



**Able-Disabled Advocacy, Inc. (A-DA)**  
2006 Community-Based Outreach Report  
On the Regional Transportation Plan

**Executive Summary**

The mission of Able-Advocacy, Inc., (A-DA) is to *"provide education and job skills training for youth and adults with disabilities to help them find meaningful employment and overcome barriers to self-sufficiency."* Since 1976, A-DA has placed over 9,200 people with all types of disabilities into San Diego County's labor force. We work closely with our network of more than 250 countywide employers, educational institutions and community providers to help San Diego County residents with significant disabilities achieve independence and ultimately become self-supporting. A-DA's programs are funded by a variety of sources including the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor and Housing and Urban Development; the State of California; private foundations; and in-kind contributions from community partners and businesses. A-DA serves both youth (ages 18-24) and adults who represent all disabilities and ethnic groups.

A-DA operates several programs that are customized to meet the specific needs of each individual served. Our programs may focus on a particular target group (i.e. youth, veterans, adults, etc.) or may offer training in a specific occupation, such as Nurse Assistant or Computer Technician. Our programs include services such as vocational assessment, computer training, work readiness training, occupational skills training, career counseling, Assistive Technology, supervised job search, employment and follow-up. The expected outcome for all A-DA programs is placement into jobs where shortages of skilled workers and career growth opportunities exist.

In October 2006, A-DA entered into an agreement with the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) **to perform sufficient outreach to engage public comment from people with disabilities to be included in the preparation of the Regional Transportation Plan.** A-DA used grant funds to provide SANDAG with public comments and input regarding San Diego's local transportation network from the disabled and other underrepresented (i.e. low income, veterans and minorities) populations that reside throughout San Diego County. Specific activities performed by A-DA under this agreement included:

- A-DA conducted online research of transportation networks located in other large cities across the nation to identify best practices, lessons learned and fund raising strategies in order to create a survey instrument and other presentation materials for focus group meetings. Our review included transit practices in Seattle, Portland, San Antonio, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, Boston, New Jersey and Houston.
- A-DA prepared and distributed a survey instrument that consisted of 23 questions to elicit comments on ways to improve the overall transportation system and ideas to generate income for future transit projects in the San Diego County region. We disseminated more than 250 surveys to San Diego County residents including our clients, our network of partner agencies that serve people with disabilities, two One-Stop Career Centers, the State Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and other community groups.

- A-DA created and distributed a flier to announce focus group meetings to engage interested parties in a lively discussion regarding transportation options and funding to meet our mobility needs now, and in the future. The meeting announcement flier was produced in both English and Spanish.
- A-DA posted the transportation survey instrument on our website.
- A-DA hosted and facilitated discussions at four public focus group meetings held in the Central/Metro, South County and North County regions of San Diego.

A-DA assigned a team of qualified staff who managed and performed activities related to this critical community-based outreach project. Team members included Elaine Cooluris, Executive Director; Bob Eagleman, Director of Community Relations; and Denise Yoggerst, Special Projects Manager. Ms. Cooluris provided oversight on all aspects of project outreach activities as well as team member supervision. Mr. Eagleman coordinated the dissemination of surveys and public focus group meeting announcements and provided logistical support for focus group participants. Ms. Yoggerst prepared the survey instrument, developed presentation materials and facilitated discussions at the four public workshops. All team members were involved in the tabulation of statistical data and the development of the final report.

By the conclusion of project activities, A-DA reached more than 250 concerned individuals who resided throughout San Diego County. It is our expectation that the results of our outreach and public input will assist SANDAG in developing an updated Regional Transportation Plan. Details and findings related to A-DA's Community-Based Outreach Project follow.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

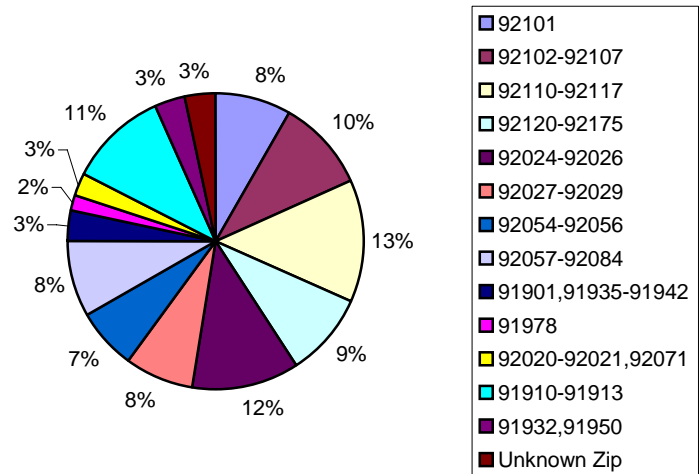
Using information obtained through online research, A-DA created a user-friendly survey instrument specifically designed to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities and those with language and/or learning barriers. The survey instrument incorporated 23 questions that solicited responses to open-ended and multiple-choice statements regarding key areas of San Diego's transportation network including: 1) ways to reduce congestion and drive time during peak hours; 2) improvements to all aspects the region's transportation network to efficiently move more people from home to work or other places as the population continues to grow; and 3) options to secure money for local transportation projects.

As noted above, A-DA distributed more than 250 copies of the survey to individuals visiting each of A-DA's sites located in the Central, South and North County regions of San Diego County. Other distribution points included the State Department of Rehabilitation offices, Friends of Lake Murray, Jobs Corps, San Diego Vets Center, two One-Stops as well as A-DA's partner organizations. Additionally, individuals attending the public focus workgroups completed a survey. Exhibit A provides the survey instrument used by A-DA to solicit comments from the public pertaining to San Diego's transportation network

A review of survey data collected indicated that respondents represented a broad range of ethnic populations, disability challenges, ages and gender groups as described below.

**Residency Zip Code Data**

Thirteen percent (13%) of the respondents lived in the 92110 zip code, and eleven percent (11%) lived in the 91910 zip codes. The graph identifies the zip code breakdown for all respondents.



**Demographics (Age, Ethnicity and Gender)**

Of the respondents, 60 percent (60%) were female and forty percent (40%) were male. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the respondents were ages 1-24; twenty-four percent (24%) were ages 25-40; twenty-six percent (26%) were ages 41-54; sixteen percent (16%) were ages 55-64 and; eight percent (8%) were over 64. The ethnic breakdown of respondents was as follows: Sixteen percent (16%) were African American; forty percent (40%) Hispanic; thirty-three percent (33%) Caucasian; three percent (3%) Asian; three percent (3%) Filipino and; five percent (5%) did not respond.

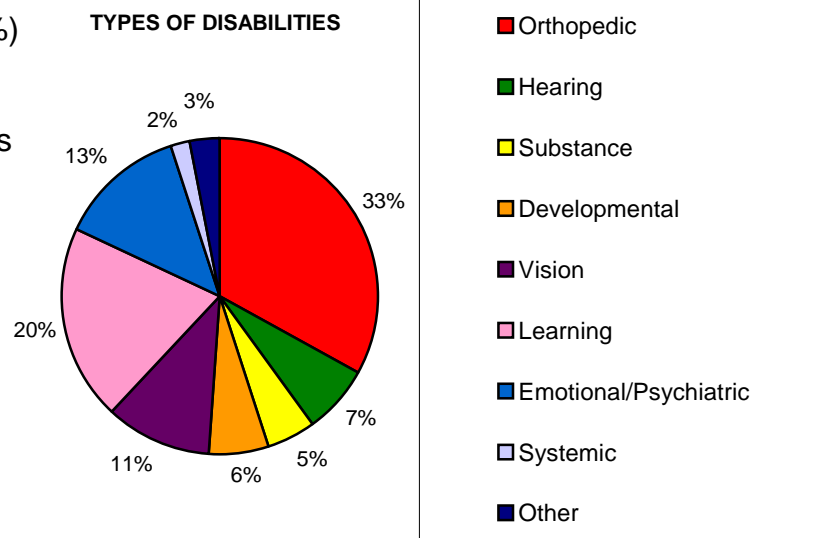
**Employment**

Forty-three percent (43%) of all respondents indicated that they were currently employed full-time; ten percent (10%) indicated they were employed part-time and; twenty-nine percent (29%) indicated they were not employed. The remaining eighteen percent (18%) did not respond.

**Disability Status**

Eighty-two percent (82%) of survey respondents indicated that they had a disability and eleven percent (11%) indicated they did not.

The remaining seven percent (7%) did not respond. The types of disabilities reported by survey respondents are illustrated in the graph.



## Survey Results

While compiling the survey results, we found some duplication in the answers to several questions asked. Therefore, this report only reflects a summary of respondents' comments on 15 of the 23 survey questions as stated below in bold.

### 1. Do you feel that your opinion and input are important to the staff of SANDAG in planning San Diego's future transportation network?

#### **Responses**

Sixty-five percent (65%) of survey respondents indicated that their voice was important in helping SANDAG plan the San Diego region's transportation network. The remaining thirty-five percent (35%) felt that their opinions did not matter and that local government does whatever they want to do regardless of community input.

#### **Comments**

Key comments made by survey respondents to the above question included:

- ✓ Input from the community is essential since we are constantly out on the roads and see where the needs are.
- ✓ SANDAG should consider the public's comments since we are the ones who pay taxes for our roads and public transit system.
- ✓ I do not believe they will listen to my opinion, however, many of the people I work with who are disabled attempt to try to have a voice.
- ✓ Many of SANDAG's staff represent able-bodied individuals and therefore, decisions are made from people without disabilities who do not fully understand our needs.
- ✓ I am disabled and have Spina Bifida, but it seems like the bottom line is more important than my concerns.
- ✓ I feel my opinion is representative of the public and it will help SANDAG to address problems where it is most needed.
- ✓ This is another exercise in futility just like that of the airport.
- ✓ It is important that SANDAG collect data from the public to make positive improvements that affect all residents of San Diego County.
- ✓ SANDAG did a great job improving the freeways in North County. I think adding lanes for FasTrack commuters is a wonderful idea.

### 2. How do you get around San Diego?

- Automobile    Bus/Trolley    Light rail    Walk    Bicycle    Other

#### **Responses**

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the respondents indicated that they used an automobile to travel around San Diego; forty percent (40%) indicated that they use the public transit system and the remaining seven percent (7%) either walk or ride a bicycle.

### 3. About how many miles do you drive or commute per week?

#### **Responses**

Survey respondents indicated that they commuted an average of 91 miles per week.



**7. What do you feel are the TWO most serious problems on our roadways?**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic congestion and delays               | <input type="checkbox"/> Crumbling roads and bridges  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor public transportation services         | <input type="checkbox"/> Pedestrian or bicycle safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of alternative modes of transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Bad (unsafe) drivers         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other                                       |   |

**Responses**

- A. **Traffic congestion** – 37% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices
- B. **Bad Drivers** – 19% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices
- C. **Poor public transit** – 14% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices
- D. **Lack of alternative transportation** – 13% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices
- E. **Crumbling roads** – 9% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices
- F. **Other** – 5% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices, but did not provide a comment
- G. **Pedestrian or bike safety** – 3% of respondents ranked it in the top 2 rating choices

**8. How would you rank the order of importance in improvements needed to our transportation infrastructure to make the commute on San Diego’s roadways easier?**

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| _____ Add lanes to existing roads or freeways | _____ Build lanes for buses only      |
| _____ Build more freeways or roads            | _____ Build more high occupancy lanes |
| _____ Expand train/light rail service         | _____ Add more Carpool lanes          |
| _____ Other                                   |                                       |

**Responses**

- A. **Add to roads and freeways** – 38% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- B. **Lanes for buses only** – 26% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- C. **Expand light rail service** – 17% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- D. **Build more freeways** – 15% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- E. **Build more HOV lanes** – 2% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- F. **Add more Carpool lanes** – 2% of respondents ranked as the top choice.

**9. Please rank needed improvements to the public transit system in the order of importance to reduce traffic congestion and make it easier for people to get around.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ More bus routes. Where?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Improve accessibility for people with disabilities. How?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Extend existing bus routes. Which routes?
- \_\_\_\_\_ More light rail service. Where?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Expand trolley service. Where?
- \_\_\_\_\_ More bus/trolley services on the weekend or in the evening. Where?
- \_\_\_\_\_ More bus/trolley and light rail services during rush hours. Where?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

### **Responses**

- A. **More bus routes** – 32% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- B. **Improved accessibility** – 21% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- C. **Extend existing bus routes** – 13% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- D. **More transit services during rush hours** – 12% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- E. **More light rail service** – 9% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- F. **Expand trolley services** – 7% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- G. **More transit services on weekends/evenings** – 6% of respondents ranked as the top choice

### **10. Do you know about the FasTrack?**

#### **Responses**

Of all respondents, only thirty-six percent (36%) knew about FasTrack. The remaining 64% had never heard about FasTrack.

### **11. Would you pay to use the Express Lanes on the interstate when driving alone?**

#### **Responses**

40% of respondents indicated that they would pay to use FasTrack lane as a solo driver. The remaining 60% indicated that they would not pay a fee to use these lanes.

### **12. Which of the following do you think would be most effective in reducing congestion during rush hours (morning and evening commute)?**

- Give cash incentives to employees who ride public transit, car pool, bike or walk to and from their workplace
- Allow single riders to use the Carpool Lanes for a nominal fee
- Dedicate lanes of the freeway for freight vehicles and public transit
- Restrict workers from driving government non-emergency vehicles on freeways
- Give incentives to businesses that offer employees flexible work hours
- Build new houses and business facilities closer to public transit
- Promote carpools/vanpools
- Other

#### **Responses**

Respondents identified employer incentives for employees who ride transit, carpool, bike or walk to work as their first choice for reducing congestion; followed by dedicated lanes for freight vehicles and public transit and; restricting non-emergency government vehicles on the roads during peak hours as their third choice.

#### **Respondent Comments**

- ✓ Build businesses near homes so not everyone has to go to Downtown, Kearny Mesa or North County.
- ✓ Adopt a toll fee for freeway usage during peak times so people will use public transit services.
- ✓ Subways, trolleys, carpools, buses, bicycles, roller blades work in Philadelphia, why not here?

**13. Where should funds from for transportation improvements when federal and state monies are not available? (check all items on the follow list that you would support)**

- Increase the local tax rate by one cent for a period of 20 years
- Levy of \$0.20 per assessed value on commercial and industrial zoned property
- Increase taxes on commercial and industrial properties
- Increase residential property taxes by one percent for a period of 20 years
- Impose a monthly trash collection fee
- Increase fees for public transit services (i.e. bus, trolley, and light rail)
- Place a one-half cent sales tax on public transit services
- Increase building permit fees by one percent for a period of 20 years
- Other

**Responses**

- A. **Increase local tax rate** – 13% supported an increase in local taxes.
- B. **Levy on commercial and industrial property** – 14% supported a levy.
- C. Increase taxes on **commercial and industrial property** – 15% supported increased taxes on commercial and industrial property.
- D. **Residential property tax increase** – 5% supported an increase in residential property taxes.
- E. **Monthly trash collection fee** – 7% supported a trash collection fee.
- F. **Public transit fee increase** – 7% supported an increase in transit fees.
- G. **One-half cent public transit tax** – 8% supported placing a one-half cent tax on transit services.
- H. **Increase building permit fees** – 19% supported an increase in building permit fees.

**Comments**

The remaining 12% of survey respondents did not support any of the above options, but they offered the following comments:

- ✓ Use the toll fee from the Coronado Bridge since there was only supposed to be a fee until building costs were paid off.
- ✓ Get money from the government and leave low-income people alone.
- ✓ Seek donations from people with high incomes or foundations.
- ✓ Begin charging a toll fee on freeways during peak hours and have law enforcement officers issue more citations for people who break the law.

**14. How would you rank in order of importance the areas most in need of more funding to accommodate San Diego's rapid growth on our roadways?**

- Improvements to the transit system for disabled riders
- New or better buses or trolleys
- Road/Freeway repairs
- More stop signs or lights at major intersections. Where?
- More crosswalks on roads with heavy traffic. Where?
- More lanes on freeway(s). Where?
- More lanes on major roadways and main streets. Where?
- Other

**Responses**

- A. **Improvements for disabled riders** – 32% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- B. **Road/Freeway repairs** – 20% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- C. **More freeway lanes** – 14% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- D. **New/better buses or trolleys** – 13% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- E. **More crosswalks** – 9% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- F. **More stop signs/signal lights** – 7% of respondents ranked as the top choice.
- G. **More lanes on roads** – 5% of respondents ranks as the top choice.

**15. Is there any area of public transit services that need improvements for accessibility by the elderly and people with disabilities?**

**Responses**

Sixty-two (62%) of all respondents indicated that improvements for accessibility by the elderly and people with disabilities were needed.

**Comments**

Concerns and areas of improvement noted by respondents included:

- ✓ Services on route 50 take forever and it bugs regular people and me too.
- ✓ Continue services on bus route 712 between Palomar Road and Bay Blvd.
- ✓ There is a need for a pedestrian crosswalk in front of the mobile park located at 2070 Coronado Avenue.
- ✓ There is a need for improvements to bus stops and trolley stations to protect disabled wheelchair riders who need shelter from elements of the environment such as rain or sun.
- ✓ Drivers and transit riders need to slow down for people with disabilities.
- ✓ Older buses need wheelchair lifts and maintenance work.
- ✓ Bus drivers need to attend ongoing sensitivity training to effectively deal with customers with disabilities.
- ✓ A more efficient and flexible paratransit system is needed in San Diego County.
- ✓ Move disabled to a lower floor on buses and trolleys.
- ✓ Offer public transit service in outlying areas of North County.
- ✓ Add more direct bus routes to get from one area to another to help people with disabilities get to work or school on time are needed.

## Comments - continued

- ✓ People with disabilities should have their own bus, because sometimes they make able-bodied people late for work.
- ✓ Increase the space and designated number of seats for people with disabilities on buses and trolleys to accommodate more wheelchair riders.
- ✓ Educate riders on how the public transit system works, especially how to transfer from one bus to another.
- ✓ I've witnessed an elderly couple almost get caught in between the doors on the Coaster. There should be cameras on all of the doors so that the conductor knows when to close the doors. There should be greater concern for safety in general!
- ✓ Reinstate bus routes in Chula Vista that are frequently used by disabled and elderly riders who access the Career Center and other businesses on Bay Blvd. in Chula Vista.

## PUBLIC FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

A-DA hosted and facilitated four public focus group meetings in the Central/Metro, North and South regions of San Diego. Outreach efforts employed by A-DA to promote and attract residents to attend these very important focus groups included the distribution of more than 180 fliers; emails to organizational leaders; and posting meeting information on our website. Additionally, A-DA posted the transportation survey instrument on our website. A-DA distributed fliers to clients at each of our locations in the Metro, South and North County regions, two One-Stop Career Centers, our network of partner agencies that serve people with disabilities, and various Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) offices. As a result, A-DA attracted an average of 22 people per focus group.

Based upon experience, A-DA scheduled two hours for each focus group meeting to allow sufficient time to engage participants in an interactive and meaningful discussion. Denise Yoggerst of A-DA, facilitated all four of the focus group meetings. She began each presentation with a warm-up exercise where participants introduced themselves and identified their primary mode of transportation. A-DA created and presented a 20-minute PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit B) to provide participants with an understanding of: 1) the objective of the focus group; 2) SANDAG's mission; 3) the process used to update the Regional Transportation Plan; 4) current and future transportation projects and; 5) issues related to population growth in our region. Ms. Yoggerst clearly explained that A-DA was hosting the focus group meeting on behalf of SANDAG to obtain input from the public that focuses on the regional transportation system and engage their assistance in identifying alternative ways to fund current and new transit projects. She then indicated that comments from people with disabilities are critical in helping SANDAG define and implement accessible projects to improve the entire transportation system including our roads, highways and public transit services. Throughout the presentation, Ms. Yoggerst emphasized that public input especially from the disabled community, was critical and this was the primary reason that they had been invited to participate in the focus group.

## Observations

Overall, A-DA's staff felt that the icebreaker exercise during the introduction helped participants warm up to the discussion and generate interest. Each of the four groups made comments during and after the PowerPoint presentation. Highlights of **key points** made by participants during the four focus group meeting discussions follows.

**How could the region's transportation infrastructure be made more accessible for people with disabilities as they travel around the area using the public transit system or a private vehicle?**

- ✓ Purchase and use pedicabs as an alternative mode of transportation for wheelchair users to alleviate congestion in the Downtown San Diego area.
- ✓ More outreach and advertising is needed to educate the public on the FasTrack lanes, especially regarding use by solo riders for a fee.
- ✓ Make improvements to bus stop stations to protect and shelter disabled wheelchair rider's shelter from elements of the environment such as rain or sun.
- ✓ Expand bus services to include designated "Disabled Riders Only" buses.
- ✓ Expand hours of public transit services operation in the mornings and evenings to help people get to and from work in major employment activity areas like Otay Mesa and Sorrento Valley.
- ✓ Make published bus schedules easier to read and understand, especially information regarding transfers from one bus to another.
- ✓ Require that all bus drivers attend ongoing sensitivity training to effectively deal with customers with disabilities and the elderly.
- ✓ Improve paratransit bus services to provide more flexibility and increased routes.
- ✓ Reinstate bus routes in Chula Vista that are frequently used by disabled and elder riders who access the Career Center and other businesses on Bay Blvd. Service for several bus route have been eliminated, thus the elder and people with disabilities must walk or ride wheelchairs farther.

**What are your thoughts about ways to generate money for current and future transit projects?**

- ✓ Use FasTrack fees for transit improvement projects.
- ✓ Increase taxes on land development projects including homebuilders along the 56 corridors.
- ✓ Institute a fund raising campaign similar to United Way where employees have the option of donating a fixed amount to SANDAG through automatic payroll deductions.
- ✓ Become one of the organizations that is on the list to receive donations through the United Way campaign.
- ✓ Add a full-time person to SANDAG's staff that is solely dedicated to working with private employers and foundations to raise funds for transportation projects as well as grant writing.

- ✓ Negotiate with the City of San Diego to receive a percentage of the money generated through sporting events held at Qualcomm Stadium to fund transit projects.
- ✓ Increase parking and traffic citation fees to provide SANDAG with funds for transportation projects. Penalize people who break traffic laws!!

At the end of each session, the facilitator reviewed the survey instrument and asked participants to complete the document.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

A-DA believes that through the survey and focus groups, people with disabilities and other underrepresented populations such as the elderly and ethnic minority groups, had a voice in helping to resolve transportation issues in our community. We believe that this project was fruitful in fulfilling our mission in providing insight to SANDAG—not just with the survey and focus group input but with the additional inherent knowledge that A-DA possesses in assisting individuals with disabilities access transportation.

General observations made by A-DA while conducting this outreach project include the fact that 50% of the survey respondents were 41 years of age or older and resided in areas where the average household income is at or below the poverty level. A-DA found the ages of respondents and their comments to be particularly insightful given SANDAG's tremendous growth projection for the aging population that will reside in San Diego by 2030.

Recommendations made by A-DA based upon survey comments and focus group discussions include:

- SANDAG needs to consider extending the public transit services to later into the evening to enable people with disabilities and the elderly better access to leisure activities that may end after 11:30 p.m. and/or to jobs that require employees to work the graveyard shift. Furthermore, many residents with disabilities who do own a car, cannot afford the high prices of gas and parking for both employment purposes and normal daily living activities. Therefore, it is extremely important that San Diego County residents including people with disabilities, minorities and those on fixed incomes that live in remote areas of East and North County have access to affordable transportation.
- Consensus among all groups was that any increase in public transit fees or local sales and other taxes would place a financial hardship on them. A resounding comment heard at each of the focus group meetings was that low-income individuals were having difficulty keeping food on the tables and a roof over their family's heads. SANDAG needs to find ways to get money from those that financially benefit from improved transportation services such as developers, business owners and high wage earners.
- Expand designated areas on buses for elderly and disabled riders including accommodations such as wheelchair storage and reader signage for people who are blind.
- Bus drivers and trolley operators should attend sensitive training classes to effectively communicate with people with disabilities and the elderly and better adhere to safety policies.

- Operate public transit services to connect major employment and medical sites to homes in areas where people with disabilities and the elderly reside to ensure all population groups receive universal access to public, private, educational, medical and recreation facilities. Simply put, plan and operate transit services that connect major employment and activity centers with the homes of more low-income individuals/communities.
- SANDAG needs to maintain a strong community-outreach program that is input friendly to a wide variety of demographic groups in order to reach audiences in every part of the county to solicit their feelings, concerns and ideas to how their needs can be better met.

A-DA believes that this community-based project was particularly effective because of the underrepresented population of individuals with disabilities and ethnic groups that it reached. It is extremely important that these population groups continue to have a voice in future planning processes, especially in light of the anticipated aging and other demographic shifts, i.e. ethnicity, that are projected to occur within the next twenty years.

**In closing, on behalf of the community of San Diego's citizens with disabilities, A-DA wishes to thank SANDAG for this important opportunity to share our insights in the development of your updated Regional Transportation Plan.**