

# Employment Transportation for Homeless Veterans

## Part of the *Transportation for Our Military Series*

*This brief, which is part of a series focusing on the transportation needs of veterans and their families, explores transportation issues encountered by homeless veterans. One of the most formidable obstacles facing homeless veterans in securing housing and employment is the lack of transportation options. Below we highlight innovative responses that can help communities, such as those with a Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative grant, and veterans service organizations to improve access to employment, education and training, and other community destinations for homeless and low-income veterans.*

Even with their valuable military work experience, veterans and military personnel returning from overseas deployment encounter difficulties transitioning to jobs in the civilian workforce. The challenges are even greater for homeless veterans—and one of the largest is the lack of transportation options to connect them with affordable housing and employment and training opportunities. Today's sluggish economy, with fewer jobs available and some that may not be accessible by public transportation, has intensified these difficulties. This brief identifies innovative local programs operated by veteran services, human services, and public transit agencies designed to connect military and veteran populations with the transportation they need.

### About Homeless Veterans

Homeless veterans span several different military conflicts, from the Vietnam War to the current operations in the Middle East. Nearly 76,000 veterans are homeless, representing about 23 percent of the total homeless population.<sup>1</sup> Creating transportation options that serve the needs of homeless veterans requires an understanding of the characteristics of these soldiers:

- Most homeless veterans are male (97 percent) and single.<sup>2</sup>
- Homelessness among female veterans is on the rise,<sup>3</sup> and

may be compounded by the need for these veterans to also care for young dependents.

- Almost 80 percent of homeless veterans reside in down-town urban areas,<sup>4</sup> which means that public transportation could be part of the solution for them.
- Over 60 percent of homeless veterans served by the Department of Labor's Veterans Reintegration Program were able to retain jobs when affordable transportation options were available.<sup>5</sup>

### Transportation to Work and Learning

A number of national and local programs provide reintegration services to assist homeless veterans and service members transition into civilian life. Among the supports they provide is employment assistance, often in participation with Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs)<sup>6</sup> and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists<sup>7</sup> at Department of Labor One Stop Career Centers. LVERs conduct outreach to employers to increase job opportunities for veterans. DVOPs work one-on-one with veterans to help them overcome barriers to employment. Both LVERs and DVOPs can provide customers with transportation support services, including transportation vouchers and information about local transportation options.

<sup>1</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. "Supplemental Report to the 2010 Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress on Veterans." <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pages/veterans> (accessed 9/7/12)

<sup>2</sup> Military.com. "Homeless Veterans Programs." <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/homeless-veterans-programs.html> (accessed 9/7/12)

<sup>3</sup> Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor. "Homeless Women Veterans Listening Sessions." <http://www.dol.gov/wb/programs/listeningsessions.htm#UH6m9WeltNs> (accessed 10/16/12)

<sup>4</sup> National Coalition for the Homeless. "Homeless Veterans." September 2009. <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/veterans.html> (accessed 12/12/12)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. "Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994, FY 2011 Annual Report to Congress." <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/usera/2011USERRAReport.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For additional information about Local Veterans Employment Representatives, visit [http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment\\_Services\\_fs01.htm#LVER](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment_Services_fs01.htm#LVER).

<sup>7</sup> For additional information about Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists, visit [http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment\\_Services\\_fs01.htm#DVOP](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/fact/Employment_Services_fs01.htm#DVOP).

Here are some steps transit and nonprofit agencies are taking to assist homeless veterans:

- Veteran support groups frequently partner with human service agencies to provide bus passes for underemployed and homeless veterans. For example, Goodwill Industries of Houston and Nashville's Operation Stand Down provide bus passes to help military and veteran clients get to interviews and participate in other job search activities.<sup>8</sup> Participating agencies set participation requirements and verify customers' eligibility.
- Free or reduced transit fares. In recent years, many transit agencies have extended free or reduced fares to qualifying military personnel. Most require riders to be in uniform. Many programs also allow veterans with proof of a service-related disability or valid ID to ride for free or at a reduced rate.<sup>9</sup> In 2010, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) in San Francisco implemented a program that provides active duty military personnel on leave from Afghanistan and Iraq with \$50 worth of BART tickets.<sup>10</sup>

The following are some other steps transit and nonprofit agencies are taking to assist homeless veterans. Although the initiatives discussed below do not specifically focus on serving veterans, components of each can be replicated in programs more directly centered on providing access to homeless veterans.

- Passes and tokens. In Cincinnati, Ohio, the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) created the Everybody Rides Metro Foundation,<sup>11</sup> a nonprofit organization that subsidizes Metro bus tokens and passes for low-income individuals to support self-sufficiency. The foundation partners with SORTA and 80 local human service programs, including ones that serve veterans, to provide tokens to low-income commuters. Partnering agencies purchase tokens from SORTA at the full price of \$1.75 each and are reimbursed by the foundation at \$1.10 per token. The tokens must be used for work-related travel. Participants usually receive a two-week supply of tokens, but exceptions are sometimes made. Providing assistance with transportation costs to homeless veterans as they re-enter the civilian workforce helps ensure continued access to employment until they receive their first paycheck.

Transit agencies in New Jersey and Detroit provide free monthly passes to new employees who leave public assistance to begin work through Get a Job, Get a Ride programs.<sup>12</sup> Employers must

enroll in the program and employees must meet specific eligibility requirements.

- Car ownership programs. A variety of vehicle loan and donation programs exist nationwide. Most programs set strict guidelines: generally, applicants must be transitioning from public assistance to work and must be referred by a local human service agency. Some programs are more flexible, requiring applicants to demonstrate the ability to make small monthly payments and participate in financial literacy or auto maintenance classes as a prerequisite to receiving a loan. One program asks participants to "pay it forward," either through monthly service hours or in cash support of future participants. These programs could be set up so that qualifying applicants are encouraged to carpool to work and training opportunities with homeless or transitioning veterans in their communities.<sup>13</sup>
- Bike share programs. Some community bike programs donate bicycles to organizations serving homeless individuals, including those providing assistance to homeless veterans. In Washington, D.C., Capital Bikeshare partnered with Back on My Feet, D.C. to launch a pilot program offering discounted memberships to ten qualifying Back on My Feet members. The year-long membership provides bikes for getting to and from job interviews, classes, or training.

## For more information

Did you know? Across the nation, transportation providers and organizations serving veterans are working together to improve access to transportation for veterans and their families. To learn more about these state and local Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiatives and get involved, visit [www.fta.dot.gov/veterans](http://www.fta.dot.gov/veterans).

Read more about Joblinks' resources to support local partnerships in helping veterans, active duty service members, and their families access employment and other destinations through transit and ridesharing strategies. Share your stories; the perspective of veterans and active duty service members is especially welcome. Visit <http://bit.ly/JoblinksVeterans>.

*The Joblinks Employment Transportation Center connects communities with transportation-to-work solutions. Visit us at [www.solutionsto-getthere.org](http://www.solutionsto-getthere.org).*

*This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the federal government. 2013*

<sup>8</sup> National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (ed). "Best Practices, Profiles of Promising Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Grantees." <http://www.hvrp.org/> (accessed 8/31/12)

<sup>9</sup> To view a chart of existing free or reduced fare programs, visit [http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Chart\\_ReducedFareAndFreePrograms.pdf](http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Chart_ReducedFareAndFreePrograms.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Visit <http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=1989> for additional information about the BART program and other transportation services available to veterans.

<sup>11</sup> Additional information about the Everybody Rides Metro Foundation is available at <http://www.everybodyridesmetro.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> For additional information about Get a Job, Get a Ride, visit <http://www.smartbus.org/aboutus/overview/Pages/employerprograms.aspx> and <http://www.ridewise.org/display.php?sc=es&adid=238>.



<sup>13</sup> For a listing of car ownership programs, visit [http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/CarOwnership\\_Listing.pdf](http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/CarOwnership_Listing.pdf)