

Montgomery County Commission on Aging  
Summer Study Report on Transportation  
September 2008

The Summer Study on Transportation is pleased to submit the following report to the Transportation work session as it prepares for the Senior Leadership Summit.

The Commission on Aging believes it is critical for seniors in Montgomery County to have transportation options in order to maintain a mobile lifestyle and age in place. In an effort to achieve this, during our Summer Study, we undertook a rather extensive analysis of current and potential programs and services available to County residents. We learned the following:

- In addition to Metro Access, there are approximately 68 public and private programs that currently provide transportation to seniors. The attached chart describes those services that are funded by the County plus a small sampling of private services. The remaining services available are either private car services for which there is a substantial fee, or faith-based groups that operate on a voluntary basis for members of their community.
- The actual number of seniors who are served is not clear because of the varying ways in which programs compile their records – either by trips or by numbers of seniors.
- In addition to Metro Access, the County currently spends \$6,198,748 on transportation for seniors:
  - \$5,279,879 million for Call N Ride (Taxi Vouchers) and \$153,000 for Connect-a-Ride (see next bullet) are in the Department of Transportation budget.
  - \$579,174 for Senior Programs Transportation; \$18,000 for Escorted Transportation; \$105,695 for Senior Connection; and \$63,000 for the American Red Cross; \$765,869 are in the Department of Health and Human Services budget.
- The only program within the County that operates as a helpline, assisting seniors in determining which services are appropriate for them, is Connect-A-Ride (CAR), a program of the Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA) supported in large part by the County. JCA operates CAR as an information and referral program fielding over 5,000 calls last year and made 4,025 referrals. Of the 5,000 calls, nearly 2,000 calls came from seniors who, in seeking transportation information, called the Ride On Transit Information Center to which CAR is linked. .
- Among the concerns identified by the program providers contacted during the Summer Study are:

- 1) The need for low cost or free escorted services for those who are confused or frail. A substantial number of private pay escorted options are available.
- 2) The difficulty in finding volunteers to drive for those programs utilizing volunteers.
- 3) Lack of awareness by seniors of existing program availability.
- 4) Inability to serve all those who are in need for a variety of reasons including:
  - a) Inability to provide a subsidy for those who cannot afford to pay
  - b) Short-term notifications of need are often not met since people are often unaware that many of the lower cost or volunteer driver options for medical transportation have a notice or application period of at least 3 days to 2 weeks.
  - c) Insufficient number of low cost programs with vehicles that accommodate wheel chairs.
- 5) Lack of understanding by seniors of how to effectively access available services.
- 6) Seniors have a preference for cars and small vans rather than buses, a preference that appears to be confirmed since only 3% of Ride-On riders are seniors and persons with disabilities despite it being a free service for both of those populations.

Furthermore, during the summer of 2008, members of the Commission on Aging , Access to Health Care Committee, conducted site visits and interviewed the discharge planners at each of the five hospitals located in the County. Difficulties for seniors in obtaining transportation to and from the hospital and for medical appointments was identified as a major issue by each facility.

In addition to our research on existing services in the County, the Summer Study Group also contacted ITNAmerica, the *Independent Transportation Network*, a program that operates out of Portland, Maine, which provides technical assistance to communities that wish to become affiliates. Attached is a report of that research.

In conclusion, the COA Summer Study on Transportation is concerned about the fact that few seniors appear to know what is available, as well as the fragmentation and lack of coordination of existing services currently being offered. At the same time, we do not feel that we have sufficient data about either the costs that are currently being expended to provide services or the extent of unmet needs.

With more accurate information about both of these factors, we believe the County will be able to determine the feasibility and cost effectiveness of creating an effective senior transportation program that includes both coordination and provision of services. The question is which of two alternatives would result in an effective program - expanding the capacity of existing programs, including the information and referral component, or creating a new program, based on something similar to the ITNAmerica model, that would include both coordination and provision of transportation services. Therefore, we recommend that a study, coordinated through HHS, be undertaken to evaluate these two alternatives.

Attachments:

ITN interviews 8/08

Survey of selected transportation providers 8/08