

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND (SWFCB)

SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE FUNDING OF MASS TRANSIT

Public transportation is a major key to independence, productivity, and community participation for those of us who are blind, severely visually impaired or otherwise prohibited from obtaining a driver's license by virtue of a disability. Whether we live in the city proper, or the less populated areas of Lee County, our ability to travel independently is contingent on the sustainability of these transit entities. Obviously, our vision loss Denys us the option of driving a motor vehicle, and when our only transit resource is to depend on those who do, our independence is reduced and in some instances, our very life choices are affected.

While for the fully sighted population, getting to and from work is a minor consideration, to us it can be the difference in whether an employment opportunity is offered or accepted.

All of us understand what happens when transportation resources are reduced. We are forced to carefully UTILIZE what resources remain. With reduced or eliminated mass transit services, we have little choice but to rely on a friend or family member for transportation, and we understand there is only so much that can be asked. Decisions must be made. Of course we would give up participating in a community event or a trip across town to visit a friend when food shopping, a medical appointment; matters of life are the priority. In short, for us access to transportation plays a vital role in the governance of our lives.

Each year, Lee County is faced with the prospect of cutting transit services to the detriment of those who rely solely on public and Para transit. The Southwest Florida Council of the Blind has participated in all means of public outreach to minimize the harm done to the transit system by budget cuts, and still we are faced with changes that will affect fixed route riders and therefore, ADA transportation passengers. This occurs year after year, despite the fact that by this year's end, it is estimated that LeeTran will have provided a record 4 million rides on its fixed route system, up from last year's 3.2 million rides. The ADA transportation system known as Passport will have provided an estimated 105,000 rides, also a record number of rides. It is estimated that as many as 60,000 citizens of Lee County cannot obtain a driver's license and therefore, depend on LeeTran's fixed route and ADA transportation to keep them independent, mobile and participants in the community in a meaningful way.

We encourage the Legislature and Governor to quickly carry out whatever MEANS prove necessary for ensuring that Lee County's fixed route entities which also govern ADA transportation are provided with a regular and adequate source of funding.