



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 7, 2022

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAION, CITY MANAGER /s/

FROM: YON LAMBERT, DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of a Resolution to Expand the DOT Paratransit Program Service Area into Washington, D.C.
[ROLL-CALL VOTE]

ISSUE: Should the City of Alexandria Paratransit Program, DOT, expand its service area into Washington, D.C.?

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council adopt the attached Resolution (Attachment 1) expanding DOT paratransit service into Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND: The Alexandria DOT paratransit program began in 1984 as a service to Alexandria residents who were unable to use public transit due to a disability. The program was modified in 1993 to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The program offers trips at a reduced rate to residents who are approved through a certification process. In addition to providing service throughout Alexandria, the program currently provides service to Alexandria residents travelling to and from the City to the following Virginia jurisdictions: Arlington County, Fairfax County, City of Falls Church, and City of Fairfax. In 2021, the City issued an Request for Proposal (RFP) for new contractors to provide transport services and software services to help modernize the program. Residents pay the following fares for this service and the City subsidizes the remaining cost:

- Within Alexandria - Free (as of September 2021 when DASH went fare free)
- Up to 5 miles outside of City limits - \$4
- More than 5 miles outside of City limits - \$6

The new contract per trip cost to the City ranges from \$34-51 based on the volume of trips each month. The DOT Paratransit program is operated by the City of Alexandria and is separate from MetroAccess, which is the regional paratransit service operated by WMATA. MetroAccess provides trips anywhere in the region that is within a ¾ mile from a WMATA rail or bus route. Alexandria residents can participate in both programs and choose which service to use for trips. The City pays WMATA for trips taken by residents of Alexandria. The per trip rate varies each year based on the total number of MetroAccess trips in the region and the overall service cost. The annual per trip rate has varied drastically over the last several years, but most recently the per trip cost was \$152 in FY 2022.

In order to provide individuals with disabilities the maximum amount of mobility in the City and into Washington D.C., the City encourages paratransit clients who may be able to use the fixed-route system to do so. Prior to becoming free for all users in September of 2021, the City began providing free DASH service for paratransit and MetroAccess clients in October 2017.

DISCUSSION: The Alexandria Mobility Plan has a stated Policy to *Make Transit Easier to Use*. One strategy recommendation to address this policy is to *Modernize the paratransit program for the City's aging population*. To accomplish this strategy and meet the goals of improving customer service, providing more transportation options for people with limited mobility and finding efficiencies to reduce the cost of the program, staff has partnered with new companies to update reservation management and routing software that will enable online and mobile bookings, better reporting features, more efficient routing and shared rides, new client communication tools, and improved client tracking. Expanding the program boundaries to allow for riders to and from Washington, D.C. supports these goals as well.

Currently, clients who need to travel into D.C. must use MetroAccess. Because of the dramatically increasing cost to the City for MetroAccess trips and the positive feedback from clients of the DOT Paratransit program, staff proposes to expand the boundaries of the program to extend into D.C. The cost of trips using MetroAccess vary for the client but can be up to \$6.50. By pricing all trips more than five miles outside of Alexandria at \$6, DOT clients might be encouraged to use the City's program instead of MetroAccess, which is less expensive for the City and the clients.

This program has consistently grown in ridership over the years, particularly as the aging population in Alexandria also increases. Shifting trips from MetroAccess to the City's program will help to offset these costs and to ensure funding is available to continue this service.

Staff has notified the Commission for Persons with Disabilities and the Commission on Aging about this expansion into the Washington D.C. area and provided a full program update to the Transportation Commission on May 18, 2022. The Commission voted to endorse the program boundary expansion at that meeting. Additionally, staff will communicate with existing paratransit users to ensure they are aware of the expansion.

FISCAL IMPACT: In FY 2019, there were approximately 4,000 MetroAccess trips between Alexandria and Washington, D.C. With the DOT Program expansion into DC, City staff anticipate approximately 50% of these trips (2,000) could switch to DOT trips. This change would result in increased trips under the DOT program, and as a result funding increases. However, the corresponding reduction in MetroAccess trips would be a reduction to the City's operating contribution to WMATA. Staff estimates at least a \$50 per trip savings for trips switching from MetroAccess to the DOT program that will be evaluated during the FY 2024 budget process.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 - Resolution
Attachment 2 - Presentation

STAFF:

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