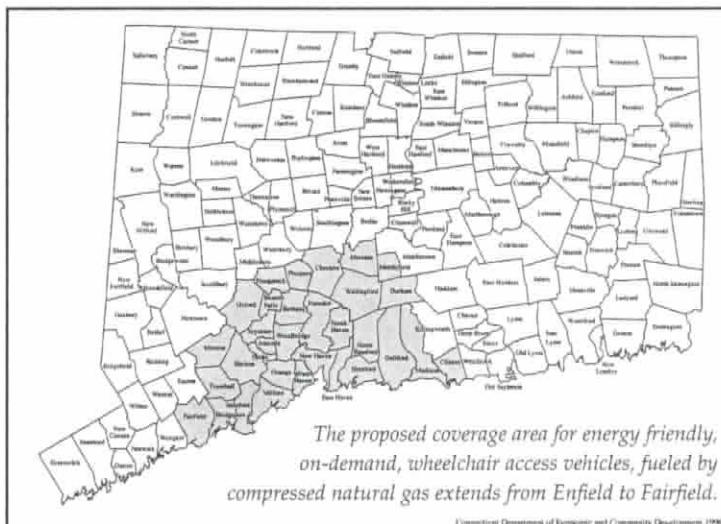


Disability and “Wheelchair Friendly” Transportation gets a Green Boost



Most of us, after the age of 16, take “getting a ride” for granted. We have a variety of transportation options when we want to go shopping, see a movie or pick up groceries. For those who operate on wheels or require other assistance, this is often not the case. For many disabled, rides must be reserved days in advance and the transport can be expensive. In short, access to Connecticut-area “Wheelchair Friendly” transportation is woefully inadequate to support the demand.

Assessing the problem, two taxi operators, Marco Henry and Bill Scalzi, hatched a different concept. They concluded one wheelchair taxi serving 30 towns is not nearly enough to provide effective demand-response service and thus a fleet of vehicles would be required to make a disabled access program truly successful.

Thus, The Yellow Cab Company of Bloomfield and Metro Taxi of West Haven partnered to introduce a truly new service in Connecticut: energy friendly, on-demand, wheelchair

access vehicles, fueled by compressed natural gas. For both companies the emphasis is on access – total access to wheelchair friendly transportation in over 60 cities and towns through central Connecticut from Enfield to

be no more than a current taxi ride, (about \$2.50 per mile).

The presidents of both companies, Marco Henry and Bill Scalzi, realized that energy friendly, 24/7, on demand transportation alternatives for our friends in wheelchairs is a concept whose time is long overdue.

“Holding up one cab to service a region is like a band-aid on a broken arm,” Henry said. “What we have learned from past project failures are, a fleet big enough to service multiple towns simultaneously is the only way it will work,” he added.

Green Access and Metro Access will offer an exceptional service to the residents of Connecticut. The project will offer on-demand transportation

service accessible to any wheelchair bound person without requiring a reservation. This is a true 24/7 service that will be available on short notice versus the current system which requires days of scheduling in advance for a single trip. This allows a disabled person and their families the freedom to live a more normal life at any time of the day or night.



Connecticut taxi company owner Marco Henry of The Yellow Cab Company and Green Access of Hartford and Bill Scalzi, President of Metro Taxi and Metro Access serving Greater New Haven.

Fairfield. As a result, the management of both companies added subdivisions to their transportation companies with “Access” in the name: Green Access covers towns north of Middletown and Metro Access covers from Middletown to the shore.

Funding for this initiative will put 140 vehicles on the road. All of them wheelchair accessible and available in towns highlighted on the map. The cost will

A Final Word

The Time is Now: Connecting Disability, Green and On Demand Access Along Connecticut's Transit Corridors

By Stan Koslowski

Congratulations to the Metro Access and Green Access taxi companies for their environmentally friendly, robust initiative to offer an expanded, on-demand taxi service that includes vehicles that are wheelchair accessible. Their vision and commitment to provide 140 green vehicles servicing sixty towns "from Enfield to Fairfield" will open up a whole range of new opportunities for Connecticut's citizens, and their efforts are to be applauded.

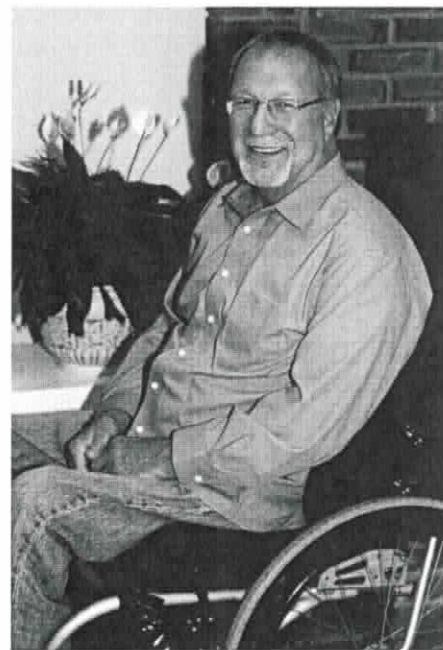
The Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative, of which I am Executive Director, is a cross-disability coalition formed five years ago to represent the interests of a wide variety of disability constituencies. We acknowledge and appreciate the advances in our transportation systems for individuals with disabilities, particularly since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, but much more needs to be done.

In our state, an estimated 13 percent (402,369) of people age five and older reported a disability, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey. According to a University of Connecticut Health Center needs assessment completed in 2007, the most frequent unmet need identified by Connecticut residents is transportation, which affects every

aspect of daily life. Another study conducted by the Health Center indicates transportation is the number one employment challenge – indeed "one of the most intractable barriers" – preventing people with disabilities from joining the workforce. The 2009 Update to the State's Locally-Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan documents the need, and national studies conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the Harris Poll, and the Community Transportation Association of America also highlight the issue, which is especially acute for those residing in suburban and rural areas, where public and community transportation are limited or absent.

These findings and more reveal barriers to transportation that continue to exist and prevent the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Transportation enables us to work, choose where to live, pursue an education, access health care, worship, shop, and participate in recreational activities. Not so for countless thousands with no access to vehicles that can accommodate their wheelchairs. In many cases, because of inadequate transportation, those who are willing and able to work cannot do so.

The investments Metro Access and Green Access are making, while ahead of the curve, also reflect a coming reality. As our population ages, there will be a dramatic increase in the



Stan Koslowski, Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative Executive Director

number of people with disabilities. It is estimated that from 2006 to 2030, Connecticut's older adult population will increase by 64%, with many elders losing their ability to drive and acquiring physical disabilities as they age.

The proposed Green Access and Metro Access taxi services are a bold step in the right direction. Serving more than 60 towns from Enfield to Fairfield will do more than provide a central corridor of on-demand vehicles. It will allow for priority, same day ride services to an underserved population with just a phone call, whereas individuals now must reserve transport days in advance, if indeed transportation services are even provided where they live. Both companies will power the vehicles with Compressed Natural Gas, a nod to our increasing awareness and implementation of energy friendly alternative fuel services in the state – also acknowledged by the disability communities. Again, I applaud this initiative and hope it is a portent of many other disability-friendly initiatives yet to come.