



PROTECTION & ADVOCACY PROJECT

400 EAST BROADWAY, SUITE 409

BISMARCK, ND 58501-4071

701.328.2950

House Transportation Committee

Senate Bill SCR 4004– March 16, 2023

Testimony of Micah Olson, P&A Position-In Favor

My name is Micah Olson. I am attorney at Protection and Advocacy. I recently moved to Bismarck from Minot, where I worked as an Independent Living Advocate at Independence, Inc., the Center for Independent Living in Minot. I drive my own vehicle using a hand control, so I do not rely on public transportation myself, but I took the Minot City Bus twice as part of my work. I also worked with several consumers who took public transportation. I am in favor of SCR 4004.

In Minot, I found that public transportation works well for some things, but there are many limitations. In Minot, there are two choices for public transportation: The Minot City Bus, which runs on fixed routes, and Souris Basin Transportation, which provides paratransit in the Minot area. The Minot city bus operates from 7 am to 7 pm Monday through Friday. It does not operate on the weekends. Souris Basin Transportation has longer hours than the city bus, but has limited hours on the weekend. Souris Basin also requires consumers to schedule a ride at least 24 hours in advance. Consumers have reported to me that 24 hours in advance is often not soon enough to guarantee that a ride will be available.

When I took the Minot city bus, I found that it was convenient and easy to use for wheelchair users. The drivers were professional and knew how to use the lift and secure my wheelchair on the bus. It would be a good option for a wheelchair user who did not drive.

Even though the Minot city bus was useful, several consumers reported significant limitations. The bus did not go to all areas of Minot, including to many new apartment buildings. Newer apartment buildings are often more accessible than older apartments and they are often better options for Disabled people. Recently in my job at Independence Inc., I worked with a wheelchair user to find an apartment. He does not drive. We found an apartment that worked for him, but it was not on the bus route. He would need to rely on Souris Basin Transportation for transportation. Another consumer who uses a wheelchair chose a less accessible apartment that was on the bus route over a more accessible apartment that was not on the bus route. She had concerns about being able to access Souris Basin when she needed it and wanted to have access to the city bus, which has a reliable schedule.

Although the Minot city bus has a reliable schedule, its hours limit its usefulness. Someone who has a typical daytime work schedule could use it to get to and from work, but it would not be useful for someone who works past 7 pm or on weekends. It is also not useful for people who run errands on weekends. A person who relies on the city bus would have to plan to do errands during the week, which could be difficult for someone who works full-time.

Consumers who relied on Souris Basin Transportation also reported some difficulties. Sometimes their work hours did not align with Souris Basin's schedule. They might arrive to work very early or late. Sometimes they would have to leave work early if Souris Basin came early. Consumers also reported not being able to schedule rides on the weekends, even if they attempted to schedule far in advance.

Souris Basin also does not allow for sudden or spontaneous trips. This became a more significant problem in August when Central Cab, the only taxi service in Minot, closed. This left the city bus and Souris Basin as the only public transportation services in Minot.

Unlike the Minot City bus, BisMan Transit does operate from 8 am to 7 pm on Saturday, which is helpful for working people who need to run errands on the weekend. It has several fixed routes. I reviewed the routes on the BisMan Transit website and found that the bus routes go to many places throughout the city, but there are gaps. For example, my apartment building, which I chose because it was new and accessible, is approximately 1 mile from the nearest bus route. If I did not drive or had car trouble my only transportation option would be paratransit, which might not be available when I need it.

Public transportation should be studied to determine the best ways to make it effective and efficient for those who use it. Increasing hours, days of service, and adding more bus routes would make a big difference for people who rely on public transportation. Adding more paratransit vehicles and drivers may also increase the paratransit system's effectiveness.