



TO: House Transportation Committee
FROM: Vermont Parent Child Center Network (VPCCN)
RE: Feedback on Transportation Issues
DATE: January 30, 2024

Contact: Donna Bailey, Addison County Parent Child Center,
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Please accept this memo on behalf of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network (VPCCN) concerning bus fares and ridership for families we serve through the VPCCN. Thank you for your consideration of this issue and interest in the families we serve.

We are proud to serve and offer services to families in every town in Vermont. As such, we are able to have insight to many of the amazing services that are provided to Vermonters. We are also painfully aware of the limitations of some services. Transportation in a rural state, as you well know, is a difficult service to wrap our collective head and resources around. There are parts of the state that are well served and others not at all. While Chittenden County, at least the more urban parts of the county, may have more access and availability to bus services, the rest of the state is very limited. We are encouraged to hear that the free services may continue outside of Chittenden County, but we are concerned about access within Chittenden County and across the state, because of the fare structure and more.

Rural Challenges

Paying for fares is difficult for those with a limited income. It becomes more challenging to encourage ridership for a service when it costs money and is challenging to access.

For instance, in Addison County, we are served through Tri Valley Transit Resources. They work incredibly hard at providing access and availability to those in need and it is not easy.

- We have mountains that split the county.
- Many families who live in poverty live outside of Middlebury, Vergennes and Bristol and as such have less access to bus services.
- Even for those who live in town, the proximity to bus stops and the schedule of buses make it difficult to access public transportation.

The Addison County Parent Child Center (ACPCC) has a transportation grant with the state through the Child Development Division (CDD), and we are able to help families access door to door transportation. Children who are involved in Protective Services get priority for free transportation to high quality childcare.

- These services used to be available across Vermont through many Parent Child Centers.
- The ACPCC is the only remaining center with this grant due to a lack of support for these grants within CDD. Because of a lack of sufficient funding, it became too burdensome for many PCCs to continue.
- In Addison, we looked into the public transit system helping us with this work and it was unaffordable for them to use the model we use – providing families with door- to-door service to high quality programs for children and their parents.

Outside of Addison County, there is little to no service for rural Vermonters who live in poverty beyond fairly restrictive Medicaid rides and some Reach Up rides. The ACPCC underwrites the grant we get because we believe it is vitally important for families and our programs. We tell you this story because it is important to keep in mind that the cost of bus fares is only one piece of riding the bus. If we charge fares and do not address the other barriers, ridership will not stay steady nor increase.

- The bus system is difficult to access due to many people having differing work schedules or having logistical and social issues that make riding a bus next to impossible.
 - Having to walk a long distance with small children to get to a bus is hard.
 - Having the schedule of the bus and family needs is a challenge.
 - Social and cultural norms make many families want a car so as not to feel embarrassed about taking a bus. We note this to say this because it is important for us to remember that taking a bus for us is a choice that makes me feel better about consumption and helping the environment and for many families we work with, it is not a choice but a necessity that does not feel liberating.

Chittenden County

In Chittenden County, many families, especially many of the new arrivals of New American, immigrant and refugee families experience challenges with the public transit system. Some of the major barriers include:

- learning to ride the bus
- when to get on and off and
- safety at bus stops and bus stations, especially at night- this bus stop safety concern is shared in other regions such as Barre and Montpelier.

We have had a number of our families experience aggressive behavior from others that seem to be because of race.

Also, for those individuals who don't read English, understanding a bus schedule can be very confusing. They may not know which bus to take, where and when to get on and off.

Bus stops aren't always conducive for older individuals, as they may not be able to stand and wait for too long, without a bench or chairs to sit.

Further, the bus station often feels uncomfortable for families we know, as there can be unpleasant and loud behaviors at the bus station. This has made some of our participants who ride the bus feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Overall, public transportation is a good service, but for some, it may not be as easy as it seems.

Conclusion

We need to continue to work toward a society where riding a bus and using public transit feel equitable and necessary for all of us. That said, this means it is necessary for us to have a sliding scale for economic reasons and for incentives for this to be a viable resource in all of Vermont. It also means that outside of more urban areas in Vermont, we need to increase access and availability before we expect Vermonters to use these resources.

As a state, we hope that Vermont continues to prioritize transportation supports for those who are most in need. It is so important for our economy and culture.

Thank you for all of your work on this important issue.

Attachment:

- VPCCN Transportation Survey Results: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/dm77z8gb842t9rq12lzf/PCCN-Transportation-Survey-Results.pdf?rlkey=w72ur4g3pcxeexlh37hd341t8&dl=0>