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APRIL Conversation

3:00‑4:00 p.m. Eastern

Please stand by for realtime transcript.

Kathy Hatch: It's almost 5 after the hour so I think I'm going to go ahead and get started. I just wanted to say hi, everybody. This is Kathy hatch, as many of you know, just like to welcome everyone. Today's call is hosted by APRIL and sponsored by the IL net so we're really happy you could join us and we're looking forward to a lively discussion. Yes? We have an hour and a half so we'll start off with presenters and they'll each talk about the importance of rural transportation to people with disabilities. Today’s call is entitled, “An update on reauthorization of the Transportation Act.”

So we'd like to change the format just a little today and keep it as conversational as possible. The last couple times we've done these, we've had folks ask questions right after the presenters finished and this time we asked if they could all speak and then we'll have a question and answer period. So at that point in time we'll ask everyone to take the phones off mute and we can get started.

So just a little housekeeping. First I think I mentioned in the invitation for today, that our Web site www.APRIL‑rural.org has several print documents and links on there already that you can use to either look at while we're talking today or you can refer to them afterwards. We also have CART this time. We started that on our last call. And so we're doing captioning and that can also be viewed ‑‑ I can hear you right now. That can be accessed via our Web site. If you go to the Web site and look at today's IL Conversation scroll down the page a little bit and you'll see a notice in kind of a bluish section that will give you a link to CART. So you can also send us questions via the chat site and I've got it up now and somebody just asked me how do you unmute. I'd like to ask everyone right now to go ahead and put your phones on mute ‑‑ because the bridge line as I mentioned, is really sensitive. And any background noise we'll be able to hear, everybody will be able to hear and it also causes distortion on the line. So to mute use star 6 and then to unmute you also use star 6. I'd also like to remind folks again, cell phones and speaker phones really cause distortion so, if you can get to a landline, you don't need to use one or the other of those, that would be great. But, if you do, just make sure you're on mute. So once we get to the QA part, I'll try to moderate discussion and we'll just kind of go from there. We'll try ‑‑ not to talk over each other but to have one question at a time. So I'd like to welcome our presenters today. I'll begin by telling you a little bit about each one.

James Corless is the director of Transportation for America, that's a coalition of 400 organizations working to promote a new transportation policy that's smarter, safer, cleaner and provides more choice. Prior to Transportation for America, James was a senior planner for the metropolitan transportation commission in the San Francisco Bay area where he managed the agency's efforts to promote smarter growth, transit oriented development and mobility options for low income communities. He's the author of California's ground breaking Safe Routes to School law. And legislation that paved the way for smart growth blueprints to become part of regional transportation planning process throughout the state.

 Alexandra Enders is a member of APRIL's transportation committee. She is senior research associate and policy analyst, at the research and training center on disability in rural communities at the University of Montana. Her policy analysis focus is on the infrastructure issues, transportation, telecommunications which determine the availability, accessibility, and usability of the vehicles of modern participation. For more than 30 years she's been involved with service delivery systems and networks, public policy, funding and quality assurance issues. Program development and training activities information services, independent living program development, emergency preparedness, and technology evaluation and effective studies.

Tim Sheehan is Executive Director of the Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin, member of the APRIL Governing Board and Chair of the Advocacy Committee, former four-year Chair of the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers, a long time member of the Wisconsin SILC and past Region 5 Representative to the NCIL Governing Board. For nearly 30 years, Tim has been an active advocate, promoting the rights of people with disabilities to live independently and to be active participants in community life. He is a founding member of both the Western Wisconsin Area Consortium on Transportation and the Community Health Partnership, a national Medicaid/Medicare managed care model for frail elderly and individuals with disabilities. Tim is a member of the Wisconsin SILC and of the State Department of Transportation’s Vision 2030 long-range planning group.

Now, I’d like to turn it over to James Corless…James.

>> JAMES CORLESS: Thanks, Kathy. And everybody for having me here today. I'm the director of Transportation for America and she mentioned a little bit on the bio about who we are. But I just wanted to make sure folks had a sense of the perspective I was coming from. Transportation for America is a nonprofit coalition. We're now over 500 members around the United States. We are primarily a lot of nonprofit organizations, and we are a very broad coalition. We range from everything from affordable housing providers to public health professionals, to environmental groups to elected officials we work with. We even have realtors on our executive committee. So we basically represent one of the broadest cross sections of interest groups that have come together around the federal transportation bill. And that's when we were formed three years ago, we were squarely aimed and are still squarely aimed at the renewal of and the reauthorization of the federal Transportation Act. My job this afternoon is just to give you all a sense of where that bill stands here in Washington. Give you some sense of timing of the possibilities that might emerge and honestly, some of the costs and benefits that might go down in the next 3, 6, 12 months depending what happens with Congress and why that's so important. And leave it to the other presenters to talk a little more specifically around rural accessible transportation. I'll certainly touch on that and that is an important part of our broader transportation. So the transportation bill in Congress is important for a lot of reasons, if you're on this call, you may understand those reasons, but to give us a little bit more historical context, this bill is a spending bill. That is why it is so important. It represents about 25% of all the money that flows out to the states and the regions and the local government transit authority, everything from the New York City MTA, the smallest accessible van provider. It's about 25% of all transportation spending but it is also very important because it does set a lot of the policy context for how the other 75% of the money is used at the state and local level. It is really the sort of the guide for a lot of things. What kind of transportation system we build and maintain whether it's roads or bridges or subway systems or paratransit or car share, you name it. It really does set the rules. The spending bill. The money that goes out to the state. This bill is funded by a federal tax on gasoline. Eighteen cents per gallon. It has its roots back in the 1950s, actually 1956. We've had a gas tax since the 30s and in 1956 President Eisenhower signed the Interstate Highway Act. It moves that couple pennies a gallon from deficit reduction to a brand‑new highway trust funds to build the interstates. From '56 to '91 we basically completed a 45,000‑mile interstate system. The tax was raised at different points by both Democrats and Republicans. A nickel increase under President Reagan in '82, meant the first portion of the gas tax was for mass transit. We went all the way to 1991 where we had a bill pass called ICED TEA which basically declared the interstate system complete and a new multimodal flexible transportation program was ushered in. The federal gasoline tax has not been raised since 1993. It’s been adjusted for inflation but it's not been raised. And now even though for a while it was increasing as miles were ‑‑ people drove more miles, and consumed more gasoline, the last few years we've had two things conspire to put less money into the highway and transportation trust fund. Number one, people are driving fewer miles today than they did just three or four years ago. And number two, cars are getting cleaner. So, if you think about efficiency even though it's a slow shift in the fleet, there is less gasoline being burned. Cars are cleaner for people who drive fewer miles, and that puts less money into the coffers of the Federal Highway Trust. Federal transportation has been immune to the severe budget cutting eras in Congress over the last few decades. We're now at a time where transportation which had once been a very bipartisan issue had not been subject to a lot of calls for cuts, is now part of the calls for cuts. And that's kind of part of where we stand today.

Fast forward to the present. Again, that same 18 cents a gallon times the federal transportation program. We have in the U.S. House the transportation committee. The House committee, run by representative John Migrant from Florida, introduced an outline, a proposal for a new bill. A new Transportation Act that would extend six years at the typical lifecycle of these bills is six years. It would only project what they said was increasingly less money. Less revenue. Over the years that amounts to a 35% cut at the present levels of nearly $100 billion over the current Transportation Act. It would probably be ‑‑ although we don't have all the details yet from the House, but an equivalent cut for roads as it would be for mass transit. But it is severe at a time that we in America need to be investing more in transportation mobility, not less. So that's where the House stands. The U.S. Senate took a very different approach. They have talked about introducing a proposal for a 2 year bill and probably one of the shorter bills we have seen on the federal level. But a 2 year bill that's for flat funding. Has a cut. Maintains existing levels at the federal level. About $55 billion a year for all modes of transportation. That 2 year bill you can imagine as I said, declining revenues, right? So how do you do a flat 2 year bill. For two years you need about $12 billion to make up that gap in the revenue. Senator Max Bauchus from Montana is furiously trying to find offsets as they call it ways to sort of fund that $20 billion gap. The Senate committee. Senator Barbara Boxer, the chair is aiming to work up a bill, it might be delayed again, but a 2 year bill flat funding level is aimed to be marked up next week. And there is a lot of activity around this because at the end of September, this very month, the current transportation law, SAFETEA LU expires. We've actually already extended it 7 times so we're two years overdue. Not only that but the federal gasoline tax expires September 30. These two things have never happened at the same time before. And while we don't necessarily think it's going to become a big political issue, it has been the subject of some Libertarian members of Congress to get rid of the gasoline tax once and for all or cut it back to 4 cents a gallon which we think would be pretty devastating. I must say in both the proposal ‑‑ and certainly our coalition cares not only about how much money we spend but how we spend it, what we spend it on. And we have been advocating for a bigger investment in public transportation, a smarter investment in coordinated transportation, better planning among different transportation modes. Better coordination of services as was required in the last SAFTEA LU, Federal transportation law. Money down to the local and regional level so that regional agencies have more leadership. All those things hang in the balance. We are certainly anticipating in the House a proposal with a big consolidating of programs. I would say that it seems like the House is actually focused more around orientation of some sort of investment in highway construction. We are seeing a similar collapsing of programs in the Senate. But the jurisdiction is split among different committees. The banking committee mass transit title. In the banking committee we certainly also had proposals but I think other presenters may touch on how to consolidate some of the programs that so‑called elderly and low income folks and people with disabilities rely on. Particularly 5317 if you're familiar with these sections of the federal transit law. Again, I think that's going to be hit on again in a little bit. But I do want to say in both chambers there's pretty important policy discussions that go along with the 6 year bill and two year bill. They may have good implications, not so good. Others we may have to watch. I would also say the administration, the Obama Administration, has a mass of big players on this. Unfortunately, they have not released a full bill. Proposal over the spring. It never really fully saw the light of day which is unfortunate. The president is going to make a big announcement on jobs and economy tomorrow evening to a joint session of Congress and in that announcement we believe there will be something on infrastructure and transportation. What exactly, remains to be seen. But we're hopeful he can once again kick start this process and get something moving in the House and Senate, ideally both. What we believe will happen next is probably one last extension. An 8th and final extension of more money that will kick this transportation along with an expiration date of September 30th to January 31st, next year, a 4 month extension and then again depending on what happens with the president's proposal, I think even the president knew they needed something in the economy. We hope to see proposals moving in the House and Senate and Senate may be closer than the House is. We hope we can get something to the president's desk by January 2012. That's a pretty tall order in terms of what else is on the plate for Congress. But it is a very important use of the transportation bill I think even though we're delayed a couple years already. We've had more people get engaged with this transportation bill and debate than we've ever seen before. And we're hoping that that kind of level of engagement and that thirst out there in the state and local areas and they may hear from perhaps many organizations for better mobility, more accessible mobility for independence, for connecting people to healthcare, to jobs, to all of these things that are so important. I'll conclude by saying though we've never seen a two year bill, there are challenges around a two year bill especially if you want to streamline or consolidate things. But we believe at the moment if you say a 6 year bill right now, you typically are talking about a bill that's 35% down - and locks in at 35% over six years. That I think while there are certainly things to work on in a two year bill that plays out. It may be the best hope for folks for adequate investment in transportation and mass transit and public transportation options. Some level of policy change we hope will then need to go forward and help administration over the next 12‑24 months. So that's a little bit about where things stand. The timing is important. I know everything probably seems chaotic back here in Washington certainly between earthquakes and hurricanes, they're predicting tornadoes here in this week. It's been a strange year. But by saying this is so important. If I was outside the beltway as I have been other years in my life, I might be throwing my hands up saying what can they do inside the beltway. But this is one bill that's enjoyed bipartisan support in the past. We're certainly hoping to try to revive some of that bipartisanship and get something that both advances from of these critical policy reforms but also invests at least a different level of investment for transportation going forward. Again I'm going to yield to my other speakers and take questions at the end.

>> KATHY: Thank you, James. Alexandra. I believe you're up.

>> ALEXANDRA ENDERS: Thank you. One of the issues that James talked about was collapsing or consolidating some of the programs and it does seem to be on the minds of both houses in Congress. Both the House and Senate, as well as the administration, in their 2012 budget for transportation suggested that consolidating three programs which are often thought of as human services programs. For those of you who may not be familiar, 5310 is transportation for elderly persons and persons with disabilities. It provides funding to the state for the purpose of assisting private nonprofit groups to meet transportation needs of older individuals and persons with disabilities. With transportation services the key words are unavailable, insufficient or inappropriate. Section 5317, as you know, the New Freedom grants seem to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand transportation mobility options available to people with disabilities beyond the requirements of the ADA. 5316 helps low income individuals and welfare recipients access employment opportunities. It also focuses on increasing collaboration between transportation providers, human services agencies employers and others.

There may be other issues you're dealing with locally. (something is missing here) So it's put together in what might be talking points, ways to think about these things and to see what your position on them might be, in your hometowns and your local communities as well as advice you might be providing that would come up into the Transportation Act. (mowing sounds in background)

 The idea of consolidation has been primarily to get administrative relief, to reduce and simplify what is turning out to be a mess in some states. If we look at this not just as a way to reduce administrative complexity -- if people have to administer these -- but as a real opportunity to develop consistency in addressing national transportation policy and providing space and communities with maximum flexibility with filling conditions. Then we review this and talk about it as an opportunity to fill gaps and accessible transportation. I think it gives you more of a handle on how you want to think about this than just thinking of it as how can you reduce the paperwork. And when asked about reducing complexity, he (Sen. Keinitz) agreed that with our assumption that the objectives of proposed consolidation are 1), to increase integration and transportation system accessibility, and 2), to increase flexibility in planning, coordinating and implementing transportation systems. He went farther and said that he also thought that our purpose was to create an environment for local planning to drive funding decisions. The only place you're going to see that now in writing is probably in the FAQ sheet and in APRIL's position paper. But challenging people to come up with objectives that are programmatic and that are geared to filling the gaps in accessible transportation is really important if ‑‑. If we're going to do that, we need to be picking up on several other themes. One of the recurrent themes that you see ‑‑ I think James can confirm this ‑‑ is that it's looking nationally, federally, to produce more flexibility in the state while being accountable to performance measures and transparency requirements is how the government accountability office has put it. So when we're looking at ‑‑ what we want to discuss and think about consolidation, looking at the objective. Looking at the opportunity but also looking at the outcomes and focusing on outcome measures not just on the process measures. That means focusing on what you're trying to accomplish, not so much how you're doing it. I think that this fits in well with APRIL's position paper on transportation too.

Especially the part ‑‑ the concept, they have evaluation needs to include how well it supports community transportation for riders, not just how well riders can get to senior centers. The jobs programs which may be less familiar to some of you because it hasn't reached out as accessibly as the minivans and commuter vans and sometimes the accessibility issues are problematic. But the focus provides a targeted model for community participation. I think if you review APRIL's position paper on the Web site (www.april-rural.org), you'll see the orientation toward the community participation of riders, not just how well the paperwork got filed, and how well the plans hit its major points. The idea that evaluation focus should come from a traveler's perspective … do people get where they need to go and when they need to get there … is a really solid part of APRIL's position paper and you could use that when you're discussing and talking about your local coordination efforts to see how all these things can come together programmatically, not just administratively. One of the other opportunities that consolidation could be looking at is the ability to continually change and systematically reassess the gap programs, 5310, 16 and 17. They don't have much evolutionary capacity right now. They kind of get fixed in federal guidance and then they don't change. But consolidation may actually provide the opportunity for perpetuating these by load ground programs perpetuating these. And they provide flexibility. Some of you may have struggled around 5317. They allow one element of the overall system to remain static and then you can't really change how you're deploying chances. It reminded me of stuff in rural housing where there are communities eligible now for rural housing funds that have long since lost their rural status. They’ve become suburban and urban areas but they still get rural money and that same thing is especially true of 5310 program but putting all these together does provide an opportunity to rethink that and create an environment for locally derived planning and pulling together the best ways to do things.

What we're really talking about is a shared understanding about the direction the programs are headed. Shared understanding may get lost under confusion about language. We did an analysis of all state management plans under 5310 and found out that coordination does not mean the same thing to everybody. Nor does the word "accessibility" which I want to talk about a little bit too. I think that one of the opportunities with consolidation is that you could create better clear and unambiguous federal guidance and lose some of this uncertainty we see amongst the states about the goals of these gap filling programs. And really get them back on a path of really filling gaps. I think it's important to note that AARP has gone on the record opposing consolidation at a Senate hearing. And I think if you're taking a look through some of the poll briefs and FAQ sheets it's time for you to decide. I think you need to consider the objectives and the potential overall effect of programmatic consolidation, take into account outcome measures, program flexibility and adaptation, long terminable policies. Look at long term national policies, look at various consolidation methods, make up your mind, look at the consolidation and groups you're working with in local transportation and figure out where you stand on this. I think maybe the policy briefs can help develop some talking points for you.

And I think I'm going to switch gears a little bit to the idea of “what is accessible?” APRIL has tried to clarify, when they've worked with National Rural Assembly and other groups, what the words “accessible transportation” mean. Everybody on this call would think of the same thing, when you think about it, it's often the image of wheelchair lifts and stuff for getting on the bus. APRIL's statement paper says it includes system, vehicles, stops, routes and all other transportation and must at least meet or exceed the minimum requirements set forth in the ADA. When Project ACTION says accessibility, we think of that too. However, in mainstream transportation, “accessibility” doesn't always mean what we mean by it. Sometimes it really doesn't go much beyond a definition like in the dictionary of “capable of being reached.” When you see the word accessible and when you use the word accessible when you're sitting down at the table talking with other people, I think it's really important to recognize that you don't all necessarily mean the same thing. Mainstream accessible was just a recent paper where they talked about the three components of “trip coverage,” “spatial coverage” and “temporal coverage,” and yes, we mean that too. We can use the transportation that exists when and where we need it. And everybody would agree on this. But the existence of a vehicle route or service differs from the ability to effectively utilize it. And I would normally apologize for using a term like effectively utilize. It's academic geek talk. However, it's also the language in the 1970 law that made it national policy that older individuals and people with disabilities have the same right as anyone else to use public transportation facilities and services. I think we need to be thinking that accessible means effectively utilize.

>> TIM SHEEHAN: Thank you, Alexandra. And good afternoon, everyone. Just to remind everybody I'm Tim Sheehan, I'm the executive director for the center for independent living in western Wisconsin. And you know, our center not only does all those wonderful things that Kathy talked about in my bio. But we've also been directly involved in advocacy in its three flavors at the individual level, the community level and at the system change level around transportation and transportation policy since 1999. And we've been providing transportation services directly in coordinating transportation through a regional, certified mobility manager over a multi-county area since 2005. So I would encourage you, if you haven't done so yet, to take a little time to go to the APRIL Web site and download those policy papers and analysis that we’ve talked about thus far. They can be great tools as you do the work that you need to do at the local level. I wanted to spend some time talking about the reality of working at the local level in all these disparate programs and these proverbial silos that we have to work in.

What has happened and what has worked with the effort we were able to accomplish with SAFETEA LU, the current highway bill that created New Freedom and another program, a demonstration program called the Transportation Rural Assistance Program, TRAP and earlier JARC, that has really made it better to do the kind of coordinated transportation service that we all envision for people of disabilities of all ages living in rural America. And that this opportunity that we have now that James talked about both in the administration's early on budget and the draft that talked about consolidation even the MICA bill. The House transportation infrastructure committee talks about folding together programs around transit and especially rural transit and obviously the Senate is also considering that approach. While there are probably a thousand details in blending programs and with their separate allocations and 0 appropriations of dollars, that could be deleterious, they also do create an enormous opportunity to build on what has worked from SAFETEA LU. Some of you may remember one of the provisions in that bill that created New Freedom was a requirement that at the local level plans around those specialized transit 53 numbers, 10, 16 and 17. And if you had state programs that were similar to that, statutory programs around Older Americans Act, people with disabilities and elders, that they had to be put into a locally developed coordinated plan. That locally developed coordinated plan was then all drawn together and then the state or whoever was administering the federal funds that are being divvied out at the local level, were then required to put all of that together into a state transportation improvement plan. A coordination plan which then needed to be signed off on or acknowledged at least by the Feds. In our effort of trying to draw together public and private stakeholders and consumers in a 10 county rural region in Wisconsin, since 1999, the ability to be eligible for 5317 funds as an independent living center and our dialogue over time in bringing together counties and human service agencies and area units on aging and public for- profit or private for‑profit transit providers, public transit providers and consumers, regional planning, veteran service officers, that requirement of looking at a local plan really was enhanced by the conversations we were forcing folks to have. It really increased our abilities to say we have the means that, now let's do it in earnest in a serious way. Similarly with the state in working with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. That requirement forced us all to have conversations about ‑‑ especially in tight fiscal times about how we conserve people – how can we serve people, diverse populations of transit dependent folks, especially in rural areas when money is impossible to find. The truth of the matter is, programmatically blending the ridership in a flexible way using different funds is a way that that can be accomplished. I believe that its the level of leadership that could accrue at the local level to do the work we need to do to make sure that the guidance is written properly, that the instructions to the states don't punish nontraditional transit providers at the local level and indeed, it folds in those broader outcomes and objectives that Alexandra talked about. They are both reflected in the APRIL position paper on transportation as well as the FAQ sheet on filling the gaps. From our conversation with the deputy secretary of policy from D.O.T. last week, at least at that level it was clear they are also open to having that sort of policy dialogue. Let me spend a couple of moments talking about building on the notion that accessibility as both a physical concept and a philosophical concept, that Alexandra was talking about, that we need to make sure the stakeholders we're talking to understand the fullness of what we mean when we say accessibility. There's also a different kind of accessibility. You know, we currently have limitations on who can get on a vehicle for what purpose. In rural areas we often find somebody who's eligible under the Older Americans Act having access to go to a congregate meal site, but I can't as a wheelchair user who is not yet, today eligible for Older Americans Act services, get on that same vehicle.

>> This is Alexandra, can I follow up on your last point?

>> TIM: Well sure.

>> ALEXANDRA: Well this is Alexandra at the Rural Institute. We have drafted up a piece, an APRIL policy brief on exactly the point that Tim is making so we don't lose the momentum behind this idea of the opportunities and consolidations. What would make it easier is, if there's only a 2 year bill, the transportation committee is going to review it. But the brief lays out this time cycle between the passage of a bill and the time you get a vehicle on the road and its at least a year before you can do evaluations. We don’t always realize how long it takes. Perhaps two years isn't long enough to do a demonstration project or to call for research and evaluation. But perhaps the transportation research board could do a project for the FTA and look at some of the issues involved so we don't lose the momentum and just kind of put it off for several more years. So this policy brief may be out fairly quickly and you may want to look for it on the APRIL Web site within a month at any rate. We'll give you more talking points and it does give the timetable that Tim just laid out which when I talked to some folks it's like the response is oh, is that why it takes so long to do anything? It might be helpful. Back to you.

>> TIM: I'll put you back to Kathy.

>> KATHY: Okay, good. Are there any questions from the audience? You need to unmute to ask your question.

>> This is Lisa Sullivan with Central Michigan center for independent living. It's actually Disability Connection.

We operate as the transportation coordinator for a New Freedom transportation voucher program. What I see here, as for our rural area, we don't have any public transportation or even any cab companies. But there seems to be a lot of protectiveness over the organizations that do get the grant between the 5310 and 5317 and so on. It's a real barrier to getting them to work together because no one wants to lose their grant or their funding and they're like, “we’ll provide this service and what you do is up to you.” They're just real defensive. And I'm wondering if APRIL or some other organization is prepared to help deal with that or if there's somebody who has an idea on how further coordination can happen. Because really apart from our annual local coordination meeting, it really doesn't happen.

>> TIM: Thanks for that question. This is Tim. Of course, that's the reality of the environment that we all find ourselves working in when we decide to get into this world, right? I call it sort of the political and geographic parochialism. There might be some elderly and disabled transportation program but it doesn't cross county lines or it doesn't cross municipal lines and it's because the political leaders of that particular governmental entity, say I'm not going to subsidize the poor people in that community next to us. All I can say is over the period of time that we continue to deal with that on a daily basis, we drew the people to the table and formed the area consortium on transportation to talk about those fears that the 5310 recipient has. All you want is my van. To talk about the reality of who they're serving and when they're serving and if we can try to start to figure out a common language. Who do you serve and is there a way we can work together to serve more folks with the same amount of money? This is where you want to get to over time after you’ve reached a common vocabulary to be that agent of change. And what we found early on when we started forming this loose group called the Area Consortium on Transportation, that if we created the venue, the place, and fed them, that they would come. Over time the barriers began to break down and there were areas that other stakeholders saw. And then, like I said, there were other things, fiscal crises at the state level. Federal law that allowed these conversations to happen in earnest and then in Wisconsin, our state, we pushed them to create a mobility manager process and we got one and got them certified. Then went beyond the Area Consortium on Transportation and developed what's called the Western Wisconsin Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee. Not only do we get together and write the locally developed plan, but we meet on an on-going basis and develop regional goals, which then fed into our regional goals that employed the regional mobility manager. So that's what it can lead to and all I can say is create the venue, make your invitations wide and deep, start basic and start simple and feed them and see where you get them from there.

>> The center of independent living actually employed the mobility manager.

>> Correct. That's our regional program coordinator, correct.

>> Okay. Thank you.

>> KATHY: Any other questions? Aw, come on folks, you must have questions.

>> Hello?

>> Go ahead.

>> Reuben, from Access in San Diego. I actually do have a question. Our light rail is fairly accessible…if you have a power chair. But under the law and ADA it is in compliance but, if you're in a manual chair, you're basically stuck. How do we as an agency change that? To make it accessible to all?

TIM: Well, I guess as the center person on the call, I'll say there's a lot of ways. First, I would see if the regional transit authority has an advisory committee and certainly that's the way that a center could rally some consumers who feel like they're being denied service, and go directly to them and I'm guessing they have a grievance process. But the big tool, as you well know, if there's a class of individuals covered under the ADA, you can file a complaint. It's certainly been my experience when a public entity gets a letter from the federal agency that has oversight, that they're investigating a pending civil rights complaint that they tend to become much more cooperative.

>> Okay, thank you. I'll look into that because I actually sit on the committee that you're talking about. But I need to gather more people that are wheelchair users. Wheelchair users more than those of us that have power chairs to get involved in start expressing voices, that's what I would have to do and bring that to the advisory committee. I do sit on that committee myself. That's what I need to do.

>> Kathy, this is Becky Williams. Could I throw a thought into that answer

>> KATHY: , of course, yes, go ahead, Becky.

>> I work at a center for independent living. But when I was at the Center for Independent Living in North Carolina, we had some issues with some things the city built that weren't accessible. I tell you, sometimes finding a TV reporter that is sympathetic to the cause can do wonders. They're called busters or whatever, that affect people in the community or also a newspaper reporter. See who reports the human services stories, get it to the people out there, show them how hard it is to access it. Get it in the newspaper and get it on TV.

>> That's an excellent idea. Thank you. I'll look into that as well.

>> KATHY - Anybody else have any ideas? Any other questions?

>> I'm Alicia. I'm a coordinator for human services transportation plan in east central Illinois. I’d like to go back to the second speaker's statements about the flexibility issue. While I know how important 5310, 16 and 17 are for my region, one thing to consider once the funding does get passed and they start looking at how they can make those regulations a little more flexible, for the 53. I think for the consolidated vehicle procurement which purchases the actual 5310 vehicles, a lot of my human services agencies have morphed into a 5311 provider through our fiscal process that we have. And we almost have every single county covered in my County area except for one. But the problem is when we talk about transportation between urban and rural areas, we refer to it as the gray areas, the areas outside the service area of the urban provider and the rural provider. There's not a lot of flexibility for the 5311 vehicles that are purchased near the 5310. If that could be thrown in there. However, if you have any influence on the federal regulations, if they could be made more flexible on how the vehicles are specifically used even interchanging between 5310, 5311 and 5307 vehicles; that would be wonderful. There are a lot of programmatic restrictions between traveling in or across areas and with the major trip generators being, you know, a lot of the rural areas are going in between the major urban areas as far as actual trips and if that could just be something that they could ‑‑ if you could take back to whoever. And my one question: Regarding the consolidation of the 5310, 5316 and 5317, I know that AARP came out against it. But one thing on our local planning perspective, we are very appreciative of it because a lot of our rural transportation providers are staff so a lot of times getting completed applications together in the short time frame they give is very difficult and they give very short notice about things. And so you could bring that back also from the local planning perspective. We would prefer a little more advance notice. We talk about it all the time about when things are coming up. But, it seems to be hard to predict when they're going to send out a call for project proposals.

>> This is Alexandra. The idea of bringing the other 5300 series or 5311, 5309, at least 5311 especially do that. So it's interesting that you're bringing that up as an issue and it might be something to kind of ask the membership and bring it back into the discussion because I know Tim and (indiscernible) have already brought into the discussion. With these programs you need to realize that every state does it differently. Some states are almost doing this consolidation already, especially Alaska but also Washington and Oregon. Is there anybody from those states on the call? Alaska, if I can put in one consolidated application and then the state D.O.T. people decide what pot of money would best fit that community need and they've got pretty coordinated transportation systems any way. But that happens in Oregon and Washington to a lesser extent and in some other states also. And so administrative relief, they wouldn't have to do the bean counting all separately and they could just consolidate it. But since the planning is done, in a consolidated way and it doesn't put roadblocks up. I'd like to ask the person from Michigan, if it's still there, if they can take the human services money from these kind of programs and they could pull it together into a multi-strategy regional transportation system it sounds like much along the lines that Wisconsin is doing and try it out for three years and if it works at the end of three years, if they did get a coordinated regional system, then everybody has to continue to put their money in. Is that no longer in Michigan? Is that not something you can tie into?

>> I've been a transportation coordinator with the 5317 for about a year and a half. And I have not heard of such a thing. We basically apply for whichever one we qualify for and it's all done separately as far as I know.

>> But you're not familiar with the other programs.

>> No, in fact I wish we had them.

>> Alexandra: Michigan does have. They may have ‑‑ with the budgetary issues they may have done something. In our analysis, I actually wrote it out as a noteworthy practice. And it wasn't ‑‑ they were using state money to do it, which is why I wondered if it's still there because of the budget issues. But and then they control these different programs together and create a regional system with this ‑‑ it seemed like the state money was the glue that held it together and it was the incentive to do what Tim has been able to do with the mobility management and the other tools that they're so effectively using in Wisconsin but it's an interesting approach. If it is no longer there it would be interesting to go back and ask how it could be put back into place.

>> Caller: We have the coordinated meeting that we have between all the organizations but really, it doesn't amount to much. We get together and talk about what we've been doing. And we do recommend the other organizations. We do presentations in which we discuss what transportation options are available in the county, and those kinds of things. But as far as actually coordinating or the state sharing money, there's nothing I know of like that. I'm kind of a little guy so there might be a lot I don't know.

>> Alexandra: Send Kathy your e‑mail and I'll send you the snippet out of the state management plan so you can go in and ask with the contingent. If it's still there, please let us know because it's a really interesting model that goes beyond just these 5310, 11 or 5310, 16 and 17. Are other people interested in consolidation?

>>Caller: As a person asking, I actually would be. Not just because of my issues but right now we have state funding that isn't helping out our public providers a great deal. But depending on interurban trips and depending on how you offer it and how you ‑‑ the system you describe regionally would be amazing if we could do it. If the funding would allow us to.

>> You're from Illinois, right?

>> Yes.

>> Illinois is very, very, very vehicle focused and also is not one of the states that requires 5310 money to be only spent on accessible vehicles. There's waivers, that's another issue. So –

Alexandra: Wisconsin is not very far from Illinois. Maybe there could be more chatting across the state line. (chuckles)

Caller: Wisconsin seems to be working really well. I don't mean to down play the great work that my public providers are doing and the agency, but when it comes to actually providing the most dense ‑‑ providing service for with the vehicles, it does ‑‑ there's a person commenting about the core and ownership over the vehicle and it really is a problem and one of the carriers is the limited role that a 5311 and a 5310 ‑‑ those vehicles can be used for and Wisconsin actually, we're closer to Indiana, so ‑‑ but ‑‑ but we'll look into it. So thank you.

>> If they could get out of being so locked into these kind of separate rules which have evolved over the years and looked at in their larger purpose it would help?

>> Caller: Yes, it would. That's one of the issues we're having in Michigan is that our agency for aging has vehicles and we have the voucher program and we transfer their people but we can't let them use their vehicles, we have to use volunteer drivers with their vehicles which are almost exclusively not accessible for wheelchairs because of volunteers with their own personal vehicles. So that ‑‑ if those other vehicles could be used for multiple purposes, that would definitely open up a lot of actions.

>> Thank you, I'll mute myself now.

>> KATHY: Other questions or discussions.

>> This is Bob Olsgard in northern Wisconsin, I'm just north of where Tim is located. And I would like to put in my two cents worth on the consolidation issue. I think it's great, but the devil is in the details. And how it actually plays out may actually deploy some of the proprietary notions of our sometime partners in public transit, sometimes enemies in public transit. A lot of times people who are running programs get very proprietary about their own particular budgets and their own particular service territories and impose limitations on where they can serve, where their vehicles can go and what can be done outside their control. I think up in our neck of the woods we'd have to get to a far greater comfort level with the idea of coordination before consolidation would even be viewed at the state level as something that is practical and one in which all players can equally participate. We're not quite there yet.

Other questions or comments.

>> This is Dana Craig from Illinois. And I've been involved with local and the regional transportation for the last few years. I wanted to let you guys know that the two biggest barriers carriers have other than accessibility in vehicles is the state of Illinois restricted what vehicles were being provided for purchase. For example, an action provides for 53 or 52, I can't remember. 5310 or 5311, I'm not sure which, it was approved and then they applied for vehicle, the vehicle that they applied for they didn't get. So for example they applied for a 22 passenger bus. But because it's an extremely rural area here and there's a lot of people to pick up so 22 passenger bus isn't actually necessary. But the budget was set on that specific vehicle. Well then by the time the vehicle was ready to be delivered, they found out that it's actually an 11 passenger bus. So then that means that their operation costs are going to double. And that doesn't already include the budget that was ‑‑ a report from last year. So that's one really large issue we've been facing here. We've been working with the state of Illinois to have them change the vehicle because we need to promote and encourage Universal Design vehicle. That's about it. All vehicles need to have that. So that's one huge issue that we're looking at. Unfortunately, the biggest barrier is insurance. But the good news is that Illinois just passed a law that allows volunteers to drive regardless of insurance liability issues. So that is the good news on that end. So that is just something that I wanted to share with you guys that our issues are happening here in the rural area of Illinois.

>> Thank you. Anyone else? Okay. Well it ‑‑

>> Caller?: About the insurance liability issue, Alaska and I think you said Washington and Oregon were developing insurance requirements. In 5310 the insurance requirement is only to cover the capital cost of equipment and we all know that's not where the insurance liability lies if you're operating a transportation program. But they've actually created some insurance liability flow that folks can buy into. Insurance is a big thing.

>> KATHY: Thank you very much.

>> ALEXANDRA: Bob brought up “the devil is in the details” and you don't want to do things that are going to hurt folks and the APRIL voice in the pulling together issues that need to be considered as guidance would be important. We'd like to hear from you folks too if you've got concerns and ideas.

>> This is Annette with the ocean state center for independent living in Rhode Island. We don't have anything but rural area here in Rhode Island. So really much of the state is far from the city and is difficult to access with public transportation. One of the things that we're seeing is that there really is not enough funding for transportation and so I think that really goes with what most people are talking about that the money is the big issue. And so how do we create more funding for transportation? And that's something that here in Rhode Island and I think Delaware are the only two places that have statewide systems and so the public transit and one city is so ‑‑ not just local by county. And so we're needing to increase the funding for our state transportation and that's not something we're finding answers to. If any of you have ideas that could really help.

>> ALEXANDRA: Someone from Illinois also brought up the issue of you know, the area you are in, it's beyond suburban but doesn't fit rural because there are a lot of different demographic categories. So, bringing up the issues of the X urban being really far away from cities but not quite rural, because I think that in some ways people in those areas have fewer options than anybody else. It might be very interesting to put some of your thoughts together. And send them to Kathy for the transportation committee. I'm sure you have ideas on how that could work. Okay, go ahead.

>> My name is Donna (can barely hear her) I’m from Kansas and our agency is having trouble getting the community involved in trying to -- from the city because we have no taxi service because of insurance issues. We've been asked why isn't there a taxi service here?) Low volume) how do we get the people involved in the community to voice their opinions and get a taxi service in the area? Because the public transportation that we do have (Inaudible) And life doesn't end at 3:30 in the afternoon. So what do you do? Any ideas on that one?

>> This is Tim. You know, the traditional sort of community organizing strategies certainly would apply on this issue or any other issue. But in terms of the availability of service, days of the week, hours of service, all those things can be part of the locally developed plan and if those gaps are identified, you know, you can use those as tools to go to the –- or whoever makes decisions about that, whether it's the county or the city or whatever, and say, “you know, here's a clear gap in the availability of inventory to meet this need, how can we get there?” So you know, when you're facing a complete absence of availability, you have to start first by demonstrating the need and then move to trying to convince someone that your argument is legitimate and therefore, should be addressed.

>> One practical thing. The meeting for these things to be discussed should be within the parameters of getting public transportation. So, if the last bus runs at 3:30, they can't schedule the meeting for 5:00 or 7:00 when everybody is going to come by car and the people who can't come, can't come because there isn't public transportation running. I mean, I see that happen all the time. Where they schedule a meeting so that people can't use public transportation to get home from the meeting. They can just only there, but not home again.

>> Thanks for pointing that out too. Folks, it's 4:30. And so if there are no more questions, I can take one more if we want to. And if not, ‑‑

>> Kathy, this is Becky again, could I throw something else also with the taxi issue?

>> Sure.

CART stopped recording at 4:30pm. Call ended a few minutes later after thanks to the presenters and the following:

**Kathy -**

**Thank you all for being here today. Again, I’d like to invite you to visit the APRIL website where you will find the documents discussed today and an archive copy plus a transcript of the presentations. Just go to** [**www.april-rural.org**](http://www.april-rural.org) **and look for IL Conversations. If you have questions about today’s discussion, you can reach me at** **kathatch@charter.net****.**

**Thanks -**

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**Again – Thanks! Good-bye everyone.**