

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE
ASSEMBLY, No. 5335
STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

DATED: FEBRUARY 25, 2021

SUMMARY

Synopsis: Requires NJT to expand or modify routes and hours of certain transportation services and to solicit input from individuals diagnosed with autism.

Type of Impact: Increased State General Fund costs.

Agencies Affected: New Jersey Transit Corporation.

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Fiscal Impact	<u>Annual</u>
State Cost Increase	Indeterminate

- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) finds that the bill will result in an indeterminate increase in operating costs for the New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJT), which in turn will increase the NJT operating deficit, requiring an increase to the State General Fund support for NJT operations. The cost is indeterminate due to a lack of detail in the bill about what would constitute accommodating the mobility needs of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Despite the general indeterminacy, the amount of additional service provided under the bill is expected to be minimal.
- Between current investments by NJT in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible features on regular route service, the provision of Access Link services, and efforts such as participation in the council on access and mobility working group and other efforts focused on support for persons with disabilities, NJT meets federally required standards to accommodate the mobility needs of all disabled persons. The legislation does not provide a clear standard that would apply to NJT above and beyond existing federal standards, except to defer to NJT to solicit input from individuals with autism spectrum disorder about self-identified needs of those individuals and for NJT to then make its own determination of what will be a sufficient level of service.

BILL DESCRIPTION

This bill requires NJT to expand or modify the routes and hours of motorbus regular route service, paratransit service, and rail passenger service, including light rail service, to accommodate the mobility needs of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder within one year of the effective date of the bill. NJT is required to solicit and receive advice, input, and guidance from individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and their advocates before the corporation expands or modifies the routes and hours of service.

The bill also requires NJT to solicit and receive, on an annual basis, advice, input, and guidance from individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and their advocates. The advice, input, and guidance is to help NJT determine whether the routes and hours of motorbus regular route service, paratransit service, and rail passenger service, including light rail service, adequately accommodates the mobility needs of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and whether further expansion or modification of the routes and hours of these services are necessary.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

None received.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS finds that the bill will result in an indeterminate increase in State General Fund support for NJT operations. The cost is indeterminate due to a lack of detail in the bill about what would constitute accommodating the mobility needs of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

An increase in the level of service provided by NJT, as required under the bill, would also presumably result in an increase in ridership revenue; however, virtually all NJT regular route service and all NJT paratransit service has a negative operating margin, so the cost of any increase in service would likely exceed any incremental revenue, resulting in a net increase in operating costs. NJT relies upon State budget subsidies to bridge this operating gap.

Between current investments by NJT in ADA accessible features on regular route service, the provision of Access Link services, and efforts such as participation in the council on access and mobility working group, NJT meets federally required standards to accommodate the mobility needs of all disabled persons. The legislation does not provide a clear standard that would apply to NJT above and beyond existing federal standards. The bill defers to NJT to solicit input from individuals with autism spectrum disorder about the mobility needs of those individuals. The bill then allows NJT to make its own determination of what those individuals will find to be a sufficient level of service.

Given that the general transit industry perspective around transit service for people with disabilities is based heavily around minimum federal standards which NJT already meets, any increase in service under this bill will likely require individuals with autism spectrum disorder consulted by NJT to identify service deficiencies relative to federal standards.

Section: Authorities, Utilities, Transportation and Communications

*Analyst: Patrick Brennan
Principal Fiscal Analyst*

*Approved: Thomas Koenig
Legislative Budget and Finance Officer*

This legislative fiscal estimate has been produced by the Office of Legislative Services due to the failure of the Executive Branch to respond to our request for a fiscal note.

This fiscal estimate has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67 (C.52:13B-6 et seq.).