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People with disabilities can't wait: transportation budget

Survival Coalition appreciates new investments in public transportation for people with disabilities that were approved in the Joint Finance Committee budget, but remains concerned that a continued lack of necessary investment in public transit and other transportation options for non-drivers are not addressing the needs of people with disabilities and their families.

"Large areas of the state have limited or no transportation options, or of the options that do exist, they are unaffordable, unreliable, unavailable at times people need them, or do not go where people need to go," said Beth Swedeen, Survival Coalition Co-Chair.

Survival Coalition's [fall 2018 statewide survey](#) of older adults, people with disabilities, and their family members revealed major transportation gaps in Wisconsin communities. Survey results underscore how transportation is a critical—and largely unmet—need that impacts every aspect of people with disabilities and older adults' lives.

Survival Coalition appreciates JFC's \$3 million increase for specialized transportation, a desperately needed increase. Unfortunately, this amount was half of the \$6 million proposed in the Governor's budget.

"Specialized transit is a critical service for people with disabilities and older adults," said Lisa Pugh, Survival Co-Chair. "In many areas of the state, especially rural areas and places without other public transit systems, specialized transit may be the primary mode of transportation system available."

The committee also approved the proposed 10% increase (\$250,000) per year for paratransit.

"The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) established access to public transit as a civil right and requires fixed route public transit systems to provide paratransit services for people with disabilities who cannot use the fixed route because of their disability," said Kristin Kerschensteiner, Survival Coalition Co-Chair.

The Joint Finance Committee (JFC) reduced the proposed 10% increase to public transit operation funding down to 2%. Even with the 2% increase, public transit is still below 2011 funding levels.

"Public transit is an essential service that enables many people with disabilities and older adults to get to medical appointments, commute to work, and take care of routine personal business, like grocery shopping," Kerschensteiner said. "Low-income caregivers serving people with disabilities and older adults rely on public transit to commute their client's homes to deliver the services that and help keep them out of expensive Medicaid funded institutions."

JFC repurposed \$22 million in existing Volkswagon settlement funds for the replacement of state vehicles to provide grants to public transit agencies to replace aging buses.

“Replacement of aging buses and other transit vehicles is a critical need and capital expenses can be difficult for local governments to outlay without assistance. This is an important investment to update essential public transit services,” Pugh said. “Accessibility features and improvements may be available on newer generation models; continuing to use older fleets delays these improvements for older adult and disabled riders.”

JFC also approved a \$250K increase per year to the Employment Transportation Program (WETAP).

“The WETAP program provides critical assistance to help low income workers commute to jobs, and for mobility management that can help coordinate transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes,” said Beth Swedeen, Survival Co-Chair.