

Testimony regarding transportation by Alex Mikowski, MSW:

- **Increasing paratransit coverage to 3 miles coverage area**
- **A position statement on the Autonomous Vehicle pilot**

This is my first time submitting testimony at the state level. I feel very passionate about all issues that relate to people with disability having equitable access to live in the community. As a person with a disability, the vice chair of our local Transportation Advisory Committee and Executive Director for our local Independent Living Center called Access to Independence of Cortland County, these issues are vital to address.

As I have previously stated, I am a person with a disability. You will notice, if I am awarded the opportunity to speak at the hearing that I have

- a slight studder (speech disability),
- I have a learning disability in written expression – much of this testimony was written with voice to text.
- I have some physical health disabilities and now use a rollator to travel.

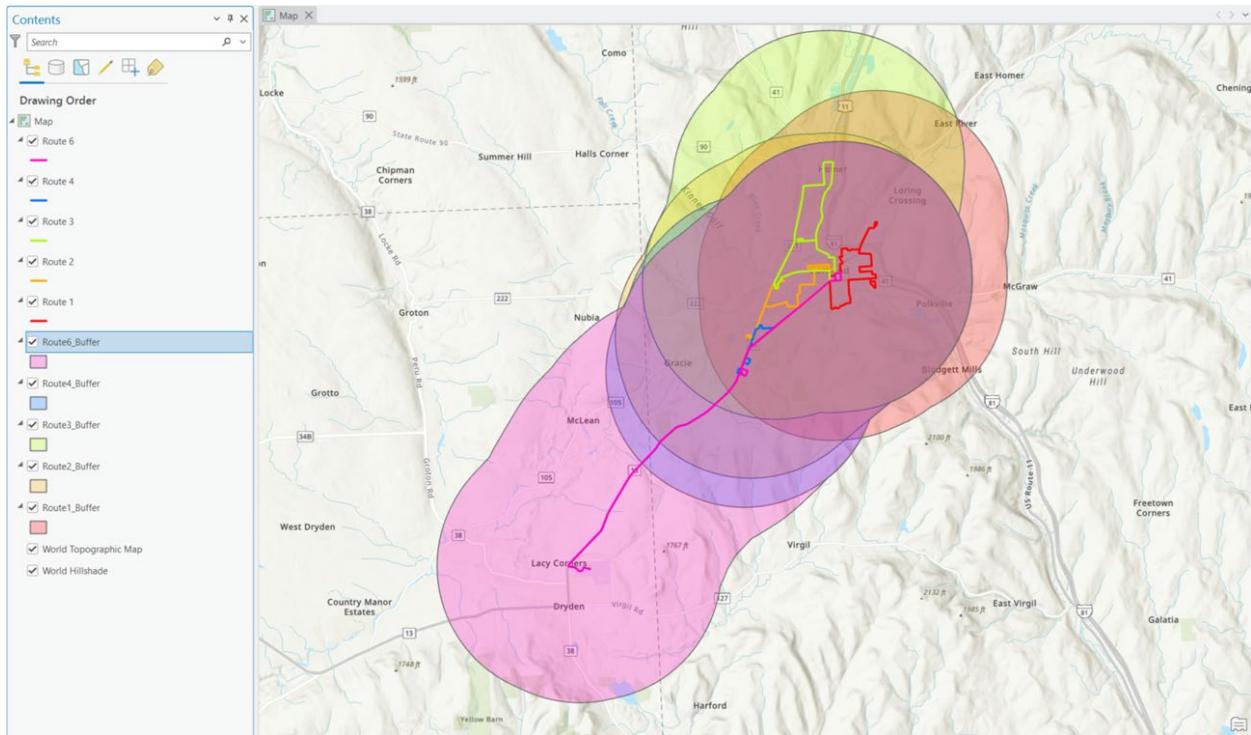
I am thankful for the resources and supports I currently have. I am passionate about transportation as a person who loves taking the Amtrak train, driving and using public transportation when available. Due to working with people with disabilities, I know that my abilities might vanish at any time. I may be a person who needs paratransit in the future. I want to make sure it is there for everyone who needs it- either in the future or now.

Context of our community

Cortland County is a rural county in central New York with approximately 46,000 residents, including the small City of Cortland and several outlying towns. The county faces many of the challenges typical of rural communities, such as limited public transportation and high rates of poverty, which can exacerbate health issues. Notably, Cortland County has a significant population of individuals with disabilities across all age groups. Nearly half (45.7%) of Cortland County students in grades 7–12 self-identify as having some form of disability or “difficulty,” including learning disabilities, mental health challenges, and physical or sensory impairments.

I am first going to address ADA rules around 3/4 paratransit coverage and the proposal to increase it to 3 mile coverage.

I have worked with our local mobility management and county planning team to get a basic GIS map of 5 current routes with the current and proposed changes. Please see this graphic provided by Scott Hourigan the Cortland County GIS Planner.



We are a small rural community where the bus has limited coverage. We have 7 standing bus routes and a large portion of the county is not covered by bus service or by the para-transit coverage.

Total number of households within 3 Mile buffer by route (proposed):	Total number of households within 3/4 Mile buffer by route (current):
Route #1 – 7188	Route #1 – 3421
Route #2 – 7086	Route #2 – 4457
Route #3 – 7501	Route #3 – 4930
Route #4 – 7101	Route #4 – 3573
Route #6 – 7271	Route #6 – 3661

Per Centro's report at the Transportation Advisory Committee on 2/2/26 for the last quarter (October – December) there was an average of fix route ridership of 200 riders per day and for para-transit 7-8 people a day.

Data is powerful and important, but I want to share 2 personal stories.

- 1- We have a community member who lives in the Hamlet town of Blodgett Mills in the town of Cortlandville. It has a post office, a church, a few businesses and

several farms. It is only 4 miles from our office and less than 3 miles from the city of Cortland. Due to his disability, he can no longer drive. He is now isolated in this small community. He is retired and used to be a volunteer tutor for people obtaining their GED, volunteered for the red cross and on the board of the community center. His talents are not be used to his full potential due to need to get a ride from a family member. And the bigger impact is the individuals who are not pulling themselves out of poverty with their GED or receiving assistance from the red cross.

- 2- I have a family member who is now legally blind and uses a rollator for mobility. She chose where to live when she could drive herself and now finds that she is isolated. She is relying on myself to drive her to the bus stop as she is outside of the .75 mile limit. She is not able to consistently access needed resources, like going to the pharmacy or the senior center. This has led to 3 hospitalizations in under 3 months. The cost of just one multi-day hospitalization would far outway the trips to these needed resources.

By enhancing paratransit we would increase social connection, drive down medical costs and increase quality of life. This is not an attack on our bus system Centro but instead assisting them to serve more people.

I support the NYAIL Disability Priority Agenda. Please see attached. It is also on the NYAIL website. <https://ilny.us/advocacy/advocacy-priorities>

A position statement on the Autonomous Vehicle pilot

I agree with NYAIL's position statement on Autonomous Vehicle. As a person who frequently uses Ubers/ Lift when traveling by train or in a new city. The more options there are to get from place to place would be amazing. And if the robot can be programmed to follow the ADA, the individuals with services dogs would have less to fear when scheduling a trip. It is important to ensure that these vehicles are accessible. As person who travels with a rollator, it would be important to be able to gain access to the vehicle. And it is even more critical for those who use wheelchairs or other adaptive tech.

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Background on the agency that I represent- ATI Cortland

Access To Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI Cortland) is a 501(c)3 non-profit that is run by and for people with disabilities. We are an Independent Living Center (ILC). Independent Living means being able to make your own choices about where you live, who you live with, where you work, and how you spend your time. Everyone deserves to participate in community life and pursue the activities they want to. People should also be allowed to take risks and succeed and fail on their own terms. Independent Living involves people knowing what choices are available, choosing what is right for them, and taking responsibility for their own actions. For people that have disabilities that affect their ability to make complicated decisions or pursue complex activities, independent living means making as many choices for themselves as possible.

We started as a grassroots coalition called Cortland County Accessibility Committee (CCAC) under CAPCO in the late 1980s and by 1998, we had become our own non-profit organization. In 2000, Senator Seward and Assemblyman Luster co-sponsored legislation that identified ATI as New York State's 36th Independent Living Center (ILC). In 2001, ATI began receiving ongoing funding through ACCES-VR (Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation), part of the State Education Department, to serve as an official ILC.

We have over 2 decades of experience working with diverse populations, managing grants, and improving community health outcomes for people of all abilities.

As an ILC, we are primarily staffed by people with disabilities. This allows us to weave our own lived experiences into the fabric of our services. A requirement to be an ILC is that more than 50% of our staff, leadership and board need to have disabilities. We work to ensure that everyone has the tools to live their most independent lives.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Alexandra Mikowski, MSW

(She/ Her pronouns)

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