



# UTC Spotlight

University Transportation Centers Program

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## For Returning Military Vets, Transportation Is Key to Reintegration as Civilians

More than 21 million veterans live in the United States, and one-quarter describe themselves as living with a disability, according to the American Community Survey (<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>). New evidence suggests that these figures may underrepresent the population affected by disability, particularly among veterans of recent military conflicts, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans often have a difficult time readjusting to civilian life, but veterans with disability face even more challenges.



Oregon Legislative Task Force

With reliable transportation, military veterans can reintegrate more easily into civilian life.

Mineta National Transit Research Consortium (MNTRC) senior research specialists Stephanie DiPetrillo and Andrea Lubin completed a report that

explores the intersection among transportation, housing, and employment as they relate to successful veteran reintegration. The report concludes that returning military veterans and support agencies must consider transportation access to essential services, without which returning military veterans can have a difficult time reintegrating into civilian life. In fact, transit-oriented development (TOD) may provide a viable option for veterans with disabilities to help them meet their post-service needs independently and successfully, which could serve to ultimately reduce homelessness and other challenges experienced by this population of Americans.

[Exploring Transportation, Employment, Housing, and Location Issues for New Jersey Veterans with Disability](#) includes interviews with personnel at local, state, and federal veterans' services organizations, along with focus-group interviews with veterans themselves.



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Veterans, especially those who are disabled, may not have transportation to access housing, support services, or medical care.

Mobility limitations can adversely affect veterans' ability to reach medical services, employment, and continuing education prospects. Physical and emotional isolation can make reintegration even more difficult. But if communities, along with veterans' services, can collaboratively work to address transportation concerns from the onset of the veteran reintegration process, and if they can ensure that service agencies and housing properties are located close to public transportation, veterans with disabilities will have better opportunities to more easily meet their diverse needs.

A series of structured interviews were conducted with 21 individuals representing 15 diverse public and private organizations and programs working with the U.S. veteran community. Specific attention was given to identifying and interviewing entities that assist working-age veterans with disabilities, including five nonprofit veteran housing providers and two transitional housing facilities supporting homeless veterans.

The majority agreed that transition to civilian life for many veterans involves learning to address a range of physical and/or mental/emotional illnesses or conditions. Seeking treatment is difficult, or impossible, if transportation is not readily available. Lack of transportation is also a significant obstacle to finding gainful employment, stable housing, and continuing education opportunities and negatively

affects overall quality of life and the ability to reconnect with family, friends, and community.

Most participants emphasized that when agencies supporting veterans are located where public transportation is limited or nonexistent, significant obstacles are created for transition to civilian life. The siting of veteran-focused services in locations that lack public transportation options means that veterans must rely on inconvenient or high-cost travel, or forgo services and opportunities completely. For example, several focus group participants explained how in an effort to obtain or retain employment, transportation issues required them to make decisions that lowered their quality of life and that of their families. One such participant accepted a job he could access only by walking seven miles each way.



Alan M. Voorhees

Public transportation plays a vital role in reintegration success.

Those respondents representing permanent veteran housing properties emphasized that residents who have access to public transportation or who can walk to nearby locations are using and benefiting from this accessibility, which enables them to better meet their needs independently and navigate a successful return to life post-military service.

Nationwide, communities and agencies can help ease military veterans' transition back to civilian life. Recommended strategies include:

- Create a one-stop resource center to support veterans' reintegration. Center staff would guide a veteran through the discharge process and continue to provide consistent support from a single point of contact for the extended transition period. Pursuing the creation of such a facility as a pilot program in one or two states should be an immediate next step. Potential implementation partners for this approach could include the United States Departments of Veterans Affairs, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development.
- Establish an exploratory task force at the state level and explore other means to promote a nationwide discussion on how TOD models can support multiple needs, including housing, employment, and transportation.
- Pursue additional research, gathering data on the transportation, location, and design characteristics of successful veteran TOD. This would help communities establish facilities that would support veterans' transition.

Reintegrating with civilian society is daunting for all veterans. Veterans coping with the additional strain of service-related disabilities must address and overcome even more obstacles. This process can be especially overwhelming without appropriate support and an understanding of the vital role public transportation can have in reintegration success. It is the ultimate intent that this exploratory study generate additional discussion and research on the topic of transportation and locational efficiencies to help advance nationwide efforts to support the successful reintegration of veterans.

## About This Project

Stephanie DiPetrillo ([sdipetrillo@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:sdipetrillo@ejb.rutgers.edu)) and Andrea Lubin ([annlubin@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:annlubin@ejb.rutgers.edu)) are senior research specialists at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, which is part of the Mineta National Transit Research Consortium at San Jose State University. Ms. DiPetrillo holds a BA in economics and a Master of City and Regional Planning from Rutgers, as well as a Master of Architecture from the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Ms. Lubin received her undergraduate degree in political science from Tufts University and a Master of Science in public policy from the Eagleton Institute/Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University.

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*This newsletter highlights some recent accomplishments and products from one University Transportation Center (UTC). The views presented are those of the authors and not necessarily the views of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology or the U.S. Department of Transportation, which administers the UTC program.*

