

oppaga Progress Report

November 1999

Report No. 99-14



Transportation Disadvantaged Commission Takes Action; Legislative Changes Needed

at a glance

The Legislature considered, but did not enact, legislation to address our prior report's recommendations, such as changing the size and role of the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged and establishing more stringent eligibility criteria for transportation disadvantaged services.

The Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged has taken action under its own authority to address several of our prior report's recommendations. It adopted a policy establishing criteria for assessing client eligibility for transportation disadvantaged services. It also directed local community transportation coordinators to maximize the use of public mass transit in serving the transportation disadvantaged.

Purpose

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Transportation Disadvantaged Commission in response to a 1997 OPPAGA report.^{1,2} This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the commission has addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

Background

The Legislature created Florida's Transportation Disadvantaged Program in 1979 to foster the coordination of transportation services for the state's transportation disadvantage population.¹ The purpose of the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, which administers the program, is to establish coordinated transportation systems from which state agencies and local entities can purchase cost-effective and non-duplicated transportation services for their clients.

¹ Section 11.45(7)(f), F.S.

² Review of the Transportation Disadvantaged Program, [OPPAGA Report No. 96-43](#), January 29, 1997.

Progress Report

The commission is composed of 27 members who represent various entities, such as state social service agencies that purchase transportation for clients, the Department of Transportation, a public transit association, rural and urban area advocacy groups, private and non-profit transportation providers, the non-transportation business community, and a representative of community transportation coordinators.

The commission has broad responsibilities for guiding the development of coordinated transportation systems for state agencies purchasing transportation services for their clients. The commission is to ensure that state agencies purchase all clients' trips from providers within the coordinated systems unless they use a more cost-effective provider or the coordinated system cannot provide the needed service. State agencies that purchase client transportation services include the Departments of Education, Elder Affairs, Children and Families, Labor and Employment Security, Veteran's Affairs, and the Agency for Health Care Administration.

The commission contracts with Community Transportation Coordinators (CTCs) to coordinate and deliver local transportation services within their local service areas. Local oversight of CTCs' operations and performance are performed by Local Coordinating Boards, which are appointed and staffed by metropolitan planning organizations or other planning agencies designated by the commission.

The commission reported that total state agency expenditures for transportation disadvantaged services totaled \$222.5 million in Fiscal Year 1997-98. The

commission reported these expenditures funded 60 million one-way trips, of which 36 million were provided by the coordinated system. The commission funded only those trips ineligible for funding by other agencies through the coordinated system.

In Fiscal Year 1997-98, the commission awarded \$25.8 million in grants to local community transportation coordinators and other planning agencies that were funded by the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund. These grants were used to purchase services for transportation disadvantaged persons who do not qualify for services funded by state agencies. The commission's administrative expenses (\$656,796) were also funded by the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund.

Prior Findings ---

In our 1997 report, we concluded that the Transportation Disadvantaged Program was successful in establishing coordinated systems throughout Florida. However, it could not be readily determined whether the program is providing services in a cost-effective manner. Further, although public mass transit systems were being used in some areas of the state to serve the transportation disadvantaged and American with Disabilities Act (ADA) clients, social service agencies were reluctant to transfer clients from using paratransit to mass transit services, although this action could produce significant cost savings. Program monitoring and reporting activities were fragmented, which increased costs and limited the agencies' ability to ensure accountability for performance and use of funds.

We also identified several other issues affecting coordination of services for the transportation disadvantaged.

- Agency requirements for client transportation differed among agencies, which limited the ability of CTCs to coordinate client trips.
- Statewide client eligibility screening was limited. In some parts of the state, individuals could self-declare their eligibility for services funded by the Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund.
- Many stakeholders believed that the commission's large size and composition reduced its effectiveness in carrying out its mission and increased competing interests among commission members which make it difficult to reach consensus on program issues. Further, some commission members appeared to have business relationships that were inconsistent with the stakeholders' interests that they were to represent while serving on the commission. In addition, other commissioners had business relationships with each other and could have potentially benefited from commission decisions.

We made several recommendations noted below to the Legislature for improving the program's efficiency and effectiveness.

- Incorporating stringent eligibility criteria that individuals would need to meet in order to qualify for transportation disadvantaged services.
- Modifying the size, composition, and role of the commission. Specifically, we recommended that the Legislature consider reducing the commission's size

from 27 members or replacing it with a smaller advisory body to maintain program oversight at the state level.

- Requiring local coordinating boards to designate a lead agency that would work with other funding entities at the local level and the commission at the state level to consolidate monitoring and reporting activities and eliminate duplication of effort.
- Requiring the commission to work with all agencies that provide or purchase transportation disadvantaged services to eliminate conflicting requirements, such as varying client wait times and contradictory driver training requirements.

Current Status ---

The Legislature considered, but did not pass, legislation that would have addressed our prior recommendations.

However, the commission took action under its own authority to address several of our prior recommendations.

- The commission adopted a policy establishing criteria for assessing client eligibility for transportation disadvantaged services. This policy prohibits individuals from declaring themselves to be transportation disadvantaged. The policy also directs local CTCs to maximize the use of public mass transit in serving transportation disadvantaged individuals. These criteria apply only to services funded by Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund grants, as state agencies must comply with eligibility criteria set in state or federal law.

Progress Report

- The commission reported that it was working with state agencies and with CTCs and local coordinating boards in an effort to streamline monitoring and reporting requirements. For example, the commission reported that it had implemented a pilot project in Brevard and Putnam counties in which its staff would conduct joint monitoring visits with local coordinating board staff to evaluate local CTC operations. The commission further reported it reduced the amount of information it required for CTCs to include in their revised annual operating reports.

Actions Not Taken —

We continue to believe that the Legislature should consider modifying the size, composition, and role of the commission. The Legislature should consider reducing the commission's size from its current 27 members or replacing it with a smaller advisory body to maintain program oversight at the state level. Many stakeholders believed that the commission's large size and increased competing interests among commission members made it difficult to reach consensus on program issues.

OPPAGA provides objective, independent, professional analyses of state policies and services to assist the Florida Legislature in decision making, to ensure government accountability, and to recommend the best use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475).

The Florida Monitor: <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/>

Project supervised by Tom Roth (850/488-1024)

Project conducted by Amy McKee (850/487-9212)