

Equal Access Transportation for ALL

In a recent decision, the Connecticut DOT denied the permits that are necessary for Metro Taxi of West Haven and The Yellow Cab Co. of Bloomfield to expand our service and licensed territory. The permits would have facilitated our ability to purchase 140 wheelchair-accessible taxis through a U.S. Dept. of Energy grant.

If not purchased by January 2012, our state loses this one-time federal funding opportunity (that won't cost the State a dime) to appropriately expand wheelchair-accessible taxi service throughout a large portion of Connecticut.

The Connecticut DOT's decision is an affront to the more than 170,000 Connecticut residents who have a mobility disability. Group after group, individual after individual representing the disability community, testified before the DOT as to the need for on-demand cab service, a service we all take for granted. Yet the DOT blatantly ignored their plea.

The DOT heard public testimony on this issue last March and it was compelling to say the least. Individuals with mobility disabilities who were able to travel to the DOT in Newington in slick, wintry conditions spoke of isolation, frustration, depression, loneliness, separateness, injustice, inequality – a keen sense of being cut off from society and the vital pulse of life's spontaneous pleasures. We heard descriptions of people getting stranded at night and having no way to get home, people who'd be able to get a job if they had taxi service, having to take an ambulance to attend a parent's funeral, being cooped in one's house for six months at a time, and an elderly man who just wants to see the Festival of Lights in New Haven.

Metro Taxi has persevered on behalf of the disability community and spent the good part of a decade working with various organizations representing the community, trying to get antiquated DOT legislation changed to allow wheelchair-accessible taxis here in

Connecticut, Finally, in October 2009 with revised legislation, Metro Taxi introduced Connecticut's first wheelchair-accessible taxi, "Metro Access." That one taxi in Greater New Haven unleashed pent-up demand of seismic proportion. That's no surprise since demographics show that approximately 5 percent of Connecticut's roughly 3.5 million residents have a mobility disability. That's more than 170,000 people, not counting those with mobility disabilities who want to visit family and friends in the State of Connecticut.

How much more "need and necessity" must the DOT see?

Metro Taxi is stunned by the DOT's myopic decision, a decision that continues to condemn a large part of Connecticut's population to isolation, lack of movement, and the ability to work and socialize spontaneously. Having only three wheelchair-accessible taxis in a state with 3.5 million people shamefully shows how far our state lags behind in key areas of concern to people with disabilities – EQUALITY and ACCESSIBILITY. The DOT's decision is devoid of compassion at the minimum, if not completely out of touch with the need of the citizens of Connecticut. Several regions in the U.S. are successfully using wheelchair-accessible taxis to supplement public transportation options, allowing those who rely on scooters, walkers, or wheelchairs to equal access, "on-demand" transportation.

Metro Taxi is determined to support the rights of the disability community, as well as the community at large that is concerned with the environment and foreign oil dependence. Along with our supporters, we will look into all available options, including an appeal of the DOT's decision to ensure equal transportation access to all. It is unfortunate that the Connecticut DOT must be reminded of its primary mission; representing the needs of Connecticut citizens.