



# OLR RESEARCH REPORT

March 29, 2011

2011-R-0129

## **TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE**

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You asked about transportation assistance for people who need help getting to and from work. You specifically wanted to know if there are vehicle donation programs in which a vehicle is repaired and given to a person who needs it for work. You also asked for information on the Department of Social Services' (DSS) Diversion Program.

This report highlights programs available to assist with transportation for employment. It is not meant to serve as an exhaustive inventory of all transportation-related services to which individuals or families might avail themselves.

### **SUMMARY**

In Connecticut, there are several ways low-income families can get help with their transportation needs. Good News Garage (GNG), a vehicle repair program, assists qualified, low-income working families to purchase a donated used car at an affordable price. Clients contribute toward the cost of the vehicle and its future maintenance.

Families involved in the Jobs First program can get assistance directly from that program, such as payments for bus fare and mileage reimbursement when clients drive their own cars.

Additionally, the state's five Regional Workforce Investment Boards (RWIBs) coordinate transportation assistance for people participating in the Jobs First program and other low-income individuals. This assistance includes evaluating and expanding transit routes, providing free bus fare, assisting with car repairs and fees, and providing shuttle services.

DSS offers Diversion Assistance, an up-front lump sum payment equivalent to up to three months of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), to families with short-term needs who are eligible for TFA. This program offers a short-term benefit, including transportation assistance, as an alternative to ongoing monthly TFA benefits.

Governor Malloy has proposed eliminating funding for one of the better known transportation programs, a bus that takes Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun employees from Hartford County to the casinos.

## **PROGRAMS TO ASSIST WITH EMPLOYMENT TRANSPORTATION NEEDS**

### ***Vehicle Donation Program -- Good News Garage (GNG)***

GNG is a nonprofit car donation program operated by Lutheran Social Services. The GNG program fixes and sells donated cars to people in need. GNG started in Burlington, Vermont in 1996 and has since expanded into Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Since its inception it has provided over 3,500 vehicles. The typical GNG recipient is a low-income single mother.

Donors may complete the Online Car Donation Form or call GNG to determine their car's suitability for the program. GNG accepts most vehicle donations provided the car has a clean certificate of title or Bill of Sale (for older cars). Cars can be dropped off at a program site or picked up for free at a donor's home. Donated vehicles may be repaired and sold to a person in need, or if they are too expensive to maintain or repair, they are sold at auction, with the proceeds helping fund the program.

Car donors can receive a tax deduction. The amount of the deduction depends on whether the car is sold at auction or repaired and given to a family in need. In general, if the car is sold at auction, the donor may deduct what the car sells for at auction. If a car is sold to a family in need, the deduction could equal the vehicle's fair market value.

In Connecticut, people wishing to purchase a car would do so through GNG's JumpStart program, by contacting the Client Services Coordinator

at (860) 218-2970, extension 4. JumpStart vehicles are repaired and go through a safety check to ensure they will be safe and reliable for 12-18 months with proper care. These vehicles are generally valued between \$3,000-\$4,000, but clients purchase them at half their "book" value (on average \$1,500-\$2,000). The purchase price must be paid in full at the time of title transfer.

To be eligible for a vehicle, a person must (1) have a valid drivers license; (2) be employed, have a job offer, or participate in job training; (3) have a difficult commute (no access to public transportation, car required for work, multiple workplaces, etc.); and (4) have no other operable car registered in their name.

People interested in purchasing vehicles must also demonstrate their ability to purchase, register, insure and maintain a vehicle. And, their income must be less than 60% of the state median income (SMI) level for their family size. (Currently 60% of SMI is \$51,228 annually for a family of three.)

Currently, the JumpStart program is not accepting new applications. It has a long waitlist, with clients waiting four to five months on average to receive a car.

GNG's TransMISSIONs program facilitates car donations for other nonprofits. Nonprofits who want to accept car donations to raise funds work with GNG to manage the process. Under the program, GNG may retain and repair vehicles suitable for a client. Or, the vehicle may be auctioned or sold for salvage value. GNG compensates the nonprofit with a portion of the cash realized or average price of the car.

GNG manages all aspects of the donation process for the nonprofit (including pick-up, evaluation, repairs, disposition, required receipts, tax paperwork) except for marketing the program, which is the responsibility of the nonprofit. Section 501(c)(3) (nonprofit) organizations in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island may take advantage of the TransMISSIONs program.

## ***TANF and Jobs First***

TANF is a federal block grant that funds the state's welfare-to-work program, Jobs First. Jobs First is run jointly by DSS and the Department of Labor (DOL). The program consists of two primary parts: cash assistance and employment services. The cash assistance portion of the program, TFA, provides ongoing financial support generally for up to 21 months.

DSS refers time-limited TFA recipients to the program's employment component that the DOL runs, the Jobs First Employment Services program (JFES). JFES is designed to get people into jobs quickly, and emphasizes job searches and related activities over longer-term activities, such as education and training, to ensure that people can be employed before they reach the TFA time limits.

Transportation assistance is available to TFA recipients participating in the employment services program. In general, able-bodied adults subject to the TFA time limits must participate in JFES as a condition of receiving cash assistance.

Working families in which an adult is engaged in an allowable JFES work activity can receive "special benefits" to help defray some of their transportation costs. Specifically, they can receive bus fare (up to \$10 daily) and mileage reimbursement for private automobiles (up to \$10 daily).

## ***Regional Workforce Investment Boards (RWIBs)***

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 funds assistance to unemployed adults and dislocated workers. The act allows some of the funds to be used to pay for "supportive services," including transportation for these individuals. The state's RWIBs are given authority for planning and oversight at the local level under WIA. In addition to job search and other work-related activities, the state's RWIBs provide or arrange for support services, including transportation to those needing it.

There are five RWIBs in Connecticut: (1) Capital Workforce Partners (North Central region); (2) Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board; (3) Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, Inc.; (4) Workforce Alliance (South Central region); and (5) The Workplace, Inc. (Southwest Region). They coordinate transportation assistance for some individuals that need help getting to work.

**Capitol Workforce Partners.** The Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) formed the Jobs Access Task Force in 1997. Several local organizations, state agencies, and transportation providers serve on this task force. Capital Workforce Partners is one of the members.

CRCOG's Jobs Access program provides transportation to TFA recipients and other low-income individuals. DSS, DOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) fund the program. The program operates fixed route rides and can establish a new route for groups of five or more. Typically, the cost per ride is \$1.25. Employees using this service can also take advantage of two "emergency rides home" per year.

In addition, the program offers free bus passes (up to two months) for those with a new job and gas cards. Capital Workforce Partners uses WIA funds to purchase bus passes and gas cards.

**Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board.** Rides for Jobs is an Eastern Connecticut RWIB program with funding provided by DSS. The Eastern Connecticut Transportation Consortium arranges cost effective employment-related transportation for eligible individuals in the region. Services are available to individuals eligible for or receiving TANF-funded services or a member of a household with at least one parent and one dependent child. People must be referred to this program by an employment and training caseworker. Participants' family income must be below 75% of the SMI. (Currently 75% of SMI is \$64,035 annually for a family of three.) The TFA income limit is much lower, 100% of the federal poverty level (\$18,310 annually for a family of three).

Transportation is for employment related activities including employment, job search, orientations, training, and interviews. Transportation to employment is free for up to 60 days. The program is free, with no time limits, for transportation to employment-related activities.

Car-Based Solutions is a component of the Rides for Jobs program. It assists an individual whose automobile is used for employment with repairs and fees (licenses, emissions, registrations). For car repairs and fees, participants must be able to pay 10% of the cost of the repair up to a lifetime maximum of \$700. Additionally, the car must be registered to the individual and insured.

Rides for Jobs also offers trip reimbursement to individuals currently receiving TANF-funded services who use their own car or carpool. This benefit is limited to those who are working or engaged in a job search. The amount of reimbursement may not exceed \$25 per day.

**Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board.** The Northwest Access to Jobs program offers transportation services to the general public, including individuals transitioning off welfare and other low-income individuals. DSS (through the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board) and the FTA (through the Connecticut Department of Transportation) fund the program. It offers expanded bus routes, free bus passes for up to eight weeks, van transportation, free gas cards, car repairs, and motor vehicle fees. A client must request these services through the state's CT Works One-Stop Career Centers.

**Workforce Alliance.** In the south central region, Workforce Alliance offers the Rides to Work program, which provides transportation services to individuals on "public assistance" or who support minor children. Services include transportation to job interviews and job fairs, free transportation to work for the first month of employment (either with a free bus pass or other customized transportation service), and \$600 for one-time auto repairs or fees.

**The WorkPlace, Inc.** The People to Jobs program is a project of the WorkPlace, Inc., southwestern Connecticut's RWIB. People to Jobs reviews current transit routes and determines where extended service is needed for people living there. According to its website, the program also offers up to two months of free bus passes for travel to work and free gas cards to individuals eligible for or receiving TANF-funded assistance. Clients must have a referral from a CT Works One-Stop center.

## **DSS DIVERSION ASSISTANCE**

The law establishes a diversion assistance program for needy families ([CGS § 17b-112g](#)). Its purpose is to prevent families who are applying for monthly TFA benefits from needing ongoing monthly assistance. This assistance is available to families that (1) apply and are eligible for TFA, (2) demonstrate a short-term need that cannot be met with current or anticipated family resources, and (3) use the short-term benefit to avoid collecting TFA benefits.

The adult in the family must be employed or have a job offer that will begin within three months, have a solid work history, or have marketable job skills that will lead to employment.

Diversion assistance could be used for transportation, child care, housing, utilities, clothing assistance, employment services, and assistance with purchasing or maintaining tools necessary for employment, among other things.

The amount of assistance cannot exceed three months of TFA and is provided as an up-front lump sum payment. Once determined eligible, applicants have three working days to refuse diversion and accept full assistance.

Families that receive diversion assistance cannot collect TFA benefits for three months unless the commissioner determines that they have experienced undue hardship. A family that is subject to the 21-month TFA benefit limit must count diversion assistance towards that limit. But, it has the same right to extensions as families who did not receive diversion assistance.

Receiving diversion assistance does not affect a family's eligibility for other DSS-administered benefits, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, medical assistance, and child care.

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