

Invest In Transportation

Reliable Transportation Is Essential to Independent Living

For people who don't drive, transportation isn't optional. It is what makes work, health care, groceries and community life possible.

Across Wisconsin, public and specialized transportation systems provide essential connections for people with disabilities, older adults and other nondrivers.

But transit providers face ongoing challenges paying operating expenses, maintaining service and investing in vehicles and other capital needs. Unstable funding makes long-term planning difficult, and some communities have already responded by reducing routes or service hours.

WILN believes Wisconsin needs a stronger and more stable investment in transportation.

The Problem

When transportation service disappears, people can lose access to their communities.

People with disabilities and older adults throughout Wisconsin depend on public and specialized transportation for everyday life.

Transportation provides access to:

- Employment
- Medical appointments
- Grocery stores and other essential shopping
- Family and friends
- Community activities and services

In urban areas, reductions in public transit can mean fewer routes, longer waits or reduced service hours.

In rural communities, transportation options may already be extremely limited. Programs supported by funding such as the federal Section 5310 program can provide rides for people with disabilities who do not have access to personal vehicles. Even programs that rely on volunteer drivers still have operating costs that must be covered.

When funding is inadequate or unpredictable, transportation providers have fewer options for maintaining reliable service.

For someone who cannot drive, the consequences can extend far beyond inconvenience.

Losing transportation can mean losing access to the community.

WHY STABLE FUNDING MATTERS

Transportation providers need to plan beyond the next funding crisis.

WILN is concerned that Wisconsin transit systems have faced chronic and unpredictable funding challenges.

Short-term funding solutions may preserve services temporarily, but transportation providers also need enough stability to plan routes, maintain vehicles, employ staff and respond to changing community needs.

People who depend on those systems need stability too.

Someone may choose a home because it provides access to a bus route. A person with a disability may depend on specialized transportation to get to work. An older adult may rely on transportation for medical care and groceries.

When routes or service hours disappear, simply moving somewhere else may not be financially or practically possible.

WILN's Solution

Wisconsin should make reliable transportation a sustained statewide investment.

WILN recommends three complementary actions:

1. Substantially increase funding for local transit agencies.

Wisconsin should provide transportation systems with the resources necessary to maintain and improve service for the communities that depend on them.

2. Allow communities to create Regional Transportation Authorities.

Regional Transportation Authorities can provide another mechanism for communities to organize and fund transportation across municipal boundaries.

WILN supports restoring the ability of Wisconsin communities to pursue this option.

3. Allow transportation funding programs to work together.

Wisconsin should reduce unnecessary funding silos and allow legally permissible coordination of transportation resources so riders can make more seamless trips for different purposes.

Together, these approaches could help stabilize transportation today while giving Wisconsin communities more tools to build stronger transportation systems for the future.

Why It Matters for Independent Living

Independent living requires the ability to participate in community life.

A person can have accessible housing and the support they need at home and still be isolated if they have no reliable way to leave that home.

Transportation connects people to jobs, medical care, food, relationships and the broader community.

For people with disabilities and older adults who cannot drive, reliable transportation can be one of the most important pieces of infrastructure supporting independence.

The Ask

WILN calls on Wisconsin policymakers to:

Substantially increase and stabilize funding for local transit, allow communities to establish Regional Transportation Authorities and create greater flexibility for transportation programs to coordinate available funding.

These three complementary reforms would give communities additional resources and tools to maintain and improve transportation options for people with disabilities, older adults and other nondrivers.

The Bottom Line

A person cannot fully participate in their community if they cannot get where they need to go. Wisconsin should treat reliable transportation as essential infrastructure for independent living.