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## **Assemblymember Buffy Wicks introduces legislation to provide equitable transportation services for older Californians and people with disabilities**

SACRAMENTO – Earlier this month, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks introduced AB 540, the Social Service Transportation Improvement Act: Coordinated Transportation Sources Agencies. This bill improves access to transportation for older people and people with disabilities with the addition of a revenue stream, increased service requirements, coordination rather than consolidation of social service transportation services, and a strengthening of county-wide networks of transportation services.

“Transportation services for our elders and people with disabilities are substandard,” said Assemblymember Buffy Wicks. “Seniors are the fastest growing population in California, but our methods for services and network of transportation services have remained stagnant, resulting in inequitable access to transportation services.”

AB540 applies proven best practices and recommendations of the 2021 California Master Plan for Aging Stakeholder Advisory Committee and the Caltrans Mobility Action Plan so that every Californian, regardless of age or ability, has access to a systematically developed and funded, seamless, person-centered transportation system.

Right now, Californians with cognitive or physical characteristics that prevent them from operating a car or using conventional public transportation often rely on ADA paratransit to go to appointments, meet basic needs and see family. ADA Paratransit has significant limitations. Expanded accessible transportation services are needed to fill gaps left by ADA paratransit. AT services will provide riders person-centered assistance, accommodate special medical equipment and mobility devices, drop users off closer to their destination, and generally fill the many gaps left by ADA paratransit, all while increasing cost-effectiveness and reducing greenhouse gasses.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for a paratransit rider to spend hours in a vehicle for a trip of just a few miles, have to arrange for transfers between two or more paratransit services in the same county, or need to book a trip more than a week in advance.

“Elders and riders with disabilities endure increased isolation and loneliness, and associated health problems, as a result of not being able to access mobility when they need it,” said Debbie Toth, CEO of Choice in Aging and a member of the California Master Plan for Aging Stakeholder Advisory Committee.

“Access to transportation services is key to allowing seniors and people with disabilities to live independently in their community.”

“This issue has been studied for more than twenty years with no notable progress,” said Eric Harris, Public Policy Director of Disability Rights California. “California’s conventional transportation and transit systems have benefitted from increased funding and dedicated funding streams while this underserved population has unequal transportation options. AB540 will remedy this.”

AB540 will increase the transportation improvement fee \$10 per vehicle and require every county to set up “coordinated transportation service agencies” to improve transportation service to seniors and people with disabilities.

“This investment will result in effective, equitable local transportation services,” said Wicks. “I invite all of California’s transit advocates and providers to recognize this important need and support this long overdue fix to our transportation system.”

This legislation is supported by numerous non-profit and advocacy organizations throughout the state and region, including Choice in Aging, The Alzheimer’s Association, Disability Rights California, LeadingAge California, The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, Justice in Aging, Senior and Disability Action, and others.

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