

TPB Technical Committee Meeting

December 4, 2009

Item 4: Briefing on an Update to the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan for the National Capital Region

Included in this packet are:

Executive Summary (new)

Updated Unmet Needs (Section 3)

Updated Strategies for (Section 5)

New Section 6, Recommended Projects

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THREE YEARS OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES

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In 2006, the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) became the Designated Recipient for two Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding programs: Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom. Authorized under the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), these programs provide approximately \$1 million per program per year for public and private transportation providers and human service agencies to support transportation services for low-wage earners to get to job sites or job training, and for people with disabilities for any trip purpose.

As the Designated Recipient for these programs, and using the guidance and procedures established in this Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan for the National Capital Region (“Coordinated Plan”), the TPB has conducted solicitations for JARC and New Freedom projects over the past three years and has funded 25 projects to improve mobility for many of the region’s residents, visitors, workers and students. The TPB has also played an important role in implementing two of these projects: the Wheelchair Accessible Taxicab Pilot Project in D.C., and the Regional Transportation Information Clearinghouse. In total, over \$7 million in projects – \$3.9 million in JARC projects and \$3.8 million in New Freedom projects – have been approved to improve access to transportation for workers with limited incomes and persons with disabilities.

Projects funded in these solicitations have:

- Introduced the first wheelchair accessible taxicab pilot program to the District of Columbia
- Taught individuals with disabilities throughout the region how to travel independently and confidently on public transit
- Created a comprehensive, one-stop shop for information about the public and specialized transportation options available throughout the region, and
- Helped older individuals with mobility limitations travel to and from essential medical appointments with the help of an aide

### Wheelchair-accessible taxis to roll out on D.C. streets

By: [Kytja Weir](#)  
Examiner Staff Writer  
November 13, 2009



**The details**

- » **WHAT:** 20 taxicab minivans with special backdoor ramps
- » **WHEN:** 2-year pilot program with the first cabs hitting the streets in December, others rolling out in January
- » **HOW:** \$1.2 million in federal, D.C. and taxi company money
- » **WHO:** Roughly 20 percent of the District's 64,000 people with disabilities use wheelchairs.

Bobby Coward tries out a new wheelchair-accessible D.C. taxicab. (Photo courtesy Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments)

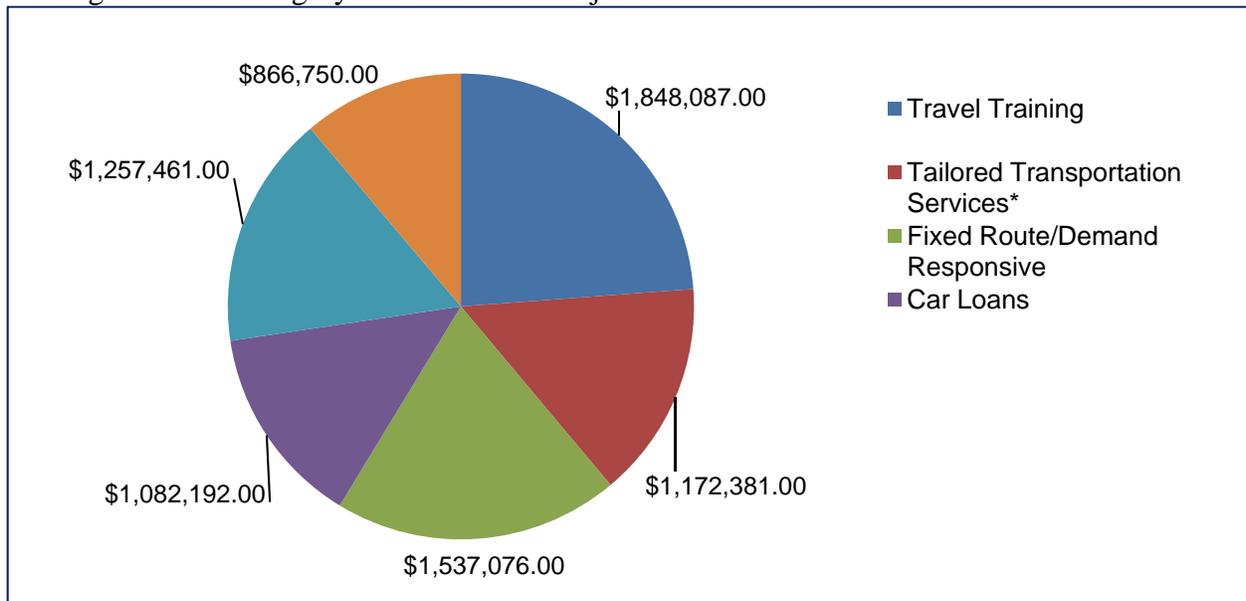
These projects, and the others funded in these solicitations, have helped many transportation-disadvantaged individuals to improve their mobility and full participation in daily activities.

### *Lessons Learned and Outcomes Achieved*

The 25 projects approved in these JARC and New Freedom solicitations cover a significant portion of the Washington, DC-VA-MD Urbanized Area and have benefited hundreds of

individuals with disabilities and working families. The projects have supported travel training programs, car loan programs, an accessible taxicab pilot project, fixed-route and demand responsive services, and tailored transportation services, like taxi vouchers and door-through-door services that improve access to existing transportation services. Figure ES-1 illustrates the funding breakdown of the 25 projects. Most importantly, the projects have tested pilot services that offer innovative ideas to mobility and accessibility challenges.

Figure ES-1: Category Breakdown of Projects Funded in Solicitation Years 2007 – 2009



\*Includes projects like taxi vouchers and door-through-door services that enhance access to existing transportation services.

Several projects are highlighted to illustrate the impact these grants, many of them pilot projects, have had throughout the region. These projects offer valuable lessons learned for transportation providers and human service agencies in providing additional services to improve transportation access for low-income workers and people with disabilities.

### *Lessons Learned*

In developing the Coordinated Plan, the Task Force emphasized the funding of pilot projects to test new programs and new ways of delivering transportation services. The projects funded in the three solicitations, as well as the solicitations themselves, have presented many useful lessons on what has worked well, and where challenges remain.

The solicitation process itself works well because it's been refined and there is a good understanding of the application and the selection process. In response to feedback obtained by applicants after the first solicitation, the solicitation period was doubled to four months to provide applicants with more time to develop proposals. The mandatory pre-application conferences and technical assistance provided by TPB staff have reduced the number of incomplete, late and/or unresponsive applications to zero in the last solicitation. The selection process and the competitive selection criteria, established in the Plan, have also worked well. The selection process is widely regarded as fair and appropriate for the region. The Task Force

has taken an active role in conducting outreach to promote the solicitation to agencies that are eligible to apply for JARC or New Freedom funds.

*Challenges Remain*

One of the major challenges that agencies face in implementing JARC and New Freedom projects is identifying the appropriate local match. This is especially challenging for operating projects, which require a 50 percent local match. The economic and budgetary challenges facing these agencies have compounded this problem. For a variety of reasons, the projects can also take longer than anticipated to implement. Limitations on JARC trip purposes have presented challenges to workforce development and other agencies that serve low-income workers in developing projects that address client needs. Finally, the Federal reporting requirements can be burdensome, especially for human service agencies not familiar with federal transportation grants.

*Implementing Agency Experiences*

Of the projects that have been completed or are well underway, a survey was conducted to gather feedback on the challenges and successes they experienced in implementing their projects. These agencies provided feedback that should prove valuable to other agencies interested in pursuing similar projects with limited dollars. Table ES 1 provides a sampling of the survey responses received.

Table ES 1: Sampling of Implementing Agency Survey Responses

“Programs should build in costs for marketing and outreach. This is not easily done by existing staff if they already have a full plate.”
“More time was spent on planning, marketing and set up than initially expected.”
“Avoid beginning new services without a long-term funding strategy.”
For agencies partnering on a project, “implement processes that take the work flow and time factor of each agency working together into consideration.”
“Know your clients and the market you serve.”
“Participants really like the additional care they receive from having an aide escort them to their appointments. It diminishes anxiety ... they know they will be taken care of.”

***Loan Program for Low-Income Workers to Purchase Cars:*** 53 loans have been awarded to low-income working families to purchase cars and access jobs. The collective repayment rate is around 85 percent. Over a quarter of loan recipients have improved their credit rating as a result of their car loans.

**61%...**

*... The percentage of car loan recipients who indicated in a recent survey that they have reduced their dependence on public benefits as a result of the car loan grants.*

*“The class was great. I thoroughly appreciated the trainers and the time they spent with me. I got to go to my dentist and I didn’t have to cancel or pay an expensive taxi.”*

*-Travel Training Participant*

**Travel Training for Older Adults with Disabilities:** 4 pilot programs have been funded to provide travel training instruction on use of the bus and rail systems to residents throughout the region. The pilots each use curricula tailored to the needs of the individual. In one pilot that has been completed, participants who completed the training have taken as many as 13 additional round trips *in one month* using public transit than before the training was offered.

By pre-screening the participants to determine their familiarity with public transit, the trainers were able to structure the classes and one-on-one sessions to accommodate the participants’ needs.

### ***Coordinated Plan Update***

While there is no federal requirement mandating the frequency of coordinated planning activities, the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force (“Task Force”) has undertaken this plan update in light of the services that have been implemented, the lessons learned from these pilots and the impact of the economy on traditionally disadvantaged populations and the agencies that serve them.

The three primary components – Unmet Transportation Needs, Strategies for Improved Service and Coordination, and Recommended Priority Actions – represent the nucleus of the Coordinated Plan and assist agencies in submitting responsive proposals for JARC or New Freedom funding that are tailored to existing needs.

By updating the primary components of the Coordinated Plan, the TPB can provide better guidance on the significant unmet transportation needs for low-income workers and people with disabilities and on the projects and activities that can have considerable impact in addressing them. All projects funded in the JARC and New Freedom solicitations must be derived from the Coordinated Plan.

#### ***Process***

The Task Force first revised the list of unmet needs to reflect the most pressing needs. These needs were identified by the Task Force based on their knowledge of the transportation issues facing their clients and were supported by customer feedback, project surveys, and in many cases, their own experiences. The list of unmet needs are categorized according to Need for a Customer Focus; Lack of Reliability; Need for Better Information; and Need for Additional Funding and Transportation Choices.

The Task Force then used the list of revised unmet needs to fine-tune the four Strategies for Improved Service and Coordination. Proposals submitted for JARC or New Freedom funding consideration must demonstrate responsiveness to at least one of the four Strategies. After establishing the Strategies, the Task Force developed 12 Recommended Projects as services that will have a significant impact on addressing unmet needs. Of these projects, 8 were in the original Coordinated Plan, and 4 are new for the Plan Update. Applications for projects not listed as a Recommended Projects may also be submitted. All applications will be evaluated according to the same competitive selection criteria.

Figure ES 2: Primary Components in Coordinated Plan Update

## Introduction

- Definitions and demographic information

## Plan Development

- Previous studies, timeline and public input

## Unmet Needs

## Summary of Existing Services

## Strategies for Improved Service & Coordination

## Recommended Projects

### *Summary*

The updates to the Coordinated Plan will be incorporated into the upcoming 2010 JARC and New Freedom project solicitation. This is the last year for which JARC and New Freedom funding was identified under SAFETEA-LU. The Coordinated Plan, as updated, and the experiences gained from the projects funded to date leave the TPB and the Task Force well positioned to continue providing guidance and funding to agencies working to improve transportation access for disadvantaged populations when these important programs are reauthorized.

## Unmet Transportation Needs

The Task Force has revised the list of significant unmet transportation needs to reflect the projects that have been funded in the past three solicitations, as well as other projects undertaken since the Coordinated Plan was approved in April 2007. The revised list reflects the same four categories of unmet needs, which guided the modifications made to the Strategies for Improved Service and Coordination.

**Figure 4 – The Four Categories of Significant Unmet Transportation Needs**

<p>Need For a Customer Focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transportation services are not tailored to responding to individual needs</li> <li>▪ A greater awareness of customer needs and how their individual disabilities impact how they travel (need better Metro Access intake)</li> </ul>
<p>Lack of Reliability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reliability of paratransit services is a major concern</li> <li>▪ Bus and rail transit are not always accessible</li> <li>▪ Need for back-up service</li> <li>▪ Hard to get dispatched cabs in certain neighborhoods</li> <li>▪ Metro Access call center not working well</li> </ul>
<p>Need for Better Information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information on existing specialized services and user-friendly fixed-route information is lacking (this includes but is not limited to non-native English speakers)</li> <li>▪ More support for car ownership among low-income families, especially east of the river and in Prince George’s County</li> <li>▪ Advocacy for families around retail transportation issues (e.g., car dealers taking advantage of ill-informed buyers)</li> <li>▪ Need for regulatory processes that better accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities (e.g., vehicle ownership and insurance, disability license plates for quadriplegics)</li> <li>▪ Need for continued marketing and outreach about services that are available</li> </ul>
<p>Lack of Additional Funding and Transportation Choices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Need for accessible fixed-route service in more suburban and ex-urban areas</li> <li>▪ Need for same-day service, especially for urgent appointments</li> <li>▪ Need for improved pedestrian access, (e.g., sidewalks, other physical infrastructure around bus and rail stops) especially in and around the Route 1 corridor</li> <li>▪ Need for additional express bus service in outer Wards and away from downtown</li> <li>▪ Need for additional volunteer drivers to help provide same-day service</li> <li>▪ Need for help with transitional transportation costs for people entering the workforce</li> <li>▪ Need to provide support for caregivers</li> <li>▪ Affordability for users is a concern</li> <li>▪ Need for incentives for drivers of accessible taxi cabs</li> </ul>

## ***Strategies for Improved Service and Coordination***

The Task Force revised the set of strategies and related actions intended to address unmet needs and fill remaining gaps in human service transportation. Proposals submitted for funding must be responsive to at least one of the following four strategies. Some projects may have a greater overall impact on unmet needs, and accordingly are a greater priority for funding.

The strategies have been revised to reflect the unique transportation needs facing both low-income workers and people with disabilities; to reflect the importance of caregivers in disseminating information about specialized services; and to reflect the importance of sustaining successful new projects after the initial pilot period.

The four strategies are:

- Tailor transportation services to the individual needs of low-income workers and people with disabilities by emphasizing the following:
  - How various types of disability – cognitive, physical and visual – impact a person’s ability to travel;
  - How non-traditional work schedules, reverse commutes and/or childcare trips impact workers with lower incomes, particularly those who are transit dependent.
- Provide user-friendly information in appropriate formats to customers, caregivers, social service and nonprofit agencies about the programs, both public transit and specialized services, which are available to low-income workers and people with disabilities, particularly those who are transit dependent.
- Develop services and programs that improve the reliability of existing paratransit or fixed-route services, or that provide alternatives for people who rely heavily on public transportation. This strategy emphasizes improving access to existing services for travelers who experience unreliability with their everyday transportation services.
- Develop and implement new programs and services to provide additional transportation options that address specific unmet needs for people with disabilities and workers with limited incomes. Additional funding should be identified and secured to support and sustain these programs.

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## SECTION 6: RECOMMENDED PRIORITY PROJECTS

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### REVISED RECOMMENDED PROJECTS FOR COORDINATED HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE

Approved by the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force November 12, 2009

#### *NEW PROJECTS SINCE THE 2006 COORDINATED PLAN ARE MARKED*



The Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force develops priority projects to encourage applications for services to address unmet transportation needs. Organizations interested in applying for either JARC or New Freedom funding may also submit applications for projects that are *not* priority projects. All applications for funding are evaluated through a competitive selection process. All projects must meet specific Federal requirements which are described at the website address listed above.

#### **JARC PROJECTS**

##### *Brochure for Low-Income Workers*

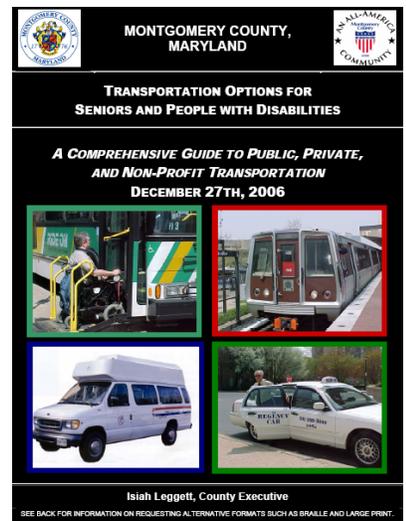
**What it is:** A publication that could be tailored to a specific geographic area with a high concentration of low-income commuters (e.g., Langley Park, Route 1 in Virginia, Anacostia). The project would operate as a pilot project that includes an evaluation component to determine how useful it is to consumers.

Information would include fixed-route service, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, car sharing, commercial transportation services, specialized transportation services, commuter services subsidy and incentive programs, and maps. Distribution could include Metro stations, local community newspapers, transportation management associations, and employer groups. The project should include a well-developed distribution strategy.

Good Example: Montgomery County produces a comprehensive guide to public, private and nonprofit transportation for people with disabilities.

##### *Shuttle Service or Van Pools to Employment Sites*

**What it is:** Employer-based funding pools could be developed to provide shuttle service or van pools to better serve shift workers and reverse commuters. The program could focus on large suburban employment centers such as the Dulles corridor, Potomac Mills or the I-270 corridor, and could extend evening and weekend bus service from new or existing providers. The program could also provide carpool matching services. Service should be open to bid on a competitive basis from any transportation provider. Project proposals should include a methodology for required FTA reporting of passenger miles so that the region can be credited with additional federal transit formula assistance.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Guidance for this data collection can be found in UMTA Circular 2710.2A, Sampling Procedures for Obtaining Demand Responsive Bus System Operating Data Required under the Section 15 Reporting System.

### ***Loan Program for Low-Income Workers to Purchase Cars***

**What it is:** A loan fund would be established to enable workers with certain income limitations to purchase cars and pay for car maintenance. The program would focus on suburban and outer suburban commuters whose jobs or homes are inaccessible by transit. Special consideration would be given to new entrants to the workforce who also transport children to daycare.

Loans would be repaid to the fund, keeping it self-sustaining and replenishing it for additional use. The program would set aside a percentage of funds to cover skills training related to budgeting and car maintenance expenses, obtaining a driver's license, and other issues related to car ownership. Preventive maintenance should be emphasized to minimize repair costs.

**Good Example:** Vehicles for Change, which has awarded more than 1,600 cars since 1999. VfC has awarded cars in Carroll, Prince George's, Anne Arundel, and Montgomery Counties, Baltimore City, the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia and Richmond.<sup>2</sup> The Ways to Work Program of Northern Virginia Family Service enables clients to get their loans directly from a banking partner, which provides access to other financial services and helps to build or repair credit.

### ***Transportation Voucher Program for Low-Income Workers***



**What it is:** A voucher project could involve a human service agency, an employer, or a non-profit agency building upon existing voucher programs to provide bus passes, taxi trips or gas cards to low-income individuals in getting to job sites, attending training programs, or transitioning to work. Multiple agencies could coordinate the purchase of passes and provide them to their clients.

Taxi voucher programs could be implemented to help low-income workers living in areas not well served by transit to connect to bus stops or rail stations. Voucher programs offer flexibility to low-income workers by allowing them to choose the transportation options that best meet their needs. This project would be an operating project that requires a 50 percent local match. However, if two or more agencies coordinate the purchase and distribution of vouchers, the administrative costs of the project would qualify as mobility management, which would reduce the required match to 20 percent for that portion of the project. Federal funds cannot be used to provide fares on public transit, so local funds must be used to provide the fare.

**Good example:** Montgomery County, MD created a taxi voucher program to help low-income residents of an area not served by transit to reach rail stations and bus stops. Doorways for Women & Families helps homeless women transition to work with taxi vouchers for trips to job training, interviews, or job sites.

### ***Expanded Transit in Underserved Neighborhoods***



**What it is:** Expanded transit in underserved neighborhoods recognizes the need to expand transit in neighborhoods that don't offer sufficient transportation options for workers without cars. Feeder service to rail stations or projects to fund the incremental costs of adding weekend or evening service hours on existing routes could be proposed as cost-effective alternatives to starting new service.

The need for additional transit service is especially great in the eastern portions of the District of Columbia and areas in Prince George's County or other residential areas with significant concentrations of low-income

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<sup>2</sup> Vehicles for Change: [www.vehiclesforchange.org](http://www.vehiclesforchange.org).

individuals. Outreach to targeted neighborhoods should be conducted to determine the days and times that the service is most needed.

**Good example:** Capital District Transit in Albany, NY recently incorporated neighborhood feeder routes into its system to replace underperforming routes. The 32 feeder routes connect to “trunk” routes at major boarding centers, and serve 20 percent of the agency’s riders.

### *Develop a Transportation Ombudsman Position*



**What it is:** A transportation ombudsman could be created as an independent, impartial position, readily available to the public, to assist consumers in resolving problems with or complaints about local transportation planning or operations. The ombudsman is not intended to take the place of other established channels for raising and resolving issues.

The transportation ombudsman could connect travelers to the appropriate agency for assistance, or could independently conduct fact-finding inquiries and recommend appropriate actions or policy changes to resolve the complaint. The transportation ombudsman would advocate for change when a process reveals a need for it.

**Good examples:** The Minnesota Department of Transportation recently created a Transportation Ombudsman position to help the citizens of Minnesota address concerns with the agency’s operations.

## ***NEW FREEDOM PROJECTS***

### *Accessible Taxi Service Subsidy Pilot*

**What it is:** A pilot program to provide the minimum financial subsidies and incentives necessary to encourage taxi companies to provide and maintain a sufficient supply of wheelchair-accessible service in jurisdictions that don’t currently have accessible taxis (such as D.C.). Incentives to companies include subsidies to offset the cost of vehicle purchase, maintenance and insurance. To be effective, incentives must be aimed at both companies and drivers to ensure that accessible vehicles are not only purchased, but also put to use and available to customers with disabilities. If incentives are offered regionally, they should be made available to any transportation provider on a competitive basis. Training grants should also be available for all transportation providers.

To have an impact, the program would need to include financial incentives for drivers, such as a stipend for attending sensitivity training to account for lost fares, and financial incentives to drive an accessible taxi. Drivers of accessible cabs could also be matched with schools, senior centers, or other organizations that might want to reserve regular taxi trips.

**Good example:** The City of Chicago made \$1 million available to cab companies to defray the incremental cost of an accessible ramp-equipped van versus a new Ford Crown Victoria. In Virginia, Red Top Cab buys accessible cabs and leases them to their drivers at a lower rate as standard cabs.

### *Sensitivity and Customer Service Training*

**What it is:** Regional sensitivity trainings could be offered to bus drivers, Metro station managers, paratransit drivers, taxicab drivers, and other front-line transportation employees on providing better customer service and interacting with people with disabilities, older adults and with riders from various socio-economic backgrounds.

General guidelines for serving customers would be provided under the auspices of good customer service for everyone.

Specific guidelines for serving customers who use wheelchairs or service animals would be addressed, as would guidelines for customers with visual or auditory disabilities. The training could include power wheelchair users and persons with visual and hearing impairments. A portion of the money should be set aside to pay stipends to drivers to make up for fares lost while attending training.

**Good Examples:** Services for the Visually Impaired in Silver Spring has a team of instructors who provide four hours of disability sensitivity training on a weekly basis. The interactive training offers direct opportunities to rehearse best practices related to the customer service needs of various disability groups. This includes the opportunity to secure persons with disabilities aboard a vehicle, rather than role playing with other trainees. Metro provides all front-line employees with ADA sensitivity training and safety training.

### ***Door-Through-Door Service***

**What it is:** A local jurisdiction could conduct a demonstration project of door-through-door service to people whose mobility constraints prevent independent travel on MetroAccess and do not have a personal care attendant. Service could be provided by personal care attendants to travel with eligible individuals. The program would be limited either through eligibility or through a cap on the number of trips.

A jurisdiction could also partner with a nonprofit, such as the Red Cross, that has experience in providing escorted service for specialized transportation.

### ***Establish A Same-Day Service Pilot***

**What it is:** A local agency could sponsor a same-day service pilot for paratransit users. The program could expand on a local taxi voucher program, or a new pilot could be established. The project could operate on a voucher system to control costs. To ensure the pilot project would be available to customers who require a wheelchair-accessible cab, the pilot would work best in jurisdictions that already have accessible cabs.

**How it could work:** Participating agencies could purchase vouchers for their clients. The clients would pay a sliding scale fare between \$2.50 – 10.00. The project could include an incentive for taxi drivers to take the voucher trips. The administrative costs of the project would qualify as mobility management if the purchase of the vouchers was coordinated on behalf of several agencies.

The conclusion of the pilot project would provide an opportunity to review any policy issues or obstacles that arise (including the reasonable limits, to both provider and user, of the sliding scale fee), and test solutions for resolving them.

### ***Provide A Range of Travel Training to Persons With Disabilities***

**What it is:** A travel-training curriculum on the bus and rail system could be developed for people with developmental and/or intellectual disabilities and offered region-wide. The curriculum would be coordinated with WMATA, local transit agencies and human service agencies to expand training services to ensure they are widely available to all who need them, and to ensure that people with these types of disabilities can obtain training sufficiently tailored to their needs so they can safely use the bus and rail systems.

**Good examples:** Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind uses Orientation & Mobility Specialists to deliver travel training for visually impaired and blind clients using a curriculum tailored to their needs.

*Create a Volunteer Driver Program*



**What it is:** A human service agency could establish a volunteer driver program to provide rides for people with disabilities. The rides could be for any trip purpose, though priority is often given for medical trips. The program could require advanced reservations, and could reimburse volunteer drivers for their mileage. Policies and procedures for recruiting and orienting drivers would need to be established.

**Good examples:** Neighbor Ride in Howard County and Partners in Care, serving Anne Arundel and Frederick Counties, both operate volunteer driver programs. Neighbor Ride has a zip-code based fare structure, while Partners in Care requests that riders pay a sliding scale fee to help with mileage reimbursement. Both organizations require advanced reservations.

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