

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 19, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER ^S

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #58 : EQUALIZATION OF FARES BETWEEN SENIOR TAXI AND DOT PARATRANSIT

ISSUE: Vice Mayor Pepper has asked whether the City should equalize DOT Paratransit and Senior Taxi fare rates for seniors who need wheelchair accessible vehicles.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council consider establishing a long-term policy which would equalize the Senior Taxi and DOT Paratransit fares for residents aged 60 and over as part of the add/delete processes by either:

- A: Changing the fares for seniors to the lower of the existing DOT Paratransit or the Senior Taxi fare (depending on which one is lower). This would then uncouple senior DOT Paratransit fares from the non-senior Paratransit fares, as well as from Metrobus and DASH fare structures. This would cost \$5,250.
- B: Increasing the Senior Taxi fares to equal the DOT Paratransit fares. This would keep all of the DOT Paratransit fares coupled with the Metrobus and DASH fares and avoid creating separate fare rates for senior and non-senior Paratransit users. This would save \$4,900 which, if approved, is recommended to be added to the DHS Companion Aide budget.

- OR -

- C: Leave the current fares policies as they are.

DISCUSSION: The Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities and the Alexandria Commission on Aging have submitted to City Council a joint request for \$5,250 to reduce the fare rate for DOT Paratransit senior users who need wheelchair accessible vehicles to the level of the Senior Taxi program. This request raises the policy issue of what these fares should be.

There are currently two City-subsidized transportation programs available to seniors age 60 and over, Senior Taxi and DOT Paratransit.

The Senior Taxi program is intended for any resident age 60 or over, regardless of income level. The fare rate charged to riders is \$1.50 per one-way trip for service inside the City limits and \$2.50 per one-way trip for Senior Taxi Extension service beyond the City limits. Because the program utilizes only taxi cabs, it is not wheelchair accessible. In FY 2003, Senior Taxi subsidies cost the City \$162,851, \$131,617 for in-City trips and \$31,234 for beyond-City trips. The fare for in-City trips has not been increased in more than 12 years.

The DOT Paratransit program is intended for disabled residents, regardless of age or income level. The program provides taxi trips for riders who do not need wheelchair accessibility and van service for those who do. The fare rate charged to riders is \$2.00 per one-way trip for service inside the City limits and \$2.40 per one-way trip for service outside the City. In FY 2003, DOT Paratransit subsidies cost the City \$869,296. The last time the fare for service inside the City was increased was FY 2000. The fare for service beyond the City limits increased in FY 2004. Paratransit fares are pegged to DASH fares (in City) and Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) fares (out of City).

OPTION A: The Commissions' request would reduce the in-City fare rate paid by DOT Paratransit Senior van users from the regular DOT Paratransit rate of \$2.00 to the Senior Taxi rate of \$1.50 so that all seniors pay the same rate, regardless of whether they need wheelchair accessible transportation or not. This would result in a fifty cent (\$0.50) increase in the City subsidy per trip. The rate for service beyond the City limits would not need to be adjusted because DOT Paratransit riders already receive a favorable rate in comparison to the Senior Taxi Extension (\$2.40 for DOT Paratransit versus \$2.50 for the Senior Taxi Extension). This change would uncouple DOT Paratransit fares for seniors traveling inside the City from the DASH rate structure. It also would create two classes of DOT Paratransit riders, seniors and non-seniors, each with a different fare level. We question the wisdom or fairness of this. We also would anticipate a future request to establish a single fare for all paratransit riders (i.e., the lower Senior Taxi fare).

The Agency on Aging estimates that the proposed fare adjustment would assist 350 individual Seniors by providing 10,500 DOT Paratransit trips at the lower Senior Taxi fare rate.

OPTION B: This option would increase the Senior Taxi in-City fare from the current \$1.50 to the DOT Paratransit level of \$2.00. The rate for service beyond the City limits would be adjusted downward by 10 cents because DOT Paratransit riders now receive a better rate in comparison to the Senior Taxi Extension (\$2.40 for DOT Paratransit versus \$2.50 for the Senior Taxi Extension). The change would keep DOT Paratransit fares inside and outside the City coupled to the DASH rate structure. If the fares are equalized by increasing the Senior Taxi in-town fare to \$2.00, the additional revenue to the City would be \$5,043, and the subsidy per trip would be reduced to \$12.55 from \$13.05 using FY 2003 data. A total of \$143 in revenue would be foregone for trips outside the City by lowering the Senior Taxi rate to \$2.40. If City Council approves this option, the additional net revenue generated by this option of \$4,900 is proposed to be used to fund the Department of Human Services (DHS) Companion Aide program. This option would result in a single fare structure for all users of the Senior Taxi and DOT Paratransit programs.

WMATA FARE CONSIDERATIONS: The City DOT Paratransit fare for service beyond the City limits (currently \$2.40) is set at the same level as WMATA MetroAccess paratransit service. It should be noted that WMATA is now considering a variety of potential FY 2005 fare increase options that could result in a MetroAccess increase of up to thirty cents (\$0.30) per trip. If this were to occur, the City's DOT Paratransit fare for service beyond the City limits, in order to remain coupled with WMATA Paratransit fares, would increase to \$2.70, and an additional twenty cent (\$0.20) City subsidy would be required to equalize fares for Seniors. Because the amount of the WMATA fare increase, if any, has not yet been determined, the potential corresponding DOT Paratransit revenue increase has not been factored into the City's FY 2005 Proposed Budget. Therefore, the additional twenty cent (\$0.20) subsidy for Seniors would be more than offset by the extra revenues generated by DOT Paratransit trips for non-seniors. It would, however, reduce the amount of potential cost recovery revenue to the City.

The following table illustrates the FY 2003 number of one-way trips provided, City cost, and one-way fares charged to riders for Senior Taxi and DOT Paratransit.

FY 2003 Actual	City Subsidy	Trips	Subsidy/Trip	Rider Fare
Senior Taxi inside the City	\$131,617	10,086	\$13.05	\$1.50
DOT Paratransit inside the City	\$438,417	35,651	\$12.30	\$2.00
Senior Taxi outside the City	\$31,234	1,426	\$21.90	\$2.50
DOT Paratransit outside the City	\$430,879	18,002	\$23.94	\$2.40

FISCAL IMPACT: The cost of Option A is \$5,250 in additional expenditures in FY 2005 compared to the Proposed Operating Budget. The impact of Option B is a revenue increase of \$4,900 in FY 2005. The additional revenues generated by Option B is recommended to be used to provide additional funds to the DHS Companion Aide program. It should be noted that the multi-year cost of Option A (which lowers fares and freezes them) is greater than Option B, which sets and then keeps Senior Taxi fares coupled to DASH and Metrobus fares which are likely to increase over time. Option C would not change the Proposed Operating Budget.

CC: Alexandria Commission on Aging
 Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities

ATTACHMENT: Senior Taxi Service Compliance and Cost Inequity Issues memorandum from the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities and the Alexandria Commission on Aging to City Council of February 12, 2004

Memorandum

Date: February 12, 2004

To: The Honorable William D. Euille, Mayor and Members of City Council
Philip Sunderland, City Manager

From: Chet Avery, Chair, Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities
Donald Fowler, Chair, Alexandria Commission on Aging

Subject: Senior Taxi Service Compliance and Cost Inequity Issues

Via this memorandum our Commissions are requesting that Council approve \$5,250 to expand Senior Taxi Services to those Seniors who require wheelchair accessible vehicles in order to use this service.

There are currently two distinct transportation services for Seniors, aged 60 and over, in the City. The first is the Senior Taxi Service, which provides transportation to the grocery store and doctors' appointments only. This service requires no eligibility review and the cost is \$1.50 per trip within City limits. The City subsidizes this service to make it affordable to Seniors, many of who live on limited incomes. At present this service is not available for those Seniors who need wheelchair accessible vehicles.

The second service is the DOT Para-transit Service, which requires an application and an eligibility review to use wheelchair accessible vehicles. Eligible citizens, regardless of age or destination, can utilize this service for \$2.00 per trip within City limits. Seniors with disabilities who are living on limited incomes are among the current users of this service. This service is subsidized by public funds.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that programs receiving public funds be available to all citizens. That is, if a 60+ year old citizen would qualify for a service if he/she were not disabled, the service must be available to the disabled citizen. New procedures between Senior Taxi Service and DOT Para-transit Service could be developed to resolve the Senior Taxi Service accessibility issue. These procedural changes will improve, and may even resolve the compliance issue, however they will not resolve the cost inequity issue.

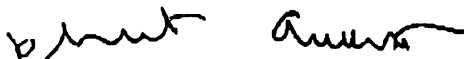
These accessibility and cost issues have been discussed for some time within both the Commission on Persons with Disabilities and the Commission on Aging. As a result the members of these two Commissions ask that funds be allocated to provide the additional subsidy, which would be fifty cents per trip, to enable Seniors who need wheelchair accessible vehicles to travel to the grocery store or to doctors' appointments through Senior Taxi Service. This subsidy

would encourage a cooperative initiative between DOT Para-transit and Senior Taxi, thus extending the Senior Taxi Service to all Seniors 60 and older.

A study compiled by the COA Liaison to ACPD cites the annual cost for this additional subsidy to be only \$5,250. This comparatively small funding request would allow for 10,500 subsidized DOT Para-transit trips to the grocery store and to doctors' appointments within the City by Seniors 60 and over who need wheelchair accessible vehicles at \$1.50 per trip. It is estimated that this subsidy will assist 350 Seniors.

Members of both Commissions have passed resolutions approving this recommendation. Now we need your help. We request that you approve this \$5,250 subsidy to eliminate the ADA compliance issues and cost inequities associated with the current Senior Taxi Services.

Thank you for your consideration, especially during these difficult economic times.



Chet Avery, Chair
Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities



Donald Fowler, Chair
Alexandria Commission on Aging

- cc: Rich Baier, Director, Transportation and Environmental Services
- Debra Collins, Director, Department of Human Services
- Jack Powers, Director, Community Programs, DHS
- MaryAnn Griffin, Director, Office on Aging and Adult Services
- Grace Lynch, Senior Services
- Members, Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities
- Members, Alexandria Commission on Aging