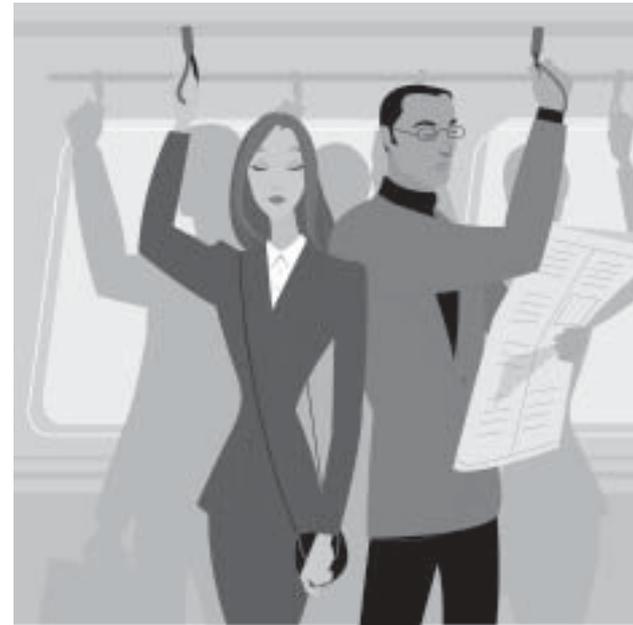


By Carolyn Jeskey, Beth Wilson and Scott Bogren  
(after getting to work on Washington Metro's S2 bus, Red Line train and the MARC commuter train)

# GOING TO WORK



Everyday in America millions of people board buses and vans, trains and subways, to get to work. And they do so in the smallest rural communities and biggest cities alike.

The American journey to work aboard public and community transportation is dynamic and vital. Whereas once suburb to center city commutes were the norm, today's commuters are just as likely to be heading from one suburban location to another, or from a rural region into an urban one. As these commutes have changed, so, too, has the nature of employment transportation, and the partnerships that invest in transit solutions.

Ninety-seven percent of all workers must leave home to access their jobs. Last year, more than half of all public and community transportation trips were work-related. Not surprisingly, commuter rail services lead the way. Demand-response service offered the lowest number of employment trips, but the overall percentage was still almost 20 percent.

In more than a dozen cities across the nation last year, more than one in five people made their journey to work everyday aboard public and community transportation. Some of these cities are obvious like New York, Chicago and Boston. Others include San Francisco, Pittsburgh and Atlanta. In rural America, journeys to work and job training consti-

tute 40 percent of all trips — a number that has nearly doubled since the early 1990s.

In the past six years, public and community transportation have played a crucial role in helping many Americans transition off welfare and public assistance and into work and training opportunities. In the wake of 1996's Welfare Reform, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century included the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program. This innovative program has helped invest millions of dollars in employment transportation around the country.

All these vital links are the result of a variety of partnerships that make employment transportation possible. In some cases, public partnerships and investments are the catalyst for trips to work; in others, partnerships between the public and private sectors are key. There are nearly as many innovative collaborations in work transportation as there are commuters themselves.

The journey to work is surely one of public and community transportation's most essential roles, but it can't be adequately measured by mere statistics and faceless data, with little regard for the actual people in the vehicles on their way to work or the real economic impact of having mobility services available to make these vital connections. In the following profiles we offer eight tales of employment transportation and its partnerships. Real Americans, real trips, real stories.

**At 6:30 a.m.**, when Frank Hurst boards the commuter rail train in Germantown, Md., his commute is already well underway. He's already walked a half-mile to a shuttle bus service, which then takes him to the train station.

# Frank

For Frank, every commute is a chance to catch up with friends and acquaintances. He discusses the latest ballgame with the shuttle bus driver, goes out of his way to wish a good morning to the train station manager and greets other riders as he strolls up the aisle of the train searching for seat on the 50-minute journey to Washington, D.C.'s Union Station.

The final segment of the commute to his office at the U.S. Department of Justice is on the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's Metro system. All told, it's 90 minutes door-to-door for Frank, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I've been making this commute for 12 years, and to drive it would be much worse. When we sail over the beltway on the train, I like to look at all of those cars and I smile, thankful it's not me," says Frank.

Most would consider Frank a choice commuter. After all, the typical suburban home now has more than two automobiles at its disposal. But not the Hurst household. Frank's wife, Ellen, takes their only car to her job everyday in Northern Virginia. Their two children attend college. For Frank, transit is the only way to get there.

"Once you make a commute for a while, it becomes part of your everyday experience. And I've made some great friends on the train. I see the same people most days, and we all keep up with what's going on in each other's lives," says Frank.

Indeed, Frank and another passenger (Bob) discuss each other's children and their college progress. It's clear from the conversation that they've known each other a number of years and that they regularly catch up with each other on the train.

"Sometimes I hear people say that the concept of neighbor is dead in America. Well they wouldn't think that if they rode the train," says Frank.

He chides another passenger who admits he didn't make any University of Maryland football games this past season. Frank's a huge fan of the Terrapins and seems to know all of the Maryland Alumni on the 5:10 p.m. train headed for Frederick, Md.

"We need you out there at Byrd (stadium, where the Terps play their home games)," says Frank to one gentleman who smiles and assures him he'll catch a game next year.

On most rides, Frank reads the paper, or catches up on a little work as the train makes its way home. He says one of the best things about his commute is that it affords him time to wind down after the workday. As he arrives back at the Germantown station, his bus awaits, warm and inviting. After a ten-minute journey through the local neighborhoods, Frank steps off the shuttle bus and begins his walk home. He'll do it all again tomorrow.

**In the cool, crisp air** of the San Joaquin Valley in Central California, Cesar Ramirez waits for the work van to take him into some of the world's richest, most productive farmland. Today, he'll work a strawberry farm, next might be almonds or avocados. Cesar is a migrant farm worker off to do work that no one else really wants to do.

The day starts early, sometimes as early as 4:00 a.m., to ensure that all the workers are ready with the sunrise. Cesar knows that it is often important to be among the first to arrive at the farms. His trip is not unique.

Though he works in California, hundreds of thousands of other farm workers, mainly migrants, head off to do the same type of work each day in Washington State, Iowa, Texas, Arizona, Florida

# Cesar

and many other states. For Cesar and many like him, the journey to work can be the most dangerous part of the day.

To help ensure the safety of farm workers on their journeys to the job, California has developed a new program to equip farmworkers with safer vehicles and trained drivers. It's a partnership with the agriculture industry.

The Vanpool program is the first of its kind in the nation, according to California Department of Transportation. It allows farm workers to lease vans, so they can take other laborers to work sites. To become certified, farm workers are required to take a minimum of 20 hours of classroom and behind-the-wheel training, after which they must pass the California Department of Motor Vehicles' commercial drivers license test and a driving test.

Cesar recalls the old vans that he used to take to work, vehicles with wooden benches bolted to the floor; vehicles he knew were unsafe. But there was no other way to go. The labor contractors hired by the big farms provided the transportation. He's glad that the state moved in to provide a more safe — and reliable — alternative. And what's more, the van pool program allows Cesar and his fellow farm workers to help themselves.

**A single mother** faced limited employment opportunities in a small South Dakota town. When Holly Keger explored her options through the Spearfish, S.D., One-Stop employment center, a counselor asked the pivotal question.

“Do you have transportation to work?”

Before becoming a mother, Holly had walked nearly everywhere she needed to go. Now with her daughter in tow, family members were providing mobility.

# Holly

“The employment counselor told me about Prairie Hills Transit. I thought the bus was just for the elderly but found out it's for everybody,” says Holly, emphasizing an important local public partnerships

between the employment office and transit provider. “They set me up with a bus pass, and every morning the Prairie Hills bus picked us up, dropped off my daughter at daycare and took me to work.”

As Holly continued to work at an area shelter for battered women, she continued to schedule rides and commute with Prairie Hills. Her voice became a familiar one to schedulers at the transit office.

“Whenever we talked to her, whenever she called in to schedule her rides, we just knew she was always smiling on the other end of the line,” remembers Prairie Hills Transit Director Barb Kline. “We knew she'd be a great asset to our team.”

The Prairie Hills bus still picks up Holly each morning, still drops off her two-and-a-half-year-old at the daycare center and still gets her to work. But now, Holly spends the rest of her day helping other residents get to work ... or to the doctor's office or the grocery store. Training in transit scheduling and dispatch with Prairie Hills has expanded her knowledge of mobility options in Spearfish.

“I thought transit meant bus stops. I didn't know about door-to-door service. It's so valuable to so many people,” she emphasizes. “We've got school kids, residents with dis-

abilities, even people whose car breaks down and they now need a ride to work.”

Holly is nearly finished with her year of dispatch and scheduling training with Prairie Hills. Transit, she says, has an enormous impact on her life.

“If I didn't have it, I wouldn't be able to work.”

And for Holly, that work is now transit.

“We're seeing first hand how transportation is making a difference in our community,” testifies Kline. “True, it's made a difference in Holly's life, but we here at Prairie Hills Transit have benefited, too. We've gained a stellar employee.”

**Montana winters can be severe,** and Kathy Collins would just as soon let somebody else do the driving. When she moved to Helena in 1982, she was relieved to discover Helena Dial-A-Ride.

“It was terrific. I could get to work on time, and I could get home on time,” says Kathy of her five-mile commute to the middle school where she teaches. The same system — in some cases, the same vehicle — also ensures that many young students make it to the classroom.

While Kathy owns a modified van that accommodates her wheelchair, an affordable, stress-free option, she says, is no contest.

“I couldn't do it without them,” emphasizes Kathy, who becomes a regular commuter from November to April. “Cowardice begins at three or four inches, even less if it's icy. When the snow is starting to accumulate, they know I'll be on board.”

Safety and reliability are important to Kathy, who can count on her bus showing up every weekday morning at 7 a.m., and every afternoon when the school day ends. But

# Kathy

inclement weather can create additional obstacles to her mobility. When winter sets in, she often finds that ramps and curb cuts get filled with plowed snow, making navigation of her wheelchair impossible.

“I've been teaching for 20 years, and during all that time, I think the school has been closed only twice,” recalls Kathy. “So, for 20 years I've been on transit, because I need to get to my classroom, and I know Dial-A-Ride will always get me there.”

## “Ride Connection was a lifesaver for me.”

That’s Laura Fero, a personal care attendant and housecleaner, who credits Ride Connection’s U-Ride program with helping her maintain steady employment. Often, like many people who neither have access to their own car, nor are able to use regular bus service, transportation programs like the Job Access and Reverse Commute-funded U-Ride are the difference between keeping and losing a job. It’s a public-private partnership that succeeds.

Laura, who lives in Forest Grove, Oregon, a rural community 30 miles west of Portland, works between three and five days each week. Since these work sites vary, she doesn’t have a standard commute. What is standard is that Laura cannot reach the homes in which she works using a fixed-route bus. Without a driver’s license or a car she has been relying on U-Ride to get her to work.

Rural transit provider Ride Connection developed U-Ride to serve area residents just like Laura, residents living in rural Washington County who do not have access to fixed-route bus service. U-Ride provides door-to-door rides, through a contract with two local taxi services — Pacific Cab and Metro West — to work, interviews and training, and childcare. Operating Monday through Saturday, from 5:00 a.m. to midnight, the program accommodates a wide range of work schedules.

As soon as she learned about U-Ride from another housecleaner, Laura contacted Ride Connection to see if she too could take the service to work. After Ride Connection staff asked her a series of questions and oriented her to using the Pacific Cab, she was on her way. That was more than two years ago.

Laura doesn’t always use the taxi service; when the weather is pleasant she’ll commute to work on her bicycle. But riding her bike to work in rain and snow when

that was her only option, before she found out about U-Ride, was very stressful for her, al-

# Laura

## ce white (island?)

though she tried to have a positive attitude.

“Compared to that time, now I feel so spoiled.”

Laura also makes use of her other means of transportation. She takes her community’s fixed-route bus shopping and on other errands, and, when the destination is nearby, she’s a big advocate of walking.

Laura plans to stop using U-Ride in the next few months. She’s going to get a driver’s license and buy herself a car that she’ll use to get to work.

She’ll miss her calls to Ride Connection dispatchers and her rides to-and-from work along the countryside with the drivers of family-run Pacific Cab. But she knows that many others will be able to take advantage of the 50-cent fares in their time of need. And she’s been telling others about Ride Connection just as her fellow housecleaner did for her.

“It feels good to spread the word.”

# Daniel

**Unemployment** has been an overarching struggle for residents of Zuni Pueblo in western New Mexico. The reservation is somewhat isolated, miles away from the area's more populated cities and towns where most employment opportunities lie. As few residents of the Pueblo have private automobiles, accessing work used to depend on inconsistent carpooling efforts — essentially, hitchhiking along the Highway 602.

Joann Kylestewa, a member of the Zuni Nation, had become the sole income provider in her home several years ago. Her husband, a seasonal firefighter, was without work. Their daughter was attending college. A new department store in Gallup was hiring, but that was 45 miles away.

"I had a hard time getting work because it was so hard to get a ride," explains Joann.

Zuni Entrepreneurial Enterprise, Inc., understood the necessary connection. Out of the organization's supported employment program, vocational rehabilitation and job training programs grew a van pool service in 1997 — cata-

# Joann

pulted by a Joblinks grant. What started as a one-van operation making limited connections is now an expansive van pool service, with

seven drivers and 17 vans operating from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. — connecting Zuni Pueblo residents with jobs in Gallup, with classes at the University of New Mexico and even with a high school some 20 miles outside the reservation. Since the van pool began — a successful public partnership — unemployment on the reservation has decreased by some 10 percent.

A van picks up Joann at her door between 10:00 and 10:30 a.m., ensuring she arrives at the store before her shift begins at noon. Another van gets her back home in the evening by 10:00 p.m. ZEE, Inc. is able to open employment doors for the community it serves by non-traditional mobility needs — shifts that don't match the nine-to-five norm.

"I really appreciate this service," says Joann. "I have better opportunities because of the van pool."

**Job opportunities** in Romney, West Virginia, are limited. But 50 miles down Route 50, the Rubbermaid plant in Winchester, Virginia, employs 1200 area employees. Potomac Valley Transit Authority is helping residents in the area make the connection.

The Potomac Valley buses, on a route initiated in 1999 with state TANF dollars, serve employees on all four plant shifts. Daniel Morgan works nights, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.,

on a rotating schedule where his work days vary. He leaves his car at a Romney drug-store parking lot, the bus picks up workers at 4:30 p.m., and drops them off at the plant an hour later. The bus will wait for workers on the ending shift, taking them back west on Route 50. The bus that picks up Daniel in the early morning is also dropping off workers for the first day shift.

"When I applied for the job, Rubbermaid told me there was transit available. It was the first time I'd ever ridden on a bus like that," he remembers. "Three years later, and that bus is always on time. We are never late to work."

As the geography of work continues to change, transit providers are reaching out to the private sector, building partnerships with employers to ensure that positions are filled, building ridership with employees to ensure economic stability.

"Taking transit to work is the best thing I ever did," confirms Daniel. "I don't rack up the miles on my vehicle, I avoid the traffic and I always get there. I'd tell other workers, it's their best move."

**Boarding an early hour bus,** Lenzy Williams takes his usual seat. The commute to work has not yet begun for many in Baldwin County, Alabama. But for Lenzy and his colleagues at Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System (BRATS), there is work to do before the vehicles start rolling. Across the nation, millions of workers board buses, vans and trains to get to jobs everyday. And everyday, those buses, vans and trains make connections because thousands of workers are moving an industry. We've highlighted transit's role in getting communities to work. For professionals like Lenzy, transit is work.

Lenzy arrived at the transit agency with little background in transit. His career had moved him from tow-truck operations for a service station to church bus operations while serving as a youth pastor. He thought a part-time position driving for the system would supplement his income while enabling him to continue serving his community through his church.

"I soon realized that I had more opportunity to help in transit than I ever did in the church," explains Lenzy. "Every person that gets on your vehicle needs something. Every time you pick up someone, you're rewarded. You're helping someone, every single day."

BRATS serves a diverse 1,600-square-mile area, stretching from the dense tourist hubs along the Gulf Coast to the

sparsely populated rural areas in the rest of the county. The growing job market is centered in the tourist areas, with many entry-level positions in hotels and restaurants. Minimum-wage employees, however, can't afford to live in the beachside communities. That means long commutes — 50-70 miles — for workers from the northern part of the county.

"A lot of what we do is getting people to work," says Lenzy, describing a passenger load that includes not only restaurant and hotel workers, but also residents working through the Association for Retarded Citizens-supported laundry services, students with after-school jobs at WalMart, and even minimum-custody inmates participating in work programs. "We've even got business owners on the bus — the people providing the jobs."

Lenzy's day begins 12 miles north of the system's Bay Minette office, in the small town of Rabun, where he and his wife have a house, two dogs, a cat and their first child on the way. Leaving his house just after 6:00 a.m., he drives to the vehicle lot 20 minutes away, clocks in, picks up the paperwork left for him by last night's north-bound driver, and starts his work day.

He begins a pre-trip inspection of his vehicle, visually combing his bus. Checking fluid levels, the tires, belts and cables. Looking for leaks, testing the lights and blinkers, surveying the vehicle for any body damage. Thanks to the agency's maintenance professionals, he emphasizes, there's rarely anything to report. His passenger list directs him to his first pick-up, and the bus rolls out for the day.

As he's advanced, Lenzy has trained and earned a Commercial Driver's License, expanding his repertoire of vehicles and routes. He attends regular training throughout the year, mastering driving, safety, lift operation, wheelchair securement and passenger assistance skills. Of course, everyday — he emphasizes — is another lesson.

"There's a lot of on-the-job training."

Lenzy has assisted in training new drivers, and has hopes that in the future he can play a role in advancing a safety program at BRATS. He has competed in local, state and national driving competitions, even winning the title of Ricon Driver of the Year in 2000.

"At the nationals, you compete with your peers from all around the country. It's a chance to learn from others, to improve your own skills. It's a lot of work and effort. It helps you grow. This is where you realize that you're a professional."

He stresses that his contribution to community mobility is only possible with the invaluable work of staff outside the bus — management, dispatch, scheduling, maintenance and accounting.

"If it's not done right in the office by those professionals, we feel it on the bus," he says. "That's why we out here on the road greatly appreciate what they do."

The skills mastered and applied in transit, says Lenzy, transfer to other professions.

"This job will prepare you for a lot of other work," he emphasizes. "Your next employer, if he took transit seriously, would know all the skills you're bringing with you."

He reviews the necessary skills he hones in his driving position: vehicle operation, lift operation, wheelchair securement, safety and evacuation knowledge, radio operation, communications skills, accuracy and attention to detail with necessary paperwork and money collection and time-management skills. Perhaps most importantly, emphasizes Lenzy, drivers must cultivate incredible people skills.

"Every aspect of society gets on that bus. Every person you can think of, we're transporting them," says Williams, summing up the list of qualifications. "I'm surprised by all the things I can put on my resume."

The job has its challenges. Beyond refining skills, techniques and organizational protocol, Williams describes the occasional difficult passenger.

"Ninety-nine percent of all the people we transport are easy to get along with, they're flexible and they appreciate the service. Then there's that one percent that are easily frustrated," says Lenzy. "It sometimes takes fancy

footwork by the driver. You try to understand the underlying causes for their behavior. Maybe they've been independent all their life, and now they resent having to take the bus. You just have to be patient until they become another fan of transit."

Behind the wheel, Williams is the face of Baldwin Transit service, and a representative of Baldwin County. He adds public relations to his resume.

"I'm promoting transit everyday where it counts the most — on the bus. Someone might hear a radio ad or they might get the phone number from a friend. But when they step on the bus, that's it. The show is on!" 🗣️

# Lenzy