

**AGING IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE  
OF THE  
COMMISSION ON AGING**

Date: March 9, 2021

9:30am-11:30 am

Virtual Meeting Topic “Transportation Services for Older Adults”

**In Attendance:** Monica Schaeffer (co-chair, AIC), Wayne Berman (co-chair, AIC), Barbara Selter, Nanine Meiklejohn, Marsha Weber, Richard Jourdenais, Miriam Kelty, Eddie Rivas, Joyce Dubow, Karon Phillips,

**Staff:** Shawn Brennan, Pazit Aviv, Marcia Pruzan, Dr. Patrice McGhee

**Guests:** Monique Gardner (liaison for Arthur Williams), Sara Fought (JCA), Sam Oji, Denise Israel (MC DOT), Khalid Afzal and David Anspacher (MC Planning)

**Opening Remarks from the Co-Chairs:** Monica and Wayne welcomed everyone and Wayne reviewed the agenda and focus for the meeting. The focus of the meeting was on Transportation Services for Older Adults and had four invited guest speakers: Shawn Brennan (Mobility Manager for MC), David Anspacher and Khalid Afzal from the MC Department of Planning; Sam Oji from the MC Department of Transportation; and Sara Fought from the Jewish Council for the Aging.

**Approval of the Minutes:** The minutes of the February 9<sup>th</sup> meeting were provisionally approved pending revisions suggested by Nanine Meiklejohn. Once these revisions are made, the minutes will be sent out to everyone for approval via e-mail.

**PRESENTATIONS ON TRANSPORTATION**

**Overview from Shawn Brennan, Mobility Manager for MC:**

Shawn talked about the important role that the Commission on Aging (CoA) plays in being an advocate and supporter of transportation services for older adults in Montgomery County. She spoke of the integral part that transportation plays in the success of programs for older adults in Montgomery County. It is important to all programs that transportation services be available, accessible, affordable, acceptable, and convenient to older adults. Transportation services support the Village Movement. New transportation initiatives impact older adults and need to be thought through. The CoA is the voice that identifies impacts as well as voices concerns, especially regarding transportation for older adults.

**Presentation from Khalid Afzal and David Anspacher, MC Department of Planning:**

Khalid and David presented the Transportation and Communications Network chapter of the THRIVE 2050 Plan for Montgomery County. The THRIVE 2050 plan is an update of Montgomery County’s current master plan. Khalid gave an overview of the rationale for the THRIVE 2050 plan saying that it was needed because of recent demographic shifts, climate change, technological innovations, economic disruptions, and lifestyle changes that impacted the County. The plan is meant to address these issues as well as improve economic health, community equity, and environmental resilience in the County. David then spoke to the Transportation and Communications chapter of the THRIVE 2050 plan. The chapter envisions how the transportation system

will address the challenges of economic health, equity, and environmental resilience. The chapter identifies four overarching policies designed to address the challenges:

- Develop a safe, comfortable and irresistible network for walking, biking, and rolling.
- Build a world-class transit system.
- Adapt policies to reflect the economic and environmental costs of driving alone. and
- Develop and extend advanced communications networks

The Planning Board is currently reviewing the revised draft of the THRIVE 2050 plan. The Plan will be published on April 8 and then sent to the County Council for review. Public Hearings on the Plan are anticipated by late May. In addition, David mentioned that an “Age Readiness Plan” will be developed to supplement the TFRIVE 2050 plan.

The follow-up questions from the Commissioners focused on matters such as rural transportation, equating aging with disabilities, the meaning of the word “rolling”, seating at bus stops, remedies to mitigate speed, the transition to the concepts of the new plan, and how can the CoA be involved as the plan moves to finalization.

### **Presentation from Sam Oji, MC Department of Transportation:**

Sam gave an overview of a wide array of transportation services for Older Adults that are provided by Montgomery County. The programs reviewed included:

- Call-N-Ride: The program provides discounted taxi services that provide mobility for low-income seniors as well as food delivery services. The service currently has 7,608 riders, 70% are seniors.
- Same Day Access: This is an ADA/Paratransit Subsidy program for certified Montgomery County Metro Access participants. It provides same-day taxi services.
- Program Transportation Services for seniors: The service is presently suspended due to Covid. The program is working with the Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA).
- Fixed Route Transportation Services for seniors. The program provides a reduced fare structure for seniors and people with disabilities using Ride-On Buses. Seating is drastically reduced during the pandemic.
- The Flex: This is an innovative on-demand, curb-to-curb and corner-to-corner App-based scheduled service utilizing small buses. The pilot program started in June of 2019 in the Rockville and Glenmont/Wheaton areas. It is presently suspended due to the pandemic, but will resume in late spring 2021. This service will improve with a call center and more convenient stops. A third zone will begin in July, 2022 with service in Silver Spring.
- The Flash: This is a new express bus service, using large buses with limited stops. At present, it operates in the Route 29 Corridor from Burtonsville to Silver Spring. There are plans to expand this service to other corridors in the County such as Veirs Mill Road and Route 355. The Flash uses fare boxes outside the buses (similar to Metro) to improve the “rapidness” function of the bus service.

Sam did discuss a new grant for a “Training Bus” that will travel the County to teach people how to use and navigate the transportation services offered by the County. A travel training video is also being produced with the JCA, to support the training bus as well as for other public events. Sam was open to have the CoA participate in the review of the video once it is produced. Sam also noted a Ride-on Route restructuring initiative that the CoA can participate in later this year.

### **Presentation from Sara Fought of the Jewish Council for the Aging (JCA):**

Sara gave an overview of the JCA and spoke briefly about the relationship with the County in providing transportation services to older adults. She spoke about the following programs offered by the JCA for older adults in the County.

- Connect-a-Ride: This program provides free information to help older adults with disabilities find transportation services. It refers callers to public, private, and volunteer services that are tailored to their needs. Travel training workshops are offered too. The program offers assistance with completing

applications to other services like Call-N-Ride and MetroAccess. The program has been operating throughout the pandemic. The JCA is working with HHS to help with travel to vaccinations sites.

- **Escorted Transportation:** The program serves eligible low-income County residents who are unable to travel alone due to physical, cognitive or emotional impairments. The service utilizes private drivers for transportation to medical appointments, grocery stores, and other destinations. The ride duration is up to 3 hours.
- **Village Rides:** This program supports community, such as Villages, with their volunteer transportation needs. It provides web-based software to maintain member and volunteer profiles facilitate scheduling ride requests, and streamline reporting and communications. Other support includes reimbursements for driver and MVA criminal and background screening costs, marketing and outreach, and annual volunteer surveys.
- **Elder Buses:** The JCA offers handicapped accessible bus services to take seniors to various senior centers in the County. Seniors must live within 3 miles of a center. While the Senior Centers have been closed during the pandemic, the buses deliver Senior Nutrition meals. The JCA operates 12 buses seating 20 passengers. Each bus can accommodate up to two wheelchairs.

Following her presentation, and a few questions, Sara indicated that an important role for the CoA would be to help promote services like Connect-a-Ride, especially now as more people need vaccinations.

### **COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND ITEMS FOR FUTURE ACTION**

Following the presentations, a robust AIC Committee discussion took place on the important role of transportation and actions that the CoA might take in support. Wayne recommended that the CoA / AIC be actively engaged in the development of the “Age Readiness Plan” of the County, Public Hearings on the THRIVE 2050 Plan, and the new Transportation Training video being prepared by the JCA and the County. There was a sense that transportation needs to be on the list of CoA’s budget priorities for next year. Eddie indicated that transportation needs to be part of the budget requests and advocacy from the CoA. Miriam expressed the need for support and expansion of the County’s Flex Program for more door-to-door service. Miriam also spoke of the need for more transportation to the County’s Rec Centers and to loosening the income requirements for the County’s Call-N-Ride program. It was also noted that the THRIVE 2050 Plan needs to better address low emission and autonomous vehicles. There was also a discussion about insensitive bus driver behavior towards seniors.

It was the desire of the AIC to actively engage in the public hearings for the THRIVE 2050 Plan and to help review the upcoming County/JCA video Training Video on Transportation.

**UPCOMING MEETING:** The next AIC meeting will be held on April Tuesday, April 13 at 9:30 am. We will continue our discussion from February on Housing and we will begin a conversation on Food Insecurity with a speaker from the County.

**MEETING ADJOURNED:** 11:40 am