



2005 WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON AGING: *Resounding Endorsement of Need for Transportation Options*



The resolution endorsing the need for more transportation options for older people was voted the number three priority at the White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA), held December 11-14, 2005, in Washington, D.C.

This is a victory for the people, and especially those of you who participated in our Senior Transportation Conference — a designated White House Conference on Aging listening session — at EXPO 2005. Throughout 2005, participants in pre-White House Conference on Aging events across the country, including ours, spoke of the need for more transportation for older people. Clearly, older people and their advocates knew what they need — good, efficient and affordable transportation alternatives and choices.

The resolution is a broad mandate with little detail. However, senior transportation advocates around the country must take this broad mandate and work to make a reality of the specific recommendations passed at the pre-White House Conference event at CTAA's EXPO in St. Louis (see below).

History of White House Conference on Aging

White House Conferences on Aging are legislatively mandated events that came into being in the mid-20th century as American demographics were shifting and the number of older people was increasing. These conferences are the way in which America speaks to the specific and evolving needs of its older citizens.

Although the first conference on aging to be designated as a White House conference was in 1961,

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Community Transportation Recommendations to the White House Conference on Aging

Similar Transportation Recommendations from Other Aging Organizations

- At the White House designated event sponsored by AARP, AgeLab of MIT and the U.S. Department of Transportation, the participants passed recommendations to increase federal investment in public transportation and to provide Medicare coverage of non-emergency medical transportation.
- The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging submitted a resolution to provide Medicare coverage for non-emergency medical transportation.
- The National Council on Aging submitted a resolution to support increased federal investment in public transportation with special attention to rural areas.

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the foundation was laid in 1950 when President Harry Truman directed the Federal Security Administration to hold a national conference on aging. There have been White House Conferences on Aging in 1961, 1971, 1981, 1995 and now 2005. The delegates typically debate and pass resolutions concerning issues significant to aging.

Through the years, White House Conferences on Aging have had significant influence on shaping policy discussions and the creation of programs. President Lyndon Johnson used the conference to create his bold vision with the development of the Older Americans Act, Medicare and a number of national nutrition programs.

Most White House Conferences on Aging have addressed transportation requesting increased support and funding for community and public transportation, and specific recommendations for coordination of senior transportation, better access to transportation, more rural transportation and more volunteer transportation programs.

Transportation was an important part of the 2005 Conference. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, acting as President Bush and Vice President Cheney's representative, delivered the keynote address opening the Conference.

This Conference was the first to have an exhibit and the U.S. Department of Transportation organized a huge display dubbed Mobility Matters, where the Community Transportation Association exhibited the design for a heated bus shelter as an example of universal design. The shelter was made for students at North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota, but it has all the features that older persons have requested in surveys. The design competition was sponsored by the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, North Dakota State University. See "Sheltering Passengers," by Tom Jirik, *Community Transportation* magazine, Fall 2004, pp. 37-47. 🚌

Our Recommendations to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging

On May 23, 2005 more than 200 transportation providers, passengers, advocates, social service providers, program planners, community organizers, gerontologists, local government officials and federal, state and local government staff attended the WHCOA Event. Twenty-one of the participants presented recommendations to be delivered to the Policy Committee of the White Conference on Aging. The participants voted on the recommendations, and the five receiving the most votes were sent to the WHCOA Policy Committee.



1) Medicare coverage of non-emergency medical transportation

As the law is currently written, Medicare funds only emergency transportation services. Older Americans need access to healthcare before a condition becomes critical, requiring an emergency room visit and possibly a costly ambulance ride. Changing the Medicare law to cover non-emergency medical transportation would encourage preventive and maintenance care measures that could save the Medicare program billions of dollars.

2) Increased transit investment with special attention to rural transportation needs

The population of older Americans is rapidly increasing, and most want to live independently as long as they can. Without options to driving, millions of older people will become isolated, unable to fully participate in their communities. We need to pay special attention to the transportation needs of rural older persons who live long distances from vital services and programs. Expanded mobility options can ensure both life-saving and life-enhancing connections that enable seniors to remain in their homes longer.

3) Legislation to provide liability coverage to transportation providers, especially for volunteer drivers

Rising insurance costs are forcing providers to cut back on services and threatening to drive some out of business. Volunteer drivers and volunteer escorts are an important complement to community transportation, especially for frail elders who need door-to-door or door-through-door service. Many programs, however, are prevented from using volunteers because adequate liability coverage is unavailable.

4) Fuel tax exemption for agencies serving older persons

The rising cost of fuel is cutting into the services that non-profit agencies are able to provide. Funding from government programs remains at the same levels or has decreased at the same time that the number of older persons needing transportation is increasing. Frequently, these agencies are the only source of transportation for low-income older persons in their service area. An exemption from the fuel tax would relieve some of the financial pressure on the agencies, and permit them to instead concentrate scarce resources on transportation services to older persons.

5) Coordination among agencies providing transportation that ensures a single point of entry for consumers

Navigating a community's transportation options can be complicated for many consumers, especially older persons, their adult children and caregivers as they wrestle with eligibility criteria and access. Agencies providing transportation should be required, as a condition of funding, to provide a single point of entry for their consumers — one phone call to learn what services are available to them and how to get on board.