




# Metro

**MARCH 25, 2011**

**TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**THROUGH: ARTHUR T. LEAHY**   
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

**FROM: MICHELLE LOPES CALDWELL**   
**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES OFFICER**

**SUBJECT: SENIOR TRAVEL TRAINING**

## ISSUE

Over one million people in Los Angeles County are 65 years old or older, and this number will continue to grow as the baby boom generation ages. Many in this age group will become unable to drive and will need to rely on alternative means of transportation. Older adults are the largest and fastest growing segment of people seeking qualification for ADA Paratransit service. Metro plans to expand its "Seniors on the Move" program and outreach materials focused on older adults to address these rapidly growing needs. We propose to implement a peer-to-peer "Senior Travel Buddy" program to help older adults to become more comfortable with using fixed route public transportation service. This will also help slow the rate of growth in demand for ADA Paratransit service.

## DISCUSSION

The Seniors on the Move program was implemented in 2003 jointly by the Los Angeles County Commission on Aging (LACCOA), Access Services and Metro and was funded by Metro. One training program was presented annually in each of the five Los Angeles County supervisorial districts, with approximately 200 people attending each session. The training program consisted of presentations on how to use the transit system, followed by a ride on a bus, with a transfer to a Metro train, where practical. Program management transferred to Metro in 2006, and the program was redesigned to provide 15 smaller sessions per year at senior centers and senior housing facilities, with more locally focused transit information. Smaller group sessions gave participants more opportunities to have their specific questions addressed. Participants in both the larger and smaller scale programs received a Metro Senior ID card (now senior TAP cards) and a one-month Metro pass to encourage their continued use of Metro's service.

These sessions have been well received, but have not reached enough participants to adequately address the growing number of older adults who need assistance transitioning to public transit. In addition, the current program does not engage participants in enough depth to help them become regular transit users. Staff is proposing a Senior Travel Buddy program as a means of reaching many more seniors in the most meaningful and cost-effective way as possible.

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The program will focus on older adults who will benefit from using public transit to get to destinations around the community, but do not know how to use a bus or train, or do not feel comfortable riding public transportation alone. A contractor will recruit older adults with experience riding public transit to serve as volunteer Travel Buddies, who will teach their peers how to ride public transit. Volunteers will be screened and trained in basic travel training techniques. Similar programs have been successfully implemented at Pierce Transit, Lane Transit and North County Transit agencies, among others.

Metro's project manager will work with the contractor to design and implement the program. One potential structure for the program could be the creation of Travel Buddy Clubs at senior centers and senior housing facilities throughout the county, with volunteer Travel Buddies serving as leaders. Travel Buddy Clubs would plan and take outings using public transit to introduce passengers to transit in an environment that is safe, comfortable, social and fun. An ongoing role for the contractor in this program is to collaborate with senior center personnel and to organize and then "staff" Travel Buddy Club meetings and events.

Another potential aspect of the program is a client referral model, where the volunteers are matched with individuals or groups who have never ridden a bus, are afraid of riding transit alone, need some assistance to carry groceries while riding, or who are inexperienced with trip planning and execution. The Travel Buddies may ride just once with a client or may become a regular riding companion for someone who needs long-term assistance.

Travel Buddies will receive a bus pass in return for their service, and will be recognized at an annual luncheon. The contractor and Metro project manager will monitor the progress of the program by tracking the number of older adults trained, satisfaction ratings by the older adults, and by randomly interviewing older adults who have received the training.

Traditional travel training programs have been successfully implemented using transit agency or contractor employees to provide one-on-one travel training, at a cost of \$500 to \$1,000 per person trained. Although this approach can be effective, we believe we can train far more people at a lower cost per successful trainee using a peer-to-peer volunteer approach.

Through the Travel Buddy program, it is estimated that a countywide network of trainers or "travel buddies" can annually teach 1,000 older residents how to use fixed-route service to maintain their independence. The estimated cost of the Travel Buddy program is \$100,000 in the first year. This includes the cost of a competitively procured contract that will include a manager and trainers to develop the program, train the volunteers, and the cost of marketing and monitoring the program.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will request funds for this program in the FY12 Proposed Budget. The program will be managed by the ADA Compliance Unit in the Office of the CEO.