

Summary of Comments Received from Veterans and Their Supporters

Washington State Veterans Forum:

A Symposium on Transportation Access for Veterans, Military Personnel and the Families

American Lake Auditorium, 9600 Veterans Drive, Building 9, Tacoma, WA

October 17, 2008, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

On Friday, October 13, 2008, the first in the nation Summit on Transportation for Veterans and Military Families was held in the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. The event was attended by over a 100 people including military veterans and their families, active duty military personnel, Veterans Administration staff, the Washington State Departments of Veterans Affairs and Transportation, and transit systems in the Olympic Peninsula. Also participating at the event were staff for Senator Patty Murray and Congressman Norm Dicks. Community Transportation Association, CTAA/Northwest and the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs sponsored the event to bring military, veterans and transit together to talk about common problems and solutions. One major theme consistently heard is that Disabled American Veterans chapters, which provide transportation for Veterans, and transit systems in the Olympic Peninsula, can work and coordinate better. As a result, a group composed of representatives from local transit, government officials, Veterans and Veterans Groups will establish a working group to develop a coordination strategy.

- While getting veterans and military families to medical appointments, training, etc. is an important issue. So many of the issues surrounding transportation are intertwined with the lack of medical opportunities for veterans in rural areas and the insensitivity of the VA administrators to find solutions for that problem. Bringing health care to the community may be cheaper than providing extensive and expensive transportation for vets to get to facilities hundreds of miles to Seattle and Lakewood. Some just don't want to go to urban areas.
- There are many homeless veterans in rural and isolated areas that are not being reached. Many have psychological or mental illnesses that make traditional health care unresponsive. It would be easier to provide a shorter trip by people in their community to services in their community.

- There is a genuine need to coordinate DAV van service among themselves and with transit providers in the Olympic peninsula.
- Many veterans in the peninsula must leave as early as 2:30 a.m. for an appointment at VA sites at American Lake (Lakewood) and Seattle. In some instances people have to sleep in the bus shelter to make sure they are there on time for the DAV van that leaves the area as early as 4:30 a.m.
- When Hood Canal bridge closes air travel may be a cheaper and more efficient (i.e. less travel time, etc.) transportation option. More ferry w/ connections for transit need to be and will be added.
- Coordination can and should exist between community and public transit providers and DAV vans. Travel trainers, training for drivers, service design, maintenance, dispatching, etc., are all areas that could be considered for coordination.
- More and creative communications need be designed for all veterans but in particular for vets in "hard to reach" areas.
- More input needs to be received from veterans and people that service veterans at the local and county level in terms of how to allocate VA resources and how to design transportation services that meet their needs.
- Volunteer DAV drivers and transportation coordinators are being severely overtaxed. As a result there is not a growth in drivers and thus less opportunity to get Vets van transportation.
- In the State of Washington the ACCT Board is raising the volunteer rate for mileage reimbursement (fed \$.58 / mile). If people could be reimbursed at a greater rate (w/out being taxed) it would be easier to recruit volunteers.
- Veterans need to get involved in their community. Work with city, county, state and federal elected officials. Get involved with transit systems and other community resource groups. Veterans need to step up as they did when they went into the service. Do our share – we all must contribute;
- It was emphasized repeatedly to contact elected officials at all levels. Even if they cannot help, they need to know the problems.
- Voucher payment should be expanded and communicated to veterans that use VA system and can use public and community transit. Certain hospitals buy "seats" for clients. Coordinated pass between cities/systems.

- Better coordination needs to exist between the availability and number of park and ride lots.
- Training and working with local senior centers should be a priority.
- There needs to be a better way to match up riders and providers (both DAV vans and public/community transit providers).
- Grant funds available from FTA – state grant funds. Come out of the Public Transit / Human Service Agency Transportation Plan. Every area is going to revise that this year. Be at the table.