

MEMORANDUM

February 9, 2022

TO: Transportation & Environment Committee
Health & Human Services Committee

FROM: Stephanie Bryant, Legislative Analyst
Office of Legislative Oversight

SUBJECT: **Worksession on OLO Report 2021-11: *Transportation Barriers to Medical Appointments***

On February 14th, the Joint Committee will receive a briefing on OLO Report 2021-11, which was released on November 2, 2021. This report responds to Council's request to better understand (1) existing medical transportation programs in the County, (2) data on populations at greater risk for experiencing transportation barriers, and (3) medical transportation services in other jurisdictions. The Executive Summary for Report 2021-11 appears on ©1.

The following Executive Branch staff will be available at the worksession to provide comments and answer questions:

- Dr. Odile Brunetto, Health & Human Services
- Dr. Christopher Rogers, Health & Human Services
- Samuel Oji, Department of Transportation

COUNCILMEMBERS PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED COPIES OF REPORT 2021-11 AND SHOULD BRING A COPY OF THE REPORT TO THE WORKSESSION.

REPORT SUMMARY

This section summarizes key findings from Report 2021-11. Comments on these findings from Chief Administrative Officer Richard Madaleno are attached at ©3.

In this report, OLO examined existing transportation options available to residents to access medical appointments and related services. OLO gathered information through document reviews, data analysis, and interviews with staff from Montgomery County Government, care providers, and area non-profits. This report provided key program information for existing County programs, including use of the Transportation Services Improvement Fund. This report also identified populations at-risk for experiencing transportation barriers and current service gaps. In sum, OLO found that Montgomery County operates numerous programs to address transportation barriers and increase access to medical

appointments; however, opportunities exist to expand service offerings to address barriers throughout an individual's lifespan. OLO's major findings are summarized below:

- Research shows persons facing transportation barriers are more likely to be older, of low-income, less educated, female, and People of Color. Stakeholders in Montgomery County identified similar populations who experience transportation barriers to medical appointments.
- Patients who walk or use public transit to access medical care are less likely to establish routine care and more likely to miss appointments. Additionally, geography poses barriers for urban and rural residents in the County
- Existing County transportation programs target low-income older adults or adults with disabilities and are often income or geographically restricted. Stakeholders report a gap in available services for programs that serve youth, young adults, adults with children, and working age adults.
- Volunteer and non-profit organizations fill critical transportation gaps in the County. However, these organizations face difficulty with volunteer recruitment, vehicle accessibility, and cost of liability insurance.
- County bus service poses numerous problems for patients including (1) trip length and number of bus transfers, (2) lack of 24-hour bus service or limited non-rush hour service, (3) cost-prohibitive bus fares, and (4) bus stop access and accessibility.
- Stakeholders report mixed results with taxicab service quality including long wait times, difficulty securing accessible taxis, and cost prohibitive taxi fares (particularly for rural residents).
- In 2015, the County imposed a \$0.25 surcharge on each TNC trip (e.g., Uber or Lyft) originating in the County. The TSIF was established to distribute revenue generated with the goal of expanding transportation options for low-income, disabled, and older County residents. Stakeholders report that the TSIF is not being used to its fullest potential - OLO found that the current fund balance totals over \$3.5 million.

OLO RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of Report 2021-11, OLO had two recommendations:

- 1. The Council should coordinate with the Executive Branch to review the Transportation Services Improvement Fund and how to use surcharge revenues to close medical transportation gaps in the County.**
- 2. Identify and evaluate potential changes to programs and services that address transportation barriers to medical appointments for vulnerable populations:**
 - Examine stakeholder-identified public transit barriers to medical appointments as part of the Department of Transportation Ride On Reimagine Study.
 - Review available data for County social service programs to determine whether the demand for programs/services that address transportation barriers is being met.
 - Review available data for County social service programs to determine whether the demand for programs/services that address transportation barriers is being met.

Transportation Barriers to Medical Appointments

OLO Report 2021-11

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

November 2, 2021

Access to transportation is necessary to receive ongoing healthcare, especially for patients living with chronic disease and require regular physician visits and medication access. This Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) report responds to Council's request to better understand (1) existing medical transportation programs in the County, (2) data on populations at greater risk for experiencing transportation barriers, and (3) a summary of programs operating in other jurisdictions. In sum, OLO found that Montgomery County operates numerous programs to address transportation barriers and increase access to medical appointments; however, opportunities exist to expand service offerings to address barriers throughout an individual's lifespan.

Demographics of Residents at Greater Risk for Experiencing Transportation Barriers. Stakeholders identified populations in Montgomery County who experience transportation barriers:

- Persons in Communities of Color;
- Persons with Limited English Proficiency;
- Persons of low-income;
- Older Adults (ages 65 and older);
- Children, including those in foster care;
- Persons experiencing homelessness;
- Persons living with chronic illness; and
- Persons living with disabilities.

Vehicle Access. Patients who walk or use public transit to access medical care are less likely to establish routine care and more likely to miss appointments. County data show around 7% of households in Montgomery County do not have access to a vehicle and that those without access to a vehicle are more likely to be a Person of Color, of low-income, or non-English speaking. Similarly, customers who use Ride On bus service are majority Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (78%); speak a language other than English (42%); or report an annual household income of less than \$30,000 (47%).

Geographic Barriers. Geography poses barriers for urban and rural residents in the County. Rural residents without vehicle access encounter a lack of transportation options, higher transit costs, and limited availability of and farther distances to medical providers. Comparatively, short distances to medical facilities in urban areas may pose significant barriers to a patient that cannot afford transit or must walk to the appointment.

Medical Transportation Programs in Other Jurisdictions. Other jurisdictions offer transportation programs that narrowly target transportation needs of specific populations, including vulnerable populations or those with specific medical needs:

Programs that Assist Vulnerable Populations

- Free or reduced cost monthly bus passes
- Shared van services for seniors, those with language barriers, and vulnerable legal status
- On-demand transportation for rural residents without fixed-route service
- Purchase of gas cards or vehicle maintenance funding for individuals with private vehicles but who are not able to afford costs to attend appointments

Targeted Medical Needs

- Uber rides to women's health appointments for those with no or limited fixed route transit service
- Free bus passes to pregnant women and women with young children
- On demand transportation and ride schedule for individuals living with chronic illnesses
- Use of transportation network companies to provide and track rides for patients without smartphone access

For a complete copy of OLO-Report 2021-11, go to:
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Reports/CurrentOLOReports.html>



Existing Transportation Programs in Montgomery County. Existing County transportation programs target low-income older adults or adults with disabilities and are often income or geographically restricted. Stakeholders report a gap in available services for programs that serve youth, young adults, adults with children, and working age adults. Further, some older adults and adults with disabilities to earn too much to qualify for transportation assistance programs but not enough to pay for private transportation. Additionally, OLO found:

- Volunteer and non-profit organizations fill critical transportation gaps in the County. However, these organizations face difficulty with volunteer recruitment, vehicle accessibility, and cost of liability insurance.
- County bus service poses numerous problems for patients including (1) trip length and number of bus transfers, (2) lack of 24-hour bus service or limited non-rush hour service, (3) cost-prohibitive bus fares, and (4) bus stop access and accessibility.
- Stakeholders report mixed results with taxicab service quality including long wait times, difficulty securing accessible taxis, and cost prohibitive taxi fares (particularly for rural residents).
- Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) may provide expediated service compared to taxis, but stakeholders report several issues: (1) unregulated drivers; (2) technology associated with services may be difficult to navigate or require banking information, and (3) limited availability in rural areas of the County.

Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF). In 2015, the County imposed a \$0.25 surcharge is on each TNC trip (e.g., Uber or Lyft) originating in the County. The TSIF was established to distribute revenue generated with the goal of expanding transportation options for low-income, disabled, and older County residents. Stakeholders report that the TSIF is not being used to its fullest potential - OLO found that the current fund balance totals over \$3.5 million.

Transportation Services Improvement Fund Expenditures and Balance

Revenue	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	Total
Fee	\$263,731.63	\$1,295,383.18	\$1,926,205.79	\$2,318,601.54	\$2,396,425.09	\$979,784.75	\$9,180,131.98
Expenditures							
Spent	--	--	\$68,148.80	\$273,268.10	\$499,836.96	\$296,019.30	\$1,137,273.16
Encumbered	--	--			\$319,911.74	\$319,911.74	\$319,911.74
Resolution 18-1144*	--	--	\$4,146,279.00			\$4,146,279.00	\$4,146,279.00
Fund Balance							\$3,576,668.08

Source: MCDOT; Finance; OLO. *Resolution 18-1144 appropriated funds to support existing programming freeing funding in the Mass Transit Fund for FY19 only.

OLO Recommendations

Recommendation #1: The Council should coordinate with the Executive Branch to review the Transportation Services Improvement Fund and how to optimize surcharges to close medical transportation gaps in the County.

Recommendation #2: Identify and evaluate potential changes to programs and services that address transportation barriers to medical appointments for vulnerable populations:

- Examine stakeholder-identified public transit barriers to medical appointments as part of the Department of Transportation Ride On Reimagine Study.
- Review available data for County social service programs to determine whether the demand for programs/services that address transportation barriers is being met.
- Leverage existing partnerships with hospitals and care providers to expand opportunities that address the diversified transportation needs of the County.



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Richard S. Madaleno
Chief Administrative Officer

MEMORANDUM

October 27, 2021

TO: Chris Cihlar, Director
Office of Legislative Oversight

FROM: Richard S. Madaleno, Chief Administrative Officer *BSM*

SUBJECT: Draft OLO Report 2021-11: Transportation Barriers to Medical Appointments

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Office of Legislative Oversight's (OLO) Report 2021-11: Transportation Barriers to Medical Appointments. The County Executive and I recognize the crucial role transportation plays in accessing healthcare and in improving overall health outcomes. We know that having access to a variety of transportation options to get to health care facilities, obtain social services, and engage in personal activities such as grocery shopping is vital to ensure the health and wellbeing of our residents, especially the most vulnerable residents underscored in the OLO report.

The draft report included the following recommendations.

Recommendation #1: The Council should coordinate with the Executive Branch to review the Transportation Services Improvement Fund and how to optimize surcharges to close medical transportation gaps in the County.

CAO Response: We agree with this recommendation. The Montgomery County Departments of Transportation (MCDOT) and Health and Human Services (DHHS) will work with other stakeholders, including key Boards, Committees and Commissions, to explore ways of using the Transportation Services Improvement Funds (TSIF) to improve transportation access to medical facilities for older adults, persons with disabilities, and those with low-incomes. We recognize, as emphasized in the OLO Report, that more can be done to address the transportation needs of low-income youth, young adults, adults with children, and working-aged adults who experience transportation barriers to medical care, social services, and personal activities of daily living. MCDOT and DHHS will work together to examine current strategies and devise innovative, efficient, and effective strategies to use the TSIF to offer client-centered public and private transportation services to address the transportation needs of low-income youth, young adults, adults with children, and working-aged adults.

Recommendation #2: Request that the County Executive identify and evaluate potential changes to programs and services that address transportation barriers to medical appointments for vulnerable populations.

This recommendation includes the following additional recommendations of the Council:

- Request that the County Executive examine stakeholder-identified public transit barriers to medical appointments as part of the Department of Transportation Ride On Reimagine Study.
- Request that the County Executive review available data for County social services programs to determine whether the demand for programs/services that address transportation barriers is being met.
- Request that the County Executive leverage existing partnerships with hospitals and care providers to expand opportunities that address the diversified transportation needs of the County.

CAO Response: We agree with these recommendations. MCDOT will ensure that the Ride On Reimagined scope of work includes an examination of public transit barriers to medical appointments. We also agree with the report's emphasis on the Executive Branch providing flexibility in transportation options (taxicab, transportation network companies, gas cards, bus tokens, etc.) to meet the personal transportation preferences of low-income County residents needing to access medical care and social services throughout the County. The Office of Procurement, MCDOT, and DHHS will collaborate to review available data and examine current procurement regulations and contracts to ensure that the availability of public and private transportation offerings that are client centered. The OLO Report clearly presents the research that underscores the disparities that exist when vulnerable County residents do not have accessible transportation to attend medical appointments. Through strong existing partnerships, DHHS and MCDOT will work collaboratively with the County's hospitals and care providers to examine innovative, efficient, and effective strategies to address the transportation needs of vulnerable, at-risk patients experiencing transportation barriers in accessing medical care and social services, as well as personal activities such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy.

We look forward to discussing these items at the Council session.

cc: Fariba Kassiri, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Earl Stoddard, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Jake Weissmann, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Chris Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation
Raymond Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Ken Hartman, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive

OLO Report 2021-11 – Transportation Barriers to Medical Appointments

summarized in this report.⁶⁰ For each program, OLO summarizes eligibility factors, services provided, and program costs (including rider fees and program operations when available).

Table 8. Existing Transportation Programs Identified by Stakeholders

County Government (starts on page 18)			
Program	Operated by	Population Served	Participant Fee
1 Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation	MCDOT	Low-income beneficiaries	Free for qualified beneficiaries
2 Call-N-Ride	MCDOT	Adults 65+ and Adults 18+ with disabilities	Income dependent sliding scale (\$5.25 - \$30.00 or \$10.50 - \$60.00) for a \$60.00 or \$120.00 value on a swipe card
3 Same-Day Access	MCDOT	MetroAccess riders	\$30.00 payment for a \$60.00 value on a swipe card
4 Ride On Programs	MCDOT	Youth (18 and under), Adults (65+), and persons with disabilities	Program dependent
5 HHS Programs	HHS	Program dependent	Free for qualified participants
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (starts on page 27)			
Program	Operated by	Population Served	Participant Fee
6 MetroAccess	WMATA	Ages 5 and older with an ADA-recognized disability	Maximum fare of \$6.50 per trip
7 Abilities Ride	WMATA	MetroAccess riders	Minimum of \$5.00 per trip
8 Reduced Fare	WMATA	Program dependent	Program dependent
Non-Profit Organizations (starts on page 30)			
Program	Operated by	Population Served	Participant Fee
9 Connect-A-Ride	Jewish Council for the Aging Staff	Adults 50+ and Adults 18+ with disabilities	Free
10 Escorted Transportation	Jewish Council for the Aging Staff/Volunteers	Adults ages 50 and over who meet income and disability requirements	Income dependent sliding scale (\$7.00 - \$25.00)
11 VillageRides	Jewish Council for the Aging Staff	Villages and Nonprofit Organizations	--
12 Senior Rides	Senior Connection	Adults 60+	Free for qualified participants
13 Villages	Volunteers	Restricted by zip code and age	May charge a membership fee
14 HELP Organizations	Volunteers	Program/need dependent	Free for qualified participants

⁶⁰This report does not provide a full scan of all programs operating in the County.