GOOD TO GO: Transit Options for Older Adults
September 26, 2006
Summary Report

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On September 26, 2006, the NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation Policy & Management, together with the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, AARP, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, NYU Wagner Institute for Civil Infrastructure Systems, and the University Transportation Research Center, Region 2, hosted the seminal event, “Good to Go: Transit Options for Older Adults.” With over 200 individuals in attendance from the private and public sectors, the event focused on what is being done and what could be done to provide transit options for older adults throughout the region.

In addition to the framing remarks by Thomas Nelson and the keynote address by Federal Transit Administrator James Simpson, the symposium featured two panels of experts who tackled these issues through a combination of dialogue and presentation. The following is a summary of what transpired.

Background
How to address the transportation needs of older adults—that is, adults 65 years and older—is of increasing concern to communities throughout the United States. Seventy-six million Americans were born between 1946 and 1964, and the first group of these baby boomers will turn 65 five years from now. Indeed, older Americans represent the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population; in 2000, one in eight Americans was over the age of 65; by 2029, Americans 65 and over will represent 20% of the population. And, unlike previous generations, many of these older adults are likely to continue working and remain active in other parts of their lives as well.

Meeting the transportation needs of older adults represents both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, driving continues to constitute the primary mode of travel for all Americans, including those over 65. But, given the tremendous reliance on the automobile as the primary mode of choice in the United States, perhaps the greater challenge is in addressing the needs posed by those who find that driving is no longer an option. For older adults who no longer want, or find themselves unable, to drive, public transportation becomes particularly important in maintaining quality of life. It is the only means for meeting daily needs and remaining engaged in the world. Yet, unless one is fortunate enough to live in an urban area with sufficient access to public transportation, options are limited.

Framing the Issue
Thomas C. Nelson, Ph.D., Chief Operating Officer, AARP
Thomas Nelson began the session by framing the issue and providing the results of AARP’s survey, “Good to Go: Assessing the Transit Needs of New York Metro AARP Members,” which was conducted to provide background for this event.

Findings of AARP Survey of Members in the New York Metropolitan Area
Even with the wealth of transportation options in the New York Metro area, over 77% of AARP members surveyed in the area preferred driving over other modes. For those who do not have a driver’s license, over 58% preferred to be driven in a private car. Eight out of ten respondents said they go out of the home more than three times a week, but how often they get out of the house varied considerably by income. Those with lower incomes were not only less likely to drive, but also less likely to leave their homes. More than eight in ten respondents said public transportation is available in their community, but despite this availability more than one-third said that there was no transportation stop within a quarter-mile from their home. Thus, while public transportation may exist, it is not readily available to all individuals within a community. Fewer difficulties were reported when respondents actually used public transportation, and most found it largely satisfactory. This is a testament to the quality of public transportation provided in this region, and yet more than half of those who are drivers indicated it would be extremely difficult to remain in their communities if they were no longer able to drive.
There is no one solution to solving the transportation issues of older Americans; one size does not fit all. Though there are multiple transportation options in the New York metropolitan area, for suburban outlying areas such as northern New Jersey and southern Connecticut, this is simply not the case. Moreover, solutions for the suburbs of New York may not work elsewhere around the country and vice versa.

**Planning for Demographic Shifts**
Ten states will soon have more Medicare-eligible older adults than they have school age children. Even the suburbs, once centers of young family life, are on the leading edge of the aging trend. The New York metropolitan area is no exception; the same pattern holds here. Seven of the region's ten counties (the Bronx, Kings, Nassau, New York, Queens, Suffolk, and Westchester) rank in the top 35 U.S. counties with the largest populations over age 65.

Every planning decision in every community needs to take into account the shifting demographic reality—attending to the needs of the elderly can no longer be an afterthought. This mobility challenge is even greater when it comes to Baby Boomers. Many have lived their entire lives where driving and living were practically one and the same. And even though we want to extend our driving lives as long as we can, the reality is there is a life cycle to our driving. The average male will outlive his driving abilities by at least six years, and the average female by ten years.

**Beyond the Single-Occupancy Vehicle**
We need to look beyond single-occupancy vehicles if we are going to create livable communities. We need to aggressively invest in our mass transit systems, particularly those for poorly served suburbs. Other studies completed by AARP show that having transportation options contributes significantly to giving people a sense of control over their lives as well as access to social services, health care, and family and friends.

Public transportation should not be seen as a last resort when driving is no longer an option. As the older population ages in number, developing a comprehensive transportation system across all modes—bus, train, taxis, and pedestrian facilities—will become increasingly important.

**AARP's New Partnerships and Programs**
Transportation systems throughout the country are addressing the needs of older adults. For example, in Louisville, KY, the transit agency and AARP Kentucky collaborated on the production of a travel-training video on how to use public transit, and the transit provider is paying attention to schedule design, safety, and comfort. Some of the more innovative programs are experimenting with GPS tracking. Washington, DC, for example, is using next train technology for the metro system to let people know how long it will be before the next train arrives. All of these improvements will enhance the potential for customer-based public transportation.

AARP is currently training staff and volunteers to be the voice of the 50+ consumer in Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) throughout the country. By using existing channels for public participation, AARP expects to be able to raise the right kinds of consumer-based questions as regional transportation planning and investments take place. Recognizing that to help older Americans continue to be active, involved, and productive for the next 10-20 years, we must start with a comprehensive transportation system that offers choice, control, and independence, AARP is also seeking new partnerships and alliances; it has worked closely and continues to work closely with the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and the National Complete Streets Coalition to help make this happen.

In conclusion, Mr. Nelson stressed that public transportation needs to be a key component within a family of transportation services, combined with improved infrastructure for autos, pedestrians and bikes, enhanced transportation services for paratransit users, accessible taxi cabs, and volunteer driver programs. If we create this kind of diversity in our transportation system, older Americans will have the kind of access and mobility they need to stay active and engaged in their communities. Equally important, if we bring about these kinds of changes they will not only benefit older adults, but will benefit the rest of the population as well.
Keynote Address
James S. Simpson, Administrator, Federal Transit Administration
Speaking as one who spent most of his life growing up in New York City—taking public transit through all the neighborhoods—Administrator Simpson pointed out that when it comes to public transit there is no other city like New York; the New York metropolitan area is unique and transit-rich. As the new FTA Administrator and the national spokesperson on transportation, Mr. Simpson shared some of his observations, and provided an overview of the needs of older adults and how the transportation system, and transit, is addressing them. Mr. Simpson also shared his thoughts on successful initiatives and remaining challenges.

The Need for Transportation Options for the Elderly and Disabled is Clear
Ensuring transit access for older adults is very important to the current Administration, which has an Executive Order aimed at coordinating and enhancing human services for transportation. The Bush Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) also have a new initiative on congestion within which FTA has its own role: with mass transit operating at capacity, moving people off highways onto mass transit will significantly impact FTA’s capital and operating structure.

Local Decisions are Needed. Mr. Simpson echoed Mr. Nelson’s belief that one size does not fit all. Local decisions are needed. The FTA’s role is to share best practices and give support on projects, but not to tell local communities what they need to do.

FTA’s Investment in Public Transportation. Fortunately, Americans have recognized that transportation is important for healthy communities and personal independence. In 1964 Congress created a public program to help support public transportation. Today, through the FTA, the federal government provides approximately $8.5 billion dollars annually to develop new transit systems and improve, maintain, and operate existing systems. FTA oversees thousands of grants to hundreds of state and local providers who are responsible for managing their transit systems and infrastructure projects. Overall, the annual federal investment in public transportation represents about 17% of all such investments; the remainder comes from state and local government contributions, dedicated state and local revenues, the fare box, and other revenue-generated systems.

Programs That Meet the Mobility Needs of the Transit-Dependent Human Services Transportation. Individuals who are transit-dependent live in all parts of the country including here in New York City. In a survey on disabilities conducted by the Harris Poll, over 54 million Americans, almost 20% of the population, reported having a disability, and addressing the number of people with lower incomes continues to be a challenge. Thus, it is not only older adults, but also the other groups combined who rely on transit.

Each day, men and women find it difficult to participate in community life because they lack a ride. Human services transportation means meeting the day-to-day mobility needs of people who are transit-dependent, especially older Americans, individuals with low incomes, and people with disabilities. The family of human services transportation, supported by federal programs, includes more than dedicated buses or vans; it also includes programs that reimburse consumers for taxis or tokens, gas, vehicle operating costs, and volunteer driver programs. Human services transportation is vital. Lack of transportation affects an individual’s independence and opportunities. Human services transportation tries to not only improve individual lives, it also affects our economy, culture and society. When transportation does not work, other things—our healthcare system, our economy, our civic culture—cannot work at their best either. Reliable transportation is a prerequisite for a healthy economy and often is the first step towards independence and opportunity for older adults, people with lower incomes, and people with disabilities.
Remaining Challenges

Gaps in Services. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) signed into law by President George Bush in July of 1990, recognized the rights of people with disabilities to the same public transportation service that is available to other Americans. Today over 90% of America’s public transit buses are accessible, and every new bus or transit system must be accessible.

In spite of the significant investments in public transportation services we still have serious gaps. Transportation to the grocery store, a city council meeting, or a doctor’s office may not be available, affordable, or accessible. These gaps in service, even here in New York City, are particularly burdensome for individuals who are transportation-disadvantaged, especially older adults.

In response to the challenges in service gaps, federal, state and local governments created specialized programs to meet particular transportation needs. The federal government has 63 separate programs administered by eight departments like Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Transportation (DOT), and even more agencies that provide special transportation services to older adults and others dependent on these services. However, most of the human service programs fund limited transportation service to provide eligible participants with access to services such as health care, senior centers, or rehabilitation programs. The result is a complex web of transportation services at the community level (Figure 1).

To demonstrate the lack of coordination of transportation services at the community level, Mr. Simpson gave an example of one neighborhood where there are three different vans, each supported by separate funding streams—Medicaid, the Area Agency on Aging, and the public transportation system. Each carries 1-2 passengers and picks up neighbors going to the same town, and yet, people living in surrounding neighborhoods cannot get service. Why is this the case? The emergence of transportation options that are tied to specific programs, available only to specific population subgroups, has created a complex, often duplicative, web of transportation services. Each program is likely to have different eligibility rules, different destinations, its own reservation systems, and unique travel routes. Merely figuring out what services are available to your particular destination can be an enormous challenge for consumers.

United We Ride

Through United We Ride, a campaign spearheaded by the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM), we are working on solutions and strategies for coordinating human service transportation across federal, state, and local programs. A study by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) estimated that $700 million a year can be saved by improving the coordination of human service

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Figure 1: Transportation Service Chart
transportation. The Council’s goal is to simplify access, so that anyone, especially older adults, can call one number and get service, regardless of where they are going, who is providing the service, and who is paying for the service. They are in the process of finalizing two joint policy statements. First, grantees across all federal programs can and should plan services together to serve the total needs of the community, and not just the narrow needs of their own programs. Second, vehicles supported through one federal program can be used to serve consumers of other federal programs. The Council is also working on principles of how to share costs, and strategies that will work across various federal programs. The Council looked at these coordination challenges and concluded that there are five key items that are critical for building coordinated human services transportation:

- There must be leadership at every level of implementation.
- Partnerships are essential; there must be networks and solid partnerships that include all stakeholders interested in this issue.
- Partners need to work together to plan and identify needs, barriers, resources and solutions for building coordinated transportation systems.
- Communities should offer a family of transportation services that provides choices for older adults and others that meets all needs.
- Communities need to take advantage of the new technology solutions available for coordinating reservations, scheduling, dispatching, reporting, and billing.

Administrator Simpson ended by calling for hard work, collaboration and consensus building. Meeting the transportation needs of older adults will require creative thinking on how to deliver transportation services, but this is the chance to build transportation services that work for all our citizens. It is time to work together so that older adults in New York and across this country can fully participate in our communities and live happy and healthy lives.
PANEL 1: CURRENT APPROACHES

Moderator: Robert Hodder, Editorial Content Manager, Livable Communities, Integrated Communications, AARP

Panelists: William Millar, President, American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
William Wheeler, Director of Special Project Development and Planning, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
Lawrence Salley, Commissioner, Westchester Department of Transportation

William Millar, President, American Public Transportation Association (APTA)

Mr. Millar provided a national perspective on the state of public transit. Transit is on a long-term and short-term growth trend. Last year Americans boarded public transit over 9.7 billion times, the highest usage in more than 47 years. In 2005, public transit grew by about 1.3%, while use of the automobile grew by 0.1%. Over the past ten years, public transit use has grown to over 25% in this country. APTA recently released statistics for the first half of 2006, and found that transit use is up by about 3.2%. In the first 6 months in 2006, the New York City area’s transit system carried 24 million riders more than in 2005. Besides the long-term trend, the short-term trend in many communities has been driven largely by gas prices. If the past is any guide for the future, some of the transit riders who switched over to avoid high gas prices will stay. Moreover, with the long-term price of fuel going up, in the long run we are going to see continued growth in public transportation ridership.

Need for A Paradigm Shift

The idea that Americans were born in a car, live in a car and may die in a car is starting to change. The Pew Center for Social Research reported that in the last 15 years, the percentage of people who say they love to drive has dropped from 79% to 69%. Another question they asked was “Do you consider your car special?” In 1991, 43% said yes, and today only 23%. It is clear that Americans’ love for the automobile is starting to wane. There are many reasons for this, among them congestion and cost. People want choices. In a report for TRB this year, the Harris Poll found that when Americans were asked a series of questions about their transportation options—what did they want more of and what did they want less of in the future—44% responded that they wanted more commuter trains, 35% wanted more intercity rail passenger service, 23% wanted more local bus, and 11% wanted more travel by car. In 2005, voters were asked if they wanted to raise their taxes or extend expiring taxes to support public transportation: 84% of those initiatives passed around the country. It is clear that people want something different.

Before the White House Conference on Aging in 2005, there was a dearth of information on transportation on the agenda. But at the conference, out of a total of 73 resolutions presented, the resolution on transportation got the third highest number of votes (ranked higher than reform for Social Security or Medicare). It was very clear for the delegates—which included older adults, those who work with older adults, those who advocate for older adults—that transportation is one of the most critical issues for older adults.

It is a penalty that we pay as a society for having invested so much in a single mode of transportation, the result of a deliberate investment strategy. In the United States we spend about $1.6 trillion a year, 11-12% of our economy, on all of transportation, across all modes. Of that, more than $1.3 trillion is spent on the highway system, on vehicles beyond the highway systems, and related costs. If we are spending more than 80% of our money on one mode of transportation, it should be no surprise that we get a lot of highways, cars and trucks, and all the byproducts that come with them—air pollution, congestion, and a whole host of other difficulties.
Successful Programs Around the Country
There are several successful transit-related programs for older adults around the country. While at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Mr. Millar founded the Free Transit for Senior Citizens program, funded from the Pennsylvania lottery, that used existing resources—buses, trains, and trolleys—and made them free for persons aged 65 and over. Taking away the fare doubled the transportation usage rate of older adults in Pennsylvania.

In Orlando, FL, the local transit system, LYNX, has taken a different approach, providing travel training to older adults. Getting on a bus or train for the first time can be scary, so having someone accompany older adults and explain the schedules proved to be a positive effort. In Eugene, OR, the Lane Transit District has a similar program—Bus Buddy—which recruits volunteers from the community to accompany people who have never ridden transit or have not since they were of school age.

At the national level, AARP and APTA created the Easy Rider Program which is intended to identify the ideas and initiatives that communities are trying to meet the transportation needs of elders. As Thomas Nelson from AARP mentioned, one size does not fit all. Mobility management for transit providers in the future will require an understanding of the needs of their customers and the existence of a wide variety of tools to meet those needs. It requires recognizing that people in different stages of their lives need different kinds of services; people need not only fixed-route bus or rail services but demand-responsive services as well. It requires mobilizing volunteer efforts, and local institutions solving local problems. It is going to require undoing the confusing transportation service web chart that Administrator Simpson showed earlier. While some of that can be done in Washington, DC, most of it has to be done in the local community. Even in complex places like the boroughs of New York, you need to know which lines can be eliminated. New York’s solution may not exactly be the solution of Topeka, KS, but it will be what works in New York just as the folks in Topeka have to figure out what works there. Mr. Millar applauded the efforts in Washington to unscramble the web-like network of services, but ultimately stressed that local decisions and initiatives will be the keys to success.

APTA continues to work on information that will help older adults in terms of using public transit but also working with AARP and the Community Transit Association of America in re-writing AARP’s book that helps people retain their driver’s licenses. APTA is also writing the chapter about what happens the day you do have to give up the keys. In all, there is no shortage of ideas, no shortage of experiences from around the country from which to draw.

William Wheeler, Director of Planning and Special Project Development, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)
William Wheeler began by sharing a regional review of current and future transportation from a recent briefing to the MTA Board. Between 1970 and 2006, the region’s “over 70” population has grown by 52% and between now and 2030, there is going to be significant growth in all segments of the aging population. There are going to be different needs for the different groups of older adults, with some people more mobile and others less independent. As transit providers, we need to recognize this diversity and take it into account in transportation planning.

Older Adults Today Have More Complicated Travel Habits
Ten to fifteen years ago, how we interacted with older adults was different, with the focus more on ADA and mobility impairment issues. Today’s older adults are more active, and determining and meeting their travel habits and needs is more complicated.

* For further information about the Easy Rider program and about other community initiatives, visit the APTA website www.apta.com.
**The Aging Workforce.** This region’s workforce has grown significantly and continues to grow. By 2012, we expect about a 50% increase in the number of workers age 55 and over. There are a lot of people now using the system who are in the workforce and will remain in the workforce for a long time. As transit providers, we have to recognize whether they have the same needs as younger customers and we have to be ready to meet them.

Older adults who are not working are using the system for other reasons. There are suburban residents with access to cars, who at some point are going to “hang up their keys.” There are going to be a lot of city residents as well. The city is going to grow the equivalent of another city by 2030, and many of these city residents are not going to have cars. They, too, will be using the transit system.

**Improvements for Older Transit Riders**

Many improvements in the transit system are going to benefit older Americans whether they are riding the system to work or not. For example, the MTA just published large print subway maps to make it easier to see and navigate the system.

Programs specific to older adults also exist. MTA offers a Reduced-Fare Program that provides half fare or less with Reduced-Fare MetroCard discounts. Anyone 65 years of age or older, or who has a qualifying disability, is eligible. MTA Reduced-Fare MetroCard works the same as a regular MetroCard; you can buy unlimited rides or pay-per-ride. Reduced fare benefits are available on MTA New York City Transit subways and buses, NYC Transit and MTA Bus express buses during non-rush hours, MTA Long Island Bus, MTA Long Island Rail Road, and the MTA Metro-North Railroad anytime except weekday rush hours to New York City terminals. Half a million people are enrolled in MTA's Reduced-Fare Program. Eighty-two percent of them are older adults, and this number is expected to grow.

**Current and Future Challenges**

One-third of older adults age 65 and over, living in Manhattan, use public transit. Richard Florida’s book, *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2005), argues that people worldwide are going to be returning to the cities for a number of reasons, and mobility is a key reason. The MTA, particularly with services in large urban areas, could face a resurgence of people returning to the city as they age.

Unlike most transit systems in the United States and around the world, the MTA operates a 24-hour system. It carries more older Americans each day than Los Angeles carries in total ridership. Convenience is going to be an important issue. Elevators and escalators are going to be vital in the system—not just because we need them, but because we need more efficient ways to maintain them. Changing platform levels for older Americans is also an important consideration in current and future transit planning.

The challenge is to be smart about ways to meet these needs. Accessibility for older adults and the disabled takes many forms: it can be physical where one cannot climb the stairs; or it can be geographic in terms of being in areas that are underserved by transit; and it can be informational in terms of having to learn a new transit system.

In summary, the coming challenges are going to be multi-dimensional and more complex than those of ten years ago. For those who understand land use from the local community perspective, it will be important to promote smart development and planning because transit access and planning are closely linked; communities that are planned for transit are transit accessible.

**Lawrence Salley, Commissioner, Westchester Department of Transportation**

Offering a more local and suburban perspective, Lawrence Salley began with a brief description of Westchester County and its residents. Westchester County is a large, diverse suburban county with significant African American and Hispanic populations and a fast growing Asian population.
With a total population of roughly one million, 18% of whom are aged 60 or over (which is higher than the national average) Westchester is facing significant challenges with regards to the aging population.

Westchester County Department of Transportation operates 357 vehicles of various types, and is the 40th largest surface transit provider in the country. It also operates 60 paratransit vehicles that carry 200,000 people annually, and the system is growing as the Westchester population ages. In terms of income, 75% of the passengers come from households that earn less than $35,000 a year, and over 70% of the passengers are transit-dependent, with no access to a private vehicle. Six percent of Beeline riders are aged 60 years or over, slightly higher than the national average.

The Road to Making Responsible Plans for Senior Mobility
Before the White House Conference on Aging, Westchester conducted a pre-White House Conference on Aging with the goal of generating recommendations at the grassroots level for use by delegates in crafting resolutions at the White House Conference. Westchester created 18 caucuses to deal with various issues pertaining to the elderly, including a Transportation Caucus. Among its accomplishments, the Transportation Caucus organized an all-day senior mobility conference in June 2005 with nationally recognized speakers and workshops dealing with various topics including: cutting-edge mobility strategies, attracting older adults to public transportation, creating communities that promote senior mobility, keeping older drivers on the road as long as safely possible, and making responsible plans for future senior mobility needs.

As a result of the Transportation Caucus, a resolution was adopted at the White House Conference which became the third highest ranking resolution of the 73 adopted at the conference. The resolution ensured that older Americans have transportation options and retain their mobility and independence.

Westchester County Department of Transportation has been working on several ways to address the issue of senior mobility. Presently, Westchester DOT is working with the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council (NYMTC) to analyze time of day pricing and see what can be done to attract more older adults to the system. Westchester is also pioneering some efforts with its Department of Senior Programs & Services and following on the recommendations that came out of the Transportation Caucus.

Programs for Senior Mobility
Westchester County developed an inventory of senior population concentrations and high interest senior destinations throughout the county. The findings from the focus groups have been significant and have helped shape new transportation services. In May 2006, at the Salute to Seniors program, Westchester DOT provided a variety of activities to attract more older adults to its system including free giveaways of transportation discount books, and on-bus training for attendees. Importantly, at the focus groups when older adults were asked why they did not use transit, they responded that transit did not go where they wanted to go. As a result, Westchester DOT modified its Route 9 Bus to now make a loop that stops at various locations where older adults want to travel.

Westchester DOT is also collaborating with AARP to make the New Rides program available to older adults. New Rides is a web-based system that matches people who are interested in carpooling with those people who want to drive or be passengers in the system. As an incentive, you can earn bonus points redeemable at a number of major retailers. Westchester DOT is also undertaking a program of travel training where it will work with older adults and their caretakers to help familiarize them with the transit system. They are also analyzing marketing strategies for senior transportation services in Westchester County. As of April 1, 2007, MetroCards will be introduced into the Beeline system which will provide other advantages for older adults.
In closing, Mr. Salley emphasized that in Westchester County public transit alone is not going to be the answer for all older adults mobility needs. Innovative and different approaches will be needed, but DOT is committed to helping identify them.
PANEL 2: CURRENT APPROACHES

Moderator: Robert Yaro, President, Regional Plan Association (RPA)
Panelists: Marcus Harazin, Assistant Director, Division of Local Programs Operations, New York State Office for the Aging
Neil Yellin, President, MTA Long Island Bus
Chris Zeilinger, Assistant Director for Governmental Affairs and Training, Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)

While the first panel described current efforts, the second panel focused on how to overcome the obvious impediments—financial, political, and bureaucratic—to move an agenda that meets the needs of the region’s aging population.

Marcus Harazin, Assistant Director, Division of Local Programs Operations, New York State Office for the Aging

Mr. Harazin noted that beyond physical disabilities, sensory disabilities need to be taken into account when planning for transit and paratransit systems. He provided some background information about the role of the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOA), NYSOA’s issues and concerns, what they are doing in the area of transportation, and what they would like to accomplish.

NYSOA works with a network of 59 area agencies on aging which provide case management, home care, day care, and transportation services to the elderly and their caregivers. NYSOA funds community based services, and much of that funding is directed toward transportation. NYSOA also works with New York State to review over 5,000 applications, is a partner in the United We Ride program, and coordinated Governor Pataki’s “Project 2015: Planning for the Boomers,” which engaged all state agencies to look at the aging of the Baby Boomers. In June 2006, NYSOA represented New York State at a disaster preparedness conference specifically focused on the elderly and disabled. The impetus for the conference was Hurricane Katrina since the elderly and disabled constituted 70% of the fatalities, and transportation was a key failing point that led to these high numbers. Transportation is a critical need which resonates with all of us. Some of the long-term care reform efforts which direct states to give people alternatives to nursing home care are pushing care for the elderly out into the community with a resulting need for access to new and better transportation services.

Changing Demographics

During the next 20 years, changing demographics will have a tremendous impact on transit. People getting older, people who are disabled are aging in place, and there is a high influx of older non-English speaking immigrants. Indeed, immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the elderly population in New York City. All of our transportation systems were designed 20 years ago to focus on a more homogenous population and updates are needed. However, transportation is expensive. New York State spent $338 million on Medicaid transportation, and tens of millions of dollars from Older Americans Act funds and state community services for the elderly program funds. If you add in adult disabled and developmentally disabled funds you get the picture of how much is spent on transportation; we cannot afford to have independent systems any more.

As we design systems locally or on a regional basis we need to look at the elderly population. Lack of transportation means many things—a loss of independence, risk of institutional care and higher costs—all things we are trying to move away from. Instead, we want to move towards providing more transportation options, where people can stay in the community, and communities become more senior-friendly. People will not want to leave their communities if transit is accessible. We know from the statistics given by previous speakers that 82% of Americans worry about being stranded when they are unable to drive, and that 98% believe that loss of mobility is extremely important, equating it with loss of independence.
The potential for using public transit is high. When we look at who uses public transportation, the New York City area’s system is heavily used. In fact, the Mid-Atlantic has some of the most mobile non-drivers because this region is rich in public transportation. This region also provides the most number of service transit hours per person over 65 in the country and spends the most money on transit.

The Role of Education, Culture, and Regional Influences on Transit Usage
Education, culture, and regional influences are also important in terms of affecting older adults. NYSOA has been looking at ways to create incentives for greater transit use. Providing giveaways is one means, reducing fares is another, but doing things “smart” is even more critical. For example, Oregon has free Tuesdays and the elderly schedule all their medical appointments on that day. Providing guides and assistance are all important. NYSOA joined the United We Ride campaign which fits into Project 2015 which stresses the need for aging-friendly communities: places that people are going to want to grow up, raise their children, go to work, but also retire in. To do that requires a united effort. NYSOA worked with its local counterparts to remove barriers. Currently, it is running a pilot project in Albany, NY, where all the agencies pool their money with one RFP to fund one provider. Lessons learned from the experience will be shared at a regional level. NYSOA hopes to use the same planning model to build projects in Buffalo, NY, Long Island, and elsewhere in New York State.

Neil Yellin, President, MTA Long Island Bus
Neil Yellin echoed the earlier speakers and explained that in the past ten years, Long Island Bus has experienced significant ridership increases. Last week, Long Island Bus established new daily ridership records on both its fixed route and paratransit systems. There are several reasons for the surge in ridership; one in particular has to do with the change in demographics. The traditional suburb now has a greater diversity of ethnic groups; more stratified incomes, meaning more lower-income people; and, an aging population. Rather than offer statistics and charts, Mr. Yellin showed photos of some of the changes in Long Island that are affecting mobility and transportation for the elderly.

In East Meadow, there is a stretch of property about three-quarters of a mile in length which five years ago was a vacant lot, undeveloped land, abutting the Meadowbrook Parkway. Today, it is comprised of all senior housing, developed virtually one next to the other. During the planning and construction phases, the transit companies were never advised that this was being built. Even though these facilities are near the road, there is a bus stop which only serves one side of the street. For someone to use the bus on the return trip would require crossing over 7 lanes of traffic going in both directions.

How Has Long Island Bus Addressed Senior Mobility Issues?
Mr. Yellin often speaks to senior communities about their transportation needs. When asked about where they originally come from and if they used the public transportation there, almost everyone answered yes they have used public transportation in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, etc. When asked the follow-up question, “Since you’ve been living in Nassau, how many of you still use the public transportation system?” the response is little to none. Over the years, Mr. Yellin has found that the reasons for not using public transit fall into three general categories: safety and security, convenience, and physical comfort.

All Long Island Buses have wheelchair lifts and front door kneelers. Long Island Bus also invests in the latest technologies: all buses have voice enunciations and visual LED displays to announce stops so people know where they are and when to get off. Long Island Bus offers a half-fare program, 24 hours a day, as well as the MetroCard half-fare program. They also adopted the “won’t you please save these seats for the elderly and handicapped” program, which places a decal with this wording on 9 seats per bus, including the ones closest to the bus operator which tend to offer greater security for passengers.
A major issue that Long Island Bus faces is a lack of coordination and information sharing with real estate development. For example, a senior housing complex in Bethpage was developed without consideration of public transportation. After construction, Long Island Bus stepped in and retro-fitted it for public transportation. Mr. Yellin showed examples of areas served by Long Island Bus that are desolate, with houses all facing inward, and with no amenities—no lighting, no bus shelter, no benches, not even a path. However, he also noted that Long Island Bus is making strides towards creating access and bus amenities, and working with developers during the planning stage when possible.

**Paratransit Has Been Remarkable, Which Is Both the Good News and Bad News**

The most dramatic improvement in transit service has been the ADA statute. There is no provision for age; it is strictly for people who cannot use the public transit system because of their disabilities. Consequently, on Long Island Bus’s *Enable Ride*, 60% of the users are over the age of 60, and 56% are over the age of 65. Mr. Yellin pointed out that growth of paratransit has been remarkable which is both good news and bad news. Long Island bus began operating with 10 buses, and now has 85 buses. Ridership over the past 10 years has increased 261%. The cost of a trip on the system is about $32. For Suffolk the cost is about the same, in Westchester the cost is about $38, and in New York City, the cost is almost double that. And costs are not being addressed by any government agencies. Providing such service is, in effect, an unfunded mandate. Anecdotally, in many areas of the country, transit agencies have tried to cut fixed route services to jettison the cost associated with providing the paratransit service, but when transit is reduced, everybody loses—older adults, disabled, and the general population.

Mr. Yellin shared some ideas for transit providers who serve the elderly and disabled. First transit providers must enforce the notion that providing mobility to older adults is a shared and cooperative responsibility. Coordination is needed among transit agencies, land developers (in terms of how they design and develop their properties), governments at all levels, and advocates. Second, the use of demand-response systems, such as paratransit, needs to be expanded to include older adults in need both financially as well as physically. Finally, we must come to realize that mobility is a necessity for older adults and non-older adults alike and therefore must receive the appropriate appropriations to address their needs properly.

**Chris Zeilinger, Assistant Director for Governmental Affairs and Training, Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)**

As he listened to Neil Yellin’s presentation, Chris Zeilinger was reminded of T.S. Eliot’s poem, “The Waste Land.” He shared some lines from the poem: “come in under the shadow of this red rock and I will show you something different from either your shadow at morning striding behind you or your shadow in the evening rising to meet you.” Mr. Zeilinger offered a synthesis of the earlier presentations as well as some additional observations.

**What Are We Going to Do?**

On the one hand, those that work in public and community based transportation are doing much to meet the mobility needs of older adults, persons with disabilities, and others who have come to rely upon and depend upon transportation and mobility services. On the other, transit does not always “go where you need to go, when you need to go. It’s frightening. It’s scary. It’s intimidating.” What can we do about it?

Much has been accomplished on the federal level; we focused on federal transit investment, and how that was built on the heels of growing expectations. We heard earlier about the Americans with Disabilities Act which provided a platform for fully enfranchising persons with disabilities into the fabric of American life. Many of us are aware of the growing challenges and expectations of our Medicaid, Medicare, and other social security programs. Those who work with low income populations might remember the bold experiment some of us want to call welfare reform from
about 10 years ago, which created temporary assistance for needy families. All of these programs at the national level raised the general expectations. Thus, if you are on welfare, there is no excuse; you have to get to work. When transportation is needed, somehow it is going to have to be provided. If you need to get to medical care, one way or another there needs to be some access to those healthcare services. We have raised the expectation levels to create some of the challenges that we heard about at the MTA, Long Island Bus, and Westchester County where there has been significant growth in transit.

Federal Legislation that Provides for Transportation in the New York Metropolitan Area
This year, federal transit support to the New York metropolitan area for urbanized public transportation service is almost $740 million, shared between New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. New York State received just over $7 million, about 1%, for elderly and disability transit capital investment. For job access and reverse commute programs, the New York metropolitan area (sharing between New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) gets $9 million; this is a small sum of money given the large number of people with low incomes trying to get to their jobs. There is a new program, the Freedom Initiative that goes above and beyond the baseline of the Americans with Disabilities Act, to provide $5-6 million to the New York metropolitan area. Though it is not a large sum of money, there are some smaller initiatives that can be supported. For example, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) used the little bit of money received from the FTA that was then matched with the money from the U.S. Department of Labor to create the Institute on Transportation Coordination. CTAA held a competitive selection of teams across the country to call for proposals. The New York metropolitan area had one of the teams that won and was selected for advanced assistance. CTAA is providing some assistance to help this coordinated planning process become an actionable item and realize some successes. Interestingly, planning joint transportation and human services is part of the main fabric of federal transit grants. Joint planning has been federally required since 1996, and now we are finally starting to make it happen.

What Makes A Successful Program?
What does it take to make these programs work? One of the common ingredients in all the successful examples from around the country is customer involvement. One of the secrets in fixed route public transit is that if you run enough fixed route bus service, people will ride it, but that does not mean the problem is solved. A number of people may not have ridden transit because they did not like it, they were scared by it, or it did not go where they wanted to go. Customer involvement will help answer those issues. We heard from Westchester County that it is important to have customer involvement, engaging community based organizations as providers, planning partners, or as bus buddies. With advances in technology, people are living longer. However, funding for the elderly has remained constant or decreased, and that needs to change.

Closing and Next Steps
Joel Ettinger, NYMTC Executive Director
In his closing remarks, Joel Ettinger, NYMTC Executive Director, reiterated that while there are successful examples, no one size or solution will fit all. The New York metropolitan region must tailor solutions to the local communities. This conference is just the beginning of the discussion on transit options for older adults in the New York area. He then laid the foundation for moving forward to address the issues discussed at the event:

- NYMTC will continue its partnership with AARP. It plans to meet to determine next steps and how to move forward this agenda.
- NYMTC and AARP will continue the dialogue at regional and local levels. Follow-up efforts could include listening sessions or workshops.
As a result of these kinds of discussions, we can define county, borough, or city specific follow-up activities which can include listening sessions and consumer outreach. It is clear from the discussions today that it is beneficial to have conferences like this at a regional level. Perhaps a challenge to AARP, to the FTA, to APTA, is to pursue this further at a national level with conferences like this around the country.

Finally, Mr. Ettinger noted this conference could be the start of a series of NYMTC and Rudin Center co-sponsored regional conferences to address some of the region’s transportation issues, including, for example, transit oriented development, safe routes to schools, and bus rapid transit.

Questions/Answers with the Audience – Panel 1

Questions directed to the members of the first panel touched upon specialized needs, whether or not the strategy should be to provide separate services for older adults and the disabled, and how to balance the various needs of a diverse population.

One participant talked about the difficulty of running a small, independent paratransit program, and suggested that it would be simpler and more efficient if they could fold their services into MTA’s *Access-a-Ride* program because of funding difficulties. Mr. Wheeler agreed that it was an interesting idea that is part of a broader issue that one size does not fit all. The MTA serves large populations, but with the special needs population, the issue is whether they can be flexible enough to serve those specialized needs. Mr. Salley also responded to a similar question about on-demand service. Westchester County supports on-demand service through the paratransit program but he believes the private sector can provide it with more efficiency and at lower cost. Related to this point, another participant asked about the physical structure of the transit system and if consideration is given to accommodate the needs of different populations, noting that trains seem to be more crowded and people are carrying more with them when they ride transit than in past years. Mr. Wheeler responded that there is a balancing act in vehicle design between trying to add more capacity for people and luggage because ridership has increased, and reserving space for ADA accommodation. The crux of the issue is how to design a vehicle that meets all those needs? Using a variety of fleets with different design specifications is one way to answer those needs, but the key for meeting the needs of a diverse population is to provide options, a family of services, and a variety of design considerations.

A third participant asked about how to make transportation services in the New York metropolitan area meet the needs of older adults and the disabled. Mr. Wheeler pointed out that there has been a debate going on whether it is better to modify the existing system or to provide a separate system for older adults and the disabled, and there are compelling reasons on both sides. Mr. Hodder alluded to a point made by Mr. Nelson that we need to provide a family of transportation services, but how to balance the structure of those services remains a challenge.

Questions and Answers with the Audience – Panel 2

The questions posed by the audience to panelists from the second session touched primarily on how to implement transportation service for older adults and the disabled and how to encourage transit usage. Mr. Zeilinger reminded everyone that the impressions that people have of transit are formed at an early age. Part of what sets transit apart in New York City among many other factors is that children use the transit system to get to and from school. In other parts of the country, there are yellow school buses which kids generally do not like to ride on, and they remember that experience when they think about any kind of transit in the future. Socially, people are conditioned to think that somehow it is a disgrace to ride a bus. Thus, perceptions need to be changed to encourage transit ridership.

Participants also asked questions about planning and coordination between real estate development and transportation planning. One participant raised a point about Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and how to reframe the discussion around looking for concentrations of older Americans and delivering transit service to them. Although much of
America is aging in low density, some of America is aging in concentration. In NORCs there are a large percentage of residents who have aged in place, often in community housing or apartments, and in various neighborhoods. How do we provide efficient service to the people in those communities or to understand their needs? How do we educate older adults about where transit does go and generating interest for destinations that are well served? Marcus Harazin mentioned that this year, New York State is increasing the number of NORCs being funded in New York City and statewide. New York City also has funded several NORCs. The process for approving new NORCs will look at transportation as a core service, and not only to transportation but proximity and access to key services. These NORCs are good models that fit into livable communities and send the message that it is acceptable to age in place. You do not have to move out of your community; we will bring the services and develop new services to you. By the end of 2006 the number of state funded NORCs will have risen from 17 to about 37. Mr. Harazin agreed that educating consumers is important. When one is new to a transit system, one has to learn it, one has to understand it, one has to learn the schedule, and one has to know where to stand. These are things that older adults can pick up and they just need a different approach. It is a different market segment and transit providers have to use different messages to talk to older adults about what is important to them.

Furthering the discussion on coordinating transit service to serve concentrations of older adults, Neil Yellin shared his thoughts on the constraints he faces on Long Island. Although bus service can be flexible, there are some limitations. The constraints are logistical; buses can not go down every street or every cul-de-sac which characterizes the suburbs. Often they have to work with and within existing barriers and come up with new strategies to address them. While transit providers would like older adults to use the fixed route system and not use the paratransit system, more education and training are needed.

Relating to planning, one participant asked how counties, towns, and their planning departments can be encouraged to work together and pay attention to where they are going to build housing for older adults. Marcus Harizan mentioned that the United We Ride program is a good model, one that looks at not just the transit system but also community and development so that information is shared. Transit providers need to identify models that work and celebrate them. They need to involve not just transportation, aging, and social services stakeholders, but also housing planners and consumers.

Robert Yaro pointed out that in the New York metropolitan area there is a model that works. The New York region is the most densely urbanized region in the country and it has more than one-third of the total U.S. transit ridership. This is because its communities were originally organized around "sidewalks and shoe leather." The models on Long Island are not organized in this way. On Long Island, there are more than 100 village, town, and hamlet centers which can be in-filled, redeveloped, and intensified with new housing that are organized around public transit. The key is building around the models that have existed here for centuries, and moving away from big box, warehousing operations.

Mr. Yaro added that the Regional Plan Association (RPA) has been leading several efforts on Long Island. One of these is a new program called the Mayors and Supervisors Institute which is designed to inform elected officials on how to create communities that are transit, pedestrian, and senior-friendly. His experience has been that the chief elected officials understand the concept, but the problem has been building the public support, and obtaining the support of the planning boards and other bureaucracies. RPA has also been working with NYMTC on a regional visioning effort on Long Island for the past year and a half, designed to engage the public and create a new kind of awareness about the need for new planning models.

To some extent, communities that are zoning for older adults still tend to be single family or townhouse communities; they are not designed around the needs of today. The Smart Growth idea is development that encourages communities to work with transit providers to zone for development. New York is behind the curve on this front, but it is possible to catch up. It comes
back to leadership and starts with discussions like this one about how important it is. The focus of
today is on the needs of older adults, but if you add up the needs of all of the groups that rely on
transportation other than single-occupancy vehicles, it is about 40% of the households in this
region. Thus, we need to join AARP and other groups that represent other parts of this
constituency to have a stronger voice for transit and smart growth.