

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: 9/15/08

Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Resolution #08-56 authorizing city staff to implement the proposed plan for the Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle Bus Project for Fiscal Year 2008-2010.

REPORT BY: Isabelle Leduc, Senior Services Supervisor

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Approve Resolution #08-56 authorizing staff to implement the proposed plan for the Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle Bus Project for fiscal year 2008-2010, supported by grant funding from the Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority in the amount of \$161,600.

BACKGROUND

Paratransit Program

The City of Albany Paratransit program supported entirely by Measure B Funds provides the following three types of transportation services to eligible Albany residents and the disabled community: subsidy on taxi trips, door-to-door shopping trips twice weekly to local grocery stores, and a monthly group trip to a different destination each month.

Taxi program: The taxi program provides eligible residents same day, on demand service, available 24 hours per day, seven days per week. When taking a taxi ride, riders get a receipt from the taxi driver; and receive a 70% reimbursement of the total cost of the ride.

Shopping trips: Shopping trips are offered twice a week using the Albany Senior Van. Riders are picked up at their homes, driven to a local grocery store, given time to shop independently and taken home when they are done. The volunteer van driver assists riders with their grocery bags into their homes.

Group trips: The Albany Senior Center also offers one group trip per month to a different destination throughout the Bay Area. In the past, destinations have been to Monterey, Santa Cruz, Sonoma, Napa and San Francisco. Currently, buses are reserved for each outing through a regional bus company. Trip attendance varies between 10 and 25 passengers.

The Albany Senior Van

The currently-owned Albany Senior Van is a 1992 GMC accessible van, which is 16 years old and in fair condition. The van accommodates 6 ambulatory passengers or 4 ambulatory passengers and one passenger using a wheelchair. The van is currently used for the shopping trip program twice a week and is driven by volunteers. Although the van is wheelchair accessible, going in and out of the van is very difficult for seniors with mobility impairments and for those using walkers and canes. The van doesn't have steps to go in and out of the vehicle and no luggage compartment for grocery bags. Passengers step in and out of the van through a sliding door with the help of the driver and must step over grocery bags lying on the floor. Furthermore, the size of the van, its age and present condition make it unreliable for long distances and therefore unsuitable for the monthly group trip program.

Grant Funding

City staff applied to the Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority's Paratransit GAP Grant program, which is dedicated for "Special Transportation for Seniors and People with Disabilities" and has received a grant in the amount of \$161,600 to purchase a new vehicle. "The Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle" purchase would ensure that the current service level is maintained and give the City of Albany's Paratransit program the opportunity to expand its services. The grant award is fully endorsed by the ACTIA board and its advisory board PAPCO.

BENEFITS

Gap funds will be used to maintain and expand current Paratransit services offered by the City of Albany Paratransit program by acquiring a new accessible bus with a capacity to accommodate 22 ambulatory passengers or 16 ambulatory passengers and 2 passengers using wheelchairs. Specifically, the new bus called the "Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle" will be used to support and expand the door-to-door grocery shopping trip program, expand the group day trip implemented by the Albany Senior Center and offer field trip opportunities to Albany Adult School classes that are being held at the Albany Senior Center and other Albany Community-based organizations.

With the purchase of a new accessible bus, the shopping program will accommodate more riders each day in a comfortable, safe and reliable vehicle. With a luggage compartment underneath, the proposed vehicle will prevent riders from tripping on grocery bags left on the floor of the bus since all bags will be left in the designated compartment.

The Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle will also be used for the monthly group day trip. Currently, the Albany Senior Center offers one monthly day trip and reserves a bus from a regional company. Having our own bus, and hiring a driver will allow the Senior Center to provide more recreational and accessible trips in a cost effective way. The use of the bus will expand to support activities such as the new walking group co-sponsored by the Friends of Five Creeks, allowing them opportunities to organize walks in locations that are not easily accessible via public transportation with an emphasis on accessible walking areas for people with disabilities who use a wheelchair. An example of such an area is

Inspirational Point in Tilden Park. For a small fee, to help defray the cost of maintenance, gas and driver's salary, local community-based organizations and Albany Adult school classes offered at the Albany Senior Center will have the opportunity to organize field trips to destinations of interest to them. They will do so by contacting staff at the Albany Senior Center who will be responsible for the scheduling of the bus and driver. The Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle will provide access to more transportation options for seniors and people with disabilities.

The Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle will enrich the lives of seniors and people with disabilities in the community by first ensuring that the current level of service is maintained, but also offer the opportunity to expand on the number of trips provided, from basic needs trips such as grocery shopping to recreational and fitness enhancing trips. In addition to providing more transportation options, the acquisition of a bus will create a strong sense of community and belonging as it will serve more people and bring increased visibility to the City's Paratransit program.

ENVIRONMENTAL PURCHASING POLICY

The proposed Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle bus is a 27' bus, El Dorado National – Aero Elite, Chevrolet 5500 – Chassis with a clean burn diesel engine. This vehicle is certified as the cleanest vehicle meeting all certification past 2010. Although diesel fuel is more expensive than regular gas, diesel provides twice as much miles per gallon than gas. Another major advantage of the diesel engine is that its life expectancy is twice as much as a gas engine. A diesel engine can run 300,000-350,000 miles while a gas engine will run up to 200,000 at the most. A diesel engine is also less costly to maintain than a gas engine. A vehicle with a CNG converted engine was also considered, but the City of Albany doesn't have the infrastructure to supply a vehicle of this type.

After looking at the pros and cons of all the options available and taking into account the City of Albany's Environmental Purchase policy, it was determined that a clean burn diesel engine was the best alternative to meet the needs of the program, its budget and the environment.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The two-year GAP grant in the amount of \$161,000 covers the entire cost of the vehicle purchase, a portion of the maintenance and gas expenses, all of the outreach costs to the community, which will include flyers and the design and printing of a colored brochure. The City's base Measure B that the City already receives, which is now used to cover the cost of the reserved bus for group trips, will cover the salary of the new part-time bus driver. Measure B fund balances will cover additional fuel and maintenance costs not covered by the "base" Measure B grant and the GAP grant. Increased ridership will also increase fare revenue, which will be used to offset any additional maintenance and gas expenditures.

Acquiring a new bus, a one-time expenditure, is the most cost efficient way to maintain and provide a wide array of services that meet the needs of the community within the resources available, and expand and maximize transportation options to seniors and people with disabilities. Should the current 16-year old Senior Center van become inoperable it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to find an outside contractor to fulfill the accessible transportation needs of the door-to-door shopping program. Furthermore, the proposed group trip program expansion will not be possible within the current Paratransit budget if a bus is reserved for each outing proposed.

The condition and age of the current Albany Senior Van limits greatly the availability of services to seniors and people with disabilities that the City of Albany Paratransit can provide. The City of Albany has been very resourceful in providing Paratransit services using resources available in the most efficient and cost effective way possible. Acquiring a new vehicle that can accommodate more riders will ensure that the current program continues to provide a wide variety of transportation services efficiently and safely.

Lastly, the Albany Senior Center Community Shuttle is innovative in that its use will be very flexible while maximizing transportation options for seniors and people with disabilities. Future expansion could include a shuttle through the city that would take riders to destinations that are needed to fulfill basic needs. What would be unique of the shuttle is that it would drop off riders in front of stores instead of leaving them at a distance; this makes a big difference for people with mobility impairments. Examples of stops include Safeway, Longs and Target with stops near housing in between. A stop at the nearby BART could also be included to allow transfers to other transit modes. Staff will continue to look for funding to use the new vehicle to its full capacity.

Attachments

Attachment A – Resolution #08-56

Attachment B – Timeline