AGING IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of the March 12, 2024, Meeting
9:30 am to 11:30 am

"Transportation Services for Older Adults in MoCo – Update on Programs, Services, and Challenges"

Call to order: Meeting called to order at 9:30AM

Commissioners In Attendance: Wayne Berman (co-chair), Betsy Carrier (co-Chair), Laurie Pross, Mary Sweeney, Mona Grieser, David Engel, Linda Bergofsky, Kate Stein, Barbara Selter, Joyce Dubow, Bob Levey

Staff: Pazit Aviv, MoCo; Shawn Brennan, MoCo; Peter Flandrau, MoCo;

Guests: Deanna Archey, (MCDOT); Gerard Etienne, (MCDOT); Walton Harris (MCDOT); Faisal Khan (MCDOT); Denise Israel (MCDOT); Sara Swarr (MC Dept of Recreation); Sarah Fought, (JCA, Jewish Council for the Aging)

OPENNING REMARKS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS: Wayne and Betsy welcomed everyone and introduced today's meeting and the featured presenters. Today's meeting focused on one of the key needs of older adults in Montgomery County. The meeting's featured topic is "Transportation Services for Older Adults in Montgomery County" – Update on Program, Services, and Challenges." Our panel of speakers will address this topic from several perspectives. The panel features Denise Isreal, Walt Harris, and Deanna Archey representing the Montgomery County DOT; Sara Fought of the JCA. The agenda for the panel session is as follows:

- MCDOT Outreach Activities & Program Updates, including Call-and-Ride, Same Day Access, and Metro Access, – Denise Isreal & Faisal Kahn
- Outcomes from the Ride-on Reimagined Study – Deanna Archey
- Great Seneca Transit Network – Deanna Archey
- Recreation Transportation Issues – Sara Swarr & Deanna Archey
- Update on the FY23 TSM Operating and Capital Grant Programs – Walton Harris
- JCA Program Updates & Travel Training Program – Sara Fought
- Age Friendly Transportation Perspective – Shawn Brennan
- Questions and Answer.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES: The minutes for the February 13th, AIC meeting was reviewed and approved.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSIONS:
After the opening remarks, Denise Israel and Faisal Khan reviewed the activity in four outreach program areas that support transportation of older adults.
1. The Call-n-Ride and Same Day Access Program:
   - Call-n-Ride (CNR) Program provides transportation subsidy assistance to County residents on a sliding fee scale determined by household income. The service helps transport low-income seniors (63 years and older) and individuals with disabilities (aged 18-62) to medical and/or personal appointments.
   - Participants' subsidy levels range from 50% - 91.3%; determined by household income. Participants receive up to $120 value (individual payment + County's subsidy) on their County-issued swipe card each month for taxi rides.

- The Same Day Access (SDA) Transportation Program is part of CNR Program, designed specifically to provide subsidized transportation assistance to current Montgomery County Metro Access clients. There is no income requirement for this program. Participants receive up to $60 value ($30 individual payment + $30 County's subsidy)
- In fiscal year 2023, 445 new participants joined the CNR program totaling approximately 5500. The program provided 93568 trips to program participants.
- In fiscal year 2023, eligible senior age limit was decreased from 65 to 63, and annual income limit was increased in each household category for more seniors to become part of the program.

2. The Medicaid Transportation Program:
   - The Medical Assistance Transportation grant program provides transportation services for Montgomery County Residents who are Medical Assistance recipients and need transportation to access medically necessary services.
   - This program provides "last resort" transportation for ambulatory, wheelchair and stretcher-bound recipients who have no other means of transportation available to get to and from medical appointments, or whose medical or physical needs prevent them from using such available transportation and have no other available transportation or are physically unable to utilize other existing transportation services.
   - In fiscal year 2023, there were 2402 participants in the Medicaid Transportation Program. The program provided 65561 trips to the clients.
3. The Metro Access Program:
   - MetroAccess is a shared-ride, door-to-door service for people who generally cannot use public transportation due to a disability. It is available seven days a week.
   - Fares are calculated at twice the fastest fixed route equivalent fare, with a maximum fare of $4.00 per one-way trip.
   - Riders must schedule trips no later than 4:30 p.m. the day before the trip.
   - Conditionally certified MetroAccess users can ride free on Metrorail, Metrobus and Ride On.
   - Applying for MetroAccess certification requires medical information and an in-person assessment. (A ride to the appointment is available if needed.) Call 202-962-2700 and press 5 for information about program eligibility.
4. The Medical Assistance Transportation Grant Program
   - The Medical Assistance Transportation grant program provides transportation services for Montgomery County Residents who are Medical Assistance recipients and need transportation to access medically necessary services.
   - This program provides "last resort" transportation for ambulatory, wheelchair and stretcher-bound recipients who have no other means of transportation available to get to and from medical appointments, or whose medical or physical needs prevent them from using such available transportation and have no other available transportation or are physically unable to utilize other existing transportation services.
   - In fiscal year 2023, there were 2402 participants in the Medicaid Transportation Program. The program provided 65561 trips to the clients.

Both Denise and Faisal talked about the extensive County effort to promote and help older adults use these programs. Lots of questions followed their presentation.

Our next presenters were Deanna Archey and Sara Swarr. Deanna reviewed the status and draft outcomes of the Ride-on Reimagined Study that looked at more efficient and effective bus routing and scheduling service improvements. MCDOT held many community meetings through which they got input from many residents and community groups. The result is a series of significant changes to routing and service changes that will be implemented over the next several years. Deanna also spoke about the plans for the Great Seneca Transit Corridor and how the bus only service will support the growing Life Science Corridor.

Then Deanna talked about the innovative Ride-on Flex service that is an App-based, on-demand small bus service. MCDOT's new on demand transit service helps you get around in defined Rockville and Glenmont/Wheaton zones. Ride On Flex has no fixed stops or fixed schedules – it comes when you book a ride during regular service hours. Best of all, you pay only standard Ride On fare to ride Flex—no more than $1! Flex:
- connects riders in the zones to transit hubs, commercial centers, public services—and home.
- uses Ride-on Flex mobile and a new call center option for booking all rides.
- features brand-new 11 passenger buses with wheelchair accessibility and free WiFi.
- accepts reservations only for same-day, on demand service—you are offered the next available time.
- accepts ride requests to and from any location within the serviced zone, **including curb to curb for those with disabilities**.
- **a new call center option if no smartphone or a special need; call 240-301-3842**
- takes only cash and SmarTrip® cards, passes and tokens.
- **a 2020 National Association of Counties (NACo) Innovation Award Winner**

Following Deanna's presentation, Sara Swarr from the MoCo Department of Recreation spoke about the problems that the Senior Centers are having with the WMATA Metro Access buses. Many MetroAccess buses arrive very late or do not show up at all, leaving older adults waiting long periods of time or searching for back-up / emergency rides. Often, older adults must remain on the bus for long periods of times as the bus goes through it routing. This is also a problem for Ride-on buses that service the Senior Centers. These problems are exasperated when a wheelchair access vehicle is needed for transporting an older adult. There seem to be a lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the County. There were lots of questions for Sara and Deanna about this problem. Many AIC members felt that bus service improvements for older adults to recreation centers need to be made. In addition, the AIC talked about the need for some kind of emergency transportation service to supplement MetroAccess or Ride-on in order to prevent people from being stranded or waiting excessive amounts of time for transportation.

Our next presenter was Walton Harris. Walton talked about the FY23 Targeted and Specialized Mobility Grant Program that provides funding from the Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF) to Montgomery County nonprofit organizations who work to provide transportation, and transportation related services, to individuals who are disabled, seniors, and individuals with limited incomes. These three targeted population groups are the same groups that County law specifies must be served by this fund.

In the fiscal year 2023 budget, the Montgomery County Council approved $800,000 to establish a capital and operating grant program at a dollar ratio of $4 to $1. This means that of the $800,000 that was approved, $640,000 was dedicated to capital projects, while $160,000 was directed for operational needs of nonprofit organizations. The Department of Transportation, working closely with the recently established Office of Grants Management created the grant application process, as well as the parameters for the grant program. More that 30 grant proposals were reviewed, and the department chose 23 organizations to award grant funding. Some examples are as follows:

- One of the operating grants include a $30,000 reimbursement award to Rainbow Community Development Center for a food pantry. This organization worked to provide food deliveries and distributions to two housing complexes for seniors with limited incomes. At Arbor Crest Senior Apartments and Victory Crossing Senior Apartments, the nonprofit organization provided a total of four food distribution events and provided service for more than 500 seniors. The organization was also able to provide more than 20 individual grocery deliveries to both seniors and individuals who were disabled.
- The Arc Montgomery, another nonprofit service partner, also received a grant reimbursement award in the amount of $30,000. The Arc Montgomery was able to use these funds to provide transportation nearly 200 individuals with intellectual disabilities. These transportation trips included social, recreational, employment, independent living skill building exercises (i.e., grocery shopping) and medical trips. In total, the Arc Montgomery provided nearly 12,000 trips.
- On the Capital grant side, The Senior Connection of Montgomery County was provided a grant reimbursement award of $45,000 to acquire a wheelchair accessible vehicle to provide transportation for Montgomery County seniors. Again, more robust reporting numbers will be available in August, but as of the organization's December mid-year statement, they had provided nearly 100 trips to seniors to various locations in the County. These could include houses of worship, recreational activities, and medical appointments.
- Winter Growth, a nonprofit organization located in Olney also received a $45,000 grant reimbursement to acquire a wheelchair accessible vehicle. This organization provides adult medical daycare to seniors and adults who are disabled. As of their mid-year report, the organization has provided nearly 125 trips to approximately 50 program participants.

Some of the other organizations that received capital grant funding include Identity Inc. or Identity of Montgomery County which purchase a shuttle van to provide transportation service to recreational events for at-risk youth from households with limited incomes, the Jewish Social Service Agency for the purchase of a wheelchair accessible van to transport seniors to and from medical appointments, and Vietnamese American Services which purchased a 12-passenger vehicle with a sidestep entry way to allow seniors easy entry onto the vehicle. Vietnamese American Services or VAS uses the vehicle to transport seniors to adult daycare activities and to Senior Club meetings.

The department will begin the process of reviewing grants for the FY24 Enhanced Mobility Grant Program later this month with reimbursement awards to be made in mid-to-late April. That program has similar funding levels as the FY 23 Enhance and Mobility Grant Program.

Our next presenter was Sara Fought of the JCA. Sara talked about the JCA Transportation and Mobility Program and associated outreach efforts. She spoke about four main programs.
1. Connect-a-Ride Program: This program provides free information about senior transportation in the County. This includes referrals for public, private, volunteer, subsidized options; assistance with applications; and translation services. Also provide under this program are:
    a. Travel Training workshops.
    b. Classroom session.
    c. Group Ride-on and Metro rail rides.
    d. Senior SmarTrip Cards provided.
    e. Educational presentations around the County, at County locations and Senior Buildings
2. The Escorted Transportation Service Program. This program provides rides for Montgomery County residents unable to travel alone. The key requirements for using the program ae:
    a. Doctors sign off required.
    b. Income eligibility requirements
    c. Clients pay on a sliding scale based on income.

    This program enables individuals to retain independence/remain in their home by providing rides to medical appointments and other places. Sara noted that there is a dearth of certified private providers leads to scheduling challenges making it impossible to support all requests.

3. The VillageRides Program. The JCA is partnering with 12 community organizations with volunteer driver programs. The program is helping the 12 community partners provide volunteer rides for seniors along with other services. The program provide this community organizations with:
   a. Access to ride scheduling platform.
   b. Reimbursement for background checks and ride subsidies
   c. Marketing material
4. The Elder Bus Program. This program provides shuttle service to 6 senior / recreation centers:
   a. Holiday Park
   b. Long Branch
   c. North Potomac
   d. Schweinhaut
   e. White Oak
   f. Damascus

Our final presenter was Shawn Brennan, representing the Age-Friendly Transportation Domain group. Shawn recommended that the AIC become advocates for better transportation services for older adults. She offered three areas of need for advocacy:
1. The need for more and better on-demand services,
2. The need to improve Metro Access services, especially for service to Senior Rec Centers;
3. The need for an advocate to WMATA to push for improvements to these services.

Following all the presentation there was lots of time for questions and a lively discussion. Much of the conversation centered around the need to more and better quality on-demand transportation services and the problems with WMATA – MetroAccess services, particularly to senior recreational centers. One other area of discussion was the need for better programs to handle emergency transportation needs for older adults and people with disabilities to enable them to get to and from activities or appointments when there is an unexpected problem or emergency.

BUSNESS MEETING: As time was limited, a short business meeting followed at which the these items were discussed:
- Pazit gave a brief update of County and Village activities, that also included and update on legislation and funding for the Hub-and-Spoke model.
- The Committee discussed idea for the next AIC meeting to be Volunteer / Employment Services for Older Adults

UPCOMING MEETING: Our next meeting is planned for Tuesday, April 9, 2024. The featured topic will be on Volunteer / Employment Services for Older Adults

MEETING ADJOURNED: Motion was made and seconded to adjourn meeting at 11:35 am