

Wheelchair accessible taxicabs were put into service in November 2009. Pictured, left to right: Bobby Coward, president of DC Adapt; Judy Heumann, Director, DC Department of Disability Services; DC Councilmember Muriel Bowser, chair of the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force; and David Sharp, president of Crossroads for Accessible Living.



## Wheelchair-Accessible Taxi Project Rolls Out in D.C.

Taxicab service in the Washington region is becoming accessible to people in wheelchairs thanks to a pilot program developed by the TPB. By the end of 2010, a fleet of 20 wheelchair-accessible minivan taxicabs will be in service in the District of Columbia. The Pilot project was funded through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) New Freedom Program, which provides funding for transportation programs and services that go above and beyond what is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Until the TPB implemented this pilot project, D.C. was one of the few major cities without wheelchair accessible taxi service.

The TPB is the region's designated recipient of funding from the New Freedom Program, as well as from the FTA's Job Access/Reverse Commute Program. The TPB's Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force makes grants from these programs

available on an annual basis through a competitive application process.

In 2008, the TPB awarded \$1 million in New Freedom funds for the pilot project which TPB staff coordinated and implemented. TPB staff oversaw the establishment of operating parameters for the pilot project such as draft taxi regulations, dispatch options and vehicle procurement. Two taxi companies for a pilot project were granted funds to start wheelchair-accessible taxicab service in the District of Columbia. The two companies, Yellow Paratransit and Liberty (Royal Cab), have worked closely with TPB staff and the D.C. Taxicab Commission to design the project and acquire the vehicles. Each company is receiving \$384,000 in New Freedom Funds for the purchase of 10 accessible cabs and for operating assistance. The D.C. Taxicab Commission provided each company with a partial match of \$100,000.

The TPB also approved funding and implemented two coordinated elements of the wheelchair accessible taxicab project: a centralized marketing campaign, including the development of a user guide, and driver training to ensure that drivers are comfortable providing the service and that customers receive consistent and reliable service.

In November 2009, the TPB's Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force, chaired by TPB Vice Chair Muriel Bowser, held a demonstration showcasing the wheelchair-accessible taxicabs, which are fully compliant with the ADA. Local elected officials and members of the Task Force attended the event and participated in the demonstration. Four of these vehicles were put into service in December 2009, marking the first time mobility-impaired residents and visitors of the District of Columbia have had access to wheelchair-accessible cabs. ■