



Safety and Service Delivery Committee

Information Item III-A

March 8, 2018

Abilities Ride Update

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Board Action/Information Summary

☐ Action ☒ Information

MEAD Number:
201961

Resolution:
☐ Yes ☒ No

TITLE:

Abilities-Ride Update - First Six Months

PRESENTATION SUMMARY:

This presentation describes the Abilities-Ride program, Metro's newest paratransit service alternative. The presentation (1) outlines the program's features; (2) identifies the participating service providers; (3) provides an update of the program's first six months; and (4) details Metro's next steps with the program.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this presentation is to inform the Safety & Service Delivery Committee about the Abilities-Ride program, the results of the first six months, and Metro's next steps.

DESCRIPTION:

Abilities-Ride builds on the success of the TransportDC program in Washington, DC, and on the TaxiAccess program, created and operated by the Maryland Transit Administration. It provides MetroAccess-eligible customers with a flexible alternative to the paratransit service.

Key Highlights:

- 515 unique customers took at least one Abilities-Ride trip in the first 136 days.
- 8,219 trips were provided in the first 136 days.
- Metro plans to greatly increase customer outreach and marketing to build Abilities-Ride ridership.

Background and History:

Demand for MetroAccess has grown tremendously over the past five years. Correspondingly, the cost of MetroAccess has grown as well.

This growth has led Metro to look proactively at ways to reduce demand for MetroAccess through the development and promotion of alternative services. In doing so, Metro has developed a mobility management plan focused on

facilitating access to privately operated services that provide MetroAccess-eligible customers more flexible transportation options, but also cost much less than a comparable MetroAccess trip. Given that a one-size alternative will not fit all circumstances or meet the needs of every customer, Metro realizes that many alternatives are necessary in order to effectively make MetroAccess the safety net instead of the primary option.

While accessible fixed route services, Metrobus and Metrorail, will always be the best alternative to MetroAccess, there are circumstances in which fixed route services are not an option for people with disabilities, so other alternatives to MetroAccess are needed. Long before Metro began working on facilitating alternatives to MetroAccess, customers in two Virginia jurisdictions already had MetroAccess alternatives to choose from: (1) Specialized Transit for Arlington Residents (STAR) in Arlington County and (2) Fastran in Fairfax County. The existence of these long-standing services has been effective in keeping the growth in demand for MetroAccess in these jurisdictions at more measured rates than other parts of the service area.

Metro followed more recently with the creation of the Coordinated Alternatives to Paratransit Service (CAPS) in Maryland, TransportDC in Washington, DC, and now Abilities-Ride in Maryland.

CAPS: The CAPS project is focused on trips to and from human services agencies (HSA) for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Since October 2013, CAPS has provided service for clients of two HSAs in Maryland. The project began as a coordinated pilot effort between Metro, the HSAs, and the State of Maryland. It has since been moved to a non-ADA service administered by the HSAs and funded by Metro. CAPS has allowed Metro to demonstrate that coordination between HSAs and a paratransit provider can result in a service that is less costly to provide, but is a more effective and responsive to the needs of customers with intellectual disabilities than traditional ADA paratransit services.

CAPS provides weekday shared-ride, roundtrip service between the HSAs main facilities and the homes of the clients. CAPS service includes the highly desired features of regular drivers, routine routes, routine pick-up and drop-off times, and assigned seating when necessary. CAPS is well regarded by the customers, their families, and the HSA social workers.

TransportDC: In February 2014 Metro presented District of Columbia officials with a business plan proposing an alternative for DC residents eligible for MetroAccess and traveling to and from dialysis facilities. By October 2014, the service, now known as TransportDC, was underway. TransportDC began with a soft launch, allowing Metro and DC officials to observe and assess service being provided under the program. During the soft launch, trips were only provided to and from dialysis facilities. Following the soft launch, service was expanded to all general purpose trips, ridership then grew quickly, and now TransportDC provides more than 100,000 trips annually.

TransportDC trips must begin and end within DC, and the program features the following transportation benefits for customers: same-day service, wait times of less than one hour, flat fare of \$5, and non-shared ride direct trips.

TransportDC is also demonstrating the benefits and challenges of addressing the latent transportation demands of people with disabilities. TransportDC is a jurisdictional-run program. DC is paying \$23 to the cab companies per one-way trip on TransportDC.

Abilities-Ride: Metro's next step in building alternatives to MetroAccess has been the creation of a general trip purpose alternative in Maryland, the Abilities-Ride program. Since September 18, 2017, MetroAccess customers have been able to call two cab companies; Regency Taxi and Silver Cab, to schedule trips they otherwise would have taken on MetroAccess. The taxi providers feature same-day service; reservations; apps with 'where is my ride' functionality; and direct trips.

Like the soft launch of the TransportDC program, Abilities-Ride also began with a soft launch in order to allow Metro to assess the capabilities of the participating vendors. In the first 136 days of the program, 515 customers took 8,219 trips through this alternative program.

Discussion:

Following the completion of the soft launch, which ended on February 28th, Metro launched an integrated comprehensive marketing plan (ICMP) to significantly increase monthly ridership on the Abilities-Ride program services through creative and repeated outreach and marketing. The ICMP will help meet its first full-year (post soft launch) Abilities-Ride ridership goals of 150,000 trips and \$4-\$6 million in savings.

Two ICMP activities currently underway include the development and ongoing distribution of 5,000 refrigerator magnets, 1,000 of which are being mailed directly to specific customers, and continued outreach to frequent MetroAccess customers. Additional planned marketing and communications efforts include creating a brochure for newly eligible MetroAccess customers that outlines every alternative available before they need to use MetroAccess; distributing additional targeted direct mail, such as postcards; using outreach teams to promote the program; and providing trip credits to incentivize customers to try the services available under the program. A new customer testimonial video is in development, which will help connect with customers visiting the Metro Access office. Follow-up customer research will be conducted, including phone surveys customer interviews, to track customer awareness of Abilities-Ride and identify barriers that prevent customers from initial or repeat program usage.

FUNDING IMPACT:

Metro expects the Abilities-Ride program to generate more than \$4 million in savings in the first full year of the program.

Project Manager:	Christiaan Blake, Director, Office of ADA Policy and Planning Acting Assistant General Manager - Department of Access Services
Project Department/Office:	Department of Access Services

TIMELINE:

Previous Actions	January 2016: Completion of Scope of Work February 2016: Request for Information March 2016 - August 2016: Additional Outreach September 2016 – January 2017: Request for Proposals February 2017 – June 2017: Review of Proposals September 2017: Selection of vendors September 2017: Start of the Abilities-Ride Program
Future Actions	February 2018: End of Soft Launch March 2018: Launch of ICMP June 2018: Review of First Full Year (post soft launch)



Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Abilities-Ride

Providing Alternatives to MetroAccess

Safety and Service Delivery Committee
March 8, 2018



Purpose

To inform the Safety & Service Delivery Committee about the Abilities-Ride program, the results of its first six months, and Metro's next steps



Abilities-Ride Program Features

- Maryland-to-Maryland trips only (could expand later)
- Fare: Customer pays first \$5, Metro pays next \$15; and Customer pays any amount above \$20
- Direct trips available – shared ride not required
- Advance reservation and same-day trips
- Maximum four trips per day (introductory period)
- Comparable availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles
- Driver training, background checks, drug/alcohol testing, and accommodation of service animals



Array of Options for MetroAccess Customers

Service	Bus/Rail	Transport -DC	Abilities- Ride	STAR/ Fastran	MetroAccess
Fare	FREE	\$5	\$5 and any amount > \$20	\$3.50 - \$9 Income- based	\$3.50 - \$6.50
Range	Regional	DC	MD	VA	Regional
Same- Day?	Yes	Yes	Yes	24-Hr Advance	24-Hr Advance
Limits	None	Varies	4 trips per day	None	None
Cost	\$4	\$23	\$15	\$33	\$50



Abilities-Ride Service Provider Partners

	Regency Taxi	Silver Cab
Trip Request Method	Phone, Web, Mobile App	Phone, Web, Mobile App
Wheelchair Vehicles	77	13
Payment Method	Cash, Credit	Cash, Credit
Minimum Fare Distance	9 miles	7 miles
Primary Jurisdiction	Montgomery County	Prince George's County



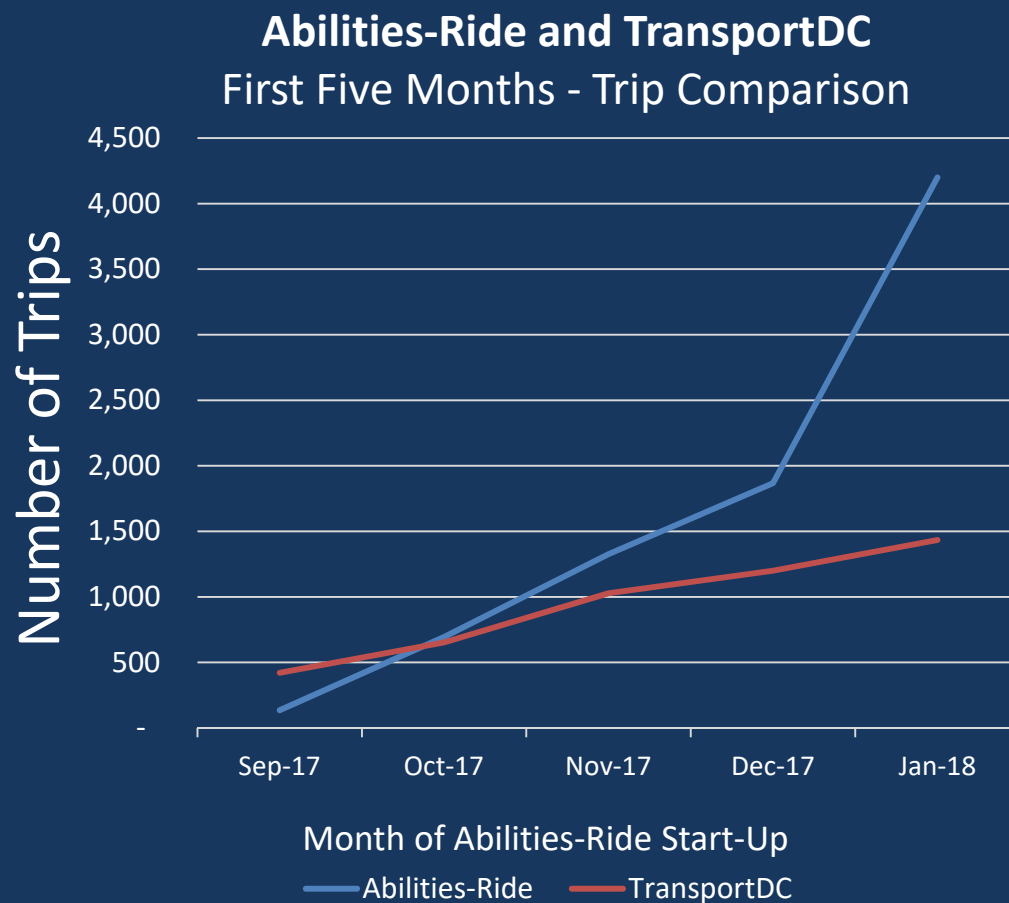
Soft Launch Strategy

- First six months allowed for adjustments and targeting of high-frequency MetroAccess users
- Outreach efforts included robocalls and distribution of informational postcards to 1/3 of eligible riders
- Ridership growth has been steady and many improvements have been made
- Abilities-Ride projected to save as much as \$4 million in first 12 months of operation after the soft launch
 - With 8,219 trips completed during soft launch, Metro has saved approximately \$287,665.



Operational Performance to Date

- 8,219 trips completed
- 475 trips have required wheelchair-accessible vehicles
- Use is slightly exceeding early adoption of TransportDC
- Favorable feedback from customers





Long-Term Strategy

- 12-month full service began March 1
 - Rides projected through pilot are 150,000
 - This level of ridership will produce \$4 million in savings
- Execute integrated comprehensive marketing plan

Abilities-Ride is an alternative to MetroAccess that gets you there **faster** and could even cost **less**.



Choose one of three easy ways to reserve a ride using Abilities-Ride:

Regency Taxi Company

- SmartPhone app: **ARMON USA App**
- Website: armonusa.com
- Telephone: **301-990-9100**

Silver Cab Company

- SmartPhone app: **Coach Transportation**
- Website: coachtransportation.com
- Telephone: **301-277-6000**

- You pay the first \$5, Metro pays the next \$15, then you pay any amount over a \$20 fare.
- Trips must begin and end in Maryland.
- You can take up to four trips a day.
- Reservations aren't required, but they're highly recommended.





Marketing & Communications Plan

- Comprehensive marketing plan initiated following conclusion of the soft launch on February 28
- Goal: achieve 95% awareness among the 22,000 eligible riders to help achieve ridership and cost savings goals
- Highlights program benefits: Direct trips, ride sharing not required, same-day service



Marketing & Communications Plan

- **Marketing and Outreach Tactics:**
 - Direct mail (refrigerator magnets and postcards)
 - Targeted outreach to high-usage MetroAccess customers, caregivers, social service organizations, and nursing and assisted living communities
 - Advertising at facilities and media outlets that cater to customer group
 - Updated website and promotional materials
 - Possibility of free trips to incentivize initial participation
- Research will track customer awareness and identify barriers to trial and repeat usage