

PUBLIC TRANSIT: A KEY TO ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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Every day, working parents juggle the demands of transporting their children to school or day care before commuting to work. For welfare recipients who are entering the workplace, this juggling act can be a serious barrier to self-sufficiency.

In Alameda County, about 25,000 families receive Temporary Aid to Needy Families (formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children). This program assists families headed by parents who have no earnings or very low earnings. Unless the parents are exempt (because of medical conditions, responsibility to care for a newborn or disabled family member, or other reasons) they are required to participate in a welfare-to-work program known as CalWORKs.

Transportation is a major barrier to CalWORKs parents who are trying to become self-sufficient through employment. Only about 30% of CalWORKs parents have access to a car. This statistic presents a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to ensure that these parents can travel to and from jobs and child care. The opportunity is to increase utilization of public transit.

In 1998, I initiated the "Communities That Work!" initiative so that Alameda County could get a head start in responding to federal and state mandates to help welfare recipients move into the workforce. "Communities That Work!" identified transportation as one of the three key needs for welfare recipients. The other two priorities are child care and job creation.

A Welfare to Work Transportation Planning Project grew out of the "Communities that Work!" initiative. This project, staffed by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and other agencies, developed a Welfare-to-Work Transportation Plan, a Transportation Resource Guide, and maps that show transit lines in relation to services used by welfare-to-work clients.

The Welfare-to-Work Transportation Plan is a comprehensive set of recommendations designed to get welfare-to-work participants to job sites and to services that families need. The plan recommends restoring night and weekend service on main bus lines, facilitating carpool and vanpool arrangements, providing guaranteed rides home in the event of an emergency that disrupts an employee's usual travel plans, and other strategies. In response to the plan's recommendation to restore night and weekend service, the

Alameda County Transit Board (AC Transit) is planning to use a \$.10 fare increase to restore this service in key areas in Oakland, including service to work sites such as United Parcel Service and Federal Express. Welfare-to-Work Transportation Project staff are working to locate funding to implement other recommendations in the plan.

The “Transportation Resource Guide” lays out transit options, including buses, trains, and ferries, and tells users how to locate these services.

A set of detailed maps show BART and bus routes in relation to child care sites, major employers, schools, career centers, homeless shelters, health facilities, and subsidized housing. The maps identify areas with a high concentration of families receiving public assistance. They also show the location of certain businesses and the number of entry-level jobs they offer. Welfare-to-work clients and employment counselors can use these maps to plan how best to use public transportation to meet work and family responsibilities.

The “Communities That Work!” initiative brought together regional and county resources to address the transportation needs of welfare-to-work participants and to address other challenges facing these families. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I will keep working on initiatives to help welfare recipients make the transition to self-sufficiency.