

*A Report by a Panel of the*  
**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF  
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

*For the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility*

**February 2010**

# **The United We Ride National Dialogue**

**FINAL REPORT**

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The views expressed in this report are those of the Panel. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Academy as an institution, Easter Seals, Inc., or the members of the Federal Interagency Council on Access and Mobility.

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## **United We Ride National Dialogue Executive Summary**

### **Background**

Transportation plays a critical role in providing access to employment, health care, education, community services, and other activities necessary for daily life. For people who cannot drive or afford an automobile, access to transportation services is one of the major barriers to essential services and everyday activities in their community. Transportation challenges can be even greater for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes.

The importance of transportation is underscored by the myriad of programs that have been created in conjunction with health and human services programs and by the significant federal investment in accessible public transportation systems throughout the nation. Ironically, the creation of so many programs had unintended consequences for the people they were intended to help. These challenges were documented in a congressional hearing and a report issued by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) citing the need to breakdown federal barriers to the local coordination of federally funded transportation services<sup>1</sup>.

### **The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility**

The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) includes 11 federal departments, 9 of which are responsible for providing transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes<sup>2</sup>. CCAM officially launched United We Ride in 2004 to (1) Provide more rides for target populations for the same or fewer assets; (2) Simplify access; and (3) Increase customer satisfaction.

### **The United We Ride National Dialogue**

#### ***Introduction***

CCAM asked the National Academy of Public Administration (National Academy) and Easter Seals Project ACTION to develop and host the first United We Ride (UWR) National Dialogue. The goal of the Dialogue was to help shape future policy direction and provide input to the next CCAM strategic plan.

The National Academy of Public Administration (National Academy) engaged a Panel of National Academy Fellows to guide the project and conduct an independent analysis of the National Dialogue content. The Panel members brought strong public administration and management knowledge and skills to the project, including experience in policy design and

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<sup>1</sup> Transportation-Disadvantaged Populations: Some Coordination Efforts Among Programs Providing Transportation Services, but Obstacles Persist, GAO-03-69, June 30, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council members include the Secretaries of Transportation, Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, and Veteran Affairs, the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, the Attorney General, and the Chairperson of the National Council on Disability.

program implementation at the federal, state and local level. Panel members also brought a deep understanding of the challenges involved in addressing such cross-cutting, intra-agency and inter-agency issues.

The National Academy also assembled a small work group with representatives of the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, Easter Seals Project ACTION, and the National Resource Center on Human Service Transportation to help guide the process of design and implementation.

### ***Overview***

The United We Ride National Dialogue brought together key stakeholders using collaborative web-based technologies to discuss the following broad question: “*What ideas can improve access to affordable and reliable transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes?*” The Dialogue platform included several analytical tools that provided tremendous opportunity to cross-reference ideas and comments submitted by participants in answering the central question. The UWR Dialogue allowed participants to submit ideas, as well as tag, rate, and comment on ideas, helping to provide a comprehensive and actionable list of top ideas and key themes that would not have been possible using only traditional methods of public policy formation. The platform is based on the principle of ‘radical scalability’ which allows participants’ preferences and priorities to be more clearly sorted as greater numbers of people participate. The Dialogue drew:

- 6,808 visits from 3,851 unique visitors;
- Participants from 1,219 US cities and every US state;
- 783 registered participants (about twenty percent of unique visitors); and
- 280 unique ideas, which prompted 1,056 comments, 1,538 ratings, and 262 tags.

### ***Themes and Recommendations***

Four overarching themes emerged as a result of an analysis of all of the ideas, comments, ratings, and tags. Below is a summary of themes, key ideas of Dialogue participants, and related Panel recommendations:

#### ***Theme 1: The process for creating coordinated transportation plans continues to need improvement.***

*Idea 1.1. Strengthen the requirement for all CCAM grantees to engage in the coordinated planning process at the state and local levels<sup>3</sup>.*

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<sup>3</sup> The CCAM’s joint policy statement on coordinated planning reads as follows: “Member agencies of the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility resolve that Federally-assisted grantees that have significant involvement in providing resources and engage in transportation delivery should participate in a local coordinated human services transportation planning process and develop plans to achieve the objectives to reduce duplication, increase service efficiency and expand access for the transportation-disadvantaged populations.”

**Recommendation 1.1:** The Panel recommends that all CCAM members with grant programs create and implement incentives for their grantees to participate in the development and implementation of the coordinated plan at the local and state levels.

*Idea 1.2. Enhance meaningful consumer participation in the coordinated planning process.*

**Recommendation 1.2:** The Panel recommends that CCAM continue to offer information, training, and technical assistance to state and community based agencies on opportunities for meaningful consumer participation in the planning, assessment, implementation, and evaluation of transportation services.

*Idea 1.3. Promote regional coordination.*

**Recommendation 1.3a:** The Panel recommends that CCAM evaluate current policies that either prohibit or promote coordination across county and/or state boundaries, and identify opportunities to enhance regional coordination.

**Recommendation 1.3b:** The Panel recommends that CCAM provide training and technical assistance for local and regional planning organizations on ways to include priorities identified in the local coordinated plan

***Theme 2: Significant federal policy barriers still exist to facilitate access to transportation services.***

*Idea 2.1. Coordinate paratransit services.*

**Recommendation 2.1:** The Panel recommends that CCAM evaluate the differences in policies related to service provision across agencies and identify opportunities to streamline requirements (e.g., eligibility, level of assistance, vehicle safety standards, driver certification requirements, hours of operations, and scheduling procedures). The Panel suggests developing, implementing, and disseminating joint policy guidelines for opportunities identified.

*Idea 2.2. Provide explicit and clear guidance for cost sharing.*

**Recommendation 2.2:** The Panel recommends the development of a joint federal policy statement on cost sharing that is adopted by all CCAM agencies, incorporated into their grant agreements and policy guidance, and actively promoted to agencies at the state and local level. The Panel suggests that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services work closely with other CCAM members on the development and implementation of these policies.

*Idea 2.3. Expand options for using federal funds to meet local match requirements across CCAM agencies and program.*

**Recommendation 2.3:** The Panel recommends that CCAM evaluate the impact on service delivery and on local, state, and federal spending when “federal match” is allowed. The Panel also recommends that CCAM study the impact on local communities

and states when they do not have the necessary funds to support a local match requirement.

*Idea 2.4. Address gaps in transportation services.*

**Recommendation 2.4:** The Panel recommends that CCAM members re-evaluate existing transportation policies to eliminate barriers that limit access to transportation for health services and employment. The Panel also recommends that agencies create incentives for addressing gaps in transportation services especially for veterans, people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals living in rural areas.

*Idea 2.5 Simplify grant requirements and consider program consolidation.*

**Recommendation 2.5:** The Panel recommends that CCAM review current legislative and administrative policies to determine options available for streamlining transportation programs and consolidating resources.

***Theme 3: Mobility management strategies are underutilized in communities across the country.***

*Idea 3.1. Encourage vehicle coordination and sharing.*

**Recommendation 3.1:** The Panel recommends that the CCAM clarify guidance on vehicle sharing and make sure it is adopted by all CCAM member agencies and broadly disseminated at the federal, state, and local levels<sup>4</sup>.

*Idea 3.2. Promote the use of technology and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).*

**Recommendation 3.2:** The Panel recommends that CCAM continue to expand the use of technology solutions to streamline and coordinate rides, vehicles, and drivers.

*Idea 3.3. Support a broad range of services, including volunteer driver programs, taxi services, and travel training.*

**Recommendation 3.3a:** While insurance and liability are typically state issues, the Panel recommends that the CCAM provide leadership to address these important issues, especially with regard to volunteer driver programs. To this end, the Panel also recommends that CCAM develop and offer a uniform policy for consideration and adoption by the states.

**Recommendation 3.3b:** The Panel recommends that the CCAM consider supporting the use of taxi and other alternative services to address local transportation gaps in communities.

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<sup>4</sup> The CCAM’s policy statement on Vehicle Sharing reads as follows: “Member agencies of the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility resolve that Federally-assisted grantees that have significant involvement in providing resources and engage in transportation should coordinate their resources in order to maximize accessibility and availability of transportation services”.

**Recommendation 3.3c:** The Panel recommends that members of the CCAM provide technical assistance and training for teachers, therapists, and others in communities to implement travel training programs.

**Theme 4:** *There are missed opportunities to bridge gaps between transportation and other community services.*

*Idea 4.1. Coordinate with the Livable-Sustainable Communities Initiative.*

**Recommendation 4.1:** The Panel recommends that the CCAM continue to build strong partnerships with other intergovernmental initiatives that support and promote greater mobility and independence<sup>5</sup>.

*Idea 4.2. Encourage the development of accessible pedestrian environments.*

**Recommendation 4.2:** The Panel recommends that CCAM explore ways to encourage the development of pedestrian accessible environments and enhance access to transportation services.

## **Conclusion**

While the topics raised in this Dialogue are not new to the CCAM and stakeholders, Dialogue participants highlighted important and challenging policy concerns for moving forward. The themes, ideas, and Panel recommendations in this report identify significant opportunities for the CCAM to continue its important work to break down the Federal barriers to local coordination of Federal transportation resources and streamline access to transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes.

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<sup>5</sup> .The U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have developed a new partnership to build livable and sustainable communities to help American families gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs.



## **United We Ride National Dialogue Final Report**

### **Background**

Transportation plays a critical role in providing access to employment, health care, education, community services, and other activities necessary for daily life. For people who cannot drive or afford an automobile, access to transportation services is one of the major barriers to essential services and every day activities in their community. Transportation challenges can be even greater for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes.

The importance of transportation is underscored by the myriad programs that have been created in conjunction with health and human services programs and by the significant federal investment in accessible public transportation systems throughout the nation. Ironically, the creation of so many programs has resulted in unintended consequences for people who need transportation help: (1) transportation services are often fragmented and difficult to navigate; (2) transportation services can be costly because of inconsistent, duplicative, and often restrictive federal and state program rules and regulations; and (3) at times, narrowly focused programs leave service gaps and transportation services are simply not available to meet certain needs.

### **The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility**

The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) includes 11 federal departments responsible for providing transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes<sup>6</sup>. CCAM officially launched United We Ride in 2004 to (1) Provide more rides for target populations for the same or fewer assets; (2) Simplify access; and (3) Increase customer satisfaction. While significant progress has been achieved through United We Ride, challenges to coordinating stove-piped funding, policies, programs and services still exist.

### **The United We Ride National Dialogue**

#### ***Introduction***

The CCAM partnered with the National Academy of Public Administration (National Academy) and Easter Seals Project ACTION to host and facilitate the first United We Ride National Dialogue. Leveraging the power of web 2.0 collaboration tools, CCAM engaged its stakeholders in an online conversation about the existing challenges and future opportunities for enhancing access to transportation services. The goal of the Dialogue was to draw on the ideas of the community to produce concrete, actionable suggestions for national, state and local leaders charged with enhancing transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes.

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<sup>6</sup> CCAM members include the Secretaries of Transportation, Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, and Veteran Affairs, the commissioner of the Social Security Administration, the Attorney General, and the Chairperson of the National Council on Disability.

The National Academy engaged a Panel of National Academy Fellows to help with the design and conduct an independent analysis of the National Dialogue. The Panel members brought strong public administration and management knowledge and skills to the project, including experience in policy design and program implementation at the federal, state and local level. Panel members also brought a deep understanding of the challenges involved in addressing such cross-cutting, intra-agency and inter-agency issues.

The National Academy also assembled a small work group with representatives of the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, Easter Seals Project ACTION, and the National Resource Center on Human Service Transportation to help guide the process of design and implementation.

### *Overview*

The United We Ride National Dialogue participants were asked to discuss the following broad question: *“What ideas can improve access to affordable and reliable transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and people with limited incomes?”* The Dialogue platform included several analytical tools that provided tremendous opportunity to cross-reference ideas and comments submitted by participants in answering the central question. The UWR Dialogue allowed participants to submit ideas, as well as tag, rate, and comment on ideas, helping to provide a comprehensive and actionable list of top ideas and key themes that would not have been possible using only traditional methods of public policy formation. The platform is based on the principle of ‘radical scalability’ which allows participants’ preferences and priorities to be more clearly sorted as greater numbers of people participate.

The United We Ride National Dialogue yielded 280 important ideas about how to improve access to transportation for the targeted populations, including ideas for improving participation in the local coordinated planning processes, deploying intelligent transportation systems, and clarifying guidance on specific policy issues. The nearly 4,000 visitors to the Dialogue site represented a diverse spectrum, coming from 1,219 cities and every state, with representation from urban, suburban, and rural areas. Participants included consumers, caregivers, providers, managers and policy makers at the local, state, and national levels.

The CCAM’s goal of reaching a more diverse audience than possible using traditional methods of outreach was achieved. Unlike traditional town hall meetings or listening sessions, the Dialogue was not limited by the number of people who can physically attend traditional in-person meetings, and offered visitors the opportunity to participate in a variety of ways. The Dialogue was powered by a unique platform that allowed participants to submit ideas, refine them through open discussion, and vote on the submissions they found most compelling. The platform included features that enabled the aggregation, organization, and prioritization of vast amounts of input. These features helped ensure that, as more and more participants joined the conversation, the best ideas -- as identified by the participating community -- rose to the top. This approach has provided CCAM rich and actionable information that reflects the concerns and priorities of Dialogue participants.

### *Themes and Recommendations*

The 783 registered participants in the UWR National dialogue offered 280 unique ideas about the key question. Four overarching themes emerged as a result of an analysis of all the ideas, comments, ratings, and tags:

Theme 1: The process for creating coordinated transportation plans continues to need improvement.

Theme 2: Significant federal policy barriers still exist to facilitate access to transportation services.

Theme 3: Mobility management strategies are underutilized in communities across the country.

Theme 4: There are missed opportunities to bridge gaps between transportation and other community services

The intent of the Dialogue was to help shape future policy direction and provide input for CCAM's next strategic plan. The National Academy Panel identified three key strategies for CCAM to consider as it addresses the complex issues outlined by Dialogue participants:

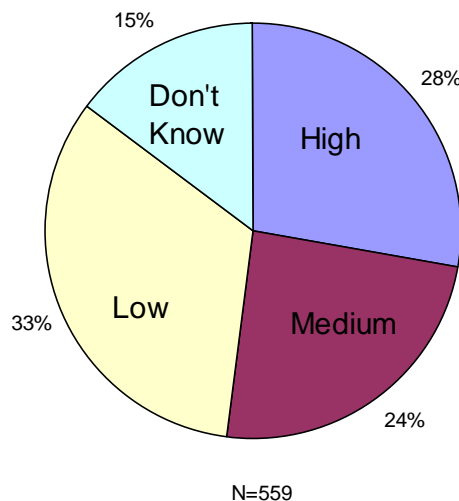
1. Utilize incentives to motivate change wherever possible, such as providing additional grant dollars, creating waivers, and giving additional points to applicants who are implementing coordination actions during a competitive funding process.
2. Continue to provide education, outreach, technical assistance, and training in order to facilitate greater adoption of the many promising practices highlighted in this Dialogue and being implemented throughout the country.
3. While incentives and education are preferred strategies, the Panel also recognizes that there are areas that will require changes in legislative and/or regulatory policy in order to effectively and efficiently coordinate transportation services across 11 federal departments and numerous federal programs.

These strategies are reflected in the specific recommendation of the Panel and are presented with each of the emerging themes throughout this report.

***Theme 1: The process for creating coordinated transportation plans continues to need improvement.***

The Safe Affordable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) includes a requirement for the development of local public transportation human service transportation plan (coordinated plans) associated with funding for three different programs administered by the Federal Transit Administration. Participants were asked “On a scale of 1-10, how involved were you in the coordinated planning process required by SAFETEA-LU (1 being low and 10 being high; or don’t know).” A web-link to additional information about the SAFETEA-LU coordinated planning requirement was also offered to participants. As shown in Figure 1, 269 of the 559 registered participants (48%) who responded to the question indicated that they either did not know about the coordinated plan or were minimally (1-2) involved in the coordinated planning process, 135 participants (24%) reported that they were involved to some extent (3-7), and 155 participants (28%) reported that they were very involved (8-10).

**Figure 1. Involvement in the Local Coordinated Planning Process**



Participants engaged in an active conversation about the coordinated planning process, as indicated by the 25 different ideas submitted and significant number of comments logged on this topic. Participants’ ideas and comments were generally divided into three categories, as outlined below.

1.1. Strengthen the requirement for all CCAM grantees to engage in the coordinated planning process at the state and local levels. While the CCAM has issued a joint policy on coordinated planning, participants indicated that challenges remain to fully engage agencies that are not funded by the Department of Transportation in the planning process at the local levels. Some participants indicated that leadership is needed from the top, and discussed the need to fully communicate and enforce the requirement for coordinated planning at both the state and local

levels across agencies and programs. Others thought that the coordinated planning process should be left to local communities, and that federal agencies should create opportunities to make local decisions about funding priorities and service configuration. One Dialogue participant suggested that, “*two basic approaches at each level of government are necessary to improve coordination: (1) examine and reform governance structures, laws, and regulations that hinder cooperation and coordination between and among agencies at the same governmental level; and (2) each level of government needs to look down the governmental food-chain to examine how its laws, policies, and regulations are hindering coordination for agencies that are dependent on them for funding and assistance...starting at the federal level and with the CCAM.*” This participant highlighted the importance of understanding the value and intent of agency engagement, as well as strategies and approaches for moving forward.

**Recommendation 1.1: The Panel recommends that all CCAM members with grant programs create and implement incentives for their grantees to participate in the development and implementation of the coordinated plan at the local and state levels<sup>7</sup>.**

1.2. Enhance meaningful consumer participation in the coordinated planning process. The idea that was the highest rated and received the highest number of comments stressed the importance of integrating consumers into the assessment, implementation, and evaluation components of the planning process. A best practice example offered was Austin, Texas, where the transportation and planning agencies are partnering with consumers to conduct customer surveys about current transportation services and related conditions, conducting on-site assessments at bus stops, and evaluating sidewalk conditions and street crossings. This information is then used to formulate recommendations to strengthen the local coordinated plan and inform the metropolitan transportation plan. Dialogue participants were interested in the outcomes from the model presented, the diversity of participation, and the opportunity for real consumer involvement used to influence transportation services and community enhancements.

Participants identified the following elements as essential for effective consumer involvement in the coordinated planning process:

- 1) Ensure that consumers with diverse backgrounds (e.g., people with different types of disabilities, older adults, individuals with limited incomes, minority groups, etc.) and with diverse experiences using transportation services are included in the process;
- 2) Schedule meetings at times and places that are accessible by train, bus, or paratransit to consumers who do not have access to private vehicles and depend on transportation services; and

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<sup>7</sup> The CCAM’s joint policy statement on coordinated planning reads as follows: “Member agencies of the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility resolve that Federally-assisted grantees that have significant involvement in providing resources and engage in transportation delivery should participate in a local coordinated human services transportation planning process and develop plans to achieve the objectives to reduce duplication, increase service efficiency and expand access for the transportation-disadvantaged populations.”

- 3) Ensure that communication about opportunities to participate in the coordinated planning process is offered in different languages and in different formats (e.g., newspapers, posters, websites, email, etc.).

In addition, Dialogue participants noted the importance of coordination among different advocacy groups in the planning process. One participant stressed that, *“there needs to be more solidarity among different groups that champion different services and populations,”* referring to the multiple interests groups for transportation, housing, Medicaid, and other services to address the needs of the same groups of people. They are, he said, *“ultimately competing with one another for funding and legislators’ attention, in practice, even if they don’t intend to.”*

**Recommendation 1.2: The Panel recommends that CCAM continue to offer information, training, and technical assistance to state and community based agencies on opportunities for meaningful consumer participation in the planning, assessment, implementation, and evaluation of transportation services.**

1.3. Promote regional coordination. Participants stressed the need for greater coordination between the local coordination plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). They also stressed the need to build communication and cooperation with the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and/or Regional Councils, two agencies at the regional level often responsible for transportation and/or human service planning.

Dialogue participants identified significant challenges for transportation planning across city, county, and state jurisdictions. According to one Dialogue participant, *“I live in a rural area that has a community that includes two states. It would benefit all of our local seniors and people with disabilities to be able to access our mobility management program regardless of which side of the border they live in.”* Building on this discussion, another participant said, *“local paratransit agencies should better coordinate rides that cross boundaries, such as county or even state lines.”* The conversation continued across many threads of submissions, including one participant who noted, *“many communities find it difficult to justify cross-county lines, let alone cross-state lines.”*

Other regional coordinated planning issues that surfaced included the need for regional transportation planning during emergencies, opportunities to create linked fare systems, and establishing one-call regional call centers for coordinating and scheduling rides.

**Recommendation 1.3a: The Panel recommends that CCAM evaluate current policies that either prohibit or promote coordination across county and/or state boundaries, and identify opportunities to enhance regional coordination.**

**Recommendation 1.3b: The Panel recommends that CCAM provide training and technical assistance for local and regional planning organizations on ways to include priorities identified in the local coordinated plan.**

***Theme 2: Significant federal policy barriers still exist to facilitate access to transportation services.***

The National Dialogue identified an increasing need to embrace a comprehensive approach to coordinating transportation services among public transportation and human service agencies. Dialogue participants submitted a broad range of ideas related to coordinating resources among agencies. While obviously tied to planning, the ideas in this section address specific policy and program strategies for coordinating funding, vehicles, services, and other resources.

*2.1. Coordinate paratransit services.* Dialogue participants frequently cited the fragmentation and lack of coordination among paratransit services provided by public transportation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and transportation services funded and provided through human service programs (e.g., Medicaid, Older Americans Act, and Head Start). ADA complementary paratransit services are provided as a civil right, ensuring equal access for those who otherwise cannot use publically supported fixed route transit; human service programs typically include funding to help individual clients access transportation for a specific purpose (e.g., doctor’s appointments, job interviews, therapy sessions, and education programs).

Participants generally expressed a strong desire to build a seamless paratransit service system that addresses the multiple needs of consumers and makes the most of limited community resources. There were differences of opinion on a few issues. For example, participants debated the value of shared rides on ADA complementary paratransit services vs. the value of rides provided by Medicaid for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT). A number of participants also expressed strong concern about the need to ensure safe, efficient, and reliable transportation for the most vulnerable populations, including frail older adults and individuals with significant disabilities. Participants discussed specific challenges created by recent Medicaid regulations on brokerage services, indicating that *“the interpretations of this rule are putting well-developed, coordinated systems at risk”* and that *“we should not allow independent brokerage models to erect new barriers to coordination.”*

Despite differences in opinions, Dialogue participants were generally in agreement that individuals’ transportation needs are not being met because of fragmented and disjointed approaches among the various agencies and programs that fund local transportation services. Participants highlighted a number of differences between agency requirements that create barriers to building seamless and coordinated paratransit service system. These included differences in:

- Requirements and processes for establishing eligibility for transportation services including need, destination, or type of transportation service required;
- Level of assistance provided to passengers (e.g., door to door, curb to curb);
- Vehicle safety standards (e.g., size, maintenance requirements, seatbelts);
- Driver certification requirements and processes (e.g., Commercial Drivers License, drug and alcohol testing, safety background checks);

- Hours of operation (e.g., daytime, evening, weekends, and holidays); and
- Scheduling procedures (e.g., prioritization, arrival and wait times).

In addition, several participants suggested that there is merit in exploring alternative service delivery strategies, such as supporting deviated fixed route systems with human service funding, or allowing non-scheduled eligible users to get a ride when they are traveling to the same destination.

**Recommendation 2.1: The Panel recommends that CCAM evaluate the differences in policies related to service provision across agencies, and identify opportunities to streamline requirements (e.g., eligibility, level of assistance, vehicle safety standards, driver certification requirements, hours of operations, and scheduling procedures). The Panel suggests developing, implementing, and disseminating joint policy guidelines for opportunities identified.**

*2.2. Provide explicit and clear guidance for cost sharing.* Participants also discussed the challenges of managing multiple transportation programs with discrete funding streams, and the lack of coordination of transportation services among public transportation providers, non-profit providers, and private providers. One participant said, “While there are case examples of states that have developed partnerships between Federal Transit Administration (FTA)-funded programs and NEMT [non-emergency medical transportation], some states have a great deal of difficulty moving forward when the interpretation is that Medicaid services can't be funded on these vehicles because they are already being funded to provide service through another federal program.” Another participant offered, “It is crazy for a Medicaid [-funded] vehicle and a local [ADA] paratransit vehicle [to be] sitting at the same apartment complex, going to the same dialysis center or doctor's office, yet it happens every day due to the funding columns and perceived rules governing trips and trip purposes. It is a huge barrier to coordination of services.” Dialogue participants expressed frustration with the lack of clear guidance for sharing costs among funding agencies and urged the CCAM to make resolution of this issue a priority.

**Recommendation 2.2: The Panel recommends the development of a joint federal policy statement on cost sharing that is adopted by all CCAM agencies, incorporated into their grant agreements and policy guidance, and actively promoted to agencies at the state and local level. The Panel suggests that the Centers for Medicaid Services work closely with other CCAM members on the development and implementation of these policies.**

*2.3. Expand options for using federal match across CCAM agencies and programs.* SAFETEA-LU allows Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grantees to use non-Department of Transportation (DOT) program funds to fulfill the local match requirement (“federal match”). However, Dialogue participants perceive that other agencies do not have the same reciprocal option in their grant requirements and guidance, and indicated that it would be helpful if the ability to use federal monies to meet the local match requirement was extended across programs.



**Recommendation 2.3: The Panel recommends that CCAM evaluate the impact on service delivery and on local, state, and federal spending when “federal match” is allowed. The Panel also recommends that CCAM study the impact on local communities and states when they do not have the necessary funds to support a local match requirement.**

*2.4. Address gaps in transportation services.* Dialogue participants identified continuing transportation gaps that exist in programs across the federal government, and expressed frustration with the often limited transportation options that are available during evenings, weekends, and holidays. While these ideas and comments were initially viewed as a mobility management concern, the Panel concluded that CCAM should review specific laws, regulations, and administrative policies that may present barriers to improving access to transportation services. Participants offered the following examples of specific programs and policies that should be reviewed.

(a) Employment. While many participants highlighted successes associated with funding provided through the FTA’s Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program, others expressed concern about the lack of transportation access to employment sites. Participants were especially concerned about the high cost of transportation services for low and middle income wage earners. Other expressed concerns about the lack of transportation available for people working evenings, weekends, or late night shifts. Participants urged that consideration be given to providing subsidized vouchers and reimbursement for gas mileage, highlighting positive examples of employees who were offered interim transportation assistance in their first weeks or months of employment or until they received their first pay check. Participants also urged CCAM to explore new incentives for businesses and employers to coordinate with local transportation providers and other organizations to create transportation solutions that enhance employment site access.

(b) Health and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation. The Dialogue generated a significant amount of discussion regarding access to health care and access to non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT). One Dialogue participant suggested that, in addition to addressing current regulatory challenges and barriers, *“provision for transportation services must be included in any new laws regarding health care reform.”* Dialogue participants consistently pointed to a growing need for addressing the demand for NEMT services, *“given the pending increased demand of an aging American population, including more people reaching the threshold age, more people living longer, and more people seeking access to ongoing healthcare treatments such as dialysis, we need a fresh approach to incorporate NEMT into the overall transportation solution.”* NEMT is often funded by Medicaid, and Dialogue participants also highlighted a significant disconnect between Medicaid-supported transportation services and other transportation services (e.g., ADA paratransit, Older Americans, and Head Start).

(c) Veterans. A number of participants expressed concern about the lack of transportation access provided to veterans and the lack of coordination between veteran’s transportation programs and others in the community. One participant said, *“In my area, the Veterans Affairs (VA) van - driven by volunteers - is one of the only transportation options available to reach a nearby major city. No matter how many empty seats it has, though, it's limited to veterans. Moreover, because of equipment limitations and liability concerns with volunteer drivers, it's limited to veterans*

*who can get themselves into the van unassisted.*” Several participants also offered suggestions for the VA, including: (a) evaluate transportation services offered within the VA facility; (b) participate in any coordinated transportation planning processes in the local community; (c) offer any excess capacity in VA transportation services to other federal agencies under agreements that provide for reimbursement to VA; (d) use any excess capacity in the transportation service of other federal agencies under agreements that provide for reimbursement to that agency; and (e) inform veterans about the transportation services of other government agencies that might be available to them.

(d) Americans with Disabilities Act. The overarching question of the National Dialogue focused on ideas to improve access to transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with lower incomes, which generated a significant amount of discussion about public transportation that is required by the ADA. There were three threads of conversation that highlighted transportation gaps related to the ADA:

- 1) Ongoing challenges and gaps regarding the enforcement of the ADA. Participants specifically noted issues related to bus stop accessibility, the ongoing challenges of getting bus drivers to announce bus stops, and the need for driver training related to passenger needs and assistance.
- 2) Concern about the relationship between fixed route transit and paratransit. Specific discussion centered on the challenges created for paratransit users when fixed route service is eliminated or reduced.
- 3) Suggestions to consider the development of a national registry of paratransit riders. The intent would be to facilitate access to paratransit services in other cities when traveling. Many cities currently offer reciprocity; however, the process for accessing these services is cumbersome and slow. The registry could also be extended to services beyond ADA paratransit (e.g., volunteer driver programs, Older Americans Act, and NEMT).

(e) Rural Issues. While this Dialogue was not intended to focus on specific geographic locations, there was a strong voice from the rural communities, as demonstrated by the 16 separate ideas submitted on rural issues. Participants indicated that parts of the country still do not have transportation services or have severely limited resources, and noted that rural transportation systems cannot be designed in the same way as urban or suburban systems. Participants stressed that while rural areas may have fewer people, the distance to the doctor’s office, work, and even the grocery store is usually greater, requiring different and innovative strategies, with greater attention to mobility management strategies. Examples included creating a shared taxi service, developing partnerships with non-profit and faith based organizations, offering greater options for public transportation, coordinating rides to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other destinations, and building volunteer driver programs. Participants also noted the significant isolation that rural Americans face when they do not have access to transportation resources.

**Recommendation 2.4: The Panel recommends that CCAM members re-evaluate existing transportation policies to eliminate barriers that limit access to transportation for health services and employment. The Panel also recommends that agencies create incentives for addressing gaps in transportation services especially for veterans, people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals living in rural areas.**

*2.5. Simplify Grant Requirements and Consider Program Consolidation.* Participants in the National Dialogue suggested that it is time to revisit the overall structure of transportation funding in order to better meet the needs of communities, including individuals with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes. Dialogue participants consistently stressed the need to develop a “family of services” that would provide a continuum of transportation options based on an individual’s ability, income, wellness, and interface with the environment.

The idea of program consolidation was raised in almost every discussion in this National Dialogue. Participants suggested specific strategies, including consolidating all transportation funds (including funding currently integrated into human service programs) and establishing a new block grant program. One participant said, “*The answer is to reengineer the service delivery to provide a single service in as many areas as possible, meeting the demands of all riders (including seniors and those with disabilities).*” The Panel recognizes the sensitivities and legislative challenges that would be required to embrace this broad strategy change for providing transportation services in our nation, but urges the CCAM to open the door to further discussion and exploration of the idea.

**Recommendation 2.5: The Panel recommends that CCAM review current legislative and administrative policies to determine options available for streamlining transportation programs and consolidating resources.**

***Theme 3: Mobility management strategies are underutilized in communities across the country.***

Participants alluded to the importance of mobility management throughout the Dialogue and offered the following suggested definitions and clarification of the term:

*“A means/opportunity to create access to existing services, so there might be a variety of strategies for the presenting issues”*

*“Includes improving access, ensuring that the infrastructure for mobility is available”*

*“ The process where you use all existing resources, public, private-non-profit, private-for-profit, to provide mobility. It also incorporates livable community design, access to transportation services (sidewalks, curb cuts, bus shelters, etc.), and Transit oriented Design (TOD)”*

*“ A way to improve mobility, not necessarily ways to improve transportation solutions.”*

While participants discussed a broad range of strategies for improving mobility management, the following sub-themes generated the greatest level of interest and discussion:

*3.1. Encourage vehicle coordination and sharing.* The issue of vehicle sharing is tied to the coordination between ADA Paratransit and other human service transportation services outlined in Theme 2-. However, Dialogue participants offered a number of additional perspectives and insights for sharing vehicles between organizations. Five different models of vehicle sharing were identified in the analysis, including several that are being implemented on a limited basis:

- Coordinate with school systems to use school buses for transporting other populations during off-peak hours, especially in geographic regions where there are limited resources available for transportation services;
- Increase the number of businesses, non-profit organizations, or transit agencies that can either lend vehicles to organizations or provide limited service for specific destinations when they are sitting idle on weekends, holidays, and evenings;
- Build incentives for public transit agencies to offer vehicles scheduled to go ‘out of service’ to non-profit organizations as a donation or at a significantly reduced cost;
- Offer opportunities for individuals to rent an accessible vehicle from transit agencies, non-profit organizations, and/or local businesses when they are not in use; and
- Promote the use of private vehicles for use in ride sharing programs.

Dialogue participants stressed that too often the lack of coordination and sharing stems from the lack of unwillingness from community partners to engage in new and innovative approaches. Dialogue participants also noted other challenges, including lack of clear guidance, competition with charter service, and the cost of liability insurance.

**Recommendation 3.1: The Panel recommends that the CCAM clarify guidance on vehicle sharing and make sure it is adopted by all CCAM member agencies and broadly disseminated at the federal, state, and local levels<sup>8</sup>.**

*3.2. Promote the use of technology and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).* Dialogue participants described the benefits of using technology for coordinating transportation resources across a broad range of transportation services, including public transportation, taxi services, volunteer programs, and non-profit human transportation providers. There was general consensus among Dialogue participants that using technology can make scheduling rides, vehicles, and drivers more efficient and more effective. Participants indicated that while technology is currently available, it is not necessarily being used to effectively coordinate efforts among transportation providers.

Participants also highlighted the need to implement mobility management strategies to enhance transportation access to specific community services by utilizing technology solutions at health clinics, work site locations, one-stop employment centers, and housing developments.

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<sup>8</sup> The CCAM’s policy statement on Vehicle Sharing reads as follows: “Member agencies of the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility resolve that Federally-assisted grantees that have significant involvement in providing resources and engage in transportation should coordinate their resources in order to maximize accessibility and availability of transportation services”.

Participants offered several examples, including one focused on the opportunity to build a technology interface between scheduling transportation services and health care appointments. One noted, *“If clinic staff knew when other patients from the same zip-code were arriving (on paratransit) at or near that hospital zone ( e.g., dialysis or therapy appointments), they could schedule the physician’s appointment accordingly. They could provide the patient with the phone number of the (transportation) carrier (ADA, Medicaid or other), who would gladly (and efficiently) add another rider.”* Dialogue participants thought that this would help to alleviate missed appointments, reduce wait times for rides, and optimize the use of limited transportation resources.

**Recommendation 3.2: The Panel recommends that CCAM continue to expand the use of technology solutions to streamline and coordinate rides, vehicles, and drivers.**

*3.3. Support a broad range of services, including volunteer driver programs, taxi services, and travel training.* Dialogue participants reinforced the value of the family of services concept, which includes the availability of a continuum of transportation resources and services in communities, including pedestrian and bike options, scooters, private vehicles, volunteer driver programs, taxi services, school buses, ADA paratransit, deviated fixed route, and fixed route services. The following topics generated a greater number of ideas and comments:

*(a) Volunteer Driver Programs:* Eighteen separate ideas were offered on volunteer driver programs. First and foremost, participants expressed the need to start this option in communities to fill gaps in transportation services. While the focus was primarily on meeting the needs of older adults, there were voices advocating for including people with disabilities and individuals with limited incomes. Dialogue participants noted the potential for new partnerships with faith based communities, retirement communities, and housing networks. Another key discussion focused on the costs associated with volunteer driving programs. One participant said *“financial assistance should be offered for the operating costs of agencies and organizations that coordinate and offer rides to seniors and people with disabilities, using unpaid volunteers who drive their own cars. Such agencies do not need or use capital funds, but need help with volunteer recruitment, scheduling, and liability insurance.”* Additional sub-themes included the need for driver training, safety, driver security checks, and the benefits of building a volunteer time credit system.

**Recommendation 3.3a:** While insurance and liability are typically state issues, the Panel recommends that the CCAM provide leadership to address these important issues, especially with regard to volunteer driver programs. To this end, the Panel also recommends that CCAM develop and offer a uniform policy for consideration and adoption by the states.

*(b) Taxi Services.* Dialogue participants emphasized the complementary role of taxis in providing paratransit services. Participants specifically highlighted the ability of taxi services to provide a greater level of demand-response service, reducing the need to make reservations far in advance for paratransit services. In addition, participants noted that taxi service is often the only transportation available during evenings, weekends and holidays. However, participants cautioned about barriers to using taxi services, like cost and the lack of accessible taxi fleets.

**Recommendation 3.3b: The Panel recommends that the CCAM consider supporting the use of taxi and other alternative services to address local transportation gaps in communities.**

*(c) Travel training programs.* The Dialogue included 11 separate ideas related to travel training for youth, older adults, veterans, and others who may need assistance in developing the appropriate skills to use transportation services. Participants defined travel training as “*training on how to use the ‘bus’ safely and independently, including training on pedestrian safety skills.*” Dialogue participants discussed the importance of ensuring that travel training was part of the ADA eligibility process, so that eligible individuals are offered the opportunity to learn how to use the fixed route bus, as appropriate.

Participants suggested that travel training is under-prescribed as part of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Transition Plan (ITP) for students enrolled in special education classes. This was also true for students who have a ‘reasonable accommodation’ under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Participants stressed the importance of introducing transportation and pedestrian safety skills to students with disabilities as early as elementary school, so they can develop the necessary skills over time.

Dialogue participants also stressed the importance of introducing travel training for older adults, and suggested that information about transportation options, including travel training, be offered at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Other Dialogue participants suggested that travel training not be limited to training on the fixed route bus system, but also paratransit services, especially for older adults, because they often move directly from driving themselves to needing door-to-door assistance.

**Recommendation 3.3c: The Panel recommends that members of the CCAM provide technical assistance and training for teachers, therapists, and others in communities to implement travel training programs.**

***Theme 4: There are missed opportunities to bridge gaps between transportation and other community services.***

There was a significant amount of discussion regarding the importance of building livable communities that include pedestrian and bike access, accessible sidewalks, bus stops, and easier access to services (e.g., grocery, healthcare, employment, recreation, and housing). Participants stressed the benefits of integrating the concepts of universal design throughout the community so that there is easier access for everyone.

*4.1. Coordinate with the Livable-Sustainable Communities Initiative.* Participants generally agreed that the local coordination plans required by SAFETEA-LU are a good starting point for improving access and mobility at the community level. In over 18 different ideas submitted, participants stressed the importance of building links between employment, education, housing, health and transportation services. Participants urged CCAM to become part of a larger dialogue and participate in the Partnership for Sustainable Communities Initiative established by the

Obama Administration<sup>9</sup>. Participants also suggested that CCAM build relationships with programs like "Complete Streets" to enhance walkable and accessible communities that clearly benefit the mobility of seniors, persons with disabilities, and others. In the words of one participant, "*integration with a broader livability initiative would promote the goals of mobility management.*"

**Recommendation 4.1: The Panel recommends that the CCAM continue to build strong partnerships with other intergovernmental initiatives that support and promote greater mobility and independence.**

*4.2 Encourage the development of accessible pedestrian environments.* Participants cited a number of challenges and barriers to accessing fixed route public transportation, including the lack of accessible sidewalks and crosswalks, which make it dangerous to get to a bus stop. Participants noted that this lack of accessibility in the pedestrian environment has had a significant impact on the number of individuals currently using more costly paratransit services. Participants urged the federal government to enforce ADA accessibility requirements at bus stops, and to increase funding for building accessible paths of travel (e.g., sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic signals). Participants also highlighted the importance of integrating options like talking signs and other technology to facilitate safe street crossings for everyone. Specifically, participants urged the federal government to promote the integration of remote infrared audible signage systems (RIAS), a technology solution that provides individuals who are blind with directional information, including the location of the bus, the bus stop, street crossings, and other key points of access.

**Recommendation 4.2: The Panel recommends that CCAM explore ways to encourage and promote the development of pedestrian accessible environments and enhance access to transportation services.**

### *Conclusion*

The Panel applauds CCAM for its dedication to improving access to transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes. The topics raised in this Dialogue are not new to CCAM and accessible transportation stakeholders, but Dialogue participants have identified important and challenging policy concerns that will be critical for CCAM to address in its next strategic plan. The themes, ideas, and Panel recommendations in this report represent an opportunity for CCAM to continue to provide leadership for simplifying access to transportation resources and building efficiencies across 11 federal departments<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have developed a new interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities to help families in all communities — rural, suburban and urban — gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs, while protecting the environment in communities nationwide.

## Demographic Information

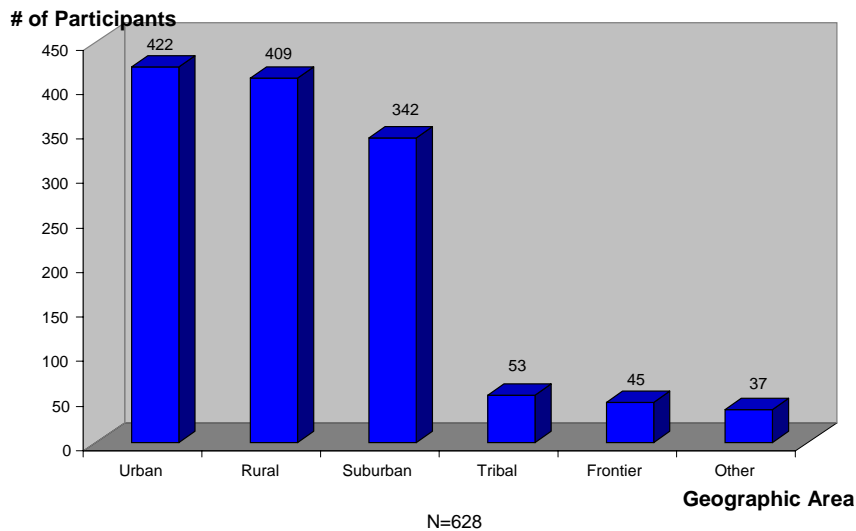
In order to register and actively participate in the Dialogue, visitors were required to create a user name and enter certain demographic information. Although much of the information requested was optional, a large number of participants took the time to provide the information requested, demonstrating a high desire and willingness to participate in the Dialogue. Distilling and examining information from the optional questions provides a snapshot of the Dialogue participants, and will help contextualize their participation the UWR Dialogue.

Most of the fields related to demographic information were optional, with the exception of one question regarding ‘area of interest’, which included 20 specific categories and other. Because this field provided participants with an option to select an unlimited number of categories, most people selected multiple areas.

### Geographic Areas

A total of 628 individuals responded to the question about the geographic area they represented. Three hundred and seventy two of these respondents selected more than one geographic region. As shown in Figure 2, a total of 409 participants identified one of their geographic areas as rural, 422 identified one of their geographic regions as urban, and 342 identified one of their geographic regions as suburban. It is harder to convene meetings among stakeholders in disparate rural communities, not to mention frontier or tribal communities, than in urban or suburban communities. Because the Dialogue was available online, it was accessible 24 hours a day during its two-week live period, which provided parity of access across the country. Thus, the National Dialogue succeeded in bringing together more participants from a broader array of geographic areas over a two week period, than a more traditional solicitation of ideas, such as a single town-hall meeting, could have achieved.

**Figure 2. Geographic Areas of Participants**

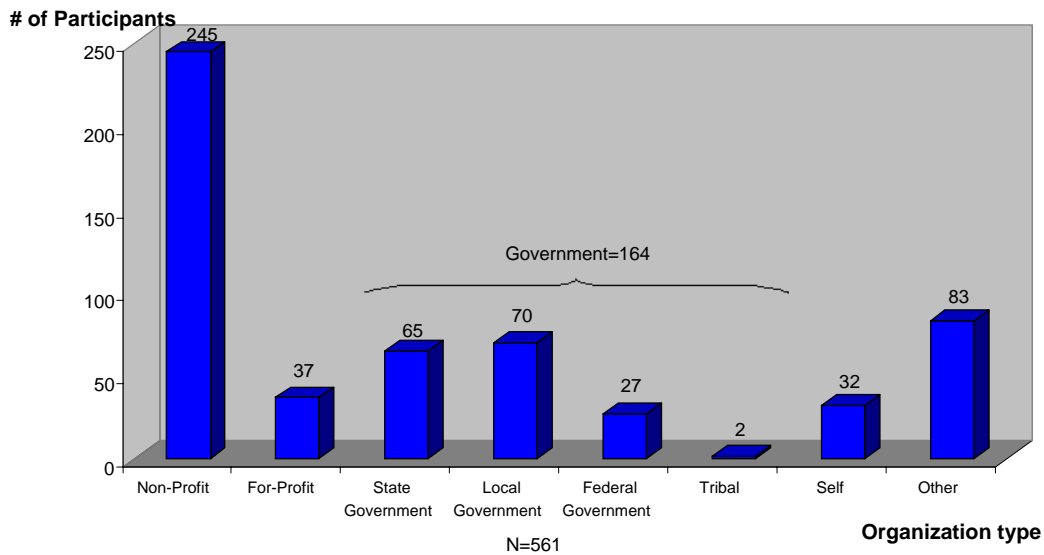




### Type of Organization

As shown in Figure 3, a total of 561 participants described the type of organization that they represented. The plurality of respondents (245) indicated that they are affiliated with non-profit organizations. Upon further review of qualitative information collected, these participants largely represented organizations providing aging, employment, disability, and education related services. Another large group of participants (135) identified themselves with either state or local government agencies, while 32 individuals identified themselves as ‘self’.

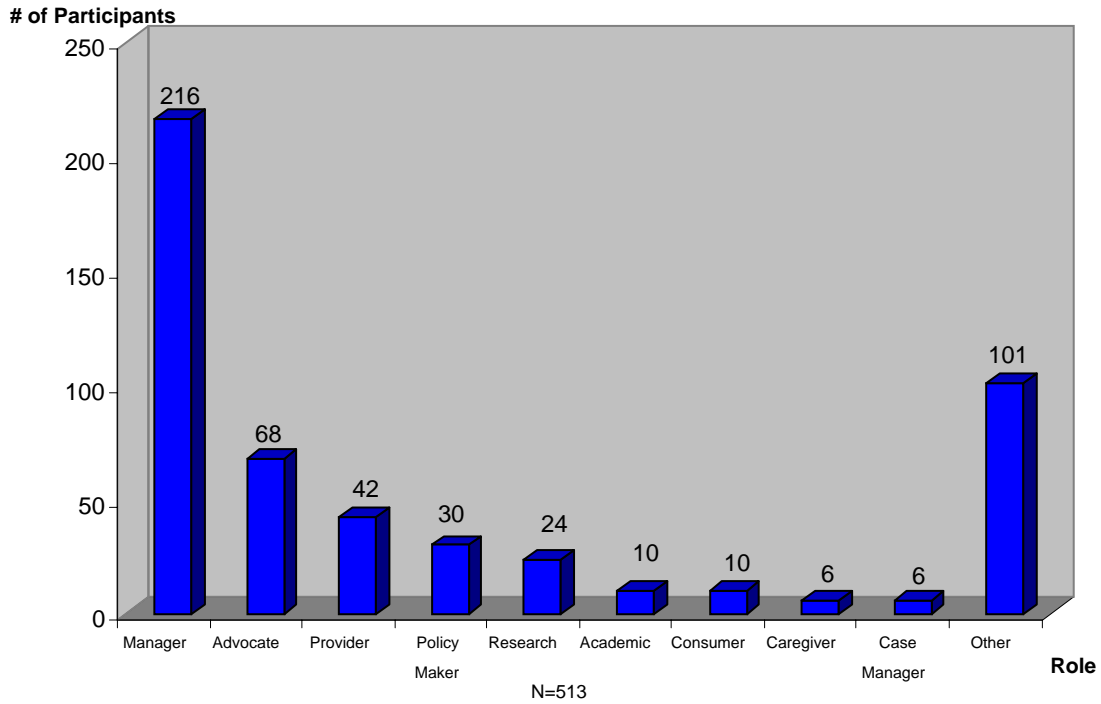
**Figure 3. Type of Organization Represented**



### Role in Organization

Five hundred and thirteen participants responded to the question about their roles in agencies, organizations, and communities. Participants represented a range of roles, including 147 managers, 68 advocates, and 30 policymakers. The primary target audience for participation was individuals who would be knowledgeable about the problems facing coordinated human service transportation as well as the policy ramifications of potential solutions to those problems. The overwhelming number of insightful and constructive comments received in the Dialogue suggested participants were highly knowledgeable about transportation services, programs, and policies. Figure 4 provides an overview of the specific roles identified by participants.

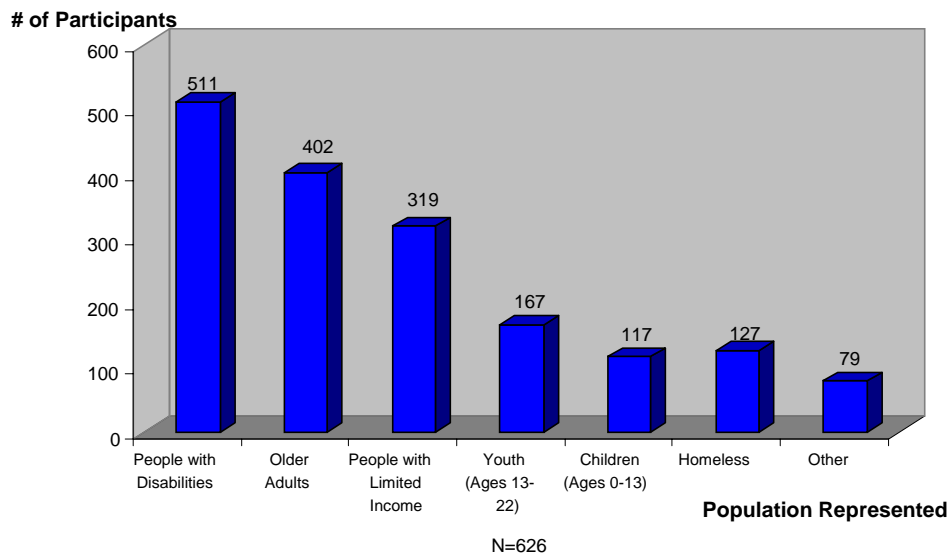
**Figure 4. Organizational Roles of Participants**



**Population Represented**

Figure 5 provides an overview of responses submitted by 626 participants regarding the populations they represent, with over two-thirds of identifying more than one population.

**Figure 5. Populations Represented**



## Methodology

Coordination and joint strategic planning occurs across many different groups at the national, state and local level. The CCAM, therefore, believed it was important to reach out across the country through an online venue that could be used to gather input from individuals, organizations, and agencies at the national, state and local levels.

The National Academy of Public Administration (National Academy) engaged a Panel of National Academy Fellows to guide the project and conduct an independent analysis of the National Dialogue content. The Panel members brought strong public administration and management knowledge and skills to the project, including experience in policy design and program implementation at the federal, state and local level. Panel members also brought a deep understanding of the challenges involved in addressing such cross-cutting, intra-agency and inter-agency issues.

The National Academy also assembled a small work group with representatives of the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, Easter Seals Project ACTION, and the National Resource Center on Human Service Transportation to help guide the process of design and implementation.

### Selecting a Topic

The first step in developing the online Dialogue site was to craft a clear, compelling question and related content to capture the extraordinary complexity of the issues, while ensuring that the questions were understandable and engaging to the intended participants. The small work group used a multi-tiered approach:

- **Brainstorming.** Sessions were held with liaisons from the CCAM member agencies to identify potential topics that could be presented to Dialogue participants.
- **Question and Content Development.** The work group followed the brainstorming session by refining the overarching question and developing a series of jumping off questions. In addition, the workgroup identified information that would be useful for Dialogue visitors and participants who might need to learn more about the issues or better understand context about United We Ride.

The overarching question utilized in the Dialogue was: **“What ideas or actions can improve access to transportation for people with disabilities, older and adults and persons of limited incomes?”** This question was broad enough that it could engage a large population, yet specific enough that actionable ideas and policy solutions could be, and were, suggested.

The workgroup and CCAM liaisons also established a series of “jumping off” questions that rotated on the front page of the UWR Dialogue site, and were intended to prompt participants to think about a variety of issues:

- What are the *policy challenges* that prevent transportation access to employment, healthcare, education, and other community activities?
- What are the *opportunities* that increase transportation access to employment, healthcare, education, and other community activities?
- How well is the *coordinated planning process* required by SAFETEA-LU currently working in your community?
- What strategies should be employed to *better coordinate resources and/or funding* for building a more effective transportation system that enhances access to employment, healthcare, education, and other community activities?

### **Building Incentives for Participation: A Value Exchange**

One key aspect of ensuring participation in on-line dialogues is providing potential participants with a clear and plausible explanation of what they could expect to gain for their time spent submitting or rating ideas. In this case, the value exchange was twofold: the opportunity to consider perspectives that one might not otherwise encounter and the opportunity to influence policymakers. The latter was expected to be especially powerful and was presented to participants as follows:

“The vision of this National Dialogue is to produce concrete, actionable suggestions for the leaders charged with enhancing transportation services for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes at all levels – national, state and local. Upon the close of this Dialogue on November 12, 2009, the members of the CCAM will review the results of this discussion. This feedback will directly influence future decisions about policies, programs, and updates to the CCAM Strategic Plan.”

The high conversion rate of visitors to registered participants at the site confirmed that the value exchange was appropriate and worthwhile to the audience.

### **Conducting Outreach for Participation**

The National Dialogue’s outreach strategy aimed to include individuals at the local, state, and national levels who had experience using, operating, and/or coordinating transportation services, were knowledgeable about current transportation challenges, had an understanding about promising practices, and could offer suggestions for potential policy and program direction. The National Academy worked with the CCAM, Easter Seals Project Action (ESPA) and the National Resource Center on Human Service Transportation Coordination to develop and subsequently execute an outreach strategy to engage stakeholders with these characteristics in the UWR National Dialogue. This multi-step process included:

- **Compiling a comprehensive outreach list.** The National Academy worked with the workgroup and CCAM liaisons to compile a comprehensive list of approximately 3,400

individuals who were interested in programs and policies related to transportation at the national, state, and local levels. Key networks that were targeted during outreach prior to and during the Dialogue included:

- Headquarter and Regional Offices of CCAM member agencies;
  - State directors of Vocational Rehabilitation, Units on Aging, United We Ride, Transit Associations, Head Start, Developmental Disability Councils, Medicaid, and Centers for Independent Living;
  - Members of the National Consortium on Human Service Transportation;
  - Veteran Service Organizations (VSO);
  - Members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD);
  - Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP) state contacts;
  - Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO);
  - Tribal Transportation Assistance Program contacts; and
  - American Public Transportation Association committee members.
- **Conducting regular and broad outreach.** The National Academy conducted periodic outreach from October 19, 2009-November 13, 2009, both prior to and during the National Dialogue. The National Academy used Campaign Monitor, an online e-mail distribution service, to send email alerts. This system eliminated duplicative email addresses and allowed the National Academy to track the number of individuals who opened the alerts. The software also provided an option for individuals to share the email alert, with an ability to track this information. Figure 6 provides a report of each of the email alerts sent:

**Figure 6. Email Alerts**

Date of Email Alert:	Audience Size:	Number of Unique Opens:	Number of Click Throughs <sup>11</sup> :	Number of Forwards: <sup>12</sup>
Prior to Dialogue				
10/19/09	2,259	379 (16% )	118	8
10/26/09	3,436	695 (20.17%)	199	11
During Dialogue				
11/2/2009	4,193	959 (24.17%)	445	32
11/5/2009 <sup>13</sup>	4,371	869 (19.88%)	309	21
11/9/2009	4,394	803 (19.04%)	278	1
11/12/2009	4,471	785 (18.42%)	292	4
11/13/2009	4,507	693 (16.09%)	227	0

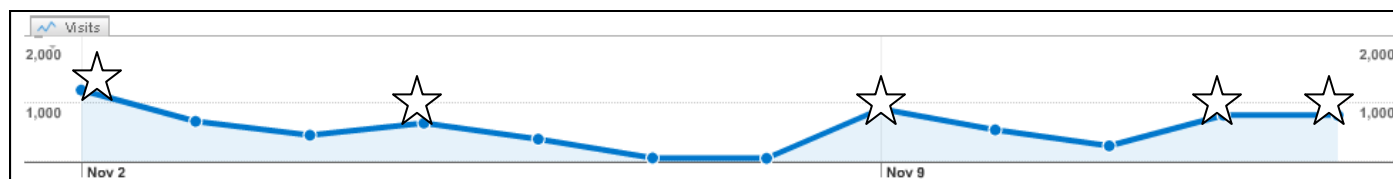
<sup>11</sup> A ‘click through’ indicates that an individual clicked the link to the UWR Dialogue site directly from the outreach email

<sup>12</sup> This number only measures individuals who forwarded the message using Campaign Monitor. Due to the high incidence of direct traffic we believe that many individuals forwarded the message on their own.

<sup>13</sup> Three e-mails with different content were sent to the email list on November 5, 2009. Each was designed to increase participation in the site. The aggregated results are presented here.

The direct outreach efforts conducted by the National Academy contributed positively to the traffic that the site experienced. Figure 7 shows that each day that an e-mail was sent, there was a spike in traffic to the Dialogue site. The e-mail on November 5, 2009 reversed the downward trend in unique visitors from the first day of the Dialogue to the third, and the e-mails on November 9<sup>th</sup> resulted in the second highest number of visits to the National Dialogue site.

**Figure 7. Visits to the United We Ride National Dialogue**



### ☆ Dates of Email Reminders

Alerts were posted on dozens of websites and direct emails were sent on a broad range of list serves to over 100,000 individuals as a result of the outreach. Among the organizations that promoted participation in the Dialogue were Easter Seals Project ACTION, the Department of Labor e-policy workgroup, United We Ride Ambassadors, the Office of Special Education Technical Assistance Network, the United We Ride website, the Administration on Children and Families Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Office, and Disability.gov.

The metrics indicate that the outreach reached the right people, in terms of (a) the people who visited the Dialogue site and registered to become participants, and (b) the level of ideas supported. The top four referring websites (United We Ride, Easter Seals Project ACTION, Department of Labor, and Twitter) generated 697 click-throughs to the UWR Dialogue site. This, coupled with the direct traffic figure in the participation analysis suggests that the most effective communications were direct e-mail communications or word of mouth transmittals from trusted sources, rather than website publicity. Alternatively, it may indicate that the e-mails, sent to so many individuals, penetrated communities to such an extent that they already knew about the Dialogue and did not feel compelled to click the links featured on various websites.

### Measuring Traffic and Participation

Bringing together a large number of participants who might not otherwise have had a chance to impact the direction of United We Ride was a key goal of this Dialogue. Several metrics provide an indication of the breadth and quantity of participation in this Dialogue, as well as some qualitative information about the participants. Two broad categories of metrics about the Dialogue were captured: traffic and participation.

Traffic metrics collected for this Dialogue include unique visitors, total visits, page views and server requests. The National Academy also used a Google Analytics tool to capture information about the average time spent on site by the user, the average number of pages viewed per visit, the geographic origin of visits and the “bounce rate” (the “percentage of single-page visits or visits in which the person left [the] site from the entrance (landing) page.”)

The most basic measures of engagement with the Dialogue gauge site traffic. While these metrics do not reveal who participated in the Dialogue in terms of contributing content, they do provide information about the efficacy of the outreach efforts, as well as the ability of the Dialogue to engage its intended audience on a sustained basis. Over the 12 days the Dialogue was live:

- The site received 6,808 visits from 3,851 unique visitors who spent an average of 8:34 minutes on the site
- 68.71% of all visits were direct visits, meaning they linked directly to the Dialogue from the URL included in an email message or copied and pasted the URL directly from an email message or elsewhere
- There were 54,604 page views, with the average visitor looking at about eight pages
- The site had a “bounce rate” of 31.82% (includes single page visits or visits in which a visitor leaves the site directly from the landing page). This is the lowest bounce rate of any National Dialogue hosted by the National Academy to date
- There were visitors from 1,219 US cities and every US state.

Participation metrics collected for this Dialogue captured the number of registered users<sup>14</sup>, ideas, comments, ratings and tags. Metrics relating specifically to participation help the National Academy understand the extent to which visitors felt compelled to take part in the Dialogue. Over the course of a week, the National Dialogue generated:

- 783 registered participants (about twenty percent of unique visitors)
- 280 unique ideas, which prompted 1,056 comments, 1,538 ratings and 262 tags.

Based on the information yielded from the site metrics, a few broad conclusions can be drawn about the character of this Dialogue with regard to public engagement:

- ***The opportunity to contribute was valued.*** Despite the relatively specialized nature of the topic at the center of the Dialogue, the effort engaged about 4,000 unique visitors. On average, visitors to this Dialogue spent more time on the site than visitors to other National Dialogues hosted by the National Academy spent (8:31 minutes compared to an average of 7:03 minutes for all other dialogues). This indicates that the opportunity to read and learn about the various issues was important to many people, even if they did not register on the site. Particularly since the site offered few interaction opportunities that required more than a few seconds to complete (commenting, rating, tagging and other functions), it is reasonable to conclude that much of this time was spent submitting unique ideas and/or reading, rating, tagging and commenting on multiple items.
- ***Visitors heard about the Dialogue through outreach or word of mouth.*** The high rate of participation indicates the outreach conducted by the National Academy and Easter Seals Project Action was successful. Many visitors either typed the URL in directly, or copied and pasted it from somewhere into their browser bar. These people knew about

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<sup>14</sup> A registered user is any individual who creates a unique username on the Dialogue site; this step is necessary in order to submit, comment on, rate, or tag an idea, or to explore other participants' profiles.

the site before they visited it, as opposed to hearing about it and then searching for it using a search engine online. This is the highest rate of direct traffic for any Dialogue conducted by the National Academy, and may reflect the deep engagement of people who consider themselves part of this community.

- ***Visitors repeatedly took advantage of interaction opportunities.*** More than half of all visits were from return visitors, and members of this group spent an average of 11:03 minutes on the site. This indicates many were highly engaged in the Dialogue, spending 30% more time on the site when they returned. In addition, return visitors viewed an average of 10 pages, 20% more than visitors who came for the first time.
- ***Rating appeared to be an effective content sorting mechanism.*** The ability to rate ideas was the primary mechanism through which the participant community could sort feedback so that the most compelling or popular ideas rose to the top. The average ratio of ratings to ideas was 5:1, which is consistent with other Dialogues hosted by the National Academy.
- ***The site generated and sustained a high participation rate.*** One important goal of any online deliberation is to ensure that a high proportion of those who visit the site ultimately participate. Since registration was not required to view submitted ideas, this Dialogue's conversion rate of about 20 percent—or one out of every five people who visited the site—reflects the proportion of visitors who felt compelled to submit an idea, or to discuss, vote on, or tag an idea. This conversion rate is substantial, particularly given the relatively specialized subject matter being discussed in the UWR National Dialogue. It suggests that the content and format of the Dialogue were compelling, and that barriers to entry on the site were appropriately low. Additionally, the high conversion rate indicates that outreach targeted the right people to engage in this conversation.

## Limitations

In order to ensure that the UWR Dialogue site was accessible, the National Academy conducted a range of accessibility assessments during the platform design phase, including consumer testing of all of the functions on the Dialogue site. We tested across different browsers, including Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox and Safari, as well as through accessibility programs such as JAWS.

During the UWR Dialogue, visitors experiencing accessibility challenges were offered an option to notify the National Academy. As a result, several individuals reported challenges and the UWR National Dialogue team provided reasonable accommodations, including assistance with registration, entering ideas, adding comments, and rating. However, the National Academy and Easter Seals Project ACTION received additional feedback from individuals in the disability community who were not able to fully participate in the Dialogue. The National Academy and Easter Seals Project ACTION are working to address the challenges encountered during the UWR Dialogue and identify strategies (e.g., telephonic access) to more fully engage individuals with disabilities in future dialogues.



## Conducting the Analysis

The Dialogue platform included several analytical tools that provided tremendous opportunity to cross-reference ideas and comments submitted by participants in answering the central question. These tools provided the option to sort ideas and conversations by those with the highest ratings and the most comments. While the ideas with the highest ratings and most comments obviously float to the top, it was also important to understand the relationship between all of the ideas submitted by participants. Participants had the option of tagging specific ideas with key words and/or phrases during the Dialogue. A tag cloud was then created and displayed on the site, showing all of the tags. Tags that were used more often were shown in a larger and darker font. Figure 8 displays tags that were used in the Dialogue.

**Figure 8: Tag Cloud from UWR National Dialogue**



The platform also offered the ability to search and sort the ideas by specific tags, which allowed the National Academy to conduct an analysis of parallel ideas, ideas submitted on similar topics, and those ideas that were cross-cutting in nature. The National Academy Panel, which conducted an independent analysis of all of the ideas and comments, also used this data to identify the key themes and sub-themes of the Dialogue.

### **About the National Academy of Public Administration**

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### **About Easter Seals Project ACTION**

Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA) is funded under a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration. This initiative promotes universal access to transportation for people with disabilities under federal law and beyond by partnering with transportation providers, the disability community, and others through the provision of training, technical assistance, applied research, outreach and communication. In its over twenty-one year history, ESPA has reached thousands of people and organizations with its free training, useful materials and technical assistance. ESPA's activities are coordinated with the other major partners and cooperative agreement recipients of the FTA including the Transportation Research Board, the National Transit Institute, the Community Transportation Association of America's National Resource Center and the American Public Transportation Association. ESPA is hosted within Easter Seals, an almost 100- year old national non-profit organization that provides exceptional services, education, outreach, and advocacy for people with disabilities and their families so that people living with disabilities can live, learn, work, and play in our communities.