

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-154T](#), a statement for the record to the Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Millions of Americans are unable to provide their own transportation or have difficulty accessing public transportation. Such transportation-disadvantaged populations may include those who are elderly, have disabilities, or have low incomes. Older adults represent the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population, and access to transportation is critical to helping individuals remain independent as they age.

This statement addresses (1) the federal programs that provide funding for transportation services for the transportation-disadvantaged populations, including older adults, and (2) the types of challenges faced in providing services to transportation-disadvantaged populations. This statement is based on GAO's body of work in this area from 2004 through 2012.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any new recommendations. In 2012, GAO recommended that the Secretary of Transportation, as the chair of the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, along with its member agencies, should (1) complete and publish a strategic plan that would outline agency roles and responsibilities and articulate a strategy to help strengthen interagency collaboration and communication, and (2) report on the progress of Coordinating Council recommendations and develop a plan to address any outstanding recommendations. DOT has begun taking action to implement these recommendations.

View [GAO-14-154T](#). For more information, contact David J. Wise at (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov.

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TRANSPORTATION-DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS

Coordination Efforts are Underway, but Challenges Continue

What GAO Found

In 2012, GAO reported that 80 federal programs in eight different agencies fund a variety of transportation services for transportation-disadvantaged populations, which include older Americans. Within the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is a key source of federal transportation funding for older Americans. For example, some FTA programs provide formula funding to states to serve transit-dependent populations with special needs. States typically distribute these funds to local nonprofit human service agencies to buy vehicles to transport older adults and people with disabilities, and the funds may support transportation to access a range of activities, such as grocery shopping. While some federal funding programs are transportation focused, transportation was not the primary mission for the vast majority of the 80 programs GAO identified in 2012. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services' Medicaid program reimburses states that provide Medicaid beneficiaries with bus passes, among other transportation options, to access eligible medical services. Total federal spending on transportation services for the transportation disadvantaged remains unknown because federal departments did not separately track spending for roughly two-thirds of the programs identified in 2012. Through regulations, guidance, or agency initiatives, some agency programs require or encourage their grantees to coordinate transportation services. For example, FTA's Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program required grantees to coordinate and establish locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans.

While some transportation planning and service coordination efforts are under way at the federal, state and local levels, GAO previously identified continuing challenges such as insufficient leadership at the federal level and limited financial resources and growing unmet needs at the state and local level. For example, in 2012 GAO reported that insufficient federal leadership and guidance about how to coordinate transportation services for the transportation disadvantaged and navigate various federal program requirements might hinder the coordination of transportation services among state and local providers. Selected state officials also said that the federal government could provide state and local entities with improved guidance on transportation coordination—especially related to instructions on how to share costs across programs (i.e., determining what portion of a trip should be paid by whom). Limited financial resources and growing unmet needs challenge state and local providers as well. Several state and local officials expressed concern about their ability to adequately address expected growth in elderly, disabled, low-income, and rural populations. For example, transit agency officials reported to GAO in 2012 that demand for Americans with Disabilities Act paratransit—a service that can be more costly to operate than traditional fixed-route transit and that is often used by transportation-disadvantaged populations including the elderly—has increased because of the growing older population.