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**TESTIMONY**  
**to**  
**SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFIARS**  
**FIELD HEARING**  
**Thursday, March 28, 2013**  
**Sioux Falls, SD**

**by**

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Euha chi cante wasteya nape ceyuspa pi (I give each of you a heartfelt handshake)

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Field Hearing. I am honored.

The people who have needed the most help with transportation have accepted Tribal Transit systems across Indian Country voraciously. Transportation on the Pine Ridge Reservation via some type of vehicle is most often either unavailable or if a vehicle is available – is not in the best working condition or the cost of operating the vehicle is prohibitive. The safe, reliable services of Oglala Sioux Transit have already provided a valuable addition to the quality of life factors for many residents of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

#### **1. Oglala Sioux Transit**

After an extensive planning process, the Oglala Sioux Transit Project received funding from the Federal Transit Administration and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to construct a 12,500 sq. ft. transit facility and purchase buses (three 22 passenger and five 16 passenger). The Transit Facility was completed October 2008. Vehicles were purchased and delivered September 2008 and January 2009. Transit services began on February 3, 2009 as a deviated fixed route system covering approximately 1,806 miles daily with the main route being 111 miles one way (from the village of Wanblee on the eastern side of the Reservation to Prairie Wind Casino on the western side). Unlike urban areas, the Pine Ridge Reservation's communities are widely separated and located along rural roads that were not designed for efficient transportation. The seven (7) routes travel through sixteen (16) of the main villages on the reservation with 35 stops providing the general public with access to college courses, employment, medical, business and shopping services on the reservation. The Program has been actively considering expanded transit services for a 24 hr/day, seven days/wk schedule across the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and a 3

times/day, 3 days/wk scheduled route to Rapid City, SD. The Oglala Sioux Tribal Council will shortly be considering its input into these decisions and we anticipate a final determination in the near future. The increased levels of service will greatly enhance the Transit system's capacity to address the transit needs of a much broader portion of the client population.

The OST DOT Transit Program is comprised of seventeen employees (Coordinator, Office Manager, Maintenance Support Technician, Dispatcher, Bus Drivers (12), and a Bus Mechanic. We also take part in providing slots for TANF workers that provide the Receptionist, filing and cleaning of the facility.

The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is comprised of approximately 2.7 million acres of land (4,200 sq. mi.) that encompass three counties of South Dakota – Shannon, Bennett, and the southern half of Jackson. There are 6.5 (Shannon), 2.9 (Bennett) and 1.6 (Jackson) persons per square mile within the boundaries of the Reservation. Based on Tribal program data the population of the reservation is approximately 47,000, of which there are 38,000 enrolled tribal members. The 2010 US Census shows 20,048 (a massive undercount) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development's NAHASDA population numbers of 43,146. The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is extremely rural, with an under-developed economy and infrastructure. According to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, unemployment on the Reservation is 89 percent. (BIA Labor Force Report, 2005). Persons below poverty levels on the Reservation remain among the highest in the United States with the 2009 Census data indicating 51% for Shannon County, 37.8% for Bennett County and 36.1% for Jackson County.

Due to the extreme poverty of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, many residents do not have access to private automobiles and, in the absence of Oglala Sioux Transit, must often pay another individual to transport them to their destination. Many of these travelers are the elderly and

disabled. A transit study/survey conducted for the OST Short Range Transit Plan (December 2002) indicates that the lack of a public transportation system hinders individuals on the Reservation in accessing employment, medical appointments, conducting business, shopping and attending college classes. Oglala Sioux Transit is increasingly meeting the needs of many of these persons as the program has matured and become more widely known.

a. Transit Passengers

The Transit Program provides transportation in handicapped accessible vehicles (buses and vans) as a deviated fixed route rural transit system. In order to serve the widely dispersed communities on the Reservation, the Project has established routes with bus stops convenient to the local residents that provide this access for transportation to their destination. Many have stated that they would like to just go visit relatives in another district. Hiring and training tribal members for the project has provided residents with safe, reliable transportation to their destination.

The types of passengers that ride the transit range in ages from infant to senior citizens that are 60+ years old. Based on the total for the four full years of operation, seniors comprise an average of Year 1 – 20% to year 4 – 26% of passenger trips. Students are designated as anyone in attendance at an academic institution from Kindergarten through College. Some of the Student riders could be considered as Adults or Senior citizens, but a passenger can designate themselves as a student if they have an Identification Card (i.e. college students) so they can receive the \$1.00 off the fare.

The following table provides a brief summary of the Program's operational benchmarks and illustrates increased usage by the membership.



c. Local Support

Transit services are coordinated with many of the Tribal programs that have limited budgets for client transportation (Oglala Lakota College Centers (9), Community Health Representatives, Anpetu Luta Otipi, Transitional Living Program, Domestic Violence Shelters, Childhood Programs, SD Department of Social Services, Oglala Sioux Tribe District Service Centers, Oglala Nation Tiospaye & Advocacy Center, etc.). We expect increased usage by these clients as program budgets tighten in coming years.

**2. Tribal Transits Nationally**

A few Tribes across the US have been accessing FTA funding through the States but more are now beginning the process of developing full blown rural transit systems as funds have become available through the Section 5311(c)(1), in FY06, 63 Tribes awarded approximately \$8 mil and in FY12, 72 Tribes were awarded approximately \$15 mil.. Each fiscal year's Notice of Funding Availability from FTA has seen many more proposals submitted for more funds than are available. Many of the Transit systems are beginning to fully understand the processes and regulations required by the FTA funds and are beginning to develop their transit systems into longer term endeavors. The new MAP-21 funds will enable some of the Tribes to purchase vehicles and construct facilities to enhance their services, many Tribes had begun their Transit services out of their Department of Transportation's Road Shops or shared offices with other Tribal Programs.

Most issues on reservations commonly experienced by Tribal Transit Managers are long routes, high mileage, lack of facilities, finding local consultants with transit expertise with tribal knowledge, etc. It has also been mentioned at the Tribal Transit conferences that direct contact

between FTA regional offices and Tribes would be beneficial in terms of funding and services. Several Tribes have met and formed a National Tribal Transit Association to represent and advocate for them on tribal transit issues. The organization is in its infancy stage and just beginning to collect data and coordinate issues for Tribal transit systems across the nation.

### **3. MAP-21**

Tribal Transit provisions of MAP-21 represent a significant improvement in the availability of resources that Tribes may access to assist with their public transportation needs. If tribal transit programs are to be successful, FTA funding must be adequate, predictable, and stable. It is my view that the Formula distribution of \$25 million dollars is a significant improvement over prior years. While I recommend that annual appropriations be increased in future years due to inflationary factors and increased transit program development by more Tribes, Tribes may now rely upon a funding distribution process that has objective criteria that should minimize “feast or famine” funding decisions. Tribes should be able to plan upon likely future funding levels (two, three, or more years later) with a reasonable degree of certainty. Facilities, equipment, routes and schedules can now be established on a long term basis that riders can become familiar with and rely upon.

With the above discussion in mind, I would like to make the following points about tribal transit policies:

1. I am in substantial agreement with the funding formula factors set forth in MAP-21;
2. I agree that funding distribution should include both annual formula-based awards and separate competition-based grants;

3. I disagree with any “matching funds” requirement as a factor in qualifying for or receiving FTA funding. Many Tribes simply do not have either an adequate resource base nor sufficient taxing authority to provide matching funds on an ongoing basis. These facts are particularly true for many of the poorer Reservations located in remote and isolated areas of the country.
4. There has been considerable discussion about establishing a 10 per cent cap on indirect costs. Many tribal transit programs think a 10 per cent cap of Indirect Costs is a reasonable compromise between the need of Tribes to receive adequate contract support and the funding needed for delivery of direct transit services.
5. With respect to the Request For Comments published in the Federal Register on November 9, 2012 (see II b) I am concerned that some limitation is needed to prevent potential formula distortions. It is appropriate for Tribal Transit Programs to interface with off-reservation communities and even to provide direct public transit services under certain circumstances. However, I recommend a more extensive consultation process with Indian Tribes before FTA moves forward with its II b proposal.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation for the Senate Committee holding this field hearing. I am excited about the progress made by Indian Tribes and the FTA in providing public transit services on an equitable basis to one of the most underserved segments of the United States population. The Congress, the FTA, and Indian Tribes can rightfully be proud of the accomplishments made to this date and look forward to a continued partnership for future gains.