



ADDRESSING EQUITY: IDEAS FOR HELPING VOTERS WHO NEED TRANSPORTATION ON ELECTION DAY

In order to vote, people must be registered in their state. But in order to actually cast a ballot, people need to be able to get to the polls. Although absentee (or voting by mail) is increasingly an option, voting in person—whether at an early voting center or at a precinct on election day—requires the ability to get to a voting center or polling place. Even voters who vote absentee may take their ballot to a drop box, which can also require transportation.

At a recent Board meeting of LWV of the National Capital Area (LWVNCA), this topic was discussed and it was decided to prepare a short piece to share with leagues in NCA. It is intended as a resource you may choose to use at your own meetings to decide if this is something there is interest in pursuing. The jurisdictions that comprise LWVNCA vary significantly, ranging from very urban with a lot of public transit to more suburban with fewer transportation options and a reliance on cars. As a result, we recognize that local league decisions will vary depending on local circumstances. It is also possible additional ideas may even come forward!

Supporting transportation for voters is consistent with LWV's mission from two perspectives. First, as noted on the LWVUS website, the aim of LWV is to empower voters, protect and expand voting rights and ensure everyone is represented in our democracy. That means educating voters and helping to ensure that voters can cast a ballot. The purpose of our extensive voter registration efforts is to increase participation. Second, helping with transportation is an equity issue. Data on public transit in the DC metropolitan area show that public transportation, especially bus, has been strongest among low-income workers who can't work from home and don't have easy access to a car. Demand during the pandemic shifted to neighborhoods with minority and low-income workers rather than moving commuters from suburban areas to downtown.¹ The same pattern is observed in smaller regional bus systems that operate in the suburbs. Low-income riders may also face a challenge if voting requires them to pay for an "extra" bus ride to get to a polling place.

OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

These ideas are offered as a starting point for discussion to consider if and how your league might address transportation barriers for voters in your jurisdiction.

Transit Agencies

¹ "The Pandemic Changed the Workday but Will Transit Riders Return," Washington Post, May 17, 2021.

1. **Seek free (or significantly reduced) fares on public transit on Election Day and/or early voting.** While it would be nice if polling places and drop boxes were at or near transit stops, that is not always the case. This would be a big “ask” of the transit agencies with financial implications but could be a good public service activity and could result in another agency actively promoting voting. This approach would not likely permit leagues to promote vote411.org or otherwise note the league. In Los Angeles, in 2020, transit authorities offered free bus and train rides on all lines, used 2 stations as early voting centers and had drop boxes placed at 19 bus and rail stations,² recognizing their role in helping to make voting easy and accessible. In Montgomery County, local buses are free through July 2, 2022. The District, Arlington County, and other local jurisdictions have various programs for free or reduced fares for certain groups, which are not specific to Election Day.
2. **Ask the transit agencies to identify which routes go to, or very close to, early voting polling centers and/or drop box locations and to promote the information, especially on those routes.** This becomes especially important as voting locations change or close. We suggest early voting centers here because there are fewer of them compared to election day precincts. The request need not include changing any routes. It would be hoped that the transit agencies would promote that information, which should also include relevant dates for early voting and be made available in both English and Spanish. The league might also promote the information on websites and handouts. Again, to the extent that the transit agency is preparing the information, we would not likely be able to promote the league or vote411.
3. **Ask transit agencies to conduct public service announcements** to promote voting and offer to help them develop the message. This could include signage on and in buses, at rail stations and in rail cars.
4. **Purchase advertising on public transit.** Advertising on WMATA is expensive and ridership remains down due to the pandemic, but reduced advertising rates are available to non-profit organizations. Contact aaron.bronson@outfront.com. For more information. There may also be reduced or free advertising for government agencies, which may suggest partnering with the local Board of Elections to help get information out about voting. Directly purchasing advertising space would allow the league to use its name and promote vote411.org.

Neighborhood Outreach

5. **Work with local volunteer organizations to identify volunteers who would be willing to offer a ride to a colleague in the group.** Organizations could include faith-based groups, neighborhood groups, civic associations, senior villages. For example, a volunteer senior village in one neighborhood identified volunteer drivers, announced their availability (generally, not by name), received requests for rides and then matched the requester with a volunteer who established a mutually agreeable time to vote or go to a drop box. This would be most feasible by tapping into existing groups that already have a communication mechanism in place.

²<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/coronavirus/los-angeles-metro-free-rides-election-day/2441441/>

6. **Assess whether any ride-sharing services are offering free or reduced fare rides** for Election Day in your area. Ride-sharing organizations include Uber or Lyft, but can also include bicycles. If so, help get the word out. [note: LWVUS announced a national partnership with Lyft to provide free and discounted rides to the polls for the primary in targeted state and local Leagues and plan to have a nationally available discount code for the General Election.³]
7. **Contact local companies to encourage actions that can help their employees get to the polls on election day.** Specifically for transportation, companies might consider helping employees carpool to take their ballots to a drop box or offering transportation coupons/fare cards to employees. In 2020, some companies provided flexibility to staff so they would have time to vote and/or avoided scheduling meetings on Election Day.

*Report prepared by Linda Kohn and Edna Miller, LWV Montgomery County (MD)
March 2022*

³ https://www.lwv.org/newsroom/press-releases/league-women-voters-partners-lyft-get-out-vote-2022?utm_source=LeagueUpdate&utm_medium=email&utm_id=02242022