

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Transit Administration**

[Docket # FTA-98-4343]

Job Access and Reverse Commute Program**AGENCY:** Federal Transit Administration, DOT.**ACTION:** Notice.

SUMMARY: The Department of Transportation is seeking public advice in implementing the Jobs Access and Reverse Commute Program authorized in Section 3037 of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). This notice also includes questions regarding the implementation of the Job Access/Reverse Commute Program. Responses to the questions posed are invited.

DATES: Comments must be submitted by September 18, 1998.

ADDRESS: Comments should be sent to the Department of Transportation, Docket # FTA-98-4343, Central Docket Office, PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Douglas Birnie, Program Manager, (202) 366-9157.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Program Preparation**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) intends to complete a program solicitation and guidelines by October 1, when FY 1999 funding becomes available. Funding availability in early FY 1999 will ensure that assistance provided pursuant to Section 3037 of TEA-21 may be applied in a timely fashion to support regional programs creating Job Access and Reverse Commute services. Limited funding, particularly in the initial years of the program, may affect funding availability for some applications.

Although implementing guidelines for the Job Access & Reverse Commute program are being developed, prospective applicants should review the legislative criteria as a guide to the preparation of programs for funding. Please note that the Job Access & Reverse Commute funding is predicated on the development of local partnerships. A collaborative transportation/human services planning process must be established to develop Job Access programs. This process should involve agencies implementing welfare and work force development programs, non-profit community based and faith-based organizations,

stakeholder representatives, employers and a variety of existing transportation providers and agencies. In larger urban areas, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) will select applicants and in smaller urbanized and rural areas, states will select applicants. The programs that are developed are to be regional in nature, although portions of the program can be targeted to specific areas within the region. An area may have one designated recipient for funds, but these funds may be passed to any number of subrecipients. An operating partnership involving consultation and use of existing public, private and non-profit transportation providers, including the area transit agency, is expected. Using the existing transportation infrastructure reduces start-up costs and enhances service sustainability. Finally, a financial partnership is encouraged among the stakeholders. The Job Access and Reverse Commute program requires a 50/50 match. This program is considered catalytic funding upon which to assemble additional human service, transportation and private resources to meet job access transportation needs.

Funding from other Federal programs may be used as match dollars. These include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Community Services Block grants through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Welfare to Work (WtW) grants through the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) as well as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant and HOPE VI Grants. TANF and WtW grants, when used as match, may be used only for new and expanded transportation services and cannot be used for construction or to subsidized current transportation operating expenses. Such funds also must supplement rather than supplant other State expenditures on transportation. Other transportation funds allocated to transportation agencies by DOT may also be used to address these transportation needs.

Public Consultation

DOT in conjunction with its other Federal partners desires to develop a Job Access & Reverse Commute program that is responsive to the needs of the stakeholders who are implementing welfare reform and transportation activities. We are seeking your advice on the questions listed below and other issues related to the implementation of the program. Although we will not be able to respond directly to individual

comments, we will address collectively the comments received when we issue the national program solicitation and guidelines. For the convenience of those individuals and organizations with computer access to the internet, you may submit your written comments to FTA home page web site, which may be reached at—<http://www.fta.dot.gov/wtw/japc>.

Additionally, any public interest organization seeking to elaborate upon its views with Departmental officials may request a meeting. Please contact Ms. Corine Hegland, U.S. Department of Transportation at (202) 366-8850.

Program Purpose

The Jobs Access and Reverse Commute Program provides competitive grants to local governments and non-profit organizations to develop transportation services to connect welfare recipients and low-income persons from their residence to employment and support services.

Program Features

Section 3037 of TEA-21 authorizes a Job Access and Reverse Commute program. Job Access projects provides transportation services to connect welfare recipients and low-income persons to jobs and activities related to employment. Reverse Commute projects provides the public transportation services to the general public that provide connections to suburban employment centers from urban centers, rural areas and other suburban locations.

- Criteria for selection include indication of the need for additional services as identified in the transportation plan and explanation of the extent to which services will address these needs.

Funding Features

- Split funded from both the Mass Transit Account and General Funds.
- Guaranteed funding (Mass Transit Account & general revenues) increases from \$50 million in 1999 to \$150 million in 2003.
- Not more than \$10 million per year may be used for reverse commute activities.
- Provides 50% Federal share.
- Other Federal transportation-eligible funds could be used to meet the local match, including TANF and WtW funding for Access to Jobs projects.

JOB ACCESS AND REVERSE COMMUTE GRANTS

[In millions]

	Year					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total Authorization	0	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$150	\$150
Guaranteed	0	50	75	100	125	150

Grant Award Factors

- The percentage of population that is welfare recipients.
- The need for additional services and the extent to which the proposed services will address those needs.
- Coordination with and use of existing transportation providers.
- Coordination with state welfare agencies implementing the TANF program.
- Use of innovative approaches.
- The presence of a regional plan and long term financing strategies.
- Consultation with the community to be served.
- The need for additional services identified in the regional transportation plan for reverse commute.

Eligible Costs

- Operating and capital expenses for Job Access transportation service.
- Funds promotion of employer-provided transportation, use of transit for non-traditional and transit voucher programs.

Eligible Applicants

- Local governments, non-profit organizations, and designated recipients [defined under 49 U.S.C. Section 5307(a)(2)].
- MPOs would designate applicants in urbanized areas above 200,000 population; states (state's chief executive officer) would designate applicants in urbanized areas of 200,000 population or lower and rural areas.

Job Access and Reverse Commute Program Implementation Questions

Funding Distribution & Program Focus

1. In FY 1999, funding for the Job Access/Reverse Commute Program may be limited to \$50 million. In light of funding constraints, what grant award strategy should be pursued? Should there be maximum or minimum grant sizes? Should grants vary by the size of the region, e.g., major areas with populations over one million, areas between 200,000 and one million, areas between 50,000 and 200,000, non-urbanized rural areas?
2. Should grants to support local Job Access programs be made on an annual

basis or on a multi-year basis covering several years worth of local activity? Annual multi-year financial grant commitments must be made subject to the availability of congressional appropriations.

3. Should Job Access and Reverse Commute funding be considered as one program where applicants can elect to reserve a percentage of their funds for reverse commute services—not tied to welfare recipients or low income person? Or, should the two components be treated as separate programs operating independently?

4. What steps should FTA take to encourage a broad range of groups, not limited to its normal mass transit partners, to participate in this program?

Eligibility Criteria

1. The legislation requires that all grants be subject to the terms and conditions of FTA's Formula (Section 5307) Program such as the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, labor protections and others. In light of these requirements, what obstacles does this present for non-traditional grant recipients? What actions, e.g., receiving funding as grantee subrecipients, are possible to ensure the participation of non-traditional recipients in the program?

2. The legislation allows FTA to fund capital and operating costs and clearly is directed to the development of new and expanded Job Access and Reverse Commute services. In addition, one of the factors for consideration in grant award criteria is the need for additional services.

What activities and services should be included as eligible? Should any activities or services be specifically excluded?

Welfare block grants (TANF & WtW) and other DOT funds can be used to purchase transit passes for welfare recipients and low income persons on existing transit routes and services. Should Job Access and Reverse Commute also be available to fund transit passes?

3. What criteria should be used for screening candidates? The legislation spells out eight (8) factors that must be considered in awarding grants (see

program description). Do these factors need additional definition? How should they be weighted in the rating process? Are there other criteria that should be addressed? Certain populations suffer disproportionate unemployment rates. How should these "hard-to-serve" populations be treated in the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program?

Planning and Evaluation

1. The Job Access and Reverse Commute Program provides funding for initiating programs whose long-term viability will depend upon coordinating services and programming traditional sources of funding. This will necessitate coordinating and integrating the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program with existing DOT, DHHS, DOL and HUD funding programs. What issues arise in achieving the blending of resources from several Federal programs? What incentives and assurances could be provided to facilitate this?

2. The legislation requires that MPOs select applicants within urbanized areas with populations over 200,000 and that states select applicants for urbanized areas with populations at or below 200,000, as well as rural areas. How should this selection process by MPOs and states take place and what documentation of participation should be required to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in project selection and development? In particular, how should low income community representatives be involved in developing plans? Should sign-offs be required?

3. The legislation has a number of planning requirements for the Job Access/Reverse Commute Program. For example, applicants must document a regional transportation plan and any project must be developed by a coordinated Transportation/Human Services planning process.

Should applicants address each requirement separately or together? What evidence of a collaborative decisionmaking process at the local level among transportation, employment and other human service organizations would satisfy these requirements?

4. The legislation has a number of coordination requirements. Applicants must coordinate with the state agency that administers the state welfare program. Applicants also must coordinate with affected transit grant recipients and receive approval of such grant recipients. What guidance should be given? How should this be documented?

5. The General Accounting Office must evaluate the effectiveness of this

program every six months, while DOT must prepare an evaluation report within two years. What specific performance measures should DOT use in assessing the effectiveness of this program? How could such data be obtained and reported?

[Examples might include the number of additional jobs that became accessible with reasonable commute times, the number of new riders or new services,

or some combination of the two, and area coverage by time period]

6. What other comments or suggestions can you provide to ensure a successful Job Access/Reverse Commute Program?

Issued: August 25, 1998.

Gordon J. Linton,

Administrator.

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