

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 27, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER *J*

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #114 : QUESTIONS REGARDING THE FISCAL IMPACT OF A SUBSIDIZED TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM FOR CITY RESIDENTS 75 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER

This memorandum responds to a request from Councilman Gaines to provide the fiscal impact of a subsidized transportation program for City residents aged 75 years and older that provides for reduced taxi fares by allowing seniors to purchase a \$20 book of vouchers for half price, at \$10. This would be modeled after Arlington County's Super Senior Taxi program. Also, this memo contains a comparison of the current City of Alexandria subsidy and Arlington County's program.

The Alexandria Office of Aging and Adult Services offers door-to-door bus service for Alexandrians aged 60 and over to attend senior centers, to shop, and to participate in excursions. This service is free, although a 50 cent donation is requested for each one-way trip. Reservations are handled through the Department of Human Services, Office of Aging and Adult Services (OAAS).

OAAS also contracts with Senior Services of Alexandria to offer Senior Taxi Service. For \$1.50 each way, elderly Alexandrians may use the Senior Taxi for trips to medical appointments and for grocery shopping. According to staff at OAAS, this population is happy with this arrangement. Disabled Alexandrians are served through the DOT program, which will not be discussed here. During the public hearing on the budget, Senior Services of Alexandria requested a total of \$200,000 for its estimated cost to operate the Senior Taxi program in FY 2006. The City Manager's proposed budget provides \$186,883.

The Super Senior Program is available to Arlington County residents age 75 and over only. The trips taken in this program must originate or end in Arlington County and the participants must use coupons instead of cash. The coupons are only sold at a Commuter Store (locations in Balston Mall, Crystal City or at the Rosslyn Metro) or online. The tickets are sold in books of 20

tickets for \$10 each. A person may purchase only up to 10 books per year. The tickets are used in lieu of cash. By limiting the number of books to 10 per person each year, unexpected trips can become a financial problem for fixed-income seniors who would have to pay the full fare once their tickets are gone. A participant must register with the Arlington Agency on Aging and wait to receive an order form and a welcome information packet from the Agency prior to using this discounted service.

There have been conversations between the Alexandria Commission on Aging and the Alexandria Commission on Persons with Disabilities as to whether or not Alexandria might switch to this type of plan. Staff reports neither commission would like to implement a voucher program as they believe it would impose an unnecessary burden on seniors.

A comparison of the current City program and the County's programs would be comparing apples to oranges. The Alexandria program is more comprehensive and easier for seniors to use. Switching to the Arlington system would be a significant curtailment of service to seniors. However, something like Arlington's voucher system does offer a better alternative for controlling rising costs due to its more significant cost sharing and limitation of usage by individuals.