



May 20, 2008

### **Public Comment on Proposed Utah Transit Authority Fuel Surcharge**

Thank you for allowing the Disability Law Center (DLC) the opportunity to comment on the impact of the proposed fuel surcharge on paratransit riders. The DLC is designated as the designated Protection and Advocacy agency for the state and is charged with protecting the rights of Utahns with disabilities.

UTA provides paratransit services to approximately 5,000 individuals with disabilities.<sup>i</sup> Many Wasatch Front residents with disabilities who seek assistance from the DLC are almost completely dependent on public transportation. In addition, this population tends to have lower household incomes. As a result, their transit options are significantly more limited than those enjoyed by the public generally. The most severely impaired members of this class rely on Flextrans to get to work, visit family, or see the doctor, etc.

We recognize that Flextrans users who are Horizon card holders are not subject to the proposed surcharge. Nevertheless, we remain concerned about the disproportionate impact the increase will have on the remaining members of the class.

For example, a typical SSI or SSDI recipient who works a limited number of hours per week may have a total household income of approximately \$1000 per month. If a member of this group took one round trip every week day, and pays at the fare box, his monthly transportation expense is \$45.00 at the current rate. Alternatively, a monthly pass costs him \$76.00. If the

proposed fuel surcharge is implemented, these numbers increase to \$50 per month at the fare box or \$84.00 with a monthly pass.

An increase of this magnitude may not appear overly burdensome until remaining basic household expenses are considered. If our hypothetical individual's budget includes \$500 a month for rent, \$200 a month for food, \$100 (on average) for utilities, and between \$50 and \$84 for transportation, he will have between \$50 and \$116 left over for all other expenses. Clearly, even a small increase in the fare structure for paratransit users will have a drastic impact on their ability to meet basic transportation needs.

We believe that waiving the fuel surcharge for paratransit users would have little effect on UTA's bottom line, because the paratransit program is so heavily subsidized. Currently, each paratransit ride costs UTA \$34.36, and 92% of that cost<sup>ii</sup> is subsidized. Because paratransit riders make up only 1.23 percent of UTA passenger boardings,<sup>iii</sup> the proposed surcharge, as applied to paratransit users, will not substantially increase the extent of the subsidy.

Waiving the fuel surcharge as it applies to paratransit users would preserve their current level of access to transportation and serve the taxpayer by helping to ensure that the social costs of fewer transportation options, such as higher medical costs or the loss of employment opportunities, may be avoided. Therefore, the DLC urges the UTA to waive the application of the proposed fuel surcharge to paratransit users.

Sincerely,

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<sup>i</sup> Report to the Utah Legislature; Number 2008-03; A Performance Audit of the Utah Transit Authority, January 2008, p. 4.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p. 7.