

TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS FOR SSI AND SSDI RECIPIENTS

**Prepared by the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
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WORK-RELATED TRANSPORTATION COSTS FOR SSI & SSDI RECIPIENTS¹

Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) and Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) are **work incentives** that recipients of SSI or SSDI may be able to use to help cover transportation costs. Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI can maintain their benefits and, if they qualify, receive additional assistance to help cover transportation costs. Only individuals who are currently employed or who have a goal of becoming employed may qualify for PASS and IRWE benefits.²

Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS)

Benefits

The purpose of the PASS is to allow an individual to achieve a vocational goal, such as returning to work or receiving specialized training. PASS plans set aside income other than your SSI (which can include SSDI income, wages, or other income) to allow an individual to maintain or increase her SSI benefits.³ The income that is set aside is not counted when Social Security determines your SSI payment amount. That money will then be applied to cover certain costs, including transportation costs. Generally, the PASS plan is approved in 18-month increments and it will reimburse the entire expense that it is meant to cover.

Examples of transportation expenses for which you may use a PASS include:

- the hire of private or commercial transportation providers;
- lease, rental, or purchase of a vehicle plus registration fees and insurance costs;
- public transportation.

Eligibility

If you receive or are applying for SSI, you may qualify for a PASS. You also must have or current or future work-related goal. Only individuals who receive SSI can use PASS plans. SSA must approve of your PASS.

How to apply

To set up a PASS, you must fill out an application and submit it to the Social Security Administration (SSA) office. Your PASS must:

¹ Information from this section was largely drawn from www.onestops.info/article.php?article_id=71, www.communityinclusion.org/onestop/section9.pdf, and www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/pass.htm.

² Note that PASS plans and IRWEs can be used for non-transportation purposes. The focus here, however, is on transportation.

³ Sometimes a PASS plan can be used in order to qualify an individual for SSI by reducing that person's countable income. <http://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/ssi-only-employment-supports.htm#3>.

- be designed especially for you;
- be in writing;
- have a specific work goal that you are capable of performing;
- have a specific timeframe for reaching your goal;
- show what money (other than your SSI payments) and other resources you have or receive that you will use to reach your goal;
- show how your money and resources will be used to reach your work goal;
- show how the money you set aside will be kept separate from other funds;
- be approved by SSA; and
- be reviewed periodically by SSA to assure your plan is actually helping you achieve progress.

The application is available at the Social Security office or online at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/forms/ssa-545.pdf>. You can take or mail the application to your local Social Security office once it is complete.

SSA suggests that you talk to someone who can help you with this application process. If you incur any costs in getting assistance with your plan, you can include those costs in your plan.⁴ You can get help filling out the application from:

- a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor;
- an organization that helps people with disabilities;
- Benefits Specialists or Protection and Advocacy organizations who have contracts with SSA;
- Employment Networks involved in the Ticket to Work program;
- the local Social Security office;
- anyone else willing to help.

Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)

Benefits

An IRWE is an expense that a disabled person incurs in order to work. This expense may be deducted from your monthly earnings that you report to Social Security when Social Security determines your benefit amount. The local Social Security Office will determine whether a particular expense is deductible as an IRWE.

If you receive SSI, the IRWE will be excluded from your earned income when SSA determines your monthly SSI payment amount as long as you satisfy the requirements below and you paid the expense in the same month that you received earned income or performed work.⁵

If you receive SSDI, transportation expenses may reduce your income level below the substantial gainful activity (SGA) limit (\$1010 for 2012) and thus allow you to maintain your SSDI benefits even if you otherwise would have exceeded the SGA limit. In other words, Social Security

⁴ <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/11017.html>.

⁵ <http://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/ssdi-and-ssi-employments-supports.htm#3>

deducts the cost of certain work-related expenses from your earnings when it decides whether you are performing substantial gainful work.⁶

Examples of expenses that IRWEs can be used for include:

- the cost of structural/operational modifications to a vehicle that a person needs in order to drive to work;
- the cost of driver assistance or taxis if individuals in the community without disabilities generally do not require this type of transportation;
- mileage expenses at a set rate for an approved vehicle for travel to and from work.⁷

Unlike a PASS plan, IRWEs will not cover the cost of a vehicle. An IRWE is not time-limited and may apply to a broader range of expenses than a PASS.

Eligibility

Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI may qualify for an IRWE. Social Security will deduct your expenses if:

- the item(s) or service(s) enables you to work;
- you need the item(s) or service(s) because of a physical or mental impairment;
- you pay for the item(s) or service(s) and are not reimbursed by another source such as Medicare, Medicaid, or a private insurance carrier;
- the cost is "reasonable", that is, it represents the standard charge for the item or service in your community.⁸

How to apply

Social Security will determine whether your expense qualifies as an IRWE. To help you claim an expense as an IRWE you should bring Social Security a note from your doctor that explains why the expense was required in order for you to work. You should also have proof of the expense, such as a receipt. Be sure to ask for a response in writing from Social Security.

⁶ <http://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/detailedinfo.htm>.

⁷ <http://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/ssdi-and-ssi-employments-supports.htm#4>.

⁸ <http://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/ssdi-and-ssi-employments-supports.htm#3>