

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 20, 2012

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: RASHAD M. YOUNG, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #15: EXPLANATION OF THE SERVICE IMPACTS OF ELIMINATING THE SENIOR SERVICES OF ALEXANDRIA SENIOR TAXI RESERVATION SERVICE

This memorandum is in response to a request by City Council to provide information on the service impacts of eliminating the Senior Taxi reservation service currently provided by Senior Services of Alexandria (SSA). The memo also describes other programmatic changes that would yield cost savings and provides a chart comparing various aspects of Alexandria's, Arlington County's, and Fairfax County's senior taxi programs.

The Senior Taxi Program was established more than 25 years ago to provide taxi rides to independent City residents age 60 and older. Trips are permitted to the grocery store and medical appointments within City limits and to medical appointments up to five miles outside City limits. Trip reservations for this service, as well as registration, record keeping and communication with Yellow Cab are managed by SSA. No records have been found to indicate that reservations have ever been made directly with a cab company.

In FY 2011, approximately 600 seniors took 17,123 one-way Senior Taxi trips. Senior Services of Alexandria handled approximately 8,600 calls for reservations, or 33 calls per day. More than 90% of these trips were for medical appointments. The FY 2011 cost for the reservation service was \$62,919, which equates to a per-trip administrative cost of \$3.67 per one way trip or \$7.34 per each round trip scheduled. The cost for the actual transportation in FY 2011 was \$190,049. The program is funded 100% with General Fund dollars.

Anticipated impact of eliminating current reservation and recordkeeping service

- Seniors would call the transportation provider (currently Yellow Cab) directly. Prior to implementation of any change in program operations, staff would make every effort to inform and educate the Senior Taxi riders. Staff also would work with the transportation provider to promote a smooth transition. Some seniors have expressed a preference in having a familiar individual to contact to make taxi reservations, so elimination of the current reservation service with SSA might decrease satisfaction for some program users.
- The registration and recordkeeping components of the Senior Taxi Program would be managed by staff within the Department of Community and Human Services, Division on Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), with the assistance of a qualified volunteer. The increase in administrative responsibilities for existing staff would total approximately four hours per month and would require approximately eight hours per month of volunteer time.

- Reservationists at the transportation company will need to spend additional time taking Senior Taxi reservations. They will need to verify that the caller is eligible for the program based on information updated weekly from DAAS, and they will need to ask the purpose of the trip to make sure it met program criteria. The reservation software currently utilized by Yellow Cab has this capability.

Given that staff does not have records or any knowledge of the Senior Taxi program operating without the SSA reservation service, it is difficult to estimate costs associated with its elimination. An additional 33 Senior Taxi calls per day directly to Yellow Cab represents an approximate 1% increase in its total daily call volume of 3,000. Yellow Cab has stated its dispatchers spend approximately 18 seconds on a “typical” call. If each of the 33 Senior Taxi calls per day were to take one minute, this change would add less than one hour of additional time per day for Yellow Cab reservationists, which would represent a minimal cost. Further, a request for proposal (RFP) for Senior Taxi and DOT Paratransit programs is being issued imminently. This RFP may result in a different transportation provider and/or reservation service if Council decides to restore funding.

Alternatives

A different program model, such as a discount taxi coupon system patterned after those in Arlington and Fairfax Counties could substantially reduce administrative costs. A comparison chart showing senior taxi programs operated by the City of Alexandria, Arlington County, and Fairfax County is included as an attachment. However, such a restructuring of the program could not realistically be accomplished until FY14.

Other costs saving measures to consider include:

Cost Saving Measure	# of riders affected (based on FY11 actuals)	Estimated Savings (based on FY11 actuals)
Raise co-pay to \$3.00 for all trips	600	\$17,000
Raise age to 62	15	\$5,500
Raise age to 65	51	\$32,500
Raise age to 70	125	\$77,300
Eliminate out of city trips	Everyone	\$58,600
Eliminate grocery shopping trips	Everyone	\$23,300
Add a maximum income limit	Higher income riders. Currently, 60% of riders are above Federal Poverty level.	Difficult to estimate as we don't have exact income figures for riders, but could be significant

In considering cost saving options, it should be noted that some or all of these measures likely will be adopted in FY 2013 in order to stay within the current program budget, whether or not the reservation service is eliminated.

Attachment: Comparison of regional subsidized senior taxi programs

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Attachment: Comparison of regional subsidized senior taxi programs

	Alexandria Senior Taxi	Arlington Super Senior Taxi	Fairfax Seniors On The Go!
Age restriction	60 and older	70 and older	65 and older
Income guidelines	None	None	Maximum yearly income between \$40,000 and \$50,000 depending on family size.
Trip purpose / distance limitations	Grocery store and medical appointments within City limits. Medical appointments up to 5 miles outside of City limits.	Unlimited as long as the ride originates or ends in Arlington County.	Unlimited
Days of Service	M – F	7 days a week	7 days a week
Cost to patrons	\$2.00 per one way trip within City limits. \$2.50 per one way trip outside of City limits. This equates to approximately an 80% discount.	Patrons pay \$10 for a book of coupons worth \$20. This equates to a 50% discount.	Patrons pay \$20 for a book of 11 coupons worth \$33. This equates to a 40% discount.
Service limitations	Unlimited trips per person per year.	Maximum 20 coupon books per person per year.	Maximum 16 coupon books per person per year.
How are coupons purchased	N/A	Purchased at Commuter Stores – in person, mail or online.	Mail order from the Dept. of Transportation
Making reservations	Patrons call Senior Service of Alexandria which relays information to Yellow Cab Company via computer.	Patrons call one of 2 cab companies directly.	Patrons call one of 4 cab companies directly.
Program registration	Senior Services of Alexandria	Dept. of Aging and Disabilities	Dept. of Transportation
Record Keeping	Senior Services of Alexandria	Commuter Store	Dept. of Transportation
Loudoun and Prince William Counties – no subsidized transportation programs for independent seniors.			