



Customer Service, Operations and Security Committee

Information Item III-B

September 8, 2016

Abilities-Ride: New Service Initiative

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Board Action/Information Summary

☐ Action ☒ Information

MEAD Number:
201771

Resolution:
☐ Yes ☒ No

TITLE:

Abilities-Ride - An Alternative to MetroAccess

PRESENTATION SUMMARY:

This presentation provides information about the newest general-purpose alternative to MetroAccess being facilitated by Metro—"Abilities-Ride," including features of a pilot program, regulatory authorization, and financial impact, and next steps toward implementation.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this presentation is to inform the Customer Service, Operations and Security Committee of Metro's newest service alternative to MetroAccess—a subsidized program called "Abilities-Ride." The presentation will outline customer benefits, processes to manage the growth and cost of the program, and cost savings Metro anticipates. The presentation will also explain how Abilities-Ride will serve as a progress step in Metro's effort to ensure the ongoing sustainability of MetroAccess by maximizing alternate options for those customers who can use them.

DESCRIPTION:

Abilities-Ride is a pilot program designed to be a general purpose paratransit alternative in Maryland that could be expanded to include the entire MetroAccess service area. Abilities-Ride will not be operated as a Metro service, but rather as a public-private partnership (PPP) between Metro and multiple vendors providing existing or soon-to-be established on-demand service. Metro will subsidize up to \$15 per eligible customer trip.

Key Highlights:

- Metro will be seeking transportation network companies (TNC), or traditional transportation companies with the capability to utilize TNC technology, to broker or directly provide on-demand (same-day) transportation services to people with disabilities in a safe and efficient manner using a SmartPhone application (app).
- Abilities-Ride will be considered non-ADA because: 1) the decision to use the services Metro agrees to subsidize will be at the discretion of the customer; 2) Metro will not steer eligible customers to the alternative services; 3) the use of the alternative services will not impact the paratransit eligibility of customers; and 4) Metro will not deny a MetroAccess trip to an eligible customer due to their past use of the alternative services or due to the existence of the alternative services.

- The program vendors are able to provide more flexible and less costly service because they are not required to carry the infrastructure required by paratransit providers. Metro aims to leverage their flexibility and low-cost option for the benefit of addressing the travel needs of MetroAccess customers.
- When customers use Abilities-Ride as an alternative to MetroAccess, Metro expects to pay a maximum of \$15 - \$20 per trip compared to the current \$44 per trip, resulting in savings of 55% - 65% per trip. In the first full year of the program, there potentially could be savings of between \$4 - \$6 million.

Background and History:

To ensure the ongoing sustainability of MetroAccess, the Department of Access Services (ACCS) is working to facilitate alternatives throughout the region. There are the successful CAPS pilots in Maryland for human service agency trips, and the highly popular TransportDC in the District of Columbia for general-purpose (recently medical) trips leveraging taxi resources.

Discussion:

In the summer of 2015, following the successful introduction of two alternatives to MetroAccess, the Board asked ACCS about the possibility of establishing another alternative, but one that takes advantage of the presence of the TNCs operating in the region. ACCS had already researched this concept and developed a business plan that outlined how such an alternative would operate. ACCS then vetted the plan with the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC); issued a request for information (RFI) to get feedback for a broader group of disability community stakeholders and potential vendors; and modified the plan based on feedback received from the RFI.

Metro will now issue a solicitation for a PPP with up to three firms to offer a non-ADA paratransit option to MetroAccess-eligible customers in the Maryland portion of our service area using a smartphone application (app) and without the need for an advance reservation. The PPP will be known as "Abilities-Ride." This option will deliver higher quality service with shorter wait and travel times, and more predictable and affordable fares. It will be offered on a voluntary basis to customers, and it is our expectation that the resultant reduction in demand for our paratransit service will produce significant cost savings—between \$4 and \$6 million in the first full year of the program.

Metro's approach to potential vendors will seek specific information on various aspects of the services offered and then select the best providers overall based on several criteria, including:

- Accessibility of technology (app)
- Driver qualifications and criminal background checks
- Driver skill and sensitivity training
- Liability insurance and indemnification
- Cost per mile
- Cost per minute
- Availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles (at least one of the selected vendors will offer wheelchair accessible service)

Abilities-Ride is designed to generate savings while guaranteeing many, but not all, of the service aspects requested by members of the AAC and other disability stakeholders. Those aspects include wheelchair accessible vehicles, but not for 100% of vehicles in the PPP; accessible connectivity features; acceptance of service animals; and driver background checks.

FUNDING IMPACT:

No immediate budget impact – preliminary cost savings from the public-private partnership are already included in the FY17 budget. Actual net budget impact in FY17 will depend on a) program start date, b) total number of trips taken in the program and c) share of “new” trips versus existing trips shifted from MetroAccess service.	
Project Manager:	Christiaan Blake
Project Department/Office:	ACCS/ADAP

TIMELINE:

Previous Actions	<p>October 2013 – In coordination with the Maryland Department of Transportation, initiated the CAPS human service agencies transportation project.</p> <p>October 2014 – In coordination with multiple District of Columbia government agencies, initiated the TransportDC taxi alternative.</p>
Anticipated actions after presentation	<p>September 30, 2016 - RFP Issued</p> <p>October 13, 2016 - Pre-Proposal Conference</p> <p>November 9, 2016 - Proposals Due</p> <p>January 12, 2017 - Award Date</p> <p>March 1, 2017 - Program Starts</p>

RECOMMENDATION:

Support Metro’s efforts to facilitate the development of alternatives to MetroAccess for eligible customers.



Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Abilities-Ride

Providing Alternatives to MetroAccess

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Background

- Continuation of Metro's successful paratransit alternatives initiative
- Subsidize portion of trip cost taken by customers on specific non-MetroAccess transportation services
- Tailored for use by MetroAccess customers only
- Metro will partner with multiple providers
- Service will initially be limited to Maryland
- Customers will be afforded up to four one-way trips per day



Abilities-Ride as a Non-ADA Option

- Decision totally up to the customer (volunteer usage)
- Decision will not impact customer's
 - paratransit eligibility
 - right to schedule MetroAccess trips
- None of the vehicles used will be owned or operated by Metro



Customer Amenities

MetroAccess alternative for all eligible customers traveling in Maryland, with possible expansion to all jurisdictions coming later

- Same-day service
- Trip reservations primarily by accessible mobile app
- Metro fare subsidy of up to \$15 per trip
 - Customer pays the first \$5 of fare and fare above \$20
- Option of direct trips or shared-ride service



Accessibility

- A sufficient number of vendors will be selected to ensure equitable access for customers in need of service via wheelchair accessible vehicles
- Mobile Apps must be certified as 508 and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG) Compliant
- Drivers:
 - required to pass background checks
 - required to accept all customers traveling with service animals
 - required to have training related to serving customers with disabilities



Potential Financial Impact

- Metro anticipates between 150,000 – 250,000 subsidized trips taken via Abilities-Ride in the first full year
 - \$15-\$20 Metro maximum cost per trip
 - \$15 Metro maximum fare subsidy per trip
 - \$5 Metro maximum miscellaneous fees subsidy per trip
 - \$44 MetroAccess operating cost per trip
 - \$29 gross savings per trip
 - Between \$4.35M and \$7.25M potential first year gross savings
- Between **\$4M** and **\$6M** in potential first year net savings accounting for “Latent Demand” service and potential miscellaneous per trip costs



Next Steps

- 9/30/16 – Issue RFP
- 10/13/16 – Pre-Proposal Conference
- 11/09/16 – Proposals Due
- 1/12/17 – Award Contracts
- 3/1/17 – Start Program