

[Sample Op/Ed on the importance of transit to disabled persons]

Why Public Transportation Matters

For most of us, not driving is simply unthinkable. We jump into our cars every day to drive a few blocks or several miles for work or play. But for the millions of Americans who do not drive because they are elderly, too young, afflicted with a disability or cannot afford a car, not driving is an every day reality. So when driving isn't an option, how do people stay connected to jobs, schools, families or get to their doctor, the grocery store or just the park? The answer is public transportation.

Every day, bus, commuter and light rail systems, ferries and other forms of public transportation provide affordable, reliable and efficient services to 10 million people who commute to work. Another 25 million people rely on public transportation less frequently, but on a regular basis. For many people who would otherwise be disenfranchised – stranded, unemployed and even hungry – public transportation is a lifeline.

Right here in *(city, town)*, our *(forms of public transportation)* provide services to *(number of people)* every day and another *(number of people)* fairly often. According to *(name of source)*, *(name of transit system)* serves *(number)* low income, persons with disabilities and senior citizens who have no other reliable means of mobility. *(Add any other local statistics that show the variety and large number of people served.)*

Public transportation is at the core of our country's "Welfare to Work" program. According to a 1999 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an astounding 94 percent of welfare recipients do not have cars and are relying on public transportation to get into the workforce. Clearly, being able to get to a job is just as important to a welfare mom as getting off welfare and finding a job. Public transportation makes getting to work possible by charging as little as \$200 a year, depending on such variables as the type of transportation and the time of day.

Nationally, low-income riders have taken advantage of public transportation's affordability. According to the Center for Transportation Excellence, low-income riders spend \$23 billion per year on bus, rail, ferry trips and the like.

Indeed, so many kinds of people are touched by public transportation in so many ways. *[(Insert local story, like the following example.) Meet Brian. He's putting himself through college and determined to do well. His apartment is two miles from campus and his part-time job is another mile in the opposite direction. Brian, by the way, has a disability that requires him to use a wheelchair. So in addition to worrying about his grades and having enough money to get through school, getting his wheelchair to and from work and school is a constant concern. He counts on efficient and reliable public transportation simply to get through his day.]*

Fortunately, many mid-to-large public transportation systems also dedicate buses for the home pick-up of persons with disabilities and senior citizens – those who have difficulty accessing public transportation. These buses and vans are a part of their daily routine. In *(city/town)*, *(name of system)* serves *(number)* through our home pick-up service. For most of these residents, not having a home pick-up would mean not leaving the house.

In rural America, riders travel a billion miles every year on the 1,100 rural public transportation providers. For the 30 million rural people who are senior citizens, earning wages below the poverty line or suffering from disabilities, public transportation services are their connection to their jobs, neighbors and friends. *(Note: If you are located in a rural area, personalize this paragraph further, possibly moving it up in the op-ed.)*

Public transportation is a catalyst for strengthening the "livability" of *(city/town)*. Our *(name of system)* provides great freedom and mobility to our residents. And when people are given good transportation choices, they are more likely to forge social and business relationships where they live that improve their quality of life and the area's economic prosperity.

Without a doubt, investing in public transportation has demonstrated big paybacks. A 1999 Cambridge Systematics study revealed that a \$10 million investment in capital improvements in public transportation results in \$30 million in increased business revenues; and a \$10 million investment in operating improvements results in \$32 million in increased sales. Without a doubt, spending dollars on transportation development and improvements breeds thriving cities, towns and communities.

Public transportation also provides jobs for more than 350,000 people across the country and thousands of others who support public transportation in engineering, construction, manufacturing and other jobs.

So why does public transportation matter? Think about where we would be without it -- poorer, more isolated, less social and less healthy -- the antithesis of what a true community is or what each of us strives to be.