

## **AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION**

### **The Problem**

Transportation is a major barrier facing many New Yorkers trying to secure regular employment. People living in urban areas often face obstacles traveling to jobs in the suburbs and/or cross-town. Transportation systems are also scarce in rural communities. Most of the counties outside of New York City have limited or non-existent transportation services.

Lack of affordable, accessible transportation is especially challenging for low-income New Yorkers trying to transition from welfare to work. Mass transit services often do not operate at times or to locations needed by many individuals, particularly if the job hours are outside regular daylight working hours, or the job (or worker) location is outside of a core urban area. Many people leaving welfare for work and other low-income workers can only secure jobs that have irregular shifts. In addition to traveling to and from work, transportation is needed to and from childcare sites. Few low-income New Yorkers can afford to purchase and maintain a car and auto insurance. Yet, national studies show that a person receiving welfare who owns a car (or has access to affordable, reliable transportation services) is likely to earn more per hour, work longer hours, stay on welfare for a shorter period of time, and retain their job for a longer period of time.

New York has made strides in improving transportation options for low-income people, including significant investments in the development of Wheels for Work Programs that provides vehicles and related support and other transportation initiatives like Community Solutions to Transportation Program (CST). Local non-profits have been very effective in developing partnerships with their Departments of Social Services to operate these and other related programs. Programs are currently operating effectively in numerous counties throughout the state. Given that the majority of persons who have left the welfare rolls who found jobs have moved into low-paying, entry-level positions it is critical that they have the transportation tools needed to advance in the workforce.

The state has been reducing funding provided for TANF funded transportation services. These cuts have resulted in programs having to significantly scale back the numbers of New Yorkers served. Wheels to Work programs are inadequately funded relative to two years ago and CST is on the brink of extinction. People receiving public assistance (and TANF-eligible persons below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line) in areas with limited or non-existent public transit should have assistance in purchasing a car. Efforts to expand and establish effective public/private transportation mechanisms designed to help low-income people access employment must be adequately funded.

### **What the Public Thinks**

According to a 2002 poll conducted for Demos, a majority of the public expresses strong support for “transitional” government benefits, such as health care, child care and transportation assistance to help low-income families find and maintain employment. 81 percent believe that the “working poor” – defined as those families where the adults are working, but still poor - should also be eligible for the same kinds of benefits as individuals leaving welfare for work. (New Opportunities: Public Opinion on Poverty, Income Inequality and Public Policy: 1996-2002.)

### **ES2 Policy**

All New Yorkers should have access to affordable, reliable transportation systems that will enable them to secure employment, pursue education and training, and bring their children to and from day care sites.

### **The State Legislative Agenda**

- New York State should use \$20 million in TANF surplus funds to support transportation initiatives such as Wheels-to-Work (\$10 million) and Community Solutions for Transportation programs (\$10 million). These funds are needed to match the federal funding stream (Job Access and Reverse Commute-JARC) to ensure adequate transportation assistance. They are also needed to restore programs to SFY2001 capacity levels.
- Each social services district, as part of its county welfare-to-work biennial employment plan, should develop a formal transportation plan that realistically meets the needs of county residents.
- Welfare recipients looking for work should receive free subway and bus passes. Such subsidies should continue for at least the first three months after finding a job. Subsidies are also needed for car insurance and car repair.
- New York should engage in “local hiring practices” for transportation related infrastructure projects. Community residents should be given the opportunity to work on projects that are in their communities.
- Under ISTEA and its successor TEA-21 (national transportation laws), states were permitted to apply one-half of 1 percent of their federal highway funding toward job training opportunities in the transportation sector. New York should use this federal money to increase training opportunities for low-income people of color and women.