

Help Improve Rural and Small Town Access: Support the Akaka Amendment

~Enhance transit service by making the most of existing resources~

The unique transportation needs of small town and rural Americans are clear: greater distances, a changing economy, and shifting demographics are all impacting the quality of life in these communities. Public transportation is critical to ensuring economic growth and access to jobs, education, and healthcare in rural and small town America:

- Transit trips helps rural residents who cannot drive, are impacted by volatile gas prices, or where congestion makes driving difficult or unpredictable.
- According to the American Public Transit Association, ridership for rural and small urban public transportation systems jumped nearly 20 percent between 2002 and 2005ⁱ – and demand will continue to rise as more than 1 and 5 Americans over 65 do not drive.ⁱⁱ
- The Community Transportation Association of America concluded that investments in rural transportation are positive for economic development.ⁱⁱⁱ

Rural transit providers face scarce resources, limited input into the transportation planning processes, huge service gaps as well as service redundancy. Today, this is in part because of restrictions in the public transportation program structure and in part because of a lack of coordination of programs and communication between providers at the front-end.

The Banking Committee has recommended consolidating a number of public transportation programs in order to improve efficiency and address funding silos. The Akaka amendment would build on those improvements by strengthening the existing coordinated public transportation plan improving the efficiency of rural transit service.

Current law directs states to develop coordinated human services transit plans aimed at reducing service redundancies for certain types of transit service. These plans have had varying degrees of success across the country. Some communities lack the technical capacity to develop plans and the restricted scope of transit providers covered by the plans has limited its effectiveness.

While the Banking Committee proposal addressed the problems related to funding silos – there is still room for improvements. By consolidating programs, the problem of having one van to pick up a nurse who lives on west side of town while another van funded under a different program picks up patients for the clinic on the same side of town could be addressed. What will be done to help expand service to the other side of town?

An enhanced public transportation plan that incorporates all rural and small urban transit will increase efficiency and eliminate redundancies, enabling providers to enhance service with existing resources. The State would work with transit providers to develop these plans, consider input from all system users and help provide technical capacity and ensure coordination through outreach and development.

"Require states to designate geographic regions for rural and small urban areas and facilitate the development of a coordinated public transportation/human service plan for all transit service in these areas."

—National Rural Assembly's
Transportation
Recommendations.

ⁱ The policy Book: AARP 2004 public policies, 10-08.

ⁱⁱ http://www.getting-around.org/home/aging_21century.cfm

ⁱⁱⁱ Community Transportation Association of America, Institute for Economic and Social Measurement. "Status of Rural Transportation," Rural Transit Assistance Program, Federal Transit Administration, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, 2001.