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December 12, 2019

California Master Plan for Aging Committee
Via email: EngAGE@aging.ca.gov

Dear California Master Plan for Aging Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations for the Master Plan for Aging. As someone who has worked and volunteered for the last 20 years in the field of senior and disabled transportation in urban, suburban and now rural communities I make the following recommendation.

As transportation is the key to accessing service of all types for our rapidly aging population, there is an urgent need for stable funding for transportation services that are tailored for this population. Currently, in most California communities only public transit agencies have ongoing, stable funding sources. Transit agencies do a good job in providing fixed-route bus service and Americans with Disabilities Act – required paratransit. However, ADA paratransit is basically a last-resort service that is difficult or impossible to use by frail and disabled seniors for several reasons. First, eligibility for ADA paratransit is based on one’s demonstrated inability to use a fixed-route transit bus. This leaves many who technically can ride a regular bus, but who are frail or who have chronic illness unable to qualify for ADA paratransit. For those who do qualify, ride reservations must be made the day before the trip and the shared ride nature of the service often has riders on the vehicle for excessive amounts of time. In short, ADA paratransit is a system-centric service, when many non-driving seniors need a service that is rider-centric.

Because of the shortfalls of ADA paratransit and the growing need for more senior-oriented transportation options, many communities in California have developed transportation alternatives that are more focused on the individual mobility needs of non-driving seniors. Examples include volunteer driver programs and discount taxi programs. The problem is that these senior-friendly alternatives struggle in most communities to find the funds to continue to meet the growing need. Some communities have stepped up this challenge by creating local tax-based funding, but in most of California, grants, local fundraising and donations provide the majority of the funding. These sources are not sustainable and better, more stable funding for senior transportation is needed to meet the growing need for these types of services.

I am not suggesting that funding be taken away from public transit and ADA paratransit services, as both of these services are valuable and necessary to serve the residents of California. My recommendation is that the Master Plan for Aging explore additional funding sources that can provide stable, on-going funding for local senior and disabled transportation services that go-beyond those provided by ADA paratransit and fixed-route bus service. In addition, I recommend that at the local level, the use of these funds should be determined primarily by the Area Agencies on Aging, in consultation with transit agencies.

Access to reliable, safe, senior-friendly transportation is a major factor in making it possible for our elderly population to age in place in their home communities. During my career, I witnessed many seniors' joy and relief on learning that these types of services were available to them. I encourage the Master Plan for Aging to seriously consider this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Paul S. Branson

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