



Testimony Regarding

S.B. No. 1093

An Act Providing Funds for Municipal Matching Grants for Demand-Responsive Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities

Made before the

Transportation Committee

March 11, 2009

The Northeastern Connecticut Transit District and the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments **strongly favor** Senate Bill 1093, An Act Providing Funds for Municipal Matching Grants for Demand-Responsive Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities. We urge the Transportation Committee to give this bill **favorable consideration.**

Northeastern Connecticut is largely a rural area. Our region covers 12 towns and more than 450 square miles; with just over 85,000 residents. Providing needed public transportation is a challenge. We operate a six-day a week deviated-fixed route service covering the more densely populated areas of Brooklyn, Killingly, Putnam, and Thompson. This service provides good coverage for about half the region's population. However, for persons outside that area transportation had been difficult to non-existent. That was until the Municipal Grant Program became available.

We can now, through the Municipal Grant Program, offer rides for elderly and disabled persons from Plainfield, Killingly, Brooklyn, Pomfret, Eastford, and Woodstock. We began this service in July of 2007. They now have the opportunity to get to a doctor appointment, go grocery shopping, or go to the mall. This is not to say that they had no options before this program – but for many their options were limited. The Municipal Grant Program allows these persons to go on their own terms. In our first year of offering this service we provided 2,163 rides. During the first two quarters of the 2008-09, we have provided 2,174 rides. Currently, we have 255 persons enrolled in the program and more are added each week.

The Municipal Grant Program has four goals:

- *Provide a uniform funding source available to all municipalities in the state,*
- *Provide new transportation services to enhance access to the community for seniors and people with disabilities where transportation services do not exist,*
- *Expand transportation services to enhance access to the community in areas where transportation is already available, and*
- *Encourage efficient use of scarce resources through coordination*

The Municipal Grant Program has realized those goals in northeastern Connecticut and they continue to be realized daily. In short, the Program works. We also want to note that the Department of Transportation has been instrumental in making this program work. They have minimized the bureaucracy and maximized coordination and efficiency.

Without this program elderly and disabled residents will lose a viable connection to health care, wellness, and just the ability to get out of the house and interact with others. We fully realize that the budget crisis that Connecticut now confronts means making difficult choices and that funding for many programs will be reduced and/or eliminated. However, when a program works and makes a difference for people in our state that already have many challenges – we ask that you give it a chance.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. Should you have any questions, please contact our Executive Director John Filchak.