

Testimony
Senate Bill 2012 – Department of Transportation
State Aid for Public Transit Budget
Senate Appropriations
January 11, 2021

Chairman Holmberg and members of the committee, my name is Pat Hansen. I am the executive director of South Central Adult Services in Valley City. I am also a member of the North Dakota Senior Service Providers and Dakota Transit Association. I am testifying in support of State Aid for Public Transit funds in SB 2012.

I would first like to express my appreciation to the Department of Transportation. They submitted and received a federal grant for \$15,000,000 to replace outdated vehicles throughout the State. This funding will bring our fleet up to federal standards for the first time in 20 years. Their efforts are greatly appreciated!

The State Aid for Public Transit funding we receive is used to match federal dollars for operating transit services and as local match for purchasing vehicles for use in public transit. If we do not receive adequate state funding for match, we may be unable to access all of the federal dollars we are appropriated.

South Central Adult Services provides the same service in the very rural areas of North Dakota that are available in the larger cities. The very rural counties we serve, which include LaMoure, Foster, Logan, McIntosh, Griggs, Emmons and Nelson provided 40,509 rides this past fiscal year. Barnes County (which is our "urban" county) provided 51,547 rides. Local service is provided to communities within the counties, and transit is available from the southwestern counties to Bismarck 5 days per week, to Jamestown 3 days per week, from our eastern

counties to Fargo 5 days per week and to Grand Forks 5 days per week. We are transporting dialysis patients from Strasberg, Linton, Wishek, Ashley, McVille, Lakota, Carrington and Valley City on a regular basis. We have made many trips to Fargo and Bismarck with patients for radiation treatments and chemotherapy in the last few months.

That is only the tip of the iceberg. We provide rides for local medical appointments, rides to work, school, daycare, Head Start, and many rides for local grocery shopping, hair appointments, rides to senior centers and rides for nursing homes and assisted living facilities. We currently have 16 full-time and 43 part-time transit employees. The cost of personnel has increased dramatically over the past few years. We have had to increase wages in order to compete with other employers in our area and have increased hours to keep up with the demand for services. Even taking the impact on the residents of our counties out of the picture, if we do not receive adequate funding, the staff reductions in these rural counties would be devastating to our employees and to the small rural communities where there are very few jobs available.

The Executive Budget estimated there would be \$8.4 million available in the State Aid for Public Transit fund in the 2020-21 biennium. In the past biennium, transit providers divided \$7.8 million. Even when providers were at the \$10 million level, South Central had to provide \$160,000 local dollars, or 13% of our budget to maintain services. This concerns me on several levels as many of the people we serve do not have other options for transportation. Some of our rural riders would be

forced to move to locations where medical services such as dialysis and cancer treatments are available. Many of the people we serve do not have vehicles.

Transit providers would like to see us get back to the \$10 million funding level that we received in the 2014-15 biennium.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.