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COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you to discuss rural safety issues in connection with the Urban Mass Transportation's section 18 and section 16 (b)(2) programs.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

The section 18 program for non-urbanized areas was created by the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1978 to assist in the provision of public transportation services in rural and small urban areas. This was the first public transit assistance program established specifically for non-urbanized areas. Under the program, funds are allocated to the States by a statutory formula based on each State's portion of the population of the Nation's non-urbanized areas - those areas with less than 50,000 inhabitants.

In the nine years that the section 18 program has been in place, Congress has appropriated an average of \$76 million per fiscal year to the program, resulting in a total appropriation of \$684 million. These funds have assisted States and localities in the establishment, maintenance, and improvement of public transportation systems in rural and small urban communities. There are now more than 1,000 rural public transportation systems nationwide receiving section 18 assistance. The characteristics of these systems vary widely, with services ranging from user-side subsidy programs using taxis in small towns, to extensive multi-county systems which broker services among several operators. The majority of riders of these systems have few alternatives; they are the elderly, handicapped, low income, or those without access to an automobile.

The section 16(b)(2) program, which was established in 1975, has made available over some \$321 million in capital funds. These funds go to private non-profit organizations to provide transportation services for elderly and handicapped persons. Forty percent of these funds are used in non-urbanized areas. Like section 18, the section 16 (b)(2) program is administered by State transportation agencies.

#### PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

When UMTA took over administration of the section 18 program from the Federal Highway Administration in 1983, we took the

opportunity to streamline the program's administrative procedures, reduce the Federal role in the project development and approval process, and enhance the responsibility of State agencies in program development and management. States submit a single, annual grant application for a Statewide program of projects, which eliminates program review and approval on a project-by-project basis. The States also may adjust funding among projects within the program of projects where necessary. New section 16(b)(2) guidance also was developed, and was modeled after our section 18 procedure, so that both programs could be administratively compatible.

The recently-enacted transit and highway reauthorization act, the Surface Transportation and Uniform Relocation Assistance Act of 1987, reauthorized the transit program through fiscal year 1991. The structure and funding of the section 18 program remain essentially the same under the new act, but the law did add a new Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP), which we have designed to support and complement our rural programs.

We believe the section 18 program is performing well. We have established a simple, responsive program that gives great flexibility to the States and rural transit operators to use the program in a way which best meets their public transportation needs.

I know that the members of this Committee are particularly interested in our efforts to coordinate our rural programs with those of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In fact, it was before this Committee in May of 1985, that we first discussed the idea of a DHHS-DOT Coordinating Council. Under former Secretary Dole's initiative, an interagency agreement was signed by Mrs. Dole and DHHS Secretary Bowen. This agreement set the framework for our joint activities and formally established the Coordinating Council. At its first meeting in March of 1987, the Council identified key issues to be addressed and decided that the undertaking of Regional Coordination Initiatives would be the most effective way to work with States and local operators. Each Governor was asked to designate a State official who could represent both transportation and human service interests to meet with Federal Regional Working Groups. The Council's second meeting was held this past Tuesday, and the Council reviewed all of the activities of the regions and also asked outside organizations to identify issues and make recommendations for further Council action.

Let me now turn to the particular focus of this hearing, safety and rural transportation.

#### UMTA'S ROLE IN SAFETY

UMTA's basic mission is to provide grants and other financial and technical assistance to transit operators, and its primary means

of oversight is the grant management process. In its oversight role, UMTA has focused on a number of key areas: fostering integrated transit planning in urbanized areas and the States; assuring that Federal transit funds are well spent; seeing that projects are completed to specifications and within budget; and making certain that grantees comply with all of the relevant Federal requirements that follow Federal funds.

Safety plays a part in this oversight role, but it is important to remember that UMTA does not have specific statutory safety regulatory functions. UMTA's safety role emphasizes the responsibility of local public agencies in assuring the safety of local transit operations. Our key emphasis in terms of safety has been in providing safety training, research, and technical assistance. For example, we currently are conducting various courses and seminars in the broad field of safety and security. In terms of operating safety, we are funding activities to eliminate or control hazards and risks in transit operations. We provide technical support for various safety and security programs. We are also considering various actions concerning drug use in the industry, including developing a drug and alcohol demonstration plan that we hope will have broad use among a range of grantees.

We are well aware that we can do more in the safety field. In September of this year the Secretary's Safety Review Task Force issued its Report on UMTA. Although the Task Force made a number

of recommendations, the Task Force concluded that, given the structure and history of UMTA's grant program and the extraordinary safety record of the transit industry in the absence of an extensive federal safety program, fundamental changes in UMTA's mission are unnecessary.

We are now in the process of reviewing the Task Force Report and deciding how to implement many of its recommendations. Some of these have to do with rural issues, and we are considering a range of activities in that area as well.

#### RURAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

We continue to look to the States to administer the section 18 and section 16(b)(2) programs, and we particularly look to them in terms of rural transportation safety issues. As the Task Force Report notes, the States have made great strides in recent years in enhancing the safety of operations by local public transportation agencies, and this involvement is particularly important in programs such as section 18 and 16(b)(2) that the States themselves run.

However, UMTA programs continue to be a good resource for training, technical assistance, and facilitating communication among the States and their local operators.

In this connection, the Rural Transportation Assistance Program which I mentioned before, contained in the 1987 reauthorization act, will be quite useful. The RTAP, which has an annual authorization of \$5 million, has been implemented by UMTA in two major components. Fifteen percent of the funds have been set aside for a national program, designed to support and enhance the efforts of the States. The remainder of the funds have been allocated to the States under an administrative formula that allocates the funds on the basis of the non-urbanized population of the States.

The national program is carried out by a consortium of organizations, which is served by an advisory board of operators and State representatives. The board is responsible for identifying training, technical assistance, and research needs, and recommending priority activities for the national program. At its first meeting in August of this year, the advisory board identified driver training as its priority area of need and recommended development of a national driver training program. Work has already begun on specific elements of such a course. Also underway are the establishment of an information clearinghouse with a toll-free telephone number, and a peer-to-peer assistance network. Many of the drivers involved will also come under the commercial drivers license training program required by the Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act that is now being implemented by the Federal Highway Administration.

Regarding the State component, we have given the States great flexibility to program the funds based on locally determined needs for training and technical assistance. We encourage the States to establish advisory panels and to seek the participation of public and private transportation providers as they develop their RTAP projects. The projects submitted so far by the States cover a variety of subjects, and reflect particular concern with driver training and safety, passenger assistance techniques, vehicle maintenance, coordination with social service transportation, and other projects.

For example, Delaware has funded driver training seminars on "safe driving techniques." South Carolina has decided to conduct a Statewide driving safety program for section 18 and 16(b)(2) grantees using simulators and slide cassette programs. West Virginia is developing a training course on first-aid procedures specific to the needs of the elderly and disabled.

We have also used section 6 research funding for certain projects. In 1986, UMTA, the Transportation Safety Institute (TSI), and the Transportation Systems Center (TSC) conducted a needs assessment survey for rural and small transit operators. As a result of the survey, UMTA, with TSI's assistance, developed a Special Transit and Rural Transit Safety (STARTS) training program. The program was designed to provide training information for transit operators. Specific topics addressed include: instructor

training, vehicle safety inspection, driver sensitivity, and passenger relations. In the area of fire safety, plans were made for developing fire safety practices, selection of fire retardant materials to be used on small rural buses, vans and other vehicles. Three seminars have been held on vehicle and passenger accident prevention, involving the training of some eighty three persons.

We are now in the process of deciding how best to make this STARTS training information available, either through the RTAP program or some other means. I know that the Committee has a number of other concerns in terms of rural safety, and I can assure you that we are considering a whole range of issues in the safety area as we review the UMTA safety program.

Mr. Chairman, I think the record shows that our section 18 and 16(b)(2) programs are running well, and that we are providing a good level of research and technical training assistance in the safety area.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, that concludes my testimony, and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.