

## Conclusion

There was consensus among all persons with whom we spoke that the issue of transporting subsidy eligible young children is a serious challenge in Massachusetts. Instead of a coherent “system” of transportation, what exists is a number of individually administered programs that are not linked in meaningful ways. As an issue that spans many state administrative units, “no one” is in charge of child transportation issues. Lacking shared vision, the individual programs are apparently all attempting to serve similar populations. Over the next several years, planning for transportation in both rural and urban environments is essential.

## References

- 1 Washington, Valora and Reed, Mary. “A Study of the Massachusetts Child Care Voucher System: Impact on Children, Families, Providers, and Resource and Referral Agencies”, Families in Society April-June 2008 (Volume 89, Number 2)
- 2 Degree, Tina, DeJesus-Flores, Francia, and Little, Clarence. “Transporting Young Children in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” TheCAYL Schott Fellowship in Early Care and Education, October, 2008
- 3 Department of Early Education and Care Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Expansion and Phase-In Concept Paper [http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/UPK\\_Concept\\_Paper\\_mstrEECntMay2008.pdf](http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs/UPK_Concept_Paper_mstrEECntMay2008.pdf)
- 4 Reville, Paul. Secretary of Education. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, letter to Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care community, October 30, 2008
- 5 Personal e-mail received: Subsidized Care Transportation Trend, 3 year analysis, 2006-2008
- 6 Although the leading cause of death for children ages 3 to 7 is motor vehicle traffic crashes, research and safety data from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)- an independent federal agency charged with investigating transportation accidents and identifying safety improvements- and the National Academy of Science’s Transportation Research Board shows that buses-both school buses and other types, such as transit buses-have lower fatality rates than other modes of transportation.
- 7 Boston EQUIP (2006). Boston Parent Survey 2006. Available at <http://www.bostonequip.org/PDF?ParentSurvey2006.ppt>
- 8 National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and Massachusetts Child Care Resource and Referral Network. “2008 Child Care in the State of Massachusetts”, March 2008
- 9 For example, a child who is enrolled in integrated preschool and then has to go to regular child care program, or a child who attends a before or after school program as well as the regular child care program.
- 10 All sectors of the special education community (ie. Department of Education, the legislature led by Representative Haddad and Senator Antonioni, superintendents, private school, etc.) all agreed to come together for a pilot project. The legislation funded a 3 year pilot through the Department of education. There was a task force to complete the project. Task Force on Special Education Transportation, “Special Education Transportation Pilot Program”. Massachusetts Department of Education, January, 2008

Follow up Study of the  
Massachusetts Child  
Care Voucher System  
REPORT PREPARED BY  
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# Transporting Young Children in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts



“It took me  
two and  
one-half  
hours to get  
to the Re-  
source and  
Referral  
agency on  
the bus from  
my house.”

Parent 2005

In 2005, the Bessie Tartt Wilson Children’s Foundation conducted a study to explore the workings and outcomes of the Massachusetts Child Care Voucher System.<sup>1</sup> Many families experienced the system as burdensome, confusing, and penalizing, further complicating their difficult and complex lives. This follow-up study shows there has been limited progress in improving access to child care for families that cannot get access to early education and care services because they lack of transportation.

National studies show that lack of access to transportation has been a key barrier to participation in universal preschool initiatives in other states.<sup>2</sup> But as the Massachusetts legislature focuses on plans for universal preschool (UPK) by 2012, transportation of young children is not receiving the policy attention it deserves.<sup>3</sup> While Massachusetts invests in its universal preschool agenda despite the economic downturn,<sup>4</sup> lack of transportation services remains a problem for many families who receive subsidies, not just those in the UPK program.

Everyone we spoke with—parents, providers, transportation agencies, Resource and Referral staff, and state government personnel—agreed that there are substantial problems related to transportation services for children in early education and care. In the three years since *Keeping the Promise* was released, the confusing array of transportation policies and practices remains a barrier to many who need subsidized child care. Meeting this challenge is a next step in building a child care voucher system that meets the needs of Massachusetts families.

In 2007 a research team held town meetings in all five the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) regions and a conference breakout session on transportation with early education and care providers, transportation providers, representatives from Resource and Referral agencies, and other interested parties. The team also interviewed 20 center based staff from eight different agencies (some of whom were also parents with vouchers), 17 parents, and 19 staff from six Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies. Researchers organized focus groups with nine transportation companies of varying sizes, representing almost 3,000 children across the state, and met with key Early Education and Care and Department of Transitional Assistance staff.

This report describes the challenges to providing families who lack adequate transportation full access to child education and care services, and recommends strategies for building an effective transportation system that provides access for all Massachusetts families.

## Overview of Transportation Policy and Services in Massachusetts

Transportation services in Massachusetts are a complex web of policies and regulations overseen by several different agencies (see Table A) including the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Early Education and Care (EEC), and Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV). At times these agencies have different or even contradictory policies. For example, a transportation company told us that the city of Springfield has regulations regarding transportation vehicles that differ from, and are more stringent than, RMV requirements.

### Table A: Major Transportation Regulations and Policies

Massachusetts regulations governing early childhood transportation services include:

**Vehicle inspections:** In addition to having the normal annual Massachusetts State Vehicle Inspection, the Registry of Motor vehicles requires CERTAIN vehicles to have two safety inspections.

**Time limits on transport:** Children shall not be transported for more than forty-five minutes during any one-way trip.

**Proper restraint according to age:** Whether being transported in a regular passenger car or an approved vehicle, all children must be properly restrained with child safety seats or seat belts.

**Professional development training and activities:** It is recommended that drivers participate in a minimum of eight (8) hours of in-service training each year.

**Liability insurance:** Child care agencies, contracted drivers and/or transportation companies must carry liability coverage on their vehicles of at least \$100,000 injury per person and \$300,000 per accident. Documentation of current vehicle insurance must be kept on file at the child care agency where transportation is provided.

The Massachusetts subsidized child care system serves about 56,000 “low income” children, of whom 14,319 receive transportation assistance. While not required to do so, 26% of early education and care programs that accept child care vouchers or contracts voluntarily offer transportation as a way to make child care more widely available



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to the eligible population, especially low income children.<sup>5</sup>

Travel on school buses and vans is for the most part safe,<sup>6</sup> so access is the primary concern about transportation for low income children. Most parents transport their own children and can select early education programs that are conveniently located.<sup>7</sup> But access is closely tied to family resources, and the availability of a state subsidy for transportation can influence or limit the early education options of “low income” children.

As illustrated in Table B, subsidized transportation is automatically available for some families, such as the homeless or teen parents, but other children may only obtain transportation services if there are enough state dollars, if there is an open slot in a program that offers transportation, and if there are available seats on the vehicles serving the program. The inevitable subjectivity of a process that uses “criteria,” such as those in Table B, to approve a family for “flexible funding” for transportation services further complicates this matter.

**Table B: Eligibility for Subsidized Transportation**

Criteria for Automatic Transportation Subsidy	Criteria for Subsidy subject to availability
Family receives supportive services related to child abuse and neglect	Availability of transportation Lives at least one mile from center
Family is homeless	Whether a parent has a car or access to public transportation
Teen Parent	Whether parent’s work schedule prevents transportation of child to or from care
Family receives Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits	Any physical incapacity that may prevent parent from transporting



## Findings

1. Families endure substantial hardships in getting their children to child care and themselves to work or school. Several “Stories from the Field” illustrate this problem.

### Three Stories from the Field

1. A parent, who was pregnant and had two young children, had to take the bus and then walk half a mile with her young children up a steep hill to get to the child care program. Her job allows her to arrive at work an hour late and leave an hour early so she can get her children to child care.
2. A parent, who was only able to access a one-way transportation voucher, had to pick her asthmatic toddler up at childcare in the afternoons and walk 45 minutes to her home, regardless of weather conditions.
3. A parent pays twenty to twenty five dollars a day for taxis because her car broke down and no public transportation was unavailable.

2. Public transportation is inadequate for families who seek to go to and from child care, work, and/or school. There is no public transportation service in some areas, and service is infrequent, inconsistent, or too time-consuming in others. Public transportation is particularly difficult for parents with several young children who have to manage equipment such as strollers or diaper bags.
3. Massachusetts does not have a systemic, reliable approach to transportation for families with limited access. Transportation is provided through a number of individually administered programs that are not linked in meaningful ways, and no one is in charge of transportation issues.
4. Massachusetts lacks a single set of transportation regulations and it is hard to get a complete picture of the many policies and regulations from different agencies. People responsible for implementing transportation policies and regulations do not always accurately understand what the policies say.
5. Procedures for providing transportation vouchers to families are inconsistent across the state. Some R&R agencies ask every parent about their transportation needs, describe transportation vouchers, and provide vouchers to parents who meet the qualifications. In others, some counselors ask parents about their needs and give vouchers while others do not.
6. Increasing costs are putting transportation services at risk, could jeopardize long-standing transportation partnerships, or could cause providers to discontinue transportation. Many early education and care programs that now offer transportation are reconsidering its

viability. Early education and care providers cannot absorb some of the increasing transportation costs because they are not reimbursed for additional costs. State reimbursement rates are too low, and many providers are not reimbursed fully for their transportation costs. The current system is not adequately funded, and challenges the survival of some vendors committed to serving “low income” children. Private transportation vendors charge about \$20/day, yet the Department of Early Education and Care’s transportation rate is only \$9/day, and has remained unchanged since 2006.

7. Some providers are hesitant to offer transportation because of liability, safety, and philosophical concerns. Many providers cited the need to hire bus monitors to ensure safety for all children, and some expressed concern about transporting infants and toddlers. Providers are concerned that communication with parents is jeopardized when parents do not drop off and pick up their children.
8. There aren’t enough providers that offer transportation, which limits the ability of R&R agencies to meet parent needs for transportation and limits the choices families can make for providers. No transportation support is provided for independent family child care providers, who provide care for about 16% of children in Massachusetts.<sup>8</sup>
9. The Early Education and Care transportation “approved travel time” regulations, with a maximum of 45 minutes travel time per day, are too low to allow many parents to transport their children to and from child care, and then get to work or school. Some families need three- or four- way transportation for their children, not just two-way.<sup>9</sup> In some communities, particularly in rural areas, the regulation that a child may not be on a bus more than forty five minutes in one trip creates issues around where the “high quality” centers are located and the ability of families to avail themselves of those services, particularly in rural areas.
10. R&R agencies cannot use discretion in the type of parent’s transportation that should be counted, such as from home to center or from center to work and vice versa.
11. R&R agencies can only meet parent transportation needs by providing a transportation voucher. Some families could manage if they had access to bus or subway passes or a small grant to fix their car, but R&Rs are not allowed to provide such cost effective help.
12. Transportation companies focus on complying with safety standards and other regulations, but they are

facing enormous fiscal and operational pressures. Companies focus primarily on safety and on how to absorb the increasing costs of mandated services rather than on challenging the mandates.

13. There is a lack of training and support. Drivers and monitors are required only to have CPR and First Aid training. Drivers and vehicles must meet specific Massachusetts Department of Motor Vehicles licensing standards with no support to do so.

## Recommendations

These three recommendations will require systemic change in the Commonwealth’s philosophy and priorities, legislation, administrative accountability, and practices.

1. **Massachusetts should undertake systemic planning.** Particularly in the current fiscal climate, capacity to serve young children in Massachusetts is limited by the lack of a cohesive interagency system.

The Commonwealth lacks a comprehensive or effective child transportation policy. As a result some communities

### Elements of a safe transportation system for preschoolers:

- Safe Vehicles
- Certified Drivers
- Availability of a Strategic Plan
- Periodic Evaluations
- Exemplary Customer Service
- A Transportation Manager
- Safety Minded Drivers
- Monitors who back up Drivers
- Knowledgeable Staff and Parents
- Adequate Budgets
- Policies and Procedures
- Training Programs
- Children and Families who understand Transportation Safety
- Education Materials
- Knowledge of Local, State and Federal Regulations and their impact
- Communication plan between families and child care providers

are inadequately served, there are long waiting lists for services and many providers and transportation companies refuse to offer, or severely limit, the transportation services they provide.

There is broad agreement that there would be efficiencies and financial benefits from a systemic interagency planning,

including the designation of an expert who could coordinate policy and service. In the special education arena, for example, a more unified set of regulations, coupled with a regional system for plotting routes, greatly increased efficiency and service capacity.<sup>10</sup>

2. **Massachusetts should expand access.** Each individual child care provider is responsible for transportation services. Because many providers decline to provide transportation services, this process is widely viewed both as inefficient and as barrier to access. Greater access to transportation can be encouraged in many ways. Examples include:

- By increasing the rates and support services, Massachusetts will encourage more participation by independent contractors, and decrease the burden to centers that provide their own transportation services.
- Massachusetts could achieve efficiencies in transportation service delivery by encouraging and facilitating the coordination of child transportation with other human services programs, many of which also provide transportation services. For example, some early education and care programs, especially in rural areas, might build stronger partnerships with school systems and, to a lesser extent, public transit agencies to transport children.

3. **Massachusetts should increase transportation rates.** Any plan to better support the transportation of young children must consider the need to increase rates, and to do so in a significant manner. We have heard from families, transportation companies and providers that the low transportation rate is a barrier to access. Sustainable and effective transportation services for children cannot be built on reimbursement rates less than half of the cost of providing services.