



Comments of the National Association of the Deaf
Submitted to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

December 1, 2011

**RE: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Accessible Transportation:
Challenges and Opportunities**

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Enzi, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) applauds the Committee for hosting the hearing on *The Americans with Disabilities Act and Accessible Transportation: Challenges and Opportunities*. We believe that this is a very important issue and would like to share some concerns on behalf of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Although individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing do not have mobility barriers to transportation, mass transportation is not fully accessible to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Very few, if any at all, mass transportation vehicles or transport stations provide visual access to all aural information. While many trains and buses have external signs announcing their designation, this is far from enough and leaves out important information such as auditory-only announcements of stop locations, emergency information or critical changes. Here are some stories about inaccessible transportation from members of our community:

- One member told about the time he was at the airport and the gate for his flight was changed unbeknownst to him without any updates to the airport wide flight information screens and he missed his flight.
- Another told about riding trains in Chicago and how sometimes the driver will announce that certain stops ahead will be skipped, and that people wanting to go to those stops need to get off immediately and catch the next train to get to these skipped stops.
- One leading member of the community was riding a train on the DC metro about a year ago and there was an apparent emergency. She was not able to understand what the driver was announcing on the PA, but could see that other passengers looked fearful and as soon as the doors opened, everyone got out of the train quickly. She was not sure what to do but got off the metro just before the doors closed and the lights went out. She was left shaken and still, to this day, has no idea of what happened that day. She wishes that there was a visual alert of some kind announcing the emergency, and perhaps even the instructions (i.e. Emergency – get off the train). Some of the newer DC metro cars have visual alerts informing passengers of the next stop, but it does not appear that this system is being used for emergency alerts. And the use of the visual alerts on those DC metro train cars are not systemically used to announce next stops.

We believe that under the ADA, all mass transportation vehicles and transport stations must make all aural information visually accessible for passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. The NAD wishes to encourage the Committee to push to make all transportation related information visually accessible for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. In addition, for any information shared with passengers on any form of transportation, a system must be in place to share the exact same information in a visual manner with passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing. We recommend that the Department of Transportation create a working group largely composed of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to develop guidelines for communication accessible transportation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H.A. Rosenblum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Howard A. Rosenblum
Chief Executive Officer
National Association of the Deaf