

Chairman Ruby and Members of the House Transportation Committee-

My name is Sargianna Wutzke and I am writing in support of SCR 4004. As a Lead Operations Officer for Community Options, an agency that provides services to individuals with developmental disabilities, I see how much of a struggle public transportation specifically para transit can be for individuals that we serve at our agency.

Community Options serves individuals throughout the state of North Dakota. No matter what part of North Dakota an individual lives in one of their biggest concerns is public transportation. I have heard many stories from individuals throughout the state with a number of concerns with paratransit in particular. I think that North Dakota should welcome a study where the different aspects of transportation are examined and see what needs to be done to better serve the elderly and individuals with developmental disabilities who utilize this service.

Some of the concerns that are a theme throughout the state include wait/pick up times, hours of operation on normal days, hours of operations on holidays and how far in advance rides need to be scheduled.

At least weekly, I hear stories of people and their concerns with wait times. About a month ago, there was an individual who utilized transit to attend a legislative working group in Bismarck and the individual was supposed to be picked up at 11:30am. His paratransit ride arrived at 1:15pm. The meeting ended at 11:30am that day and thankfully there was someone who had access to the building that could wait with him until his paratransit could arrive. This individual utilizes an electric wheelchair, and this was his only option for transportation. There is another individual who utilizes an electric wheelchair who works a job in the community and has had to wait up to an hour and a half after his ride is scheduled for his pickup after work on at least a weekly basis. These are just two examples of the struggle with wait times. I have many more of the same stories from individuals throughout the state.

On weekends like many others, I do most of my shopping and activities with friends and family. I couldn't imagine not having any access to get somewhere but that is a reality for many of the individuals that we have that access paratransit. On Sundays in the cities of Grand Forks, Wahpeton, Devil's Lake, and Williston there is no paratransit. In Jamestown, individuals need to be picked up by noon for their last ride, Bismarck paratransit runs until 2:30pm and in Minot it runs until 3pm. None of the paratransit systems in North Dakota run past 6pm on Sundays. There are many activities that individuals cannot participate in due to the limited hours of paratransit particularly on weekends. I think these hours need to be examined because everyone regardless of mobility concerns should be able to attend activities such as concerts, plays, comedy shows and even supper with friends and family. Many of these activities happen in the evenings on weekends and thus individuals who would need to use paratransit likely would not be able to participate.

Holidays are a time where many people spend time with their family. Para transits across the state either have no access on many holidays or very limited hours that are accessible on these days. For example, Fargo and Jamestown para transit do not run on most holidays including Thanksgiving, Easter and Christmas Day and only run until 5pm on Christmas Eve. The paratransit in Bismarck runs from 10am-2pm on holidays. These hours are very limited at best and many times individuals we serve are not able to spend the time they want with their family during these important times.

All the paratransit systems in North Dakota require at least a 24-hour advance scheduling of rides some needing as much as 48 hours in advance. This limits any type of last-minute plans with friends to go out for coffee, supper or to a movie. I could not even imagine a friend calling me to meet up for supper and I am free and would love to meet with them, but I could not due to them wanting to meet that day and I need to set up a ride at least 24 hours in advance.

I believe a study that will evaluate statewide challenges to system services and barriers to expanding the state's accessible transportation infrastructure is something that is very needed in our state and thus I am in support of SCR 4004.

Sargianna Wutzke, Bismarck