

STATEMENT OF JUDITH T. CONNOR, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
FOR ENVIRONMENT, SAFETY, AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS, BEFORE THE HOUSE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON AGING ON TRANSPORTATION AND THE ELDERLY,
JANUARY 29, 1976

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for your invitation to present the views of the Department of Transportation on transportation and the Elderly, and particularly to report on the section 16(b)(2) program of the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) and the section 147 rural demonstration program of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and UMTA. With me today are Jerome C. Premo, Associate Administrator for Capital Assistance, Robert H. McManus, Associate Administrator for Transit Planning, both from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, and William Mertz, Associate Administrator for Planning of the Federal Highway Administration. Their offices are directly involved in implementing the programs being examined today.

One of the founding precepts of the Republic is that all Americans, regardless of race, color, or creed, are entitled to equal opportunity. We are now realizing that we must also extend this right of equal opportunity to those of all ages and physical conditions.

There is increasing appreciation within the Department of Transportation and within the wider community, that equality of opportunity of older Americans requires equality of mobility

to permit access to the resources and services to which they are entitled and which they need. Older persons no longer seek to withdraw; they seek participation. After a lifetime of interaction with others, isolation is intolerable to the elderly and infirm.

Because of impaired physical capability, elderly individuals frequently have transportation problems. Taxis are beyond the financial reach of many elderly Americans and buses and other public transportation facilities may be difficult to reach or board. As a result, many clients of senior citizen or nutrition centers, many elderly patients of doctors, and many patrons of recreation centers and stores have limited or no access to these facilities or services. Nonprofit organizations which specialize in care for such individuals provide valuable assistance to public agencies in insuring that lack of transportation does not prevent the elderly from meeting basic needs of food, clothing, and medical care, and enjoying life. But the task is difficult and we know that many individuals who need such assistance are never reached.

Section 16(b)(1) authorizes the Secretary to make grants and loans to States and local public agencies to assist them in meeting the special needs of elderly and handicapped persons. Section 16(b)(2) was added to the Act by the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973. It permits UMTA for the

first time to make capital assistance grants to private nonprofit organizations to assist them in providing transportation services for elderly and handicapped persons where urban mass transportation services otherwise provided by States and local agencies are unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate.

To meet these special needs, the Secretary is authorized to set aside 2 percent of the funds in the basic mass transportation capital grant and planning programs for use by public agencies and private nonprofit organizations. FY 1975 was the first year grants were awarded. \$20.8 million, nearly the full 2 percent, was set aside and distributed as grants to some 1,032 private nonprofit organizations located in 47 States, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. State agencies, including departments of transportation, evaluated and recommended applicants and are administering funded projects. A number of projects funded under other UMTA programs have elderly and handicapped components. When grants to public agencies for these projects are added, spending for use in programs to assist elderly and handicapped persons totals well over the 2 percent level authorized by section 16(b).

Three-fourths of the vehicles purchased under section 16(b)(2) are 10 to 16 passenger vehicles to be used by nonprofit groups to transport elderly persons to and from medical, shopping, recreational, and other facilities. Some of the 2,282 vehicles purchased from FY 1975 grants are equipped with special communications equipment and many have wheelchair lifts or ramps.

Let me give several examples of how these funds are used. In Idaho Falls, Idaho, the Eastern Idaho Special Services Agency presently provides a comprehensive program of health, housing, employment, and other services to 2700 elderly persons, about a quarter of whose incomes are below the national poverty level. With its four new 15 passenger radio-dispatched vehicles, the agency plans to offer -- among other services -- on-demand transportation to medical appointments, the Senior Citizen Center, developmental workshops, shopping and recreational areas, and other locations. The agency expects to provide approximately 1,000 rides per week during the first year of the project. The agency is seeking to serve all of the 11,000 elderly and physically handicapped persons in eastern Idaho, where transportation presently available to elderly persons is extremely limited. Two of the four vehicles will be equipped with a lift.

Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc. is a community action agency in Maui County, Hawaii, a county without a public transportation system, where 28 percent of the elderly population have incomes below the poverty level. The four 15-passenger buses and the 5-passenger van with a wheelchair lift which this agency will purchase with section 16(b)(2) funds will provide transportation to elderly and handicapped persons not now being served and increase their access to treatment, training, rehabilitation, and shopping centers.

And in East Orange, New Jersey, the Essex Chapter of the American National Red Cross will purchase two 9-passenger station wagons. Using volunteer drivers, the Essex Chapter's present 20 station wagon fleet serves primarily elderly and handicapped persons who, because of low income and age or disability, cannot use public transportation. If its system were not in operation, many of those served would either need to be hospitalized on an in-patient basis or go without essential medical services. Section 16(b)(2) funds are needed to replace deteriorating vehicles.

Five months after the FY 75 grants were approved, Montana became the first State to actually put vehicles into service. Six organizations in communities scattered across the State recently began operation with a total of seven vehicles (five

12 passenger vans, one equipped with a wheelchair lift, one 8 passenger van equipped with a lift, and one 16 passenger bus).

The North Central Area Agency on Aging in the small community of Conrad, Montana is indicative of the type of organization receiving funds. The Agency combined receipt of its van, named the "Senior Surry," with the opening of a new Senior Citizens Center, and invited State officials to participate in the ceremonies held on December 6, 1975. The "Surry" replaces a leased vehicle which has served approximately 175 elderly people in a nine county area in North Central Montana.

The total grant to Montana was for \$124,315 to go to 13 private nonprofit organizations in 11 cities for the purchase of 16 vehicles -- three equipped with wheelchair lifts and three with mobile radio units. Of the 11 cities receiving funds, eight of these are in areas of between 5,000 and 10,000 population.

Our requirements for funding capital assistance grants for private nonprofit organizations are similar to those for public agencies. The matching ratio of Federal to local funds of 80 percent (20 percent which insures local commitment and enables us to support more projects) is identical.

UMTA plans to continue its commitment of section 16(b)(2) funds this fiscal year. \$22 million, an increase of more than \$1 million from FY 1975, is being apportioned to the States for this type of assistance to private nonprofit organizations. Although the procedures will be similar to those used last year, UMTA has tried to ensure that the coordination stressed last year becomes a reality through an increased emphasis on planning and cooperation with existing operators of such services, whether performed by public or private operators.

At the same time, we are asking more from public agencies. Earlier last year we proposed regulations which would strengthen our requirements for transportation of elderly and handicapped persons. We are presently analyzing and evaluating the several-thousand pages of public comments which we received prior to issuing final regulations. Despite increased attention to the needs of the elderly by public transportation agencies, we believe assistance to private groups continues to be desirable.

Another Department program affecting transportation needs of the elderly is the Rural Highway Public Transportation Demonstration Program, established by section 147 of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1973 and authorized to begin in fiscal year 1975. Congress established the program as a

2-year demonstration effort and appropriated \$9.65 million for the first year and recently appropriated \$15 million for the second year.

Section 147 project selection criteria are broadly defined to encourage a comprehensive, coordinated program of service for all who have inadequate transportation in the project area, including the disproportionately high percentage of elderly people living in rural areas. Among the selection criteria are "provisions for service to elderly and handicapped persons." These go beyond accessibility features -- such as hand-grips, low steps and shelters -- to include transportation services to shopping areas, medical and other activity centers. Projects must be designed and operated to allow use by the elderly and handicapped and, except for compelling reasons, projects purchasing rolling stock must include at least one vehicle which can accommodate wheelchair-users.

Over 300 applications requesting over \$100 million in program funds were submitted for the first round of selection. On September 22, 1975, we announced the preliminary selection of 45 projects in 31 States. These applicants are now complying with the public hearing requirement and making project revisions, as appropriate. Five of these projects have received final approval from FHWA/UMTA Washington offices.

The projects represent a variety of service strategies including "dial-a-ride" systems alternative vehicle types such as taxicabs, small buses, school buses, and automobiles. Most projects will also pool existing funding sources from various levels of government.

Program regulations were reissued on January 21, 1976, to begin the second round of project selection. We expect that almost twice as many projects will be selected this year.

In developing this program, the Department has coordinated closely with other Federal agencies, particularly the Office of Human Development and the Administration on Aging in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Both the section 16(b) and section 147 programs, together with other activities of the Department including research, demonstrations, capital assistance, technology sharing and interagency cooperation, reflect our continuing commitment to make available improved transportation facilities and services to the elderly.

That concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.