



Legislative Budget and Finance Committee

A JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Feasibility of Requiring Shared-ride Services During Evenings and Weekends and for Intercounty Travel

Conducted Pursuant to HR 2006-631

May 2008

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Summary

House Resolution 631 directed the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study the feasibility of requiring counties to offer shared-ride services to persons with disabilities during evenings and weekends and for intercounty travel.

We concluded:

1. **Shared-ride services would need to be provided to all eligible shared-ride participants, not just for persons with disabilities.** HR 631 only refers to the Persons with Disabilities (PwD) shared-ride program. Virtually all the transit agencies reported that, if extended hours are provided, they should be provided to everyone eligible for the shared-ride program (such as elderly, Medical Assistance, and MH/MR clients). Moreover, PennDOT’s shared-ride policy directs that service must be uniformly provided to all user groups, otherwise it is considered exclusive ridership and not eligible for reimbursement.
2. **It would cost an additional \$27.1 million to provide shared-ride services during evenings and weekends.** Of this \$27.1 million, approximately \$23 million (85 percent) would be Commonwealth—primarily Lottery—funds. The table below shows our estimate of the cost to provide evening and weekend service in those counties that do not already provide this service.

Additional Estimated Cost to Provide Shared-ride Services During Evenings and Weekends^a (\$Millions)	
Extend weekday service to 6 p.m. for an additional 28 agencies ^b	\$ 4.9
Weekday evening service from 6–9 p.m. for an additional 43 agencies ^c	13.4
Saturday service for an additional 32 agencies ^d	4.0
Sunday service for an additional 41 agencies ^e	<u>4.8</u>
Total additional estimated cost to provide evening and weekend service for all shared-ride providers	\$27.1

^aDoes not include Philadelphia or Allegheny Counties because they are not eligible for the PwD program.
^bTwenty-four agencies currently provide weekday service until at least 6 p.m., so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to extend service to 6 p.m. for those 28 agencies that currently stop weekday operations prior to 6 p.m.
^cNine agencies currently provide weekday service until at least 9 p.m., so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to extend service to 9 p.m. for those agencies that currently either provide no regular weekday evening service (39 agencies) or that currently provide evening services that stop prior to 9 p.m. (4 agencies).
^dTwenty agencies currently provide at least four hours of Saturday service, so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to provide at least four hours of Saturday service.
^eEleven agencies currently provide at least four hours of Sunday service, so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to provide at least four hours of Sunday service (all but one of the agencies that provide Sunday service offer at least four hours of service).

- 3. Shared-ride providers voiced several concerns regarding evening and weekend service.** Concerns cited by county shared-ride providers included *lack of demand* (most medical facilities, senior centers and sheltered workshops are not open evenings and weekends), *recruiting drivers and dispatchers* (most do not want to work evenings and weekends), and *passenger safety* (passengers having to wait for vans and walk home at night).
- 4. Many shared-ride providers already offer intercounty service, but it often quite limited.** HR 631 also asks us to assess the feasibility of requiring shared-ride providers to offer intercounty service. Of the 26 providers who responded to our questionnaire, 20 indicated they currently provide at least some intercounty service, although oftentimes the service is very limited. If counties were required to provide intercounty service, they would either have to be required to enter into reciprocal agreements to coordinate schedules and drop off points, or providers would have to be allowed to place some limit on how far into a neighboring county they would need to travel.

I. Introduction

House Resolution 631 directs the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study the feasibility of increasing the State contribution to the persons with disabilities shared-ride program to include night and weekend hours as well as inter-county service.

Methodology

Much of the information presented in this report comes from the Community Transportation Productivity Indicators that shared-ride providers are required to report to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. These reports provide information on the number of 65+ passenger trips, persons with disabilities passenger trips, total shared-ride trips, annual shared-ride operating expense, paid driver hours and other information needed for our estimates. We used the FY 2006-07 data.

In addition, in the fall of 2007 we sent surveys to each of the Commonwealth's 52 shared-ride providers. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the number of evening and weekend trips provided by those shared-ride providers that offer service during these hours. We then extrapolated this information to estimate the demand for evening and weekend service for those shared-ride providers that do not offer service during these hours. We also collected information on the number of vehicle hours used on evenings and weekends to determine the relative efficiency of weekday, evening, Saturday, and Sunday service.

We asked the shared-ride providers to estimate how much in additional state program payments would be required to provide evening and weekend service. However, relatively few providers answered the question, and those that did used such different methodologies for estimating costs that we were unable to use the information.

Additional questions were asked regarding possible difficulties in providing evening and weekend service and the feasibility of inter-county service. Summaries of the responses to these questions are included in the report.

Acknowledgements

LB&FC staff acknowledges and appreciates the excellent cooperation and assistance provided by PennDOT's Bureau of Public Transportation during the study. We also thank the many shared-ride transit agencies and providers that assisted us during this study.

Important Note

This report was developed by Legislative Budget and Finance Committee staff. The release of this report should not be construed as indicating that the Committee's members endorse all the report's findings and recommendations.

Any questions or comments regarding the contents of this report should be directed to Philip R. Durgin, Executive Director, Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, P.O. Box 8737, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-8737.

II. Cost and Feasibility of Evening and Weekend Shared-ride Services

The shared-ride program, which began in 1980, was most recently amended by Act 44 of 2007. Act 44 defines shared-ride service as “door-to-door demand transportation that is available to the general public on a nonexclusive basis, operates on a nonfixed route basis and charges a fare to all riders.” Act 44 also provides funding assistance for shared rides provided to older persons and persons with disabilities.

Shared-ride for Older Persons. All persons age 65 and older qualify for assistance for shared rides, and all counties in Pennsylvania provide shared-ride services to older persons. Senior citizens or an approved third-party sponsor (typically the county Area Agency on Aging) pay 15 percent of the fare, and the Lottery Fund pays the remaining 85 percent.¹ Usually a 24 to 48 hour advanced reservation is required, and hours of operation are set locally. Of the 8.65 million shared-ride passenger trips provided in FY 2006-07, 5.14 million (59 percent) were for persons aged 65 and older.

Rural Transportation Program for Persons with Disabilities. The Persons with Disabilities (PwD) program provides discounted fares on shared-ride services to individuals who do not have access to other publicly funded transportation. To qualify for the reduced fare, persons with disabilities must present proof of disability to the local shared-ride provider in their county.

Until recently, the PwD program had been authorized by the Fixed Route Transit line item in the State Budget Act and was funded through the General Fund. Act 44 of 2007 (Sec 1516 (B)) established the shared-ride program for persons with disabilities in statute, which also provided that community transportation systems could be reimbursed for up to 85 percent of the fare. As in the original program, only shared-ride transportation providers outside of Allegheny and Philadelphia are eligible for financial assistance.²

Funding for the program comes from the newly established Public Transportation Trust Fund. The PTTF consists of five separate accounts—the Programs of Statewide Significance account supports the PwD program. Primary revenue sources for the PTTF are a 4.4 percent share of the state sales tax, proceeds from the lease agreement with the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, and transfers from the Lottery Fund. For FY 2007-08, \$7.8 million was dedicated to PwD.

¹Under Act 44, proceeds from the Lottery Fund are transferred to the Public Transportation Transit Fund for distribution by PennDOT.

²Allegheny and Philadelphia are not included in this program because of their extensive fixed route networks and complementary paratransit service.

In FY 2006-07, all but 16 of the 65 eligible counties provided shared-ride services to persons with disabilities. The PwD counties provided 172,385 shared-ride passenger trips, about 3 percent of all shared-ride trips other than in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties.

Many (30) county PwD programs only began during 2006-07 and therefore had low ridership levels. The 16 remaining counties without shared-ride services for persons with disabilities are scheduled to begin programs in FY 2007-08. Exhibit 1 shows the counties with a PwD program and the year the service started.

Other Shared-ride Services. Shared-ride providers also provide transportation services to Medical Assistance recipients to travel to medical appointments; to mental health/mental retardation clients traveling to sheltered workshops, alternative programs, or mental health facilities; and to other persons aged 18-59 who meet the income guidelines needing transportation to social service appointments. All these services are funded through various programs within the Department of Public Welfare. Shared-ride providers may also enter into agreements with other agencies to provide transportation services, such as for Welfare-to-Work clients.

Current Program Costs

In FY 2006-07, the shared-ride providers reported operating costs of \$143.3 million to provide 8.65 million passenger trips, for an average cost of \$16.56 per passenger trip. Of this amount, the Commonwealth paid \$67.6 million out of the Lottery Fund for shared-rides for older persons and \$2.1 million out of the Public Transit Transportation Fund for shared-rides for persons with disabilities.

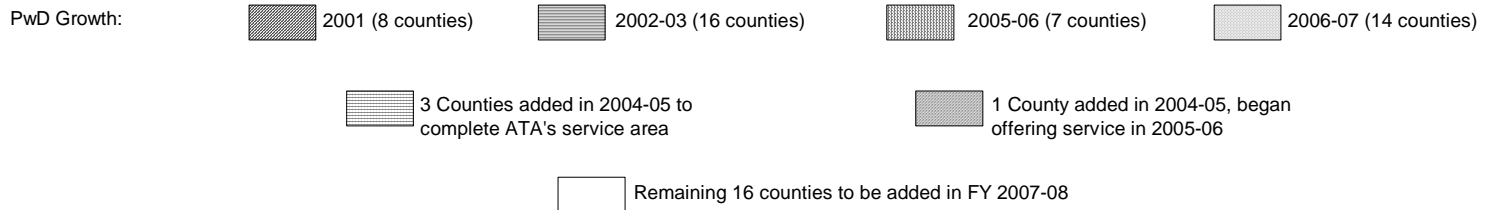
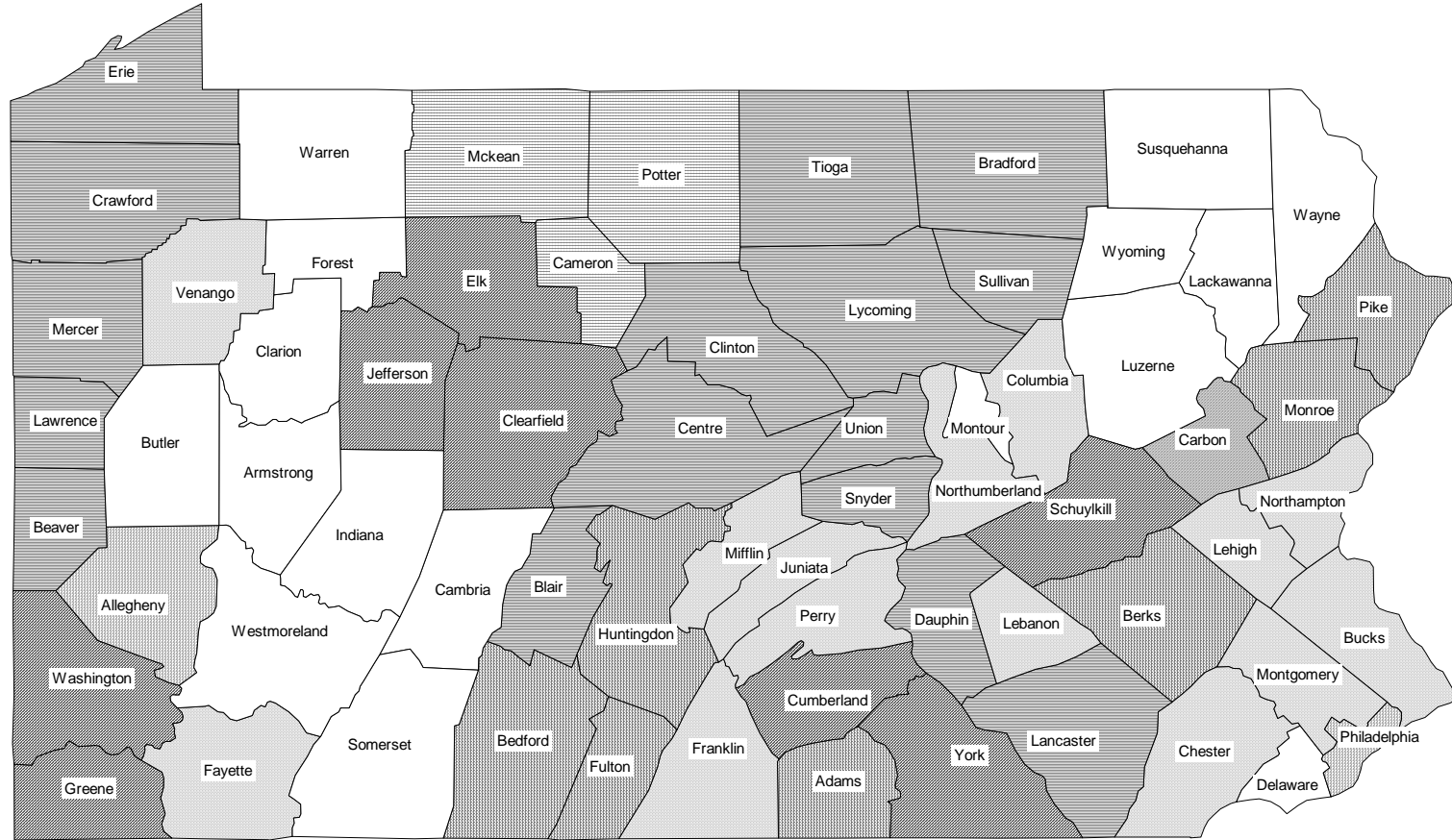
Additionally in FY 2006-07, \$18.4 million was collected directly from passengers: \$5.5 million from seniors 65 and older and \$13.0 million from passengers under age 65. In addition, \$40.6 million was collected from agencies such as the Department of Public Welfare (for both 65+ and under 65 trips).

Hours of Operation

The shared-ride operators establish their own hours of operation. As shown in Table 1, 21 of the Commonwealth's 52 shared-ride operators that are eligible for the PwD program provide weekday service that ends prior to 6 p.m. At the other extreme, two providers (Lycoming/Clinton and York Counties) provide service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Exhibit 1

Persons With Disabilities Rural Transportation Program



Source: Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Table 1

Pennsylvania Shared-ride Service Times

	Number of Providers Offering This <u>Service Time</u>
Service ends prior to 6 p.m.	21
Service to 6 p.m., but no evening hours	11
Weekday evening hours, but service ends prior to 9 p.m. ...	4
Weekday evening hours with service until at least 9 p.m.....	9
At least four hours of Saturday service	20
At least four hours of Sunday service	11

Source: Developed by LBFC staff from PennDOT reports.

Cost of Providing Evening and Weekend Shared-ride Services to Persons With Disabilities

Table 2 shows our estimate of how much additional (over FY 2006-07 costs) it would cost shared-ride providers to provide shared-ride services during evenings and weekends.

Table 2

Additional Estimated Cost to Provide Shared-ride Services During Evenings and Weekends^a
(\$Millions)

Extend weekday service to 6 p.m. for an additional 28 agencies ^b	\$ 4.9
Weekday evening service from 6–9 p.m. for an additional 43 agencies ^c	13.4
Saturday service for an additional 32 agencies ^d	4.0
Sunday service for an additional 41 agencies ^e	<u>4.8</u>
Total additional estimated cost to provide evening and weekend service for all shared-ride providers	\$27.1

^aDoes not include Philadelphia or Allegheny Counties because they are not eligible for the PwD program.

^bTwenty-four agencies currently provide weekday service until at least 6 p.m., so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to extend service to 6 p.m. for those 28 agencies that currently stop weekday operations prior to 6 p.m.

^cNine agencies currently provide weekday service until at least 9 p.m., so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to extend service to 9 p.m. for those agencies that currently either provide no regular weekday evening service (39 agencies) or that currently provide evening services that stop prior to 9 p.m. (4 agencies).

^dTwenty agencies currently provide at least four hours of Saturday service, so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to provide at least four hours of Saturday service.

^eEleven agencies currently provide at least four hours of Sunday service, so there would be no additional costs incurred for these agencies. The costs shown here are the additional costs that would be needed to provide at least four hours of Sunday service (all but one of the agencies that provide Sunday service offer at least four hours of service).

Source: Developed by LB&FC staff.

Of this additional \$27.1 million, the Commonwealth's share would be approximately \$23 million (85 percent). Given that few Medical Assistance recipients would be traveling to medical appointments and few MH/MR clients would be traveling to sheltered workshop programs during evening and weekend hours, it is likely that most—perhaps in the neighborhood of 75 percent—of these additional costs would come from the Lottery Fund, with most of the remaining costs coming from the PTF.

Our estimates are based on several assumptions:

- 1. All counties (except Allegheny and Philadelphia) would provide service to persons with disabilities.** We assumed all counties will provide service to persons with disabilities. In FY 2006-07, all but 16 of the 65 eligible counties provided subsidized shared-ride services to persons with disabilities. In the 16 counties that do not yet have a PwD program and the 30 counties that only began their programs in FY 2006-07, we estimated the number of PwD trips that will be needed by applying the same ratio (number of shared-ride trips for persons with disabilities to total number of shared-ride trips) as in the counties that have established PwD programs.
- 2. To provide evening service, all counties would also need to provide afternoon service to 6 p.m.** Many (21) counties currently stop service before 6 p.m., often at 4:30 or 5 p.m. For counties that stop service before 6 p.m., we estimated the cost to extend service to 6 p.m. by multiplying the agency's current average hourly cost by the number of additional hours required to provide service to 6 p.m.
- 3. Reported costs per vehicle hour would not change significantly during evening and weekend hours.** Several providers told us they would need to pay an additional shift differential to drivers who worked evenings and weekends. We did not factor in such additional costs. We also did not reduce dispatch or other administrative costs for weekend and evening service. Instead, we used each agencies' current average cost per vehicle hour when calculating the cost of additional evening and weekend hours.
- 4. Trip demand in those counties that do not provide evening and weekend service would be similar to trip demand in those counties that do currently provide evening and weekend service.** We used questionnaire information from those counties that currently provide evening and weekend service to develop an estimate of the percentage of total trips that would likely occur during weekdays (86 percent), evenings (7 percent), Saturdays (5 percent) and Sundays (2 percent). We used

these percentages to estimate the number of evening and weekend trips that would need to be provided by each shared-ride provider across the state.

- 5. Relative trip efficiency (passenger trips per vehicle hour) in those counties that do not provide evening and weekend service would be similar to the relative trip efficiency in those counties that do currently provide evening and weekend service.** We used questionnaire information from those counties that currently provide evening and weekend service to develop an estimate of trip efficiency for weekdays (2.66 passenger trips per vehicle hour), evenings (1.17 passenger trips per vehicle hour), Saturdays (1.43 passenger trips per vehicle hour), and Sundays (0.85 passenger trips per vehicle hour). We applied these rates to each agencies' actual passenger trip per vehicle hour rate to develop efficiency rates for each agency for each period of service. We used these individual rates, together with our estimate of the number of trips required during each time period, to estimate the required number of vehicle hours for each agency to provide evening and weekend service. This level of complexity was necessary because efficiency (together with the estimated number of passenger trips and the average cost per vehicle hour) is an important factor in estimating total costs.
- 6. Services would be provided to all eligible shared-ride participants, not just for persons with disabilities.** House Resolution 631 only refers to the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) shared-ride program. We asked the county transit agencies if they thought it feasible to provide extended shared-ride service to persons with disabilities, but not to others who use shared-ride services (such as elderly, Medical Assistance, and MH/MR clients). Virtually all the transit agencies reported that, if extended hours are provided, they should be provided to everyone eligible for the shared-ride program, both for practical (more passengers per trip) and fairness (program should be open to everyone) reasons. Moreover, PennDOT's shared-ride policy directs that service must be uniformly provided to all user groups, otherwise it is considered exclusive ridership and not eligible for reimbursement.

Additional Factors to Consider in Providing Evening and Weekend Shared-ride Services

Though costs are the primary consideration in any decision to expand the shared-ride program, county shared-ride providers noted several additional and related factors that should be considered, including:

Lack of Demand. The lack of demand for evening and weekend services was cited as a key concern by almost every shared-ride provider. Without sufficient demand, efficiency (passenger trips per vehicle hour) suffers. For example, our estimates—which are based on information the shared-ride providers reported on our questionnaire regarding passenger trips—show that weekday trips would cost an average of about \$14.25 per passenger trip; evening trips, \$32.40 per passenger trip; Saturdays, \$26.51 per passenger trip; and Sundays, \$44.60 per passenger trip.

The two primary reasons cited by shared-ride providers for low demand are: (1) few Medical Assistance and other medical trips and (2) senior centers and sheltered workshop and similar programs for persons with mental illness and mental retardation typically do not operate during evenings and weekends. Without these core groups, it appears it will be difficult, at least in many counties, to generate sufficient ridership to maintain efficient operations.

One provider indicated they would be hesitant to begin offering evening and weekend hours out of concern that, if little demand existed, they would eventually have to revoke the service, which would not reflect well on their operations.

Recruiting Drivers and Dispatchers. Another concern voiced by many of the shared-ride providers was the difficulty in attracting drivers and dispatchers to work during evenings and weekends. Several providers noted that their drivers often do not want to work evening and weekend hours and that, even if they could find drivers, they would need to pay a substantial shift differential for weekend and evening hours. One provider estimated they would need to raise the amount they pay from \$8/hour, which is what they currently pay their daytime drivers, to \$15/hour for evening and weekend drivers.

Safety. Several providers voiced safety concerns over discharging elderly and disabled persons at curbside after dark and having them negotiate their way home, particularly in unsafe neighborhoods. The need for a safe place to wait for the bus was also a concern, particularly with regard to evening hours.

Concerns were also expressed over the difficulties in servicing buses that are involved in accidents and breakdowns during weekend and evening hours.

Intercounty Service

In addition to evening and weekend hours, House Resolution 631 also directed us to assess the feasibility of requiring shared-ride providers to offer intercounty service.

We found that many counties already provide intercounty service, either because they are a multi-county service provider (e.g., STEP, which serves both Ly-

coming and Clinton Counties), because they have entered into reciprocal agreements with neighboring counties, or simply because they are willing to provide rides into a neighboring county.³ PennDOT, while it encourages transportation outside of county borders, emphasized that this is a local decision.

Issues and concerns regarding intercounty service include:

Reciprocal Agreements. Of the 26 providers who responded to our questionnaire, 20 indicated they provide at least some intercounty service, although often-times the service is very limited. Of the 20 providers who indicated they provide intercounty service, only 6 reported they had a formal reciprocal agreement with a contiguous county to provide such service.

One county provider stated that although they had had an agreement with a contiguous county, it was “abruptly” terminated and the provider is no longer allowed to pick up passengers from that county. The agency noted that it has no legal authority or approval from PennDOT to pick up passengers that live in another county without authorization from that county. PennDOT officials agree with that interpretation: unless there is a reciprocal agreement, transit providers are only allowed to provide trips to residents of their own county.

Length and cost of rides. Several transit agencies reported that they provide intercounty service but restrict how far into the county they travel. These restrictions exist, in part, because PennDOT has placed a cap of \$34 (85 percent of a \$40 fare) on the amount it will reimburse a shared-ride provider per passenger trip. As a result, the most a provider can receive to transport a senior or person with disabilities is \$40.⁴ Long intercounty trips, particularly if they involve only one or two passengers, can thus place a financial burden on the provider. Several providers noted that if they were to provide intercounty service, they would need to place limits on the length of such trips.

Coordinating Service and Fares With Other Counties. Another way transit agencies provide intercounty service is to coordinate schedules so that riders can be dropped off and picked up by the other county at or near the county line. This approach requires at least some degree of coordination in fares and schedules between the two counties.

³PUC regulations allow shared-ride providers to cross county boundaries as long as the service is being provided to the residents of that county. Commonwealth Court has similarly ruled that service provided by a county to the residents of that county is allowed to extend beyond the county boundaries, regardless of trip purpose.

⁴For an agency trip such as Medical Assistance, the provider can receive more.

III. Appendices

APPENDIX A

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 631 Session of 2006

INTRODUCED BY GEORGE, MARCH 7, 2006

INTRODUCED AS NONCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION UNDER RULE 35,
MARCH 7, 2006

A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to
2 conduct a study on the feasibility of increasing the State
3 contribution to the persons with disabilities shared-ride
4 pilot program and expanding the persons with disabilities
5 shared-ride pilot program to include night and weekend hours
6 and intercounty transportation.

7 WHEREAS, The provisions of 75 Pa.C.S. Ch. 80 Subch. A, added
8 by Act 75 of 2001, established a shared-ride pilot program for
9 persons with disabilities; and

10 WHEREAS, This shared-ride program assists individuals in
11 reaching such essential obligations as medical and dental
12 appointments, religious services and places of employment; and

13 WHEREAS, This shared-ride program has provided invaluable
14 assistance to numerous persons with disabilities across this
15 Commonwealth; and

16 WHEREAS, In recent months, automobile fuel costs have
17 increased dramatically, thereby placing a financial burden on
18 counties that administer this shared-ride program; and

19 WHEREAS, Many essential obligations occur during night and

1 weekend hours and require intercounty travel; therefore be it
2 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives direct the
3 Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study on
4 the feasibility of increasing the State contribution to the
5 persons with disabilities shared-ride pilot program and
6 expanding the persons with disabilities shared-ride program to
7 include night and weekend hours and intercounty travel; and be
8 it further

9 RESOLVED, That the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee
10 report its findings to the General Assembly no later than two
11 years after the adoption of this resolution.

APPENDIX B

Response to This Report



RECEIVED MAY 05 2008

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

OFFICE OF
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

April 30, 2008

Mr. Philip R. Durgin, Executive Director
Legislative Budget and Finance Committee
P. O. Box 8737
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-8737

Dear Mr. Durgin:

Secretary Biehler has asked me to respond to your April 11, 2008, letter. That letter transmitted the draft report on the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee's (LB & FC) study of the feasibility of extending shared-ride service hours to include evenings and weekends as directed by House Resolution 631. Thank you for giving the Department an opportunity to comment on the draft report.

This type of analysis is especially difficult because of the wide variety of service levels provided by the many shared-ride transportation operators in the Commonwealth. The information you gathered and the methodology used to quantify the financial implications of service expansion provide a fair estimate of additional operating costs as well as an assessment of operational concerns. Thank you for taking time to meet with us during the project to gain an understanding of the service, the programs and the Department's concerns.

The report indicates that the cost of service would increase and that the Commonwealth would bear the majority of those costs. It is important to note that to the passengers, the increased cost of service would be evidenced in higher fares, even if they are only paying a portion of the higher fare. Our experience with fare increases is that as fares rise, many individuals either can no longer afford trips or must choose to take fewer trips. The result could be that while evening and weekend service is available, some individuals would not be able to use either the expanded service or the previously available service because their out-of-pocket costs across the board would be higher.

You may also want to consider the potential capital expenses for expanded services—both hours of service and longer distance services across county lines. If shared-ride vehicles provide additional service in miles and hours of operation, those vehicles will have to be replaced more quickly. The estimated useful life of a vehicle is measured both in years and vehicle miles. In addition, if more trips are taken out of county, current fleet capacities may not be sufficient—a vehicle deployed outside of the county removes that vehicle from providing in-county trips. To accommodate both needs, an operator may need additional vehicles. We currently receive grant requests for vehicle replacements totaling over \$8 million annually, while available funding totals approximately \$6 million. There is no funding available for fleet expansion.

Mr. Philip R. Durgin
April 30, 2008
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Again, I appreciate the opportunity to comment. LaVerne Collins and I are pleased to attend the meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. on Wednesday, May 14, 2008. If you need anything else, please contact LaVerne Collins at (717) 787-1214.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby L. Fauver', with several overlapping strokes and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Toby L. Fauver, A.I.C.P.
Deputy Secretary for
Local and Area Transportation