



MEMORANDUM REPORT

July 26, 2005

TO: County Council

FROM: Scott Brown, Legislative Analyst *SB*
Karen Yoskowitz, Research Assistant *KY*
Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: OLO Memorandum Report 2005-8: Implementation of Council Actions on OLO Report 2002-2 (*Transportation Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities*)

This memorandum report responds to the Council's request to review whether the Council's recommendations for action on previous years' OLO projects have been implemented. This report reviews the implementation status of Council recommendations arising from OLO Report 2002-2, *Transportation Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities*.

The report is organized as follows:

Part A, Introduction , describes the scope of OLO's assignment and methodology for completing the memorandum report.	Page 2
Part B, Overview of OLO Report 2002-2 , summarizes the key findings contained in OLO Report 2002-2.	Page 2
Part C, Summary of Legislative Action , summarizes the Council's action taken on OLO Report 2002-2.	Page 3
Part D, Executive Branch's Implementation Plan , describes the Executive Branch's plan to address the Council's recommendations on OLO Report 2002-2.	Page 4
Part E, Current Implementation Status , describes the implementation status of items contained in the Chief Administrative Officer's 2002 plan to improve transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.	Page 6
Part F, Discussion Issues , provides recommended issues for a joint Health and Human Services and Transportation and Environment Committee discussion.	Page 9

Office of Legislative Oversight

100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20850, 240/777-7990, FAX 240/777-7879

Printed on Recycled Paper



PART A: INTRODUCTION

Authority. Council Resolution 15-710, FY 2005 Work Program of the Office of Legislative Oversight, adopted July 27, 2004.

Scope of Report. Following its review of OLO Report 2002-2 in July 2002, the Council requested the Chief Administrative Officer to establish a plan to improve transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.

This follow-up project describes the implementation status of items outlined in the plan, as contained in a November 12, 2002 memorandum from the Chief Administrative Officer (see ©1) to the Chairs of the Council's Transportation and Environment Committee and Health and Human Services Committee.

Methodology and Acknowledgements. OLO gathered information for this project through document reviews and interviews with Executive Branch staff from the Department of Public Works and Transportation and Department of Health and Human Services. OLO also spoke with staff from the Jewish Council for the Aging's Connect-A-Ride program. OLO circulated a draft of this Memorandum Report to Department staff. The report incorporates the technical edits received.

OLO greatly appreciates the time and valuable contributions made by Carolyn Biggins, Department of Public Works and Transportation; Dr. John (Jay) Kenney, Department of Health and Human Services; and Harriet Shapiro, Jewish Council for the Aging.

PART B: OVERVIEW OF OLO REPORT 2002-2

OLO Report 2002-2 described County-funded transportation options for seniors and people with disabilities in Montgomery County. In sum, the report found that:

- People who cannot drive confront problems accomplishing many everyday routines. Left unresolved, a lack of mobility can lead to isolation, a decline in health, and a reduced quality of life.
- Seniors and people with disabilities rely on different means of transport, including family and friends, volunteers, private service providers, and publicly funded services.
- The Council appropriated \$3.7 million in FY02 for an array of transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities, including \$2.5 million for curb-to-curb transportation, \$806K for fixed route Ride On transportation, \$211K for assisted/escorted transportation, and \$186K for transportation information services.

- County-supported programs augment a set of State-funded transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities. The State funds Metro fixed route bus and rail service, which offers reduced fares and accessible buses and trains. The State also funds MetroAccess and Medicaid Transportation, and supports the County Ride On's Call-N-Ride program.
- Formal assessments that quantify the unmet transportation needs of seniors and people with disabilities are limited and insufficient for making data-driven policy and budget decisions.

OLO Report 2002-2 stated that because a single department does not deliver all transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities, policy and budget decision-making on this issue was dispersed among several County departments and Council Committees. The report's recommendations aimed to enhance Council decision-making about the array of transportation services available to seniors and people with disabilities.

PART C: SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE ACTION

The joint Health and Human Services and Transportation and Environment Committee (HHS/T&E) held two worksessions on OLO Report 2002-2. At the joint Committee's initial worksession (held on March 14, 2002), discussion focused on the need for a systemic approach to transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities. The joint Committee also agreed to meet again in the summer of 2002 to discuss:

- Goals and priorities for future funding of transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities;
- Strategies to facilitate a systemic approach to transportation services (e.g., one stop information source);
- Available data on transportation needs of seniors and people with disabilities and outstanding data needs; and
- Measuring the quality and effectiveness of the existing transportation program/services for seniors and people with disabilities.

On June 20, 2002, the joint Committee discussed the above issues and recommended that the County Council request the Chief Administrative Officer to provide the Council with a plan to:

- **Recommendation #1:** Establish a transportation coordinator to encourage a more proactive, systemic, and focused approach to transportation services;
- **Recommendation #2:** Develop a "one stop" source of transportation information and assistance to simplify the information gathering process for seniors and people with disabilities; and
- **Recommendation #3:** Update the role of the Paratransit Advisory Group to provide policy guidance in this service area.

The joint Committee also recommended that the CAO's plan indicate the appropriate organizational location of these functions. On July 11, 2002, the County Council endorsed the recommendations of the joint HHS/T&E Committee.

PART D: EXECUTIVE BRANCH'S IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

On November 12, 2002, the CAO transmitted a memorandum to the Chairs of the Transportation and Environment Committee and Health and Human Services Committee outlining the Executive Branch's plan to address the Council's recommendations. The CAO's memorandum is attached at ©1.

In sum, the CAO did not concur with the Council's recommendation to establish a transportation coordinator for seniors and people with disabilities. Specifically, his memo states:

"...since information and referral is just one component of the transportation needs for these two groups [seniors and people with disabilities], we do not believe a Transportation Coordinator is warranted for that sole purpose."

However, the CAO did concur with the Council's recommendations to develop a "one stop" source of information for seniors and people with disabilities and to update the Paratransit Advisory Group as a policy advisory group. The rest of this section summarizes the CAO's plan to implement these two Council recommendations as outlined in his November 12 memorandum.

Multi-year Plan for One Stop Information. In his memo, the CAO stated the he has developed a "staged, multi-year plan for consolidation of all information and referral resources concerning transportation for seniors and people with disabilities." The plan called for the following seven action items to be completed in FY03 and FY04:

1. Move DHHS' contract for the Connect-A-Ride¹ service to DPWT. The plan also called for an assessment of the Connect-A-Ride contract to determine if their services could be assimilated into the one stop shop.
2. Locate all information and outreach for transportation for seniors and people with disabilities with DPWT's Transit Information Center, which provides transit information on all fixed route services.
3. Relocate DPWT's paratransit staff from Holiday Park Seniors Center to the Executive Office Building.

¹ The Jewish Council for the Aging is designated as the entity for the non-competitive contract award for Connect-A-Ride. Connect-A-Ride staff disseminate information to seniors seeking transportation services throughout the County. Connect-A-Ride staff answer questions, refer callers to appropriate transportation providers, and help seniors and people with disabilities access transportation services.

4. Reprogram and upgrade the Transit Information Center's phone system (240-777-RIDE) to direct a customer for either fixed route or paratransit services.
5. Employ a bilingual Client Assistance Specialist to provide information to callers.
6. Design and publish brochures and print media in various languages on transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.
7. Discuss the consolidation of transportation programs into one organizational unit.

Paratransit Advisory Group. In his memo, the CAO states that the Paratransit Advisory Group was re-established as the Transportation Committee on Seniors and People with Disabilities to provide a policy/guidance role. The group became (and remains) the formal coordination structure for the County Government's transportation services to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Co-chaired by the Chief of the Division of Transit and the Chief of Aging and Disability Services, the Committee provides policy guidance on transportation services to seniors and persons with disabilities to the Director of DPWT and the Director of DHHS. The Committee consists of representatives from DPWT's Division of Transit Services, DHHS' Aging and Disability Services, the Commission on Aging, the Commission on Persons with Disabilities, and non-profit organizations.

DPWT and DHHS staff also report that other mechanisms exist to facilitate coordination and communication. Division of Transit staff and DHHS staff attend monthly meetings of the Commission on Aging and the Commission on People with Disabilities. The Senior Initiative Coordinating group, chaired by an Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, is tasked with coordinating all senior programs across County Government, including programs/services provided by DPWT's Division of Transit Services and DHHS' Aging and Disability Services.

Part E: CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION STATUS

This section details the current implementation status of the seven action items (1 through 7) listed in Section D of this memorandum report. The table below summarizes the overall status; and detailed information on the implementation of each action item follows.

Action Item		Implementation Status
#1A	Move DHHS' contract for the Connect-A-Ride service to DPWT	Completed
#1B	Assess whether Connect-A-Ride services can be assimilated into the one stop shop	Completed
#2	Locate all information/outreach for seniors/people with disabilities with DPWT's Transit Information Center	Completed
#3	Relocate DPWT's paratransit staff from Holiday Park Seniors Center to the Executive Office Building	Completed
#4	Upgrade Transit Information Center's phone system to direct a customer for either fixed route or paratransit services	Completed
#5	Employ a bilingual Client Assistance Specialist to provide information to callers	Not Completed
#6	Design and publish brochures and print media in various languages	Ongoing
#7	Discuss the consolidation of transportation of programs into one organizational unit	Completed

Status of Action Item #1A: Move DHHS' contract for the Connect-A-Ride service to DPWT

In October 2003, the Chief Administrative Officer transitioned the contract for the Connect-A-Ride service from DHHS to DPWT. DPWT, DHHS, and Connect-A-Ride staff interviewed report no obvious disadvantages to the transition. All interviewees report that Connect-A-Ride is now a member of the County's "information and referral family."

Status of Action Item #1B: Assess whether Connect-A-Ride services can be assimilated into the one stop shop

The Executive Branch's assessment in October 2003 recommended not assimilating Connect-A-Ride services into DPWT's Transit Information Center (the one stop shop). In sum, the assessment concluded that it was more effective and efficient for the County Government to continue to coordinate with Connect-A-Ride in the provision of transportation services to seniors and people with disabilities.

As part of the assessment, Executive Branch also examined the feasibility of establishing Connect-A-Ride as the one stop shop. It was determined that Connect-A-Ride's telephone system and hours of operation (9 am to 3pm) limit Connect-A-Ride's ability to perform this role.

Status of Action Item #2: Locate all information/outreach for seniors and people with disabilities with DPWT's Transit Information Center

With the transition of responsibility for the Connect-A-Ride contract to DPWT, the primary contact for information and outreach on transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities lies with DPWT's Transit Information Center. The Transit Information Center is a part of DPWT's Customer and Community Relations Unit.

Status of Action Item #3: Relocate DPWT's paratransit staff from Holiday Park Seniors Center to the Executive Office Building.

Paratransit staff moved to the Executive Office Building in May 2003. Staff report that relocation has facilitated better information sharing internally among transportation staff, and externally with Recreation staff and Health and Human Services staff on transportation issues affecting seniors and people with disabilities.

DPWT staff cite Program Transportation as an example of a program that requires inter-departmental coordination. Program Transportation provides transportation to seniors and people with disabilities during the mid-day from a person's home to a senior center, a community center, and/or grocery store. While DPWT manages a contract with First Transit to provide the service via Ride On buses during off-peak hours, DHHS staff coordinate trips to grocery stores, and Recreation staff coordinate trips to senior and community centers.

Status of Action Item #4: Employ a bilingual Client Assistance Specialist to provide information to callers

Division of Transit Services staff report that due to budget restrictions, no bilingual Client Assistance Specialist has been employed to date. However, the Division has some capacity to communicate with limited English proficient persons. For example, Spanish speaking callers are referred to other available bilingual staff within the Division.

Status of Action Item #5: Upgrade Transit Information Center's phone system to direct a customer for either fixed route or paratransit services.

In Spring 2005, DPWT upgraded the Transit Information Center's phone system (240-777-RIDE) to immediately direct callers for either fixed route or paratransit services. At the prompt, callers who press "one" are automatically forwarded to Connect-A-Ride.

Connect-A-Ride maintains a database of over 200 public, private, and volunteer transportation providers in Montgomery County. Connect-A-Ride staff advise callers on transportation options such as Metrorail, Ride On, as well as curb-to-curb and assisted/escorted paratransit services.

Status of Action Item #6: Design and publish brochures and print media in various languages.

Division of Transit Services staff report that the documents currently available in languages other than English are:

- Call 'N Ride brochure, printed in Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian;
- Ride On Service brochure, printed in Spanish; and
- Taxi Hotline cards, printed in Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

In addition, the Division prints the Transportation Options for Seniors and People with Disabilities document in Braille and other languages upon request. DPWT staff report distributing over 5,000 copies of this document. An up-to-date version of the document is also available on the County's website.

Status of Action Item #7: Discuss the consolidation of transportation of programs into one organizational unit.

In November 2002, the Executive Branch consolidated the following non-fixed route transportation services under one manager in DPWT's Division of Transit Services: Taxicab Regulation; Medicaid Transportation; and Call 'N Ride. As a result of the consolidation, management staff report improved coordination of information/outreach as well as complaint handling/investigation.

The Department of Health and Human Services' Aging and Disability Services still holds contracts with *The Senior Connection* and other private vendors that provide assisted/escorted transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. DPWT and DHHS staff report that multiple forums (see *Paratransit Advisory Group*, page 5) provide opportunities for staff to coordinate these transportation programs.

F: DISCUSSION ISSUES

The implementation of the action items contained in the Chief Administrative Officer's memorandum generally fulfills the Council's goal of creating a systemic approach to transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.

To both acknowledge these efforts and explore further opportunities for improvements, OLO recommends that the Council's joint Health and Human Services and Transportation and Environment (HHS/T&E) Committee hold a worksession with Executive Branch staff to discuss transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.

OLO recommends that the Committee discussion focus on how the County Government can further simplify access to transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities. OLO suggests that the joint HHS/T&E Committee discuss with Executive Branch staff:

- The language assistance tools available to Transportation Information Center staff, e.g., multilingual staff and the language line.² Specifically, the Committee should discuss whether the need for a bilingual client assistance specialist still exists.
- Other ways to improve how the County Government communicates with limited English proficient persons. For example, providing the recorded message to the Transportation Information Center in languages other than English.
- Options for enhancing access to the valuable transportation information on the County's website. For example, placing the contact number for the Transit Information Center (240-777-RIDE) and/or creating a link directly to transportation information for seniors and people with disabilities on the County's main transportation webpage.
- Any efforts made (or plan to be made) by the Division of Transit Services to seek feedback from seniors and people with disabilities on the improvements made over past three years.

² Language Line provides over-the-phone interpretation from English to more than 150 other languages, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The County Government holds a contract for this service for use by the Police Department, Fire and Rescue Services, and the Department of Health and Human Services.



OFFICES OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE


Douglas M. Duncan
County Executive

Bruce Romer
Chief Administrative Officer

MEMORANDUM

November 12, 2002

TO: Isiah Leggett, Chair, Transportation and Environment Committee
Blair Ewing, Chair, Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Bruce Romer, Chief Administrative Officer 

SUBJECT: Transportation Services for Seniors and People with Disabilities

This memorandum is in response to your joint request to provide the Council a plan to:

- Update the Paratransit Advisory Group;
- Develop a “one stop” information source on transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities; and
- Establish a transportation coordinator.

Following is a summary of our actions to date in response to this request.

Paratransit Advisory Group

We are pleased to report the Paratransit Advisory Group has been re-established as the ~~Transportation Committee on Seniors and People with Disabilities~~ and is now co-chaired by both the DHHS and DPWT. The membership of this group has been updated and includes representatives from each department, as well as the Department of Recreation and the Commissions on Aging and People with Disabilities. Representatives from the Connect-A-Ride service and Action In Montgomery (AIM) have also participated in some of our discussions. This group will continue to meet monthly to fulfill its mission of providing policy recommendations to our departments.



One-Stop Information Source

After consultation with the *Transportation Committee on Seniors and People with Disabilities*, we have developed a staged, multi-year plan for the consolidation of all information and referral resources concerning transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. The goals of consolidation are:

- Eliminate confusion for callers who need transportation information by providing one phone number with information on all fixed route and paratransit services;
- Increase efficiency and cost effectiveness by encouraging callers to use fixed route services where appropriate; and
- Provide outreach to seniors and people with disabilities so that their transportation needs may be identified and met.

Outlined below are aspects of the physical and organizational integration, which can occur in FY 03 without additional resources:

- Movement of DHHS's contract for the Connect-A-Ride service to DPWT, which will allow the combining of these outside resources with the existing Transit Coordinator in Transit Services who provides the information and outreach for the County's paratransit/supplemental services. In the coming year, we will assess the Connect-A-Ride contract to determine if their services can be assimilated into the "one-stop shop." At this time, the County phone system cannot be connected to the Connect-A-Ride program at its current location.
- Co-location, organizationally, of all information and outreach for transportation for seniors and people with disabilities with the Transit Information Center (TIC), which provides transit information on all fixed route services.
- Physical movement of the Paratransit staff, now located at Holiday Park, to the Executive Office Building (EOB). This move will better facilitate the "one-stop" focus and allow us to better integrate the County phone services.

The County Executive has decided to make the changes outlined above in FY 03. While these immediate changes will better facilitate the information and referral function, they would still not fully achieve the desired outcomes. Therefore, the following additional resources would be needed in FY 04:

- Reprogramming and upgrading of the Transit Information Center's (TIC) phone system (240-777-RIDE) to include the ability to direct a customer for either fixed route or

(B)

Isiah Leggett
Blair Ewing
November 12, 2002
Page 3

paratransit and to allow that direction via Integrated Voice Recognition. We anticipate this cost would be roughly \$35,000.

- One bilingual Client Assistance Specialist to provide information to callers on public and private paratransit/supplemental transportation services and assist the callers in filling out the appropriate transportation applications. Salary and benefits for this position would be roughly \$65,000 annually.
- Design and publication of more brochures and print media, and in varying languages, at an estimated cost of \$50,000 annually.

The County Executive will decide what elements to recommend as enhancements in his FY 04 Recommended Operating Budget.

The final stage of the plan is to address the consolidation of all transportation programs into one organizational unit. Discussion regarding this part of the staged plan with the *Transportation Committee on Seniors and People with Disabilities* will occur in the coming year. Development of the organizational and physical components of this stage could be addressed in FY 05.

Transportation Coordinator

Since information and referral is just one component of the transportation needs for these two groups, we do not believe a Transportation Coordinator is warranted for that sole purpose. It is our recommendation that the Committee continue to discuss the policies, plans and funding needs for the Transportation Coordinator and consolidation of all transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities into one department.

Thank you for your interest in transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. Our departments will continue to work closely to improve services to these two groups. We welcome your input into this process. Please let us know if you have any questions.

BR/ab

(e)