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has a Transportation Research Board, and I've been serving as the Chair of the

Committee on Paratransit. So I meet with agencies all throughout the United States, as well as we have several international members.

So a lot of these problems that we've been discussing are fundamental problems with paratransit.

While I was in D.C., I had a huge professional honor. I won a national award for an assessment -- building an assessment for paratransit for individuals on the autism spectrum. And while it might seem like a great honor professionally, as a parent it's kind of horrifying that, 30 years after the ADA, that these issues are just being looked at for people with autism and developmental disabilities; 30 years later.

I should note that we did work -- we did keep Access Link staff apprised of the issues in the areas that we saw as barriers. And some of those are issues we've already -- have been corrected, such as the *EZ-Wallet*. A lot of -- when we were doing our assessments, we found that paying the exact fare was very difficult for our population. Now they have EZ-Wallet, so people do not have to pay exact fare.

We also have a lot of individuals who had difficulty with time management skills and executive functioning skills. And recently -- New Jersey Transit has a couple minute call ahead. My son does use Access Link, just one night a week, because he's still in the educational entitlement system. He loves it; he needs, like, a hand-to-hand service. He couldn't go to the mall, but he goes home from his program; one night a week, to and from his program. He loves it; he feels like an independent adult, not riding on the little yellow school bus. But those differences are really convenient.

And since he's been taking it, he did have trouble with the cash fare payment. And he wouldn't always have the exact payment, because he

would buy a snack at the program, and then he wouldn't have exact change. So we had to work on that, even with my own son.

And I didn't mention before, but I'm also the Chair of the New Jersey Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder Mobility and Support Services Task Force for New Jersey's adults on the autism spectrum. We are just finalizing our recommendations. We worked with a number of State agencies, and had all of their input on the recommendations. And I hope to be presenting that to you; hopefully, at your next meeting, we'll have the results published and I can bring that to you.

So I had mentioned my son Alex and his autism; and the reason why he has to use Access Link is, he does not have the ability to cross the street safely; with about 54 percent of the population with autism. So he must take that Access Link, back and forth. And when the school bus stops coming next year, next September -- well, in the summer, I'm going to have to face what a lot of the parents I work with face.

We did a report a couple years ago, and I have a couple copies. They are-- If you want to be green, you can get PDFs online. We did a detour to the right place, where we surveyed over 700 families and individuals on the spectrum and with other developmental disabilities. And we found about 72 percent of the families -- it had impacted their lives, because they had to train to support their adults -- so this was 21 and over adults with autism or developmental disabilities. And we had a lot of family members who either had to become unemployed or underemployed once those individuals reached 21. We've been wanting to do some research on that -- how big of an impact is that? Because that's just not an impact on the

individuals maybe not getting their jobs, but that's families and taxpayers who have to reduce their family income.

And we've also heard from many adults who weren't able to go to the activities they wanted, especially recreational, because there was nobody to drive them.

So with my son, there is a bus a quarter-mile away from our house. But because he can't cross the street safely, he can't access that bus. He also doesn't have the social or communication skills to be able to ride the bus independently. But he does have the New Jersey Reduced Fare Card.

One thing I want to point out, which I've been-- And I know some of the -- Assemblyman Benson is aware of this as well, and I've heard that he's trying to push it through -- in New Jersey, the Access Link application and the Reduced Fare Card are two separate applications. In many states they're combined, so you just have to apply once. And, in fact, for many people with disabilities, it's harder to get that Reduced Fare Card, because you need to go to a doctor's appointment; and with Access Link, they bring you for an eligibility determination. But we could link those together so you just have one portal for both. And then you could be riding with your friends and family with this Reduced Fare Card.

In many systems throughout the country, such as San Francisco, they even have people -- with their version of Access Link, their ADA paratransit -- can have some free trips. So it gives you some incentive to go off that costlier trip, maybe with family or friends, and some free trips. And they're able to try to track -- well, why are they going to certain locations, and not other locations, with their disability and the free fare card for the fixed-route transit? And then see if it's an environmental issue, are there

other issues? Maybe it's just a one-stop trip, and that's why they're able to take those services.

But people are doing innovative things throughout the country that we can look at. And I think one of the best things would just be having New Jersey Transit merge their services so there's one application for both services. Because we already know they have a disability, if they're getting Access Link. So there's no reason to put people through another assessment to do it again.

And a lot of the other issues with Access Link that we've heard today are just fundamental flaws with the ADA paratransit and the laws for it. The three-quarter mile barrier is not from New Jersey Transit, it's not from the Legislature, it's from the Federal government. A lot of these other constraints -- marrying the bus, the times, the dates -- that's from the Federal law; that's not necessarily from our constraints. We could go up and do above and beyond that; but we're not required to, and it would take the Legislature and the Governor to be able to expand those services. But a lot of that is just the capacity and the system design flaws.

We have done a series of recommendations, and our forthcoming one for the Task Force-- We did a number of recommendations there; we did some work with The Arc; I believe you discussed this at your previous meeting, with a number of recommendations. And some of the other recommendations I stress today for New Jersey Transit would be to reinstate their ADA Task Force, because they really need to have a mechanism to hear regularly from the constituents and riders -- for people with all disabilities, as well as family members, because it does impact all of us.

Have more accurate ride times, both on the fixed-route buses and the paratransit services. And enhance training for all staff and frontline staff, because some of the fixed-route operators don't understand the Reduced Fare Card, or people who might be able to have -- who need a companion, and the companion will ride for free. But it does reduce a seat from the paratransit, which is much costlier.

I know a lot of systems-- And we were talking about before, going to Uber and Lyft. When I was down in D.C., we had a presentation on Boston's MBTA, and they did an initial pilot study. There are some problems; they are finding it's much costlier than they had anticipated. They're finding that there are really no profiles on what riders are opting in for that type of service. None of them, really, are doing that type of analysis, so we don't know which segments of the population-- We know a lot of those services are not wheelchair-accessible, so it wouldn't be that population. As my son, with a developmental disability -- I would not want him on one of those. I would opt out of that for him because I don't think he would know how to ride with a regular -- an untrained vehicle operator who is just doing this to make a little extra pocket cash and hasn't had past training, or another type of certified training, to work with individuals with disabilities.

And lastly, I would just like to point out, as I conclude, that I think it's imperative that this Committee also start thinking about autonomous vehicles. We've just started an autonomous vehicle task force in New Jersey, and I want to make sure -- and this was a hot topic in D.C. this week -- is that we need to make sure that they're accessible for all disabilities, and that they're not just-- A lot of the talk has been about wheelchair securement and access. But as my research has found, there are

barriers for people with autism and developmental disabilities with the current paratransit services. We don't need to go forward having these same problems and these same barriers, and try to retrofit the vehicles or retrofit systems; but if we go mindfully in and design our systems to be inclusive of all people, going forward, hopefully we won't have these problems in the future.

And that also means a structure design that is equitable for all individuals. And that if it's a for-hire system, like Uber and Lyft, that it is accessible to everybody.

And those are some other innovations that some states are doing -- is taking out 10 cents a ride on Uber and Lyft rides, and putting it towards a pot of funds in California to make sure rides are accessible to everybody.

So I think there are a lot of things we can do that other states are doing and other agencies are doing throughout the country.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

FLOYD NESSE: Hi; I'm Floyd Nesse, with ACCSES New Jersey.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on transportation services.

With me today is Steve Cook, from The Arc of Mercer County. We're speaking on behalf of ACCSES New Jersey, which represents over 80,000 citizens with disabilities in our state, primarily in employment programs. We have 36 member agencies that provide employment programs throughout the state.

We're here to present some changes we believe that are necessary that would maximize transportation services. We also have some suggestions as to how we can better utilize the systems that are available today.

New Jersey citizens with disabilities lack sufficient access to mass transit, paratransit, trains, ferries, airplanes, their own vehicles. Basically, it's difficult to find transportation for people with varying types of disabilities, especially on the cognitive and autism spectrum, as my colleague said.

Although Federal and State legislation encourages more people to work with all types of disabilities, getting to work requires transportation. Inadequate transportation inhibits community involvement. Those living in rural areas often face the greatest challenge, because of the lack of public transportation and just the sheer distances that they'd have to travel.

If we're to significantly impact the lives of our citizens with disabilities, we need to make sure that there is increasing flexibility and growth in available transportation options, especially in rural areas. We need to make sure public transportation is adequately funded and available; that existing public transportation is accessible, available in a timely manner, and equipped to suit the physical, sensory, and/or cognitive needs of all the people.

We need to make sure paratransit systems, for those who need them, are available at a comparable cost, and funded as an alternative to mass transit.

We've had several membership meetings over the last few weeks, and compiled some recommendations for the Committee, for New Jersey Transit, and for Access Link.

We've heard it before, and you're going to hear it again, probably today: First, the geographic coverage of Access Link is vastly inadequate. The policy of Access Link is to provide service within three-quarters of a mile from existing Transit routes. Although the system works in certain areas of the county and in certain areas of the state that are more urban environments -- like Essex County, and Bergen County, and so on -- it's vastly inadequate in some of the more rural areas of the state.

Subsequently, people with disabilities can't find any means of public transportation to and from commerce and community centers, where the jobs really exist. We recommend that the three-quarter mile rule be re-examined, and Access Link be equipped and funded to provide more service to areas not covered by existing public transit routes.

We also recommend that they concentrate on providing service to and from commerce and community centers in those areas because, really, that's where the activity is.

In addition, in some areas of the state Access Link limits service on evenings and weekends. This needs to be changed; that really hinders employment, rather than supports employment.

The eligibility process for Access Link needs to be changed. The State already has clear eligibility requirements for DDR, for DDD, for DMHS, and so on. We recommend that persons who are receiving services from a State agency that serves people with disabilities -- that they also be deemed eligible for Access Link. We're doubling and redoubling efforts; there are just too many pots that we have to stir.

Communications with Access Link and their ridership relies heavily on their website. It has improved over the last few years, and I want

to give them those kudos. However, reaching Access Link by phone is challenging and often ineffective. We recommend that Access Link deploy a new dedicated contact center prepared to deal with people with disabilities and their families. In addition, with the advent of Uber and Lyft -- we've heard that a couple of times today -- the technology exists for better, more timely communication. I think one of the self-advocates here said, "Why doesn't the Access Link driver have a phone and call me?" I mean, the technology exists for them to do that; that's not a problem.

We recommend that Access Link look to upgrade their use of technology to allow for better and more timely communication. A dedicated contact center would also help train users of that technology as to how to use it, and how to use it effectively.

Although there are good, experienced, and compassionate drivers who are employed, there doesn't seem to be a consistency in their ability to understand the nuances of dealing with all types of disabilities. We recommend that drivers and customer service personnel undergo continuing education regarding inclusion and disability awareness.

Beyond our recommendations for Access Link, we believe that all resources available for providing transportation to New Jersey citizens need to be comprehensively coordinated. We've heard that a couple of times this morning, and I hope we can offer a possible solution to that.

The total system is fragmented and disjointed. You know, the counties' paratransit systems really don't talk to the individual service providers, and the service providers are not talking to the county, and the county and the service providers are not talking to Access Link. So there needs to be some better coordination as to how to do this.

We often see, on any given street at any given time, a nonprofit agency picking somebody up; you'll also see an Access Link bus picking somebody up, and a county paratransit person picking somebody up. So you have three different resources deployed on the same street, picking up three different people at the same time. It just doesn't make any sense. So there needs to be better coordination between all of those that are stakeholders in this. And let's face it -- really, the nonprofit providers are the ones that really have the largest assets available to do this, because all of the day programs provide transportation. There are 200-some-odd DDD agencies throughout the state; most of them have their own assets and equipment to do this.

So with that, I'm going to stop. I'm going to yield the floor to my friend Steve Cook here.

There's some success that's been happening in Mercer County that he can talk to you about; and he can talk, a little bit better, about that kind of coordination that needs to happen.

STEVEN COOK: Good afternoon.

First, I'd like to thank Senator Sweeney for taking the leadership on this issue; and also thank all the Committee members -- Senator Kean, it's good to see you -- for allowing me the opportunity to present these remarks. Your interest in the issue of transportation for people with special needs is very much warranted and appreciated.

A famous saying comes to mind, "If you build it, they will come." However, in the world of special needs, it should probably state that, "If you build it, they will only come if you provide adequate transportation."

I share this because it's important to recognize that for this population, transportation is the key to community inclusion and to prevent

isolation. Barbara Coppens said it best, “Without transportation, I just can’t do it.” And she’s right.

By way of background, I have served as Executive Director of The Arc of Mercer for over 13 years. The agency provides programs and services for over 1,000 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including the only healthcare center in our region exclusively serving people with developmental disabilities.

My involvement with The Arc actually began in 2000, serving on the Board of Directors as a volunteer. And during that time, I also served as an employee of the New Jersey Senate. I was Chief of Staff to State Senator Peter Inverso at that time; that experience taught me to be as brief and succinct in this presentation as I possibly can be today, and I’ll do my best.

Prior to working for the Senator, I served the New Jersey Department of Transportation in several relevant roles, including as a roadway design engineer, a project manager, and regional manager for community involvement. This experience exposed me to the process of identifying, designing, building, and operating transportation solutions.

I also wear two hats today. As an Arc Executive Director, I want to echo my full support for everything that Tom Baffuto, and the whole Arc team, presented. It is -- combined with working with Floyd today, and also as a member of ACCSES New Jersey, Arc Mercer wholeheartedly endorses Floyd’s recommendations related to Access Link.

However, I would like to amplify and elaborate on the recommendation Floyd made for a Regional Transportation Coordination Agency -- I’ll call it an *RTCA* going forward -- as I believe that an opportunity

exists to improve the entire transportation infrastructure for people with special needs in New Jersey.

To place some perspective on the recommendation to deploy an RTCA in each county or region, please allow me to share some information.

In addition to being part of a network of 36 vocational agencies with ACCSES New Jersey, Arc Mercer is part of a larger network of more than 200 agencies that, in part or in full, are funded by the New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities. Each of these agencies depend on and engage in some level of transportation similar to Arc Mercer. As a result, they possess numerous accessible vehicles and drivers who are already trained to support people with disabilities. It is important to note that the State has already paid for this significant investment, and it would be prudent to ensure they operate as efficiently as possible.

To illustrate the magnitude of these resources, let's review the transportation activities of Access Link to those of just Arc Mercer. While doing so, please keep in mind Arc Mercer is only one of the 200 DDD-funded agencies in the State with similar capacity needs.

For example, in 2017, Access Link reported 9.9 million passenger miles statewide. Arc Mercer drove over 720,000 miles just in Mercer County alone. Again, that's just one agency out of 200.

The key point I'm making is that, taken as a whole, Arc Mercer and the 200 agencies combined actually form the majority of transportation capacity for people with developmental disabilities in New Jersey. From experience, I can share that with proper investment in technology, training, and ongoing interagency coordination, the existing underutilized capacity of

those 200 agencies can be transformed into a more efficient and effective service for all people with special needs.

It is for that reason that the RTCAs can be a key to both maximizing existing capacity within the agency, as well as integrating them across agencies. The RTCAs will serve to share best practices for fleet maintenance, vehicle routing and, most importantly, communication between drivers, and passengers, and their guardians.

Senator Sweeney, who said it best earlier, “Conversation is one thing, but action is another.” So I have some good news. There’s actually no need to reinvent the wheel -- no pun intended. The best practices I’m referring to have already been developed thanks to grant funding that The Arc of Mercer has received through New Jersey Transit: FTA pass-through money. I would like to take the opportunity to thank and recognize Anna Magri, Director of Local Programs, and her team at New Jersey Transit, who have been excellent partners in this endeavor.

Through our grant funding relationship with New Jersey Transit, over the past five years Arc Mercer has engaged in a project to transform our transportation capability. As a result, we have developed a set of best practices that can be shared, through the RTCAs, with other agencies, with similar outcomes. The results of our efforts have been very promising, based on the following.

Travel times, on average, were reduced from 90 minutes to just under 30 minutes each way, giving our riders almost two hours of their life back every day.

Travel safety improved, with a reduction in vehicle accidents from 20 reported accidents in 2015, to only 2 in 2019; a 90 percent reduction.

From an efficiency perspective, our cost-per-passenger mile was reduced by nearly 50 percent.

And finally, Arc Mercer also enhanced communication with our drivers and passengers through technology, resulting in efficiency. The development of our own routing software and our own internal mobile application was a major breakthrough for our project.

Through the use of RTCAs, our best practices and project outcomes could be deployed. This stage is already being developed by Arc Mercer with two other agencies that are experiencing significant cost from current transportation operations.

Of course, talking about the need for funding -- I believe incentives, such as funding for enhanced technology, ongoing dispatching staff for these agencies, and resources for training could act as the carrot to entice more of these 200 agencies to undergo these best practice transformations.

Finally, the new RTCA would act as a facilitator to integrate the newly enhanced transportation services in each of the individual agencies to better help the special needs community at large.

In closing, I would like to summarize that our recommendations for Access Link enhancements will greatly improve service to people with special needs in their service areas. However, in service areas where Access Link may not be as prevalent, such as rural areas, the recommended RTCAs can serve two critical functions. First, take the lead on deploying already-

developed best practices in provider agencies, similar to Arc Mercer; second, to function as a coordinator to integrate the newly improved transportation resources to serve as an extension of the Access Link network.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee. I appreciate the time to share our experience and perspective, and applaud your interest in improving transportation for all individuals with disabilities.

SENATOR CRYAN: Steve, thank you.

Walter.

WALTER X. KALMAN: Good afternoon.

Thank you, *in absentia*, Senate President Sweeney, and members of the Committee, for this opportunity to speak to you about the issues concerning transportation for people with disabilities.

I'm Walter Kalman, the Advocate for Families and Communities for Community Access Unlimited. But more importantly, I'm also the parent of an 18-year-old young man with special needs, so I can speak to this from personal experience as well.

In my role as Advocate for Community Access, I work with lots of families to help them try to go from the school systems, on to the adult service system. And I'll come back to that in a minute, but one of the big shocks that many families get is when their child turns 21, and the school bus that rolled up to the door up to that time, doesn't show up that morning. And frequently, I'm dealing with families that are dealing with all of the other issues related to that -- which I'd like to come back to, because it does relate to the bigger picture of these issues.

Community Access is one of the largest developmental disability providers in the state, having served thousands of people throughout the State of New Jersey. But also adolescents who are at risk, who come out of the foster care system, who share similar problems in terms of their needs to receive transportation assistance in order to be successful in adult life.

I'm not going to repeat what you've heard. As Steve said, actions are better than words. So you've heard a lot of recommendations today, but I would summarize what we have all been saying are, basically, the issues confronting people with disabilities, in five words: reliability, geography, flexibility, capability, and capacity.

Reliability: You've heard from many speakers today about the fact that Access Link requires a 30-minute window to make an appointment for a pickup; and then they show up an hour-and-a-half later. You obviously can't make medical appointments or have a job with that kind of reliability, or lack of reliability. We know, as we said earlier, that there are lots of technical ways that that can be addressed.

The flexibility is another issue. Some of the bureaucratic rules that were alluded to -- the distances that you have to be, and so on. But even more so, changes in life are inevitable. And we had members who have -- because of making too many changes, have been suspended so that they can't use the systems for a period of time, almost a punitive measure to assure that they don't repeat those behaviors.

Capability: We've talked a little bit, and my friend Steve here -- we've talked for some time now about his system. Because Community Access, being one of the large providers, has an enormous fleet of vehicles. And we've been talking with him about the idea of how we might do similar

kinds of things to fill in the gaps. Because as you heard many times now, the coordination between the paratransit systems and Access Link is a real problem. The Division of Developmental Disabilities has recently been making an effort to work with Uber and Lyft as an alternative to solve some of those problems. But then that means they have to pay for that out of there already-stretched budgets that many of our members depend on for their services.

The capability is also about the vehicles that are out there -- the number of vehicles that can accommodate people with mobility issues. One of our Board Members, Myrta Rosa, is here today, and she was going to talk a little bit about some of the issues that she has confronted, with those kinds of things, because she has mobility issues. And so not every vehicle that's available out there is doing that.

And a big part of the Governor's speech the other day was talking about the dollars that are going to go into improving New Jersey Transit. I would hope that some of those dollars are going to be coming to this system to help serve people with disabilities.

The geography issue: My own Senator, Senator Diegnan, would understand how we have people who we provide housing to in Plainfield whose doctors are in South Plainfield, three-quarters of a mile away. But they can't use the paratransit system because it has to stop at the border.

And earlier-- It's interesting that Karen talked about the TIP program, and that's where I'd like to come back to for a moment in closing my comments. That's dependent on getting trained. We talked about training that's necessary for the drivers of these vehicles so that they're able to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. We talked about the

need for training for people with disabilities to learn how to better use the systems that are available to them.

As I pointed out earlier, the issue of families dealing with -- how do you get from the school system -- where everything is an entitlement, including transportation -- to the adult service system, where they no longer have that capability, and have to learn how to manage that system. I think, while it's not in the purview of this Committee, certainly the whole issue of transition and how we get from school systems to adult service systems is a related issue to these transportation issues, and is one that is desperately in need of being addressed. I won't address those issues today, but I have a number of suggestions for how we can improve that kind of transition process, because that's one of the biggest barriers the families we work with face these days.

So again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would just echo the comments -- the recommendations, particularly those of Steve's program, which I think could be a critical part of filling in the gaps in our system. But I also echo all the comments of the folks who have spoken before me.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Senator Kean.

SENATOR KEAN: Thank you; thank you, Mr. Senate President.

Just to follow up on the reliability and some of the other points that you and others have made in this regard.

And I can understand when somebody is crossing county lines to get to different points, or you have to go back to Newark and turn around, or what have you-- Are there other states that have -- if you've (indiscernible) the technology that exists -- is there a model that you've seen in other states that works in any way? Or, does the technology exist where you could, as you're crossing a certain county line, you're picking people up, you could allocate the resources on that type of thing so you would actually be able to help the partnership through that type of technology?

MR. KALMAN: Well, I don't know specifically how other states might do that. In this circumstance, I believe it's more an issue of the rules that we have put into place that limit this. I don't see any reason why this can't be solved by a bureaucratic fix, rather than depending on some technology to do it. Google Maps, and other kinds of programs like that, certainly would take you from county to county. It's the question of this invisible wall that exists when the counties are set up in such a way that they just don't cross county lines.

SENATOR KEAN: And that's why I think we can get to the point where you can-- Removing those hurdles can be simple, but it takes pressure to know that those barriers do exist through -- whether it's through history or whether it's through technology.

We look forward to working on a bipartisan basis. I know Steve has been really strong and focusing on government efficiency over these years.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Yes, I'd like to follow up on these RTCAs, Steve, if you don't mind.

So how long-- I mean, the numbers are pretty astounding, right? And they sound like a model. And from talking to some of the advocacy groups before this, they point to your success, your team's success, as the model to use.

So how long did it take you to-- You said there's one; and two more organizing, I think? Is that right?

MR. COOK: Yes, sir.

And again, I just want to reiterate. There was a conversation about -- I think Karen was mentioning about pass-through Federal money. So the Federal -- the FTA dollars were used to give a grant to The Arc about five years ago; and that grant we used--

SENATOR CRYAN: If you don't mind me asking, how much was the grant?

MR. COOK: It was about \$350,000 over five years; but it had multiple objectives. One, was developing an enhanced vehicle maintenance program so other nonprofits could use our vocational training program, training people with special needs to do minor repairs and auto detailing. And then it morphed into routing and dispatching.

So it took us about five years. And Senator, you were mentioning off-the-shelf technology on stuff-- From our experience, I will tell you, we went through three different transportation routing softwares. And I will tell you, from experience, there is nothing off-the-shelf you can buy for routing. What we do -- as Tom said, and everybody was mentioning -- county-by-county, regional -- you just have to muscle through this. We literally did a

partnership with a Princeton University Professor and developed our own routing software and our own app, which we are now making available to two other agencies that have significant transportation issues.

Now, the developer can sell it to them; we're not -- we're just giving our expertise on how to deploy it.

And the second part of this is, we actually deployed it in our agency, and I can go through a long list of mistakes we made. And what we did is, we actually worked to develop policies and procedures on how the next agency doesn't have to make the same mistakes. You have to change the culture; everybody's a driver -- teach them to use technology, deploy it.

So those best practices, through this grant, over five years -- we've spent five years making a lot of mistakes, getting to where we are today. And we think the results show we've developed -- not perfection, but best practices.

And I think it would be a very short period of time -- maybe six months -- before these other agencies can demonstrate that what we are taking and sharing with them, we will perfect even more to better replicate. So we're using them as guinea pigs, so to speak, to actually perfect this so that we can do it on a wide scale. And at that point, we would really look to get funding, so that any agency agreeing to do this can buy-- We have apps and phones that our DSPs drive every morning and afternoon. Family members are communicated with every morning, "Hey, this is about the time you're going to get picked up. Do you even need the trip?" And they can get back and say, "I don't need it today," and it goes right to our driver. These kinds of things lead to amazing efficiencies; but man, the culture shift takes a little while.

So we think these two partners will really perfect this process so we can get it down to six to eight months. And then when we're done with that, really roll it out to a larger scale.

SENATOR CRYAN: Chair, could we ask for an update in three months with the-- I don't want to ask you who the two are; I get the hint.

MR. COOK: I'm sorry; I didn't hear you, Senator.

SENATOR CRYAN: I don't want to ask you who the two agencies are; I get the hint -- or it feels like it.

So could you share with the Committee and say, over-- You're looking at a six-month roll out here for the other two?

MR. COOK: So right now we are aggressively working with -- and I'll tell you, it's another Arc that had become very dependent on external transportation. And what we're doing is teaching them how to use their internal resources, better technology. And our anticipation -- they're very motivated, because money is wasted if it's not efficient.

So the partner from Princeton -- the Professor, and the Arc Mercer, and this Arc, are going to put together a plan. So we're basically volunteering our leadership team to try to work with them, to hire the right people, and roll this out. So we're hoping, six to eight months we should actually have best practices. We could move quicker, but I don't have any resources. The Arc Mercer is pretty much picking up the cost to develop this--

SENATOR CRYAN: Right.

MR. COOK: --because our grant just ran out, from Transit. It actually ended January, I believe. So we're doing an exit interview; and from there we're just going to muscle our way through to get to the next step.

SENATOR CRYAN: So through the Chair, could we ask for an update in a few months, just to see where we're going?

SENATOR SWEENEY: Yes, absolutely.

SENATOR CRYAN: A couple other quick questions for you, and then I'll stop.

SENATOR SWEENEY: And Senator, one other thing.

Maybe, if anybody wants to do a tour, we do a tour, too.

MR. COOK: We're doing the exit interview for the grant which ended, probably in the next several weeks, Senator Sweeney. I had invited your staff to join in; and any Senators are welcome, too. I just know your passion for this.

So we will open it up to, maybe, the Senate staff or OLS, who might be interested in just seeing what we're doing. We will -- you'll really get-- And we attached, to our testimony, kind of an outline PowerPoint of what we actually went through, so you might have that, too. But I think seeing it live, what we did, would be really effective.

But Transit will be there, our partners, to close out the grant. And we're going to ask them for more money -- I'm not going to be bashful -- to go to the next step.

SENATOR CRYAN: The Committee, I think, is waiting for those questions here, too, right? (laughter)

A last one for you, and then one for Cecilia.

The culture that you talked about -- and in particular, everybody's a driver, and culture changes -- could you just expand upon that for a minute, as we delve on that?

MR. COOK: Sure.

So we have a staff of over 300 full- and part-time folks; many of them are Direct Service Professionals. They work overnight, weekends. As you know, from the DSP funding crisis, they don't make a ton of money.

So we had to work with them, train them -- number one, you're a driver. So they're very-- And to their credit, they're awesome because they love the folks they serve in their group home. But having to stop and pick up, maybe, one or two other people on the way, who are going to our program, for efficiencies was a culture shift. We deploy technologies; so they're actually using apps we developed to pick people up and drop people off, having information-- So that took training, and just the overall culture shift of dispatch operations.

I mentioned 200 providers. If you went through the list, I doubt many agencies have a transportation dispatch department, even though they have all these vehicles and drivers that are paid for by the State already -- a small investment -- so that was another culture change. And just the overall use of technology in developing the routing software. And plus, we're unionized; so we had to sit and work with them to talk about what this meant, and it actually meant more resources for them, because we saved a lot of money.

So I think there were a lot of pieces we put together; and that's-- Over the five years, we've gotten where we need to be. And so now we, and directors of different departments, go, "Really? I have to do this now?" So we're meeting with them first; they're sitting with my directors to say, "Look, we did it, and here's what happened," and the benefit. Then the next step is getting technology in their system, training the frontline staff, and also families and guardians. You know, you have to change their culture

about communication, because they're not used to it. You'll find out when you age out of school, it isn't the same. So now we've developed -- we've nicknamed it our *Guber* (laughter); I mean, Uber and Lyft -- they're subsidized by their investors. So in the long run, their costs are going to go up, and it's not a panacea, right? Short term that might work. They don't have accessible vehicles all the time, the drivers aren't trained. We've actually developed our own app that we're piloting to create a model like that.

So there are all different culture shifts for the families and guardians. But we've gone through that, and now we're at the next stage of piloting replication.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks. I don't want to tie up the Committee, but Cecilia--

DR. FEELEY: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: --you seem to have a little more perspective on other states. Is that a fair way of putting it?

DR. FEELEY: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: Are there states that do it better, if I could just ask you directly? I know Tom asked a question, but it was (indiscernible) ask you directly about it. Do you have other states' models that are stronger or better, from your experience?

DR. FEELEY: Yes, we've looked at some states and different models. I mean, New Jersey -- other than, I think, Maryland -- is unique that we have that one Transit agency that services the whole state, which a lot of other models of the states don't have. Our neighboring state Pennsylvania has all those discrete transit agencies for each of their cities; but then linking between them is really difficult.

So in some ways, we are very fortunate by having one statewide system that hits 18 of our 21 counties, and can service residents throughout the state. Like, you could take Access Link from Morris County down to Atlantic City. You might have to transfer a few times, but a lot of states don't have those types of benefits and features. We do have -- all 21 counties do have the paratransit services. So I think we have that as well. They're all 21 discrete, different services; some they can operate on a priority basis. So if you're a medical -- and we know there's a huge impact of dialysis trips. So they do prioritize, because they have to because of the limited funds, and the scope. And a lot of them have cut back hours; they don't do weekend services.

But I think there are states-- In our one model that we had done with the with The Arc of New Jersey -- our recommendations -- we did find an Oregon model that was able to use the DD funding, the CMS funding, and you bring that over to the community paratransit drivers. And we'd like to explore that model more, and figure out, "Well, how was that?" Because, right now, they're two different funding sources -- funding through FTA and New Jersey Transit, and those reporting systems, to be able to use those CMS fundings for DDD providers.

And that's another concern, is that you're segmenting this population. Because up where I live, there are new services that are able to bill through DDD, so they're doing a different funding model. But then you're segmenting that population, who aren't getting that pot of funds from the regular population and from even just other populations with disabilities. And that's what we don't want. Separate is not equal; we've known that for decades. But somebody is able to cross-bill, and we just need to figure out how they're doing it.

SENATOR CRYAN: That's great; thank you so much. Thank you for your perspective.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Any other members? (no response)

Thank you.

You know, it's very enlightening. It's not unusual that one hand doesn't work with the other. (laughter)

It was very enlightening; we appreciate your testimony.

The next panel is going to be Audrey Winkler, Executive Director, JESPY House; Scott Elliott, Executive Director, Progressive Center for Independent Living; Norman Smith, Chairperson, New Jersey Statewide Independent Living Council; and I'm going to butcher this name -- Steve G., how's that? -- Chair of the Transportation Committee, and a member of the Statewide Independent Living Council, and also an individual with disabilities who uses New Jersey Transit services very frequently.

Audrey, when you're ready.

AUDREY WINKLER: Yes, thank you; thank you for having me.

I'm Audrey Winkler; I'm the Executive Director of JESPY House. I'm also a Board Member of the Governor's DDD Fee-for-Service Oversight Board.

JESPY House is a nonprofit organization located in South Orange. We work to enable adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to achieve their full potential and lead independent lives.

And I'm going to be talking a lot about independence, in terms of transportation, today.

We do this by supporting and promoting choice, life skills development, and independent living for the clients who we serve. We serve

over 250 clients, who range in age from 18 to 72. Eighty percent of our clients, or 200 of our clients, actively use Access Link; so we have some very specific examples that I'd like to share with you.

I would like to point out that, over the last six months, with the new general manager of Access Link, we've seen some significant improvements. I will be talking about future and past also. We've noticed, recently, that the drivers are much friendlier and pleasant. You know, one of you talked about respect; that was very important. They're very accommodating, they'll wait for the clients longer, and they'll help them. So we're hearing fewer complaints on the drivers' end.

Our parents are being used for beta testers for some of the software. We heard a lot today about software improvements, and they really are moving in that direction.

There's still, however, long onboarding times for clients, lengthy trips; and that's what I'd really like to talk about.

Our ongoing accessibility concerns include the fact that 200 of our JESPY clients work in towns throughout Essex County and beyond; many rely on Access Link to get them to work. Clients have reported being taken on circuitous routes to get home, waiting outside in the cold for extensive periods, and not being able to reach customer service via telephone. So recently, Access Link took a client on a three-hour ride. She lives in South Orange, works in Newark, and somehow got a tour of Bound Brook and Passaic to finally get back to South Orange. For those of you who can visualize that route in your head, you can see it's clearly not the most direct or efficient route between South Orange and Newark.

There are limited pickup time windows; and many of my colleagues today will be talking about that, especially during rush hour times. And that's the real challenge because, if our clients can't get to work on time, then they can't work full-time. And many of our clients have had to give up their full-time jobs to work part-time because they can't get to their full-time jobs; and that's really terrible. Somebody mentioned before about -- we're an employment-first state. If we really put some meat behind that, then we would help our clients.

It's a very serious issue, and it also impacts independence for our clients. Having a full-time job promotes independence.

One example of a client-reported incident is that-- She was on a -- from South Orange to Union County, and the driver passed the client's South Orange home twice. She was in tears because she begged the driver to let her off because she had to go to the bathroom. And he wouldn't, he refused; and took her on a route that went through Secaucus and Wayne, back to South Orange many hours later. To me, that's negligence and abuse; I don't know any other way to describe it.

We also have a lot of inclement weather challenges, and I don't know why Access Link can't figure that out. So our clients, for instance, will come to our day program by Access Link; two hours later, Access Link cancels their whole service because of inclement weather. How are those clients getting back home? I mean, how do you do something like that? And I understand -- with whether, it's a little variable. But you can't just leave people hanging; that's not appropriate, it's disrespectful. And I don't know how a responsible provider, quite frankly, can get away with that type of behavior.

Our clients have also arrived at their destination past the expected window due to other customers being added to the ride. Surely there's a way to coordinate rides and timing more efficiently. That's not even a money issue; that's just an operational issue.

So the vans arrive before the client's shift ends, in many cases, causing the client to feel as if they're being rushed to leave work early. So these situations all reflect on the type of employee you can be, for a particular employer.

When trying to book a ride, the time that's needed isn't available. So available times are either too early or later than what's needed. So if your shift starts at 9 a.m. -- which many of our jobs do -- the only available pickup is 6 a.m. or 10 a.m. So either the clients have to go early and wait somewhere for two hours until the office opens, or they can't take that job. And once again, they have to move back from a full-time position to a part-time position, which really impacts independence.

So I have a couple suggestions -- quickly; I don't want to repeat what my colleagues have said.

But clearly, implementing new scheduling software has to increase efficiency, drop-off and pickup routes, and all of that.

We have to condense routes to decrease onboarding time. Taking a tour of New Jersey -- although New Jersey is beautiful -- when you're trying to get to work and home from work, three hours is really unacceptable.

And dropping off passengers when you have a desired destination. Often they will not -- they don't know which entrances. So if you're working at the mall, they'll be waiting at one end and you're at the

other end, and somehow they can't coordinate where you are; so that's another issue.

Finally, I really don't believe it's a budget issue, as I mentioned before; I think it's an issue of management efficiency and common sense operations. So before we start throwing more money at something, I think we have to back up and really look at the efficiency and the operation of the organization.

And thanks so much.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Scott Elliott.

SCOTT ELLIOTT: (off mike) Senator, is it okay if I go after these guys, since they're--

SENATOR SWEENEY: Sure; you guys go in whatever order you want; I apologize.

MR. ELLIOTT: That's okay. Just a little strategic move here.

NORMAN A. SMITH: Senator Sweeney--

STEVE GRUZLOVIC: He wants to know if he can have somebody read his testimony.

MR. SMITH: Thank You.

CHRISTINE BAKTER: Good afternoon.

My name is Christine Bakter, and I'll be reading the prepared remarks today for Norman Smith.

Senator Sweeney and members of the Select Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the most vexing issue that people with disabilities face daily: transportation on New Jersey Transit.

My name is Norman Smith, and I'm the Chairperson of the New Jersey Statewide Independent Living Council. We are a federally mandated Council appointed by the Governor to, among other authorities, advocate for systems change to empower people with disabilities to live independently.

With this authority in mind, I'm here to report that New Jersey's transportation system is failing its citizens with disabilities on a daily basis; and New Jersey Transit is a major factor in this failure. This needs to change.

Each month, this Council hears the frustration that people with disabilities have in trying to get to the store, the doctor, the bank, or to their job. We hear horror stories of riding on Access Link for an hour to go a mere mile away. We hear about New Jersey Transit buses rolling past people in wheelchairs at bus stops. We hear about waiting in a phone queue for hours to schedule a ride two weeks ahead of time. We hear about arriving two hours early for an appointment because that was the only slot available. We hear the anger about needing a last-minute ride for an emergency and not being able to get one.

I've personally experienced the frustration of trying to attract the attention of a New Jersey Transit conductor to board a train on a crowded platform. I'm always wondering why I have to make a public spectacle of myself to get their attention when there are reasonable alternatives. I have experienced the anxiety of worrying that the elevator at my stop will be working, and hoping that the urine stench is bearable. I've worried about being evacuated from a train in an emergency.

These examples are just a sample of the problems, barriers, and indignities of a person with a disability needing to use public transportation daily as he or she seeks a fulfilling life of independence. This needs to change.

Personally, I had hoped that with technology some of these issues would be solved; yet it seems like a computer-based trip planning for Access Link has caused less efficient scheduling for the riders and illogical trip routing.

While I have your attention, I want to mention a transportation topic outside of New Jersey Transit. The technology-based ride services of Uber and Lyft are failing to serve people in wheelchairs in most of the state. Combined with ride subsidies, these services could reduce the pressure on Access Link for many trips, but the lift-equipped vehicles for these services are not available, except for areas around Philadelphia and New York.

I note that SEPTA is an Uber contractor to provide on-demand services for people in wheelchairs. We need to bring this to New Jersey, and we need the Legislature and the Governor to weigh in with Uber and Lyft to change this.

In conclusion, let me say this. I'm a frequent visitor of Washington, D.C. for business. I can get around D.C. in my power chair, day or night, through various options available for everyone. This type of transportation infrastructure needs to be developed for New Jersey with input from the disability community. In this regard, the New Jersey Statewide Independent Living Council is ready to lend its expertise about issues impacting the lives of people with disabilities to bring this about.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Steve.

MR. GRUZLOVIC: Thank you.

All right; good afternoon.

My name is Steve Gruzlovic. I want to thank Senator Sweeney and the Select Committee for providing me the opportunity to share my expertise and personal experiences with New Jersey Transit.

I'm a Mercer County and Robbinsville resident. I serve on the Board of the Progressive Center for Independent Living, and I am the Statewide Independent Living Council's Transportation Chair.

I recently read the report from our ombudsman, Paul Aronsohn, and I'd like to make mention of a few points.

On page 16 of his report, underneath the Transportation Section, he says, "From a quality of life perspective, transportation poses one of the greatest challenges and greatest opportunities. For individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the shortage of accessible and affordable transportation makes their involvement in the community -- through employment or day programs -- difficult, if not impossible. In fact, the challenge often has a devastating emotional, physical, and financial impact on them and their families."

This serves true. I use New Jersey Transit services almost every day of my life for transportation purposes. In my written statement that's been provided, I broke the issues down by each service; and I'd like to come up with some solutions, and I'll do that at the end.

But I feel like in order to get a complete picture, we need to discuss some of the issues that we see on each service.

So for buses -- the lack of bus shelters at bus stops is a significant issue for individuals with physical disabilities. My wheelchair is worth approximately \$60,000, and if it's out in the rain it could get destroyed. And

many of the bus stops in the area are out in the open, with no protection from wind, cold, rain, excessive heat, and it could destroy my chair.

The drivers on New Jersey Transit buses -- they don't often know how to strap chairs in correctly. And I oftentimes have to get into arguments about how to strap my chair down safely. And it doesn't make me feel confident or comfortable that I'm going to have a safe ride.

And the maintenance -- when something goes wrong with the ramp, there's extremely long wait times that you could get stuck on a bus. About a month ago, I was stuck for approximately 40 minutes while somebody came to let the lift down on the bus so I could go home.

As far as the River Line -- the ticket validators that you have to use in order to go on the River Line -- most of the time they are broken or not accessible to someone in a wheelchair. The locations for some of these stops are remote -- like parking lots and other areas -- and they do have an emergency phone system, but at a lot of the stops the emergency phone button -- if you have an issue, it doesn't work.

And there's also a gap in the platform when you get off of the River Line.

As far as trains -- on page 2 of my written statement, I listed all the train stations that are not wheelchair accessible according to the New Jersey Transit app. This makes it so that individuals with disabilities are not able to travel to those areas.

Also with the trains -- there are temporary bridge plates that are not attached to the train. What they do is, they put it on the platform and the worker holds it with their foot. Well, if it's raining or it's slick out, the

ramp can move when you go to get on the ramp to get on the train, and that can pose a significant hazard to individuals in wheelchairs.

Also, I experienced elevators that are broken; having to get the conductor's attention, which has been extremely difficult at times, especially during rush hours when there are massive crowds of people.

And on New Jersey Transit trains, there's not a designated spot for me to put my wheelchair. So oftentimes I have to squeeze in between two seats.

As far as Access Link -- we could probably have a separate hearing, as far as the issues and solutions for Access Link. Wait times to schedule trips and limited trip availability is now the norm; and that's very sad, because there is a certain segment of our population that cannot use a normal fixed bus route, or a fixed bus route doesn't go where somebody needs to go, like the doctor's office.

There is a three-quarter of a mile radius rule from a standard bus stop. I think that poses a danger to individuals with disabilities, because a lot of times you have to wait in a shopping center, because that's where the line is. If we expanded that out -- and I'm not sure how far we should expand it out -- but if we expand it out, we'd be able to better serve individuals with disabilities.

Their online system -- I was one of the original beta testers. It has improved, but it still needs a lot of work. For instance, if you want to go someplace new that is not in your trip history, you can't do it through the online system. You still have to go through the steps of calling it in to their system so they could put it within the system so you could use it again.

And there's no availability for same-day service. If my parent or relative has an emergency and has to go to the hospital -- like my parents, for instance, I help them make a lot of medical decisions -- I'm not able to easily get there, you know? If my mother has a health episode or my father has a health episode, I can't make it. So I have to coordinate everything through the phone, when I really, honestly, should be there.

And the pricing -- sometimes Access Link is 1.5 to 3 times the price for the standard bus route; and that needs to be looked at.

As far as solutions go, I'd like to open up the guidelines on being able to use Access Link. The three-quarter of a mile rule is prohibitive, and it causes dangerous situations like I mentioned before.

We need to have a better way to provide bus shelters for bus stops because, right now, you have to go through mayor's offices and other legislative offices in order to get that done. I wish that there was some sort of hotline that you could call that says, "Hey, I'm at a bus stop, and it needs a shelter. Can we do this?" I know in my personal town, we've tried to get bus shelters by my home; and we are still waiting to hear back the exact date of when they're going to come out for measurements and installation.

As far as bridge plates and employee training -- I think that bridge plates should be attached to the train, like they are with SEPTA. What SEPTA does, in Philadelphia, is it's in the floor and they take a key and they lift it up and the plate comes out; but it's still attached to the train, so it doesn't move.

Employee training needs to improve; not necessarily members of Access Link, but on the standard bus route. And it's not about showing them

a video or giving them a brochure; it's about letting them have real-life experience with people with disabilities.

And there also needs to be better communication between New Jersey Transit and customers. I had an issue last week where a bus went past me and didn't stop. I sent an e-mail and called in to the New Jersey Transit line. I still have not heard confirmation that they've received my complaint, or a potential resolution.

Also, I'm the Transportation Chair for the New Jersey Statewide Independent Living Council, and we've asked Access Link to come to provide information. And oftentimes, when I ask questions -- the one time I did ask questions, the representative from Access Link said, "I'm not here to answer questions; I'm just here to observe what's going on." That's not acceptable; it's very upsetting. People with disabilities want to know what's going on, and we have every right to know. This way we can help them. We don't want to sit there and say, "Oh, there's a problem, there's a problem, there's a problem," over and over again. We actually want to provide solutions that may be workable for all involved.

I also think uberWAV and Lyft Access need to come to New Jersey to help individuals in wheelchairs with same-day service. I've used it over in Pennsylvania, and it is a great service. There are ways for us to get it paid for, but we need legislative and the Governor's help in order to do that.

And I just think that eventually everybody in life is going to have some sort of issue, ailment, medical condition, or disability; and that we need to treat everyone with respect, courtesy, and dignity. And these situations are not just for the betterment of disabled people, but the betterment of society as a whole.

And I want to thank Senator Sweeney and the Select Committee for their time today.

Thank you.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you, Steve.

Scott.

MR. ELLIOTT: First, I want to thank Senator Sweeney and the Committee today.

I'll tell you what -- every day I learn. I sat here today; I hear a lot of great comments, a lot of great input. I think there were some really pivotal points.

But first, I want to talk about-- Norman is the Chair of Statewide Independent Living Council. All disabilities; they cover all disabilities. The New Jersey Association of Centers for Independent Living -- there are 11 of us. We're private entities, community-based, with some Federal funds and State funds -- very small amounts of funds -- to do a lot of good work.

Transportation is the number one barrier for employment; and that's competitive, integrated employment, as well as other types. But, of course, now with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, the keywords for employment -- and, you know, under the Division of Voc Rehab, the Department of Labor is one of our funding sources -- competitive, integrated employment is key.

So a lot of good stuff here today around intellectual and developmental disabilities, which we, as well, cover; and we work with many, many families, thousands of families, with all disabilities. And I want to make sure that spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, multiple sclerosis -- if I can spit that out -- muscular dystrophy, all the different muscular

dystrophies-- We can go down the line for another hundred types of disabilities. Who in this room doesn't know someone with a disability? We know many.

I'll tell you what -- it's ironic. We could have filled this room -- this room wouldn't have been big enough if it weren't for transportation issues today. That's how many people Norman, and I, and Steve heard from, who would have wanted to come and at least listen today, if not testify.

So I've been considered an escapee from the system; I'm lucky. Our agency covers Mercer and Hunterdon counties, two distinctly different counties. I happen to live right over the border in Lambertville, New Jersey; but if I did not have a van to get to work -- and I've worked in Mercer County most of my life -- if I didn't have a van, I'm not working; I'm not working. So there's no public transportation.

So we heard rural, we heard urban. I think -- you know, what I heard today-- And Steve talked about a committee -- Senator Sweeney, you talked about restarting this -- I don't know the name of a committee or a body. We need research that's organized and consolidated. We need a plan that's organized and consolidated, and then we need the action that's organized and consolidated.

Because there are all these different fragmented groups. I mean, transportation has been the biggest issue against employment, as a barrier, ever since I've been in the human services field -- almost 25 years ago. So now this is very appreciated, by a lot of people, to take this information, look at what groups are out there, and figure out ways to come up with improvements. We're not going to solve this overnight; everybody here knows that. But to look at ways that we can make steps, take steps, to make

things happen so people can-- I mean, we all know jobs are revenue. Eighty percent of people with disabilities are unemployed. Forget the unemployment rate; that's terrible, compared to the regular unemployment rate of, what, around 3 percent now, I'm guessing. The unemployment rate for disabilities is 10 to 12 percent. That doesn't sound too bad. Forget that, toss that out the window. Unemployed -- 80 percent of people with disabilities are unemployed. Want to talk revenue? We all know what people going back to work can create for themselves, as well as taxes, as well the things towards -- even the improvement of-- And I heard a comment here; just don't -- we don't want to throw money at this. We have to get our arms around it first.

I'm done. I didn't read my testimony, so--

SENATOR SWEENEY: Scott, I appreciate your comments, and the whole panel's comments.

And I'll ask the Senators if anybody wants to speak.

But the purpose of this was-- When we started talking about New Jersey Transit, you heard about bus riders, you heard about train riders. There's a whole other population of users that the system isn't working for. So if we're going to fix it, we'll fix it for all.

Normally this community is a community that doesn't have a loud voice. You know, people like to look the other way; they try to look past you. And my big belief is, if you look at someone and get beyond the disability, get beyond the fact that you're in a wheelchair, you're very employable; you're very capable of getting something done. It's just getting beyond perception.

But without transportation, it's almost impossible for you to be a productive citizen. And we all want to have a sense of dignity and pride, to have a job, and to be part of society.

So the purpose of this hearing-- And I think we got a lot of good ideas. I mean, I think we heard a whole lot of good ideas, because we're hearing from the people who are involved in it. It gives us the opportunity to go back to work and craft some solutions, and funding will be one of them -- not that we're just throwing money at anything. But funding has to be part of it. And tying ourselves into the agencies that already exist -- talking to each other to figure this--

I learned a lot; I can tell you, this was an eye-opening experience for me. And I wanted to have a hearing just on this issue.

So anyone else?

Senator Cryan?

SENATOR CRYAN: Thanks for having the hearing, Steve. It's been educational.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Thank you.

Senator Corrado.

SENATOR CORRADO: Chairman, I couldn't agree with you more.

I want to thank everybody who took the time to come today and share their stories.

I think today was actually the most productive hearing we've had to date. Your recommendations were spot on; I also learned a lot.

And what we heard, over and over again, was common sense. We're looking to, somehow, centralize everything, work together; the

resources are out there. I think this is something we can do; and if we work together, we will all be able to get this done. Like I said, this is, by far, the most productive hearing we've had.

And I also would be remiss if I didn't recognize someone from my District, who is a huge advocate for the community, and that would be Paul Aronsohn, who is sitting back there, and has just done an amazing job.

Somebody mentioned before about -- when their child turns 21 and ages out of the system. I get that call on a daily basis, and my first phone call is always to Paul. And he has been a huge advocate and resource for me, and I hope he continues to do the wonderful work that he's doing.

But this was a good day for all of us.

MR. ELLIOTT: I'll ditto that on Paul, too.

MR. SMITH: Yes.

SENATOR SWEENEY: Senator, I'm glad you brought up Paul, because that was one of the better appointments the Governor made (laughter). And I say that with all sincerity, not as a knock on the Governor.

Paul, you care; you live it, you care about it. And the people you serve are the ones who tell us what a great job you're doing. So I appreciate it.

With that, the hearing is adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)