

# Public Transportation In Riverside County:

How to Break Down Barriers to Access for the Disabled and Elderly



Presented by the  
Office of Congressman Mark Takano  
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# Senior and Disabled Access to Public Transportation

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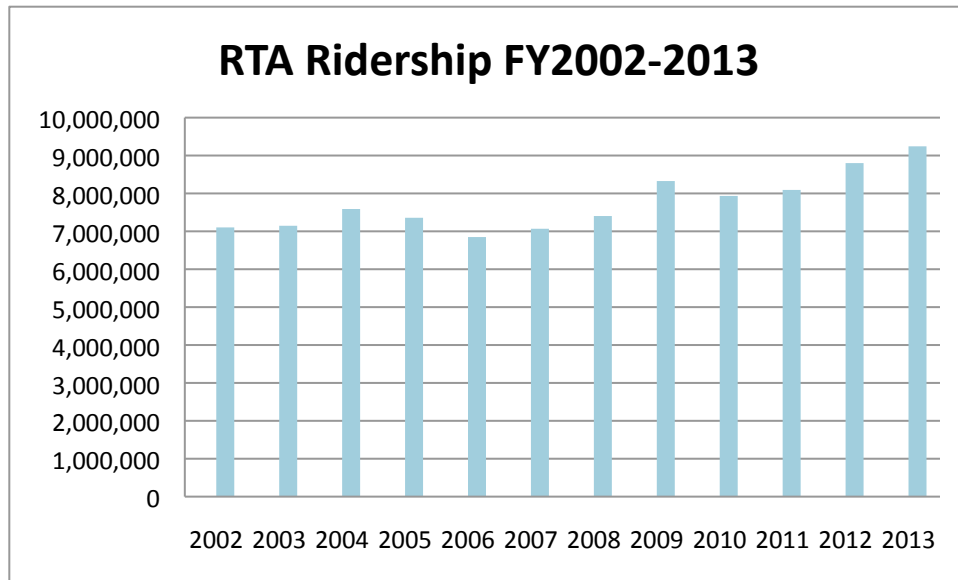
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## ***Key Highlights***

- By 2015, more than 15.5 million Americans 65 and older, will live in areas with very poor public transportation options or none whatsoever.
  - In the Riverside-San Bernardino Metro Area, 69 percent of seniors will have poor transit access by 2015.
- Adults with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation.
- The “location cost burden” for Riverside residents, based on housing and transportation expenses as a percent of income is higher than the “location cost burden” for New York City residents.
- In the 28 largest metropolitan areas, working families spend about 57 percent of their incomes on the combined costs of housing and transportation.
  - In the Inland Empire, the average is slightly higher. Working families in Riverside and Moreno Valley spend *nearly 60%* of their incomes on housing and transportation combined. In Perris, families spend around 58% of their household income.
- Last year, the Riverside Transit Agency saw an agency record of 9.57 million boardings, which is a 3.5 percent increase in ridership from FY2013.
  - Last fiscal year, RTA had 2,783,726 boardings using the senior and disabled fare, which is about 29% of their ridership.
- Since November 2011, *nearly 800* people have participated in RTA’s Travel training program for disabled and elderly riders, with over 400 currently in training or on the waitlist.
  - This program has generated 109,640 trips of elderly and disabled residents in 2.5 years.
- Public transit ridership continues to increase across the country while Federal funding for public transit continues to decrease.

***I. Introduction***

Public Transportation is a critical component to ensuring that all Inland Empire residents have a better quality of life. Not only does expanding access to public transportation help to boost the economy and reduce the environmental impact of automobiles, it also ensures that all residents, especially those without access to automobiles, are still able to fully participate in society.



Last year, the Riverside Transit Agency saw an agency record of 9.57 million boardings, which is a 3.5 percent increase in ridership from FY2012.<sup>1</sup> These numbers reflect a national trend. Transportation is the second highest household expense behind housing for Americans across the country. As fuel prices continue to rise, many families are choosing to use public transportation, instead of automobiles, to commute to work.

However, there are many communities that do not just choose public transportation, but depend on these services to commute to work, buy groceries and access healthcare. This report examines the specific challenges faced by the disabled and senior residents in accessing public transportation in Riverside County. As ridership continues to increase, and demand for public transportation grows, it is critical to ensure that public transportation is especially accessible for those individuals who cannot use or afford cars and rely on public transportation as their only means of mobility.

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<sup>1</sup> Riverside Transit Agency, <http://www.riversidetransit.com/home/> (October 2013).

## ***II. Seniors and Access to Public Transportation***

According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 88 percent of the nation’s seniors want to stay in their own homes as they age,<sup>2</sup> effectively, “aging in place.” However, most adults 65 and older do not live in urban, transit rich areas, but rather, suburban, auto-dependent areas. They are also more likely to be living on fixed incomes and therefore, less likely to be able to afford the cost of owning a car.<sup>3</sup> This creates a “mobility mismatch” between seniors living in the suburbs, who either drive very little, or do not drive at all, and the resources they can access by public transportation.

A report from Transportation for America, “Aging in Place, Stuck Without Options,” says that by 2015, more than 15.5 million Americans 65 and older, will live in areas with very poor public transportation options or none whatsoever.<sup>4</sup> In the Riverside-San Bernardino Metro Area, 69 percent of seniors will have poor transit access by 2015. Tanya Synder, in her article, *How Seniors Get Stuck at Home with No Transit Options*, cautions that the number of seniors with poor transit access could be even larger because the criteria used for “transit access” was measured by half-mile walking distance to public transportation.<sup>5</sup> For many seniors, this distance is too far for them to frequently access public transportation.

In response to the “Community Quality of Life Survey 2013,” sent out by the City of Riverside to measure resident perceptions of the city of Riverside, respondents age 65 and older rated the “ease of getting around by bus or rail in Riverside” the lowest of all age groups.<sup>6</sup> They were also the largest group that said they did not use the bus or rail services in the city.

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<sup>2</sup> Synder, Tanya, DC. Streets Blog, *How Seniors Get Stuck At Home with No Transit Options*.

<sup>3</sup> Transportation for America, *Aging in Place: Stuck Without Options: 16-17*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Synder, Tanya, DC. Streets Blog, *How Seniors Get Stuck At Home with No Transit Options*.

<sup>6</sup> City of Riverside, California, *Community Quality of Life Survey 2013*.

### ***III. Disabled Access to Transportation***

Public Transportation is a key component for ensuring that disabled Americans have equal opportunities in the job market, education, and access to facilities. Unfortunately, adults with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, of the almost 2 million people living with disabilities who never leave their homes, more than half a million never leave because of lack of access to transportation options.<sup>8</sup> This lack of access leaves thousands of disabled Americans unable to fully participate in society.

Despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, which mandated that all new public transit vehicles and facilities must be made accessible for disabled persons, there are still persistent disparities in disabled transportation access. Across the board, there are issues with compliance to ADA requirements from bus services, over-the-road buses, and train travel. Though bus services now have low-floor buses, ramps, additional grab bars, and larger signage, some transit agencies still fail to comply with the requirement to announce bus stops.<sup>9</sup> This greatly impacts the accessibility of public transportation for those with visual and cognitive disabilities.

To address access for those individuals unable to use public transportation, the ADA requires that paratransit, door-to-door shared ride, services are provided. Paratransit use has increased significantly, but restrictive eligibility criteria, trip denials, tardiness or failure to show, lack of training for drivers and inaccurate information<sup>10</sup> are all barriers for disabled individuals using this service.

The Riverside Transit Agency (RTA) and the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) are both working hard to bridge the gap between Riverside County's seniors and disabled community and public transportation. RTA offers Dial-A-Ride services for seniors age 65 and older and disabled residents. It is an "origin-to-destination advanced reservation transportation service" provided within three-quarters of a mile of an RTA normal bus route.<sup>11</sup> However, the Dial-A-Ride program is expensive, costing an individual rider using the program five days a week *around* \$1,560 a year, while the disabled/senior bus fare would cost only \$300 a year.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Leadership Conference Education Fund, *Equity in Transportation for People with Disabilities*: 1-5.

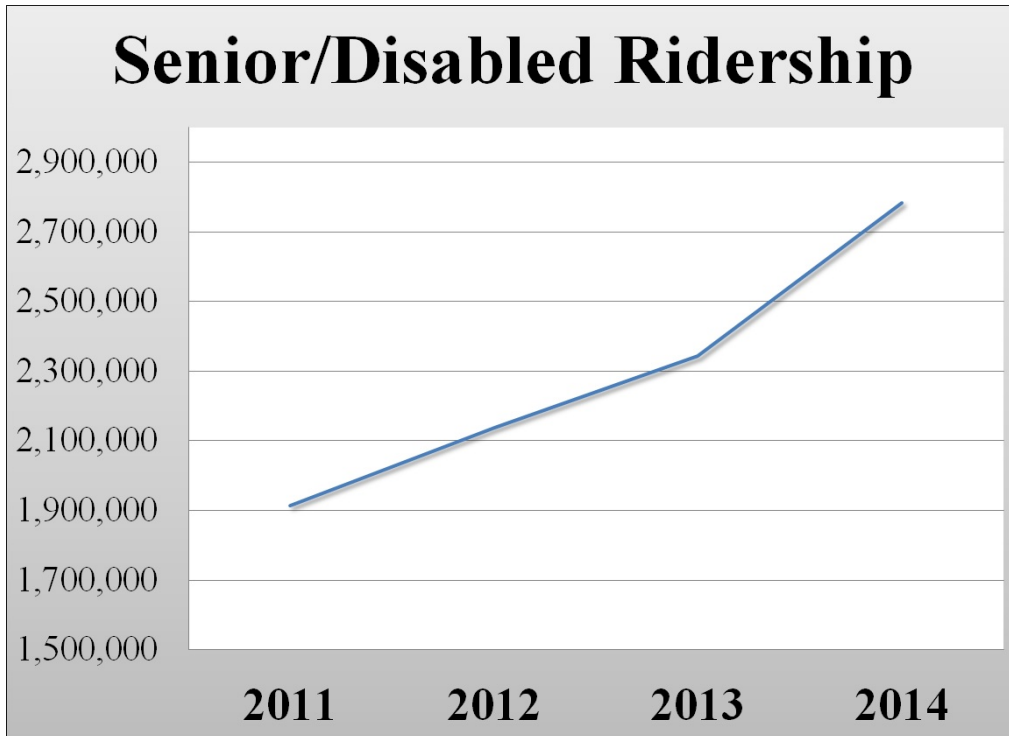
<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The Leadership Conference Education Fund, *Equity in Transportation for People with Disabilities*: 1-5.

<sup>11</sup> Riverside Transit Agency, *What is Dial-A-Ride*, <http://www.riversidetransit.com/home/index.php/dial-a-ride/64-what-is-dar> (October 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Metro, *Transitional program alleviates paratransit demand, cuts costs*.



In November 2011, RTA created a Travel Training Program to address the problem that Riverside County’s seniors and disabled residents simply did not know how to use the public transportation system. The Travel Training program provides personalized training for seniors and the disabled that teaches them route familiarization, trip planning and community interaction, which allows users to become familiar with public transit on their own terms.<sup>13</sup> RTA offers the program free of cost to seniors and disabled residents. Since the implementation of the program, RTA has seen Senior and Disabled Ridership increase greatly. In fiscal year 2013, RTA had 2,174,091 boardings using the senior and disabled fare, which was about 24% of their ridership, and in fiscal year 2014, the disabled fair was 2,783,726 - 29% of their ridership.<sup>14</sup>

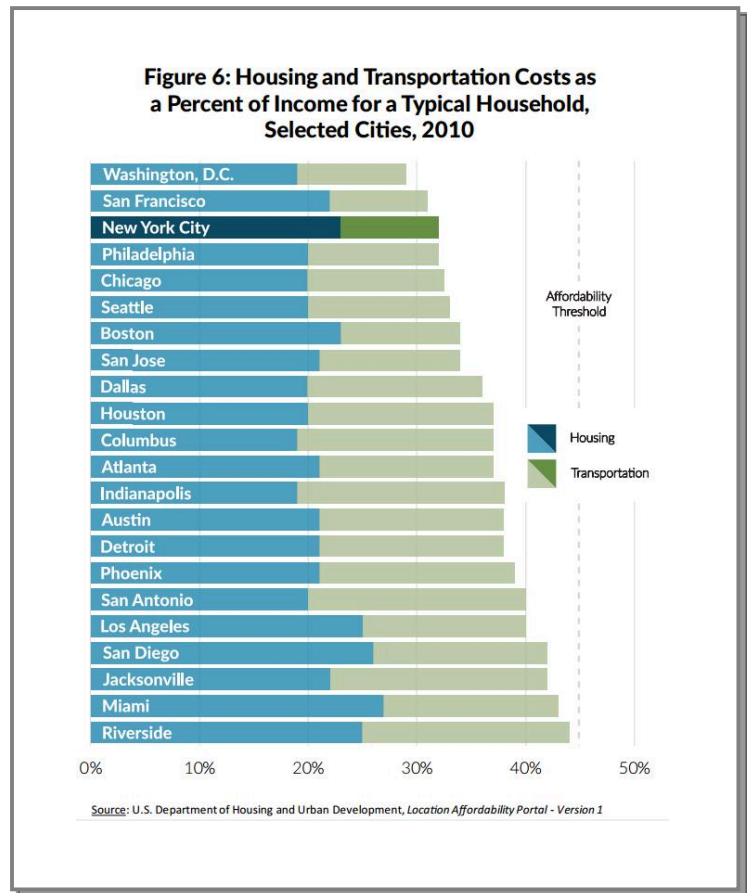
<sup>13</sup> IE511, *Inland Empire Specialized Transit: Riverside County*, <http://www.ie511.org/riverside-county-specialized-transit.aspx>.

<sup>14</sup> Riverside Transit Agency, <http://www.riversidetransit.com/home/> (October 2013).

#### IV. Transportation Access and Housing

Historically, at the federal level, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have not always worked together to ensure that those in need of low-income housing also have access to public transportation. Those in search of affordable housing are often pushed away from transit centers, decreasing the cost of rent, but increasing the cost of transportation.

To address this issue, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation, released the Location Affordability Portal. The Portal combines two tools, the “Location Affordability Index,” which allows users to compare affordability in specific regions based on housing and transportation costs and the “My Transportation Cost Calculator,” which allows users to directly compare their transportation costs in driving heavy areas to transportation costs in public transit rich areas.<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that for every dollar families save on housing, they spend 77 cents more on transportation.<sup>16</sup> Both tools help users fully evaluate their cost of living in specific cities, and represent a shift in how housing affordability should be calculated, taking transportation costs into account.



In a recent policy brief, *Housing Affordability Versus Location Affordability: The Rent's Too Damn High! But the Metrocard is a Pretty Good Deal*, by the Citizens Budget Commission in New York City, they compared location affordability as a percent of income for a typical household in selected cities. Their results, in the figure above<sup>17</sup>, found that the “location cost burden” for New York City, Washington, DC and San Francisco, three of the most expensive

<sup>15</sup> Department of Transportation, Location Affordability Portal, <http://www.locationaffordability.info/about.aspx> (August 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Center for American Progress, *The Location Affordability Portal Helps Families, Urban Planners, and Policymakers*, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2013/11/21/79740/the-location-affordability-portal-helps-families-urban-planners-and-policymakers/> (August 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Citizens Budget Commission, *Housing Affordability Versus Location Affordability: The Rent's Too Damn High! But the Metro Card is a Pretty Good Deal*: 3-4.



cities for housing, but with significant public transportation infrastructure, was actually lower than the “location cost burden” based on housing and transportation expenses as a percent of income for Riverside, California.<sup>18</sup> For all residents in Riverside, it is crucial to continue to invest in public transportation infrastructure to help ensure that Riverside is an affordable place to live.

For seniors and disabled residents specifically, not only is it critical to protect affordable housing for seniors and disabled individuals who are on fixed incomes in transit-oriented developments, but it is also important to ensure these developments create livable communities. A livable community is one that addresses the needs of all residents, regardless of age or ability. This includes, affordable housing, transportation options, and prevents isolation by promoting civic and community engagement.<sup>19</sup> It also includes adopting a “Complete Streets” policy when designing new infrastructure projects that “enables safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability or mode of transportation.”<sup>20</sup> Addressing these issues in transportation planning maximizes the benefits of transportation investment by ensuring that transportation development addresses both mobility and larger community goals.<sup>21</sup>

Access to public transportation is also connected to an increase in housing and rent costs, especially when it comes to building new transportation projects. To address this issue, a new federal rule was implemented in 2013 by the Department of Transportation to better connect housing and transportation policy. The new rule modifies the criteria for the New Starts program that provides grants for new and existing fixed rail projects. This also includes the Small Starts program that awarded the Riverside County Transportation Commission a grant to help fund the Perris Valley Line. The new rule provides incentives for applicants applying for New Starts funding to partner with housing agencies to preserve and expand the availability of affordable housing near planned transit stations.<sup>22</sup> This will help to protect and keep affordable housing near public transportation options, making it easier for low and middle-income individuals and families, disabled individuals and senior citizens to access both affordable housing and public transportation.

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<sup>18</sup> Citizens Budget Commission, *Housing Affordability Versus Location Affordability: The Rent’s Too Damn High! But the Metro Card is a Pretty Good Deal*: 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> AARP, *AARP Livable Communities*, <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/learn/> (October 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Smart Growth America, *National Complete Street Coalition*, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/complete-streets-fundamentals/complete-streets-faq> (October 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Federal Highway Administration, *Creating Livable Communities*:5-7.

<sup>22</sup> Lubell, Jermey, US News, *How New Federal Rules Will Help Align Housing and Transportation Policy*.



The Perris Station Apartments is a good example of a livable community in the Inland Empire that blends affordable housing and access to transportation for Perris area seniors. The new 84 unit senior living complex is located in downtown Perris near the stop of the new Perris Valley Line RCTC is building. The complex includes housing for those 55 and older, retail and office space as well as a second story courtyard.

*Photo Credit: <http://www.perrisstation.com/gallery/>*

## ***V. Transportation and Access to Healthcare***

The lack of access to public transportation for lower income individuals and families, senior citizens and disabled Americans is also a major contributor to health disparities. Communities without adequate transportation access are isolated from health care facilities and are also forced to spend a larger percentage of their budget on cars if they have them, reducing the funds available for health care expenses.<sup>23</sup> Increasing numbers of individuals living in the suburbs are unable to access health care facilities that are often spread out and located in non-walkable areas. Research shows that lack of access to transportation reduces health care utilization among low-income people, children, seniors, and the disabled.<sup>24</sup>

Lack of public transportation access in these communities disproportionately impacts their health by creating a balloon effect. More money is spent on transit costs, meaning there is less money for healthcare expenses. People live farther away from healthcare facilities and are therefore less likely to use them for preventative care which would prevent more expensive trips to the emergency room.<sup>25</sup> All of these health risks stem from a lack of access to public transportation.

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<sup>23</sup> The Leadership Conference Education Fund, *The Road to Health Care Parity: Transportation Policy and Access to Health Care:1-5*.

<sup>24</sup> Transportation for America. *Improving access to health care by improving transportation options*.

<sup>25</sup> The Leadership Conference Education Fund, *The Road to Health Care Parity: Transportation Policy and Access to Health Care:1-5*.

One way to bridge the divide between low-income housing and access to public transportation is through transit-oriented development (TOD). TOD is designed to maximize public transportation by building mixed use, high density housing and commerce developments around existing transportation stations. By bringing all of these elements together, it also has the potential to help low-income, senior citizens and disabled individuals better access not only housing by public transportation, but employment and healthcare.

## ***VI. Conclusions***

As the next surface transportation bill is debated throughout this Fall and into the next year, it will be important to better support programs that increase access to public transportation for those who need these services the most.

### *Restore Bus and Bus Facilities Funding*

Bus operations account for more than 50 percent of all transit trips in the nation, but when the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21) was authorized, it cut funding for buses and bus facilities by 57 percent.<sup>26</sup> These cuts have made it more difficult for transit agencies across the county to maintain a state of good repair for their buses, which translate to higher maintenance costs and less dependable bus service. If funding was increased or even restored to FY2012 levels, it would mean that transit agencies would be better able to maintain their buses, increase services, and better serve their constituencies.

### *Create more incentives to coordinate Housing and Transit*

While the provision in the New Starts grant program to incentivize more transit projects that coordinate with housing is a step in the right direction, more can be done at the Federal level to tie transportation and housing development. The State of California passed SB 1039 in 2012, which requires the Department of Housing and Community Development and CalTrans to coordinate housing and transportation policies to maximize the benefits of infrastructure investments in the state.<sup>27</sup>

### *Expand Travel Training Program Funding*

Data collected from the New Freedom program, an initiative from the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), proved that Travel Training programs are a cost effective way for local transit agencies to better serve their

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<sup>26</sup> Riverside Transit Agency, <http://www.riversidetransit.com/home/> (October 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Steinberg, Darrell, SB 1039, [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/sen/sb\\_1001-1050/sb\\_1039\\_cfa\\_20120703\\_164746\\_sen\\_floor.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/sen/sb_1001-1050/sb_1039_cfa_20120703_164746_sen_floor.html)

elderly and disabled populations.<sup>28</sup> Not only did they save the consumer and the transit agency money, they also improve the quality of life of the transit customer.

#### *RIDE Act*

The Recruiting Individuals to Drive our Elders (RIDE) Act would help states ensure that Seniors have rides to their medical visits in the most cost effective way. Currently, Medicaid programs are required to ensure that all Medicaid beneficiaries have transportation for their medical visits. However, current rules do not allow volunteer drivers to be reimbursed for their mileage, meaning that they have to bear that burden themselves. The RIDE act would allow states to reimburse volunteers for the whole trip, including mileage.

#### *Safe Streets Act*

The Safe Streets Act would require states to adopt Complete Streets policies within two years for new federally funded projects or road improvements. As mentioned previously in this report, Complete Streets policies take into account the needs of all roadway users, including the disabled and the elderly when designing and implementing new transportation projects.

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<sup>28</sup> Wolf-Branigin, Karen, et al, *Can Travel Training Services Save Public Transportation Agencies Money?*:36-37.