

On behalf of the Federal Transit Administration, the Community Transportation Association of America prepares briefs on Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) projects to facilitate a learning network among grantees and others interested in employment transportation. For more information on the JARC program, visit: [www.ctaa.org/ntrc/atij/jarc.asp](http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/atij/jarc.asp)

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## Rhode Island Public Transit Authority's *Flex Service* Meeting the Mobility Needs of People with Disabilities

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) has started an employment transportation service for people with disabilities using Job Access and Reverse Commute funds from the Federal Transit Administration. RIPTA has implemented five flexible service demonstration programs in Rhode Island's low-density suburban and rural communities that provide disabled individuals with a reliable zoned-based system. Called Flex Service, this program takes riders to work and other destinations in their community. Passengers can also travel outside their communities using Flex Service, and then transferring to RIPTA's paratransit service. The transfer costs riders an additional twenty-five cents.

### Establishing the Need For Transportation

The need for Flex Service became apparent when a statewide survey revealed the unmet work-related transportation needs of Rhode Island residents with disabilities. The results showed that 20 percent of the respondents lived in the five suburban and rural areas of Woonsocket, Coventry, West Warwick, Narragansett, or Westerly; 81 percent of those people found reliable transportation an obstacle to accepting a job. According to the 1990 the Rhode Island Demographic Census on Data-Work Disability & Mobility Impairment, there were more than 20,000 employed people with "mobility and self-care limitations." For these 20,000 people, transportation services are key to self-sufficiency.

Disabled individuals are willing to work; what they lack are mobility options to get to work. A 1999 report commissioned by the Rhode Island General Assembly cited an informal poll of RIPTA's ADA-eligible riders who live outside the ADA service corridor. Twenty-six percent of unemployed individuals identified an interest in working if transportation was available, and four percent of those working would use paratransit transportation if it were available.

### What Would They Do Without Flex Service?

Without Flex Service, according to the Rhode Island Governor's Commission of Disabilities, individuals with

*Maria, who is visually impaired, has been using RIPTA's Job Access-funded Flex Service to get to work for about a year. Flex Service picks her up in front of her house and brings her to work at two different nursing homes. Her hours and work location vary each day of the week, but a standing reservation with RIPTA meets the mobility needs of a variable work schedule. Without the service, her husband would have to drive her to work. Because their work hours don't match Maria would not have the flexibility her position currently requires. When surveyed about Flex Service, Maria reported, "The new system is great! It costs less and the door-to-door service is wonderful. Thanks to all who made it possible."*

## Profiles of Success

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disabilities would continue to pay one-third or more of their gross salaries on taxis to get to and from work. Other individuals would have to rely on rides from family members. Those who could not get transportation would likely remain unemployed.

According to Jeanne Hunter, Principal Human Services Policy & Systems specialist from the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, "RIPTA's Flex Service has provided disabled riders a means to take public transportation. This was greatly in need in the rural and suburban areas of Rhode Island. Without this service many disabled individuals would need to find alternate transportation to work, including taxis."

### **Benefits of the Program to Persons with Disabilities**

Ann LeClerc, principal planner of RIPTA's flex program, recognizes the program's essential role in helping people with disabilities get to work and participate in other everyday activities.

"RIPTA is already providing 160 trips per month to people with disabilities," notes LeClerc. "These riders are using Flex Service to get to work and other destinations such as shopping at the local mall. Passengers take transportation from any one of the five Flex Service locations and transfer to RIPTA's paratransit service to go to the Amtrak station in Providence."

Hunter mentions that the disabled community enjoys the mobility that is provided by Flex Service. "Disabled individuals seem thrilled with the Flex Service transportation service. It's making the difference between having a normal life or not. We are truly delighted with the program."

### **Job Access and Reverse Commute Funding**

In Fiscal Year 2000, RIPTA applied \$100,000 of its total JARC funds to the Flex Service program.

Overall JARC funding to RIPTA, to date:

FY 1999 — \$1,000,000  
FY 2000 — \$500,000  
FY 2001 — \$997,800  
FY 2002 — \$2,000,000

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