Transit Manager Peer Roundtable: Employment Transportation Focus Summary

March 13, 2025

There were 21 participants from 18 states. This roundtable focused on strategies for providing transportation to work for persons with disabilities, as well as hiring persons with disabilities in rural and tribal transportation agencies. Access the presentation slides, which contain links to many resources.

Panelists

- Dr. Bryna Helfer, Director of Employment Support and Innovative Partnerships, Office of Disability and Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor
- Dr. Scott Michael Robertson, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor
- Dr. Christopher Button, Supervisory Policy Advisor, Workforce System Policy, Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is one of the few non-regulatory agencies to advance people with disabilities. Its purpose is to develop and promote policy and coordinate with employers at all levels of government and to increase workplace success for people with disabilities and individuals with mental health conditions, which includes people with mental health conditions. ODEP also assists individuals and businesses and states adopt policies and practices to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The staff thinks broadly about disability employment, recognizing that a person's career isn't simply driven by their education or training.

Questions and Answers

Q: What is your experience currently supporting people with disabilities to employment in your communities?

A: A health care system that provides transportation in South Carolina South Carolina partnered with a Medicaid broker, veterans, nursing homes, adult daycares, Centers for Independent Living,

American Job Center, vocational rehab, and things of that nature. These services are for all needs and include a dollar ride program to work. Riders who move from rehab to somewhere else can still access the service. It has proved to be a very vital part of the quality of life that people have access to in their area.

In Oklahoma, people in some of counties purchase punch cards, which can get them started until they get their first paycheck. There is a work ride program where that charges a dollar per ride, reduced fare for the individuals going to or from work destinations. Some disabled workshops partner with a transit system that can pick them up at their homes and take them to the workshop and back. They had a contract with the Developmental Disability Services Division that provides a community waiver for individuals with developmental disabilities needing to go to work. That ended when they wanted the transit agency to pay to be a vendor, which the agency did not want to do.

A transit agency in Washington State has a job access program that doesn't delineate between whether the passenger has a disability or not, but they do have passengers with disabilities using the service. They use 5311 and Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) funds and subsidize it from the local sales taxes. They have quite a few people that really need the program who have no other way to get to and from work. It bookends the rest of their services - If someone is job access eligible, the pass works for any service but it's the only pass that would work to go really early in the morning or really late in the evenings. During the day, they could go on dial-a-ride or fixed route with that job access pass.

A Tribal transit system in a very rural area is equipped with all the handicap accessible wheelchair ramps and has certain routes specifically for people that want to like commute. They park their vehicles and get onto the commuter buses.

Q: What kind of jobs are you all hiring for and what's your experience with hiring people with disabilities? Are you doing it and how's it going?

A: A Tribal transit system shared that most of their drivers are older adults and some of them have some issues getting around. Dr. Helfer said that the Ask Jan website might be of use and help for older drivers who might have some limitations in lifting or bending.

A rural transit system in Oklahoma works with everybody that they can based on the tasks or the duties of a driver.

Mississippi DOT is working to recruit people coming back for second chance/reentry and obtain their driver's license. The program started out used a shelter grant and has grown also into helping persons with disabilities and other populations and it's been it's been tremendously successful in terms of innovation from starting from something smaller and then branching out.

A rural Western Massachusetts transit agency is doing a lot of work hiring people with vision impairments as well as physical disabilities and hearing impairments for their dispatch. They have set up their entire call center and their dispatch center with accessibility, which is a nice model of how to do that. They started with just one employee that needed it. And then now they have it set up so they can hire people into their systems to do that call center work as well.

One transit agency has a veteran initiative program to hire more veterans. Another agency is hiring shuttle drivers, and they do hire with some limited disabilities. They have a recruitment department that conducts their recruiting. They have also hired drivers through vocational rehab.