

Senators Clemens, Conley, Larsen, Paulson, and Rummel:

My name is Susan Dingle, and I am writing in support of SCR 4004, “directing the Legislative Management to consider studying accessible transportation in the state for older adults and individuals with disabilities.” My only reservation on this resolution as it currently stands is that it only says “to consider studying accessible transportation.” In my opinion, it should state that it “**directs the Legislative Management to study accessible transportation** for older adults and individuals with disabilities.” [emphasis added]

Accessible transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities is not some favor or perk that cities, local governments, and states may opt to offer if they’re feeling flush or in a good mood. It is a necessity. As the language of the resolution makes clear, much progress has been made in providing accessible transportation, but additional improvements and expansion are necessary in order to offer full access and mobility.

Currently, mass transit and paratransit services across the nation are suffering setbacks. Hiring enough qualified drivers and retaining them is a major difficulty, as is hiring and retaining workers in many business and service segments of the economy. Maintaining up-to-date vehicles in good working order and following an established rotation to replace vehicles as they age out in terms of miles driven and overall mechanical condition is another. These are ongoing issues, and they were issues before the pandemic that have only increased in urgency since.

Additional issues have arisen that directly impact the ability of transportation agencies to offer accessible transportation in the state for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Some of the most important of these are:

- Need for adequate local, state, and federal government financial support. Higher mill levies, greater state subsidy, higher federal grants all may be needed to help raise driver pay and benefits to attract and retain drivers, to keep equipment in proper working order, and to provide rider access services relating to tracking their bus, paying via mobile devices, and scheduling pick-ups and drop-offs.
- Need for transportation authorities to designate and reserve pick-up and drop-off spots at fixed stops, timing points, and large-use spots (e.g., senior and disabled living facilities, medical centers, hospitals, shopping centers). Need, too, for bus shelters, sidewalks, and streets up to the curb to be fully plowed and accessible to persons using canes, walkers, and wheelchairs or who have stability issues.
- Need for traffic signals especially at intersections next to transit stops to be timed to allow safe pedestrian crossing to get to and from the pick-up and drop-off spot. Need for stops to be provided at high-use buildings and businesses even if the street features high-speed levels. Examples in Bismarck, for example, are the Social Security Building and the strip mall at 43rd street, Job Service ND (on Century Avenue), CashWise on south 12th Street and Bismarck Expressway, and all of the Dan’s SuperValu grocery stores, all of which are off high-traffic streets.
- Need for public policy and transportation planning and philosophy to support accessible transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities as a right and an established part of infrastructure and all discussions of territorial expansion, annexation, and redevelopment.

Thank you for the time you have given to reading this and other testimony and in preparing for discussion on SCR 4004. **Please vote in favor of it, but with the proviso that the Legislative Management be directed to study accessible transportation**—not just to consider studying it.

Sincerely,

Susan Dingle, District 35; homeowner, taxpayer, voter