

**ASSEMBLY, No. 4234**

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**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**219th LEGISLATURE**

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INTRODUCED JUNE 4, 2020

**Sponsored by:**

**Assemblyman DANIEL R. BENSON**

**District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)**

**Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY**

**District 7 (Burlington)**

**Assemblywoman VALERIE VAINIERI HUTTLE**

**District 37 (Bergen)**

**Co-Sponsored by:**

**Assemblyman Giblin**

**SYNOPSIS**

Requires NJT to administer program to adopt paratransit best practices, requires greater coordination among paratransit service providers, and establishes regional paratransit coordinating councils; appropriates \$4 million.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



**(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 7/23/2020)**

1 AN ACT concerning paratransit services, the establishment of  
2 regional paratransit coordinating councils, supplementing Title  
3 27 and Title 30 of the Revised Statutes, and making an  
4 appropriation.

5  
6 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*  
7 *of New Jersey:*

8  
9 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the “Paratransit  
10 Services Coordination and Improvement Act.”

11  
12 2. The Legislature hereby finds and declares:

13 The current system for paratransit services is fragmented and  
14 includes various providers from different levels of government as  
15 well as from private enterprise in different regions, counties, and  
16 service areas. The ultimate impact of the current system is poor  
17 service, including but not limited to long trip times and poor  
18 communication of trip status, and high costs.

19 Access Link, which is a program administered by the New Jersey  
20 Transit Corporation that was established to enable the State to meet  
21 the minimum standards of the federal “Americans with Disabilities  
22 Act of 1990” (42 U.S.C. s.12101 et seq.), provides the majority of  
23 paratransit trips in the State. The Access Link Program, which has  
24 a very high per trip cost, should serve as a safety net for paratransit  
25 within the State, not as the primary provider of paratransit services  
26 within the State as is currently the case. Community organizations  
27 that provide paratransit services for individuals with developmental  
28 disabilities have provided evidence to the Legislature that certain  
29 paratransit services may be provided that are objectively safer, have  
30 shorter average trip times, and cost less per passenger mile. The  
31 average cost per trip for Access Link trips is, in many cases, triple  
32 the cost of similar paratransit services. Accordingly, it should be an  
33 objective of the State to direct service for regular and recurring  
34 paratransit trips away from Access Link, where possible, and  
35 toward other providers, including those funded through the  
36 Department of Human Services and the Division of Vocational  
37 Rehabilitation Services within the Department of Labor and  
38 Workforce Development, to both improve the quality of service and  
39 reduce costs, effectively using Access Link as a paratransit provider  
40 of last resort.

41 In addition to Access Link, county transit providers provide  
42 paratransit services to senior citizens and individuals with  
43 disabilities. The level of service available varies widely from  
44 county to county and the source of State funding for these services,  
45 the Casino Revenue Fund, has experienced reduced revenues in  
46 recent years. Furthermore, organizations at the county level have  
47 been charged by the New Jersey Transit Corporation with  
48 developing local coordination transportation plans within each

1 county but often lack knowledge of best practices, do not coordinate  
2 regionally, and many organizations do not have common platforms  
3 or systems for requesting, sharing, and completing trips.

4 Direct administrative connections and coordination between  
5 agencies and organizations that provide programs and services for  
6 disabled persons, generally, and transit agencies that provide transit  
7 trips for those individuals would assist the State in improving the  
8 quality of service and reducing State costs.

9 Building these relationships will help the State, community  
10 organizations, and transit agencies develop best practices for  
11 providing paratransit services, which will lead to additional  
12 improvements in the quality of services and additional reductions in  
13 costs.

14 The current system is insufficient to meet the needs of persons  
15 with disabilities in the State, including the use of routing software  
16 that has proven to be wholly inadequate to serve the special needs  
17 of the disabled community.

18 It is essential that the State improve coordination, share best  
19 practices, advance proven models, and improve the efficiency of the  
20 system.

21

22 3. For the purposes of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before  
23 the Legislature as this bill):

24 “Community organization” means an organization that provides  
25 programs and services to persons with disabilities.

26 “Corporation” means the New Jersey Transit Corporation.

27 “County transit agency” means a transportation service  
28 organized under or in conjunction with a county government to  
29 provide trips to senior citizens and residents with disabilities under  
30 the "Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation  
31 Assistance Act," P.L.1983, c.578 (C.27:25-25 et seq.).

32 “Division” means, unless another meaning clearly applies, the  
33 Division of Developmental Disabilities in the Department of  
34 Human Services.

35 “Paratransit provider” means any organization or entity that  
36 provides paratransit services, including State and local transit  
37 agencies, directly or through contract service, and community  
38 organizations that provide transportation trips, either directly or  
39 through a third party, funded by the Department of Human Services  
40 or the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services within the  
41 Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

42 “Paratransit service” means and includes any transportation  
43 service other than fixed route transportation service, except that.  
44 “paratransit service” does not include private or charter services  
45 provided by taxicabs, limousines, or transportation network  
46 companies.

1       4. The corporation shall ensure that all paratransit service that  
2 it directly manages, administers, or supports financially, including  
3 but not limited to Access Link service, shall adhere to the following  
4 standards:

5       a. All paratransit providers shall implement an open software  
6 platform such that the customer's user-interface and the trip  
7 planning software can interact with the platforms of other  
8 paratransit providers, allowing a trip requested by a customer via  
9 the user interface to be fulfilled by a paratransit provider that  
10 chooses to utilize a compatible platform without any additional  
11 action on the part of the customer. Specifically, the open software  
12 platform shall be interoperable with software developed pursuant to  
13 subparagraph (1) of subsection b. of section 5 of  
14 P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

15       b. The corporation shall structure the Access Link program as a  
16 service of last resort. In structuring the program in this way, the  
17 corporation shall: (1) actively develop a methodology whereby  
18 customer trips can be tracked, and identify any trips requested by  
19 customers that are regular and recurring in nature; (2) track and  
20 document these regular and recurring trips by pickup location,  
21 source of the request such as by phone, website, or mobile  
22 application, and relevant regular or recurring characteristics, such  
23 as, but not limited to, daily, weekly, monthly intervals, or several  
24 trips from a single source or to a single destination; (3) make  
25 information about these regular and recurring trips available to  
26 other paratransit providers in the State, including county transit  
27 agencies and community organizations that provide transportation  
28 service, either directly or through a third party, funded by the  
29 Department of Human Services or the Division of Vocational  
30 Rehabilitation Services within the Department of Labor and  
31 Workforce Development; (4) develop a system that allows county  
32 transit agencies and community organizations that provide  
33 paratransit service to compete to conduct these regular and  
34 recurring trips, which would have otherwise been provided under  
35 the Access Link program, by establishing a new Access Link  
36 program structure where the corporation is able to realize contract  
37 or operating cost savings when it shifts requested regular and  
38 routine trips from the primary Access Link provider to a paratransit  
39 provider that is able to provide these trips at a lower cost; (5)  
40 develop a system that provides a payment equal to a portion of the  
41 savings from the shifting of trips in paragraph (4) of this subsection  
42 to the paratransit provider that provides the trips in place of the  
43 Access link provider; and (6) shift trips out of the Access Link  
44 program entirely, and to other State agencies or entities if it is found  
45 that a regular and recurring trip requested through the Access Link  
46 program is better provided under a different program through the  
47 Department of Human Services or the Department of Labor and  
48 Workforce Development, especially those trip requests that would

1 not otherwise be eligible to be provided under the Access Link  
2 program.

3 c. Following the effective date of P.L. , c. (C. )  
4 (pending before the Legislature as this bill), the corporation shall  
5 not enter into any contract, or exercise any option to extend an  
6 existing contract, concerning the provision of Access Link service  
7 unless the contract or option includes a provision that the fixed  
8 costs of the contract or option shall be proportionately reduced to  
9 reflect any reduction in the provision of regular and recurring trips  
10 provided by the contractor that are subsequently fulfilled by another  
11 paratransit provider. The corporation shall establish minimum  
12 operating standards for any paratransit provider that may wish to  
13 participate in this program to ensure that all applicable federal  
14 standards are met by the paratransit provider and that adequate  
15 safeguards are provided to customers.

16 d. The corporation shall utilize the paratransit best practices  
17 training module developed pursuant to subsection b. of section 5 of  
18 P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature as this bill) in  
19 meeting the requirements of this section. The corporation, when  
20 establishing the open software platform, required pursuant to  
21 subsection a. of this section, shall ensure that the platform is  
22 affordable for the corporation to adopt and easily implemented by  
23 the various paratransit providers that will utilize the software  
24 platform.

25

26 5. a. (1) The New Jersey Transit Corporation, in consultation  
27 with the Division of Developmental Disabilities within the  
28 Department of Human Services, shall develop and implement a  
29 paratransit best practices pilot program.

30 (2) The corporation, in consultation with the division, shall  
31 select a qualified community organization to assist it in developing  
32 and implementing the pilot program. The qualified community  
33 organization shall meet the following criteria:

34 (a) the organization shall operate a facility that provides  
35 services to persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities;

36 (b) the organization shall directly provide paratransit services to  
37 persons with disabilities with those services paid, in whole or in  
38 part, by funds received from the Department of Human Services and  
39 the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services within the  
40 Department of Labor and Workforce Development;

41 (c) within the previous five years, the organization has received  
42 a Federal Transit Administration grant awarded by and administered  
43 through the New Jersey Transit Corporation for improvement to  
44 paratransit services;

45 (d) during the previous five-year period, the organization has  
46 demonstrated improvement in key performance metrics, including  
47 average trip time, vehicle accidents, and cost per passenger mile for  
48 paratransit services; and

1 (e) the organization provides transportation trips on a sufficient  
2 scale, including at least 250 daily trips under normal operating  
3 conditions.

4 b. Phase one of the pilot program shall include the following:

5 A training module for paratransit best practices shall be  
6 developed jointly by the qualified community organization and the  
7 New Jersey Transit Corporation, with consultation from the division  
8 where appropriate. The training module shall include: (1) an  
9 integrated paratransit software package that includes trip generation  
10 and scheduling, GPS directions for drivers, a mobile application for  
11 users that allows for trip requests, confirmation of trip requests, and  
12 trip status updates, and a trip accounting system; (2) a driver safety  
13 system that includes dashboard cameras, incident monitoring, and  
14 driver training; (3) assistance in hiring staff if necessary to fully  
15 implement the transportation system and train existing staff in the  
16 use of new technologies and business processes; (4) a curriculum  
17 that educates agencies about fleet management and specialized  
18 driver training for the needs of paratransit users; (5) personalized  
19 agency culture training; and (6) agency training on how to develop  
20 synergies between optimal transportation practices and the other  
21 programmatic needs of paratransit providers who provide  
22 transportation trips funded by the Department of Human Services.

23 c. Phase two of the pilot program shall include the following:

24 The corporation shall establish an application process where up  
25 to five paratransit providers that provide transportation trips directly  
26 funded by the Department of Human Services or the Division of  
27 Vocational Rehabilitation Services within the Department of Labor  
28 and Workforce Development are selected by the corporation, in  
29 consultation with the qualified community organization, to receive  
30 training in paratransit best practices from the qualified community  
31 organization. When selecting service providers to receive training,  
32 the corporation shall consider the cost for the paratransit provider to  
33 adopt these best practices, which may include but is not necessarily  
34 limited to the acquisition of new software, hiring of staff, and any  
35 necessary changes in vehicle fleet composition as well as potential  
36 savings that the paratransit provider will be likely to realize from  
37 reducing average trip time, vehicle accidents, and cost per  
38 passenger mile by adopting these best practices and the likelihood  
39 that those savings could self-fund the adoption of the best practices.  
40 Any paratransit providers selected to participate in the pilot  
41 program shall receive training from the qualified community  
42 organization.

43 d. Phase three of the pilot program shall include the following:

44 (1) If the efficiencies realized by the paratransit providers that  
45 received training in phase two are sufficient to justify widespread  
46 adoption, then the corporation, in consultation with the division and  
47 the qualified community organization, shall expand the training  
48 program by further developing the module into a best practices

1 training package designed in a manner that allows a paratransit  
2 provider to independently adopt the best practices and software on  
3 its own, or in conjunction with assistance provided generally  
4 through the paratransit coordinating councils established in  
5 accordance with section 6 of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before  
6 the Legislature as this bill). It is intended that this phase three  
7 training module shall allow for the eventual integration of  
8 paratransit services throughout the State. Integration of paratransit  
9 services shall mean the widespread adoption of the software  
10 developed pursuant to phase one of the pilot program, or similarly  
11 compatible software, so that requested trips by customers may be  
12 fulfilled, if possible, by any applicable paratransit provider, and that  
13 paratransit providers shall meet the minimum operating standards  
14 established by the New Jersey Transit Corporation so that those  
15 paratransit providers may compete for regular and routine Access  
16 Link trips under the revised Access Link program as described in  
17 section 4 of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature  
18 as this bill).

19 If the efficiencies realized in phase two do not justify expansion  
20 of the training program further, then the corporation, in consultation  
21 with the division and the qualified community organization, shall  
22 determine an alternate method of integrating paratransit services  
23 throughout the State in a manner that allows paratransit providers  
24 that meet minimum operating standards to compete for regular and  
25 routine Access Link trips under the revised Access Link program as  
26 described in section 4 of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the  
27 Legislature as this bill).

28 (2) The regional paratransit coordinating councils shall be  
29 established in accordance with section 6 of P.L. , c. (C. )  
30 (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

31 e. The New Jersey Transit Corporation shall utilize the  
32 complete paratransit best practices training module, including the  
33 associated software, when making changes to its paratransit service  
34 and the Access Link program to comply with the requirements of  
35 section 4 of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature  
36 as this bill).

37 f. (1) The New Jersey Transit Corporation shall enter into a  
38 contract with the qualified community organization that  
39 compensates the qualified community organization for its costs in  
40 developing the paratransit best practices training module as required  
41 for phase one of the pilot program as established in subsection b. of  
42 this section, and providing the training module as a publicly  
43 available resource that can be utilized by other paratransit providers  
44 in the State and used by the corporation for its own paratransit  
45 services. If phases one and two of the pilot program are determined  
46 to be successful, the corporation shall also enter into a contract with  
47 the qualified community organization to further develop the training  
48 module into a self-administered best practices training package as

1 required for phase three of the pilot program in subsection d. of this  
2 section. The self-administered best practices training package shall  
3 also be a publicly available resource that can be utilized by other  
4 paratransit providers in the State and by the corporation for its own  
5 paratransit services.

6 (2) The corporation shall enter into a contract with the qualified  
7 community organization for the actual training of agencies under  
8 the pilot program, which shall include performance standards as the  
9 division shall deem appropriate to ensure that the agencies being  
10 trained are adequately prepared to implement safer, more efficient,  
11 user friendly, and customer-focused transportation services.

12 (3) To the extent possible, the corporation shall require  
13 paratransit providers being trained under the program to first utilize  
14 operating savings resulting from adoption of the paratransit best  
15 practices training pilot program to fund the costs of software, staff,  
16 and equipment that may be required under the program, and  
17 limiting the overall costs of the program.

18  
19 6. a. There is hereby established within the Department of  
20 Human Services six separate regional paratransit coordinating  
21 councils. The regional paratransit coordinating councils shall be  
22 organized as follows:

23 (1) one council shall cover the counties of Atlantic, Cape May,  
24 Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem;

25 (2) one council shall cover the counties of Burlington, Camden,  
26 and Ocean;

27 (3) one council shall cover the counties of Mercer, Middlesex,  
28 and Monmouth;

29 (4) one council shall cover the counties of Hunterdon, Sussex,  
30 and Warren;

31 (5) one council shall cover the counties of Essex, Morris,  
32 Somerset, and Union; and

33 (6) one council shall cover the counties of Bergen, Hudson, and  
34 Passaic.

35 b. Each regional paratransit coordinating council shall have the  
36 following members:

37 (1) one designee of the Director of the Division of  
38 Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Human Services;

39 (2) one designee of the New Jersey Transit Corporation who  
40 works on the Access Link program or the Senior Citizen and  
41 Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program;

42 (3) one representative of any company or entity that has  
43 contracted with the New Jersey Transit Corporation to provide  
44 Access Link paratransit service within the region;

45 (4) one representative of each county within the respective  
46 region to be chosen by the county executive director or by the board  
47 of freeholders, as applicable;



1 (5) one representative of each county transportation agency or  
2 other comparable entity within the respective region that provides  
3 paratransit service for a county under the Senior Citizen and  
4 Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program;

5 (6) one representative from each county chapter of the Arc of  
6 New Jersey within the respective region;

7 (7) one individual that represents one or more members of the  
8 Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities within the  
9 respective region;

10 (8) one representative of Community Access Unlimited within  
11 the respective region;

12 (9) one representative of the New Jersey Association of  
13 Community Providers within the respective region; and

14 (10) up to three additional appointees of the Director of the  
15 Division of Developmental Disabilities to represent paratransit  
16 providers within the region that provide the most passenger trips to  
17 persons with disabilities.

18 c. Each agency with an eligible representative of a regional  
19 paratransit coordinating council provided in subsection b. of this  
20 section shall submit information in a form and manner determined  
21 by the Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities to the  
22 director not later than 30 days following the enactment of  
23 P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature as this bill)  
24 and on or before January 1 of each year thereafter identifying the  
25 name and contact information for the person to represent each  
26 respective agency. The term for each member on the regional  
27 paratransit coordinating council shall be one year provided,  
28 however, that any member may be selected to serve on the council  
29 for subsequent terms at the discretion of the respective agency. The  
30 director may appoint one member of each regional paratransit  
31 coordinating council to serve as the chair of that council.

32 d. Each regional paratransit coordinating council shall meet not  
33 less than quarterly, with the first meeting happening not less than 60  
34 days following the enactment of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending  
35 before the Legislature as this bill). The chair, in consultation with  
36 the other members of the council, shall set meeting dates and shall  
37 lead the coordination effort. The members shall serve without  
38 compensation but may be reimbursed by the division for reasonable  
39 expenses incurred in the execution of their duties.

40 e. The purpose of the regional paratransit coordinating councils  
41 is to exchange best practices among paratransit providers within the  
42 State. Those best practices shall include but are not limited to  
43 scheduling and routing, fleet maintenance, driver training, customer  
44 communications, safety practices, and improving the customer  
45 usability experience. The councils are also to establish a system to  
46 exchange information among and between paratransit providers and  
47 eventually open platform standards so that: (1) each paratransit  
48 provider may provide basic information to its customers about other

1 paratransit service options within each respective region; (2)  
2 paratransit providers may eventually share customer trip requests  
3 amongst each other; and (3) a single platform may eventually be  
4 developed that enables a paratransit user to visit a single platform or  
5 place to request a trip, and that trip may be distributed amongst the  
6 paratransit providers in a manner that optimizes State cost and  
7 customer experience. The councils shall also exchange budget  
8 information and investigate more efficient means of organizing the  
9 New Jersey Transit Corporation's expenditures for paratransit  
10 services, use of State casino revenue funds, and appropriations for  
11 the division related to paratransit services, for the purpose of  
12 coordinating these three respective funding pools to eliminate any  
13 duplicative funding, and to direct trips and funding to service  
14 providers that offer the highest quality service and overall best  
15 value.

16 f. The county plans required under section 6 of P.L.1983,  
17 c.578 (C.27:25-30) and any committees or groups organized to  
18 effectuate the purposes of the "Senior Citizen and Disabled  
19 Resident Transportation Assistance Act," P.L.1983, c.578 (C.27:25-  
20 25 et seq.) shall be consolidated into the regional paratransit  
21 coordinating councils. If necessary, county level subcommittees of  
22 the regional paratransit coordinating councils may be established to  
23 more effectively develop county plans; however, following the  
24 effective date of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the  
25 Legislature as this bill) county plans shall also take into account the  
26 larger regional and Statewide goals of integrating paratransit service  
27 and creating a more cohesive user experience under the pilot  
28 program established in P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the  
29 Legislature as this bill).

30 g. The New Jersey Transit Corporation shall utilize each  
31 regional paratransit coordinating council to disseminate information  
32 about the new Access Link program structure developed pursuant to  
33 section 4 of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature  
34 as this bill) and coordinate with the council in determining the  
35 operating standards required for paratransit providers to compete to  
36 provide Access Link trips and when developing the system for  
37 paying paratransit providers to provide regular and routine trips  
38 requested through the Access Link program.

39 h. The regional paratransit coordinating councils shall also  
40 advise other paratransit providers in each region and develop  
41 support materials to assist other paratransit providers in adopting  
42 and implementing the best practices training package developed  
43 under phase three of the pilot program established pursuant to  
44 paragraph (1) of subsection d. of section 5 of P.L. , c. (C. )  
45 (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

46  
47 7. The corporation, in consultation with the division, shall  
48 develop a framework to evaluate the efficacy of the paratransit best

1 practices training materials as well as the training program. Within  
2 180 days of the completion of phase two and within 180 days of  
3 completion of phase three of the pilot program, the corporation  
4 shall deliver a report to the Governor and the Legislature. Each  
5 report shall include feedback from the agencies that received  
6 training, a fiscal analysis of each agency with projections on how  
7 the implementation of the training will impact each agency's safety  
8 performance, average trip times, cost per trip, number of trips  
9 provided, and overall impact on each agency's core mission of  
10 serving people with disabilities. The division and corporation shall  
11 conduct a survey of consumers of paratransit services within the  
12 pilot program and shall include feedback from these consumers in  
13 the report. The report shall include recommendations from the  
14 division and the New Jersey Transit Corporation concerning  
15 whether the pilot program should be extended or made permanent,  
16 suggested changes to the program, opportunities for improvement,  
17 and the potential for future savings. The report shall also identify  
18 the extent to which software from the pilot has been integrated into  
19 the corporation's paratransit services, the analysis that determined  
20 how to execute the integration required under the first part of phase  
21 three of the pilot program, and findings from the division and the  
22 corporation about the overall change in coordination between  
23 paratransit providers throughout the State at the time of the report.

24  
25 8. There is appropriated from the General Fund to The New  
26 Jersey Transit Corporation up to \$4,000,000 from a portion of the  
27 additional Federal Transit Administration funds granted in FY 2020  
28 under the Section 5307 Urbanized Area Program, pursuant to the  
29 provisions of the "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security  
30 Act," Pub.L.116-136, exclusively for eligible costs to develop the  
31 paratransit best practices training module, including but not limited  
32 to, software development and licensing costs as required pursuant to  
33 section 5 of P.L. , c. (C. ) (pending before the Legislature  
34 as this bill).

35  
36 9. This act shall take effect immediately.  
37  
38

#### 39 STATEMENT

40  
41 This bill reforms the State's system of providing paratransit  
42 services. The goal of the reforms is to better integrate the various  
43 types of paratransit service currently offered in the State, allow  
44 lower cost providers to provide more of the trips, and ensure that  
45 best practices are adopted across the State.

46 The bill requires the New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ  
47 Transit) to better integrate its paratransit services with other  
48 paratransit services. Under the bill, this is achieved by requiring NJ

1 Transit to ensure that all paratransit service that it directly manages,  
2 administers, or supports financially develops an open software  
3 platform that will be compatible with the software used by other  
4 paratransit providers. The bill requires NJ Transit to begin  
5 identifying regular and recurring trips, and to develop a system  
6 where other paratransit providers can complete those trips on behalf  
7 of NJ Transit if the provider can meet applicable federal standards,  
8 provide the trip at a lower cost, and protect customer safety. The  
9 bill also requires NJ Transit to develop an Access Link program  
10 structure that allows NJ Transit to realize cost savings when  
11 reducing Access Link trip volumes, and to share those savings with  
12 paratransit providers that meet minimum federal standards and  
13 successfully compete for regular and routine trips under this new  
14 system. The bill also encourages NJ Transit to move trips requested  
15 under the Access Link program to other State based programs  
16 entirely, especially if those trip requests are not eligible under the  
17 Access Link program. This is intended to provide greater  
18 integration of paratransit service across the State, so that NJ Transit  
19 can allow paratransit providers to compete for regular and routine  
20 Access Link trips.

21 The bill requires the establishment of a best practices pilot  
22 training program for paratransit providers. The program is to be run  
23 by NJ Transit, in consultation with the Division of Developmental  
24 Disabilities (division), and a qualified community organization to  
25 be selected by NJ Transit. Under the first phase of the program, the  
26 qualified community organization and NJ Transit will develop a  
27 paratransit best practices training module, with consultation from  
28 the division. Under the second phase, NJ Transit is to select five  
29 paratransit providers, upon application, to receive training in  
30 paratransit best practices under the pilot program. The qualified  
31 community organization will then provide the training to each of  
32 the five paratransit providers under a training contract with NJ  
33 Transit. The training will include modern trip making software, trip  
34 confirmation, scheduling, a mobile phone application for customers,  
35 dashboard camera safety technology, as well as agency-wide and  
36 individual employee training and guidance. Depending upon the  
37 success of phase two of the pilot, phase three will involve either  
38 revising the training module into a training program that other  
39 paratransit providers can adopt without direct training from the  
40 qualified community organization, or NJ Transit, the division, and  
41 the qualified community organization will determine some other  
42 method of integrating paratransit service so that paratransit  
43 providers meeting certain standards can compete for regular and  
44 routine paratransit trips. The second part of phase three involves  
45 the establishment of regional paratransit coordinating councils.

46 The bill creates new regional paratransit coordinating councils  
47 (coordinating councils). The coordinating councils are to be located  
48 within the Department of Human Services. There are to be six

1 coordinating councils divided geographically by county.  
2 Membership on the coordinating councils include the division, NJ  
3 Transit, NJ Transit Access Link contractors from each service  
4 region, county government, county paratransit system operators,  
5 several listed community organizations, and up to three additional  
6 paratransit providers from each region as chosen by the division.  
7 The coordinating councils are to meet at least quarterly and share  
8 best practices. They are also required to establish a system to  
9 exchange information between paratransit providers and eventually  
10 develop open platform standards and share budget information. The  
11 coordinating councils will replace the county based councils used to  
12 develop county plans under the Senior Citizen and Disabled  
13 Resident Transportation Assistance Program, but the councils may  
14 establish county level subcommittees for this purpose. The county  
15 plans also must now account for the efforts of this bill to integrate  
16 Statewide paratransit service under a unified platform and create a  
17 more cohesive user experience. The coordinating councils are also  
18 to be utilized by NJ Transit to develop its revised Access Link  
19 program so that the paratransit providers on the council can be used  
20 as a resource when allowing paratransit providers to compete for  
21 regular and routine Access Link trips. Finally the coordinating  
22 councils are to serve as a resource and develop materials to assist  
23 other paratransit providers in achieving the integration objectives in  
24 the first part of phase three of the pilot program, either through the  
25 revised training module or the alternate solution developed.

26 The bill requires NJ Transit to issue a report with the division to  
27 the Governor and the Legislature at the end of the pilot program  
28 with information on the pilot program and a recommendation on  
29 whether or not to continue the pilot program, as well as an analysis  
30 of the decisions made about how to proceed with the Statewide  
31 integration required in the first part of the third phase of the pilot  
32 program. The division and NJ Transit are also required to survey  
33 consumers of paratransit services within the pilot program and  
34 include feedback from those consumers in the report.

35 The bill provides a supplemental appropriation of federal funds  
36 to NJ Transit for the cost of developing the training module and  
37 related software development.