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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Terri Lynch, and I am the Director of the Arlington, Virginia, Agency on Aging, a unit within a comprehensive and integrated Arlington County Government Department of Human Services. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you some of our efforts in creating the framework for a coordinated transportation system for Arlington's elders. I intend to share both our successes and the challenges that still remain.

Introduction

First, a little about Arlington: We are a highly urbanized community, directly across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. In fact, until the Congress retroceded Arlington and a part of Alexandria back to Virginia, we were part of the federal district. We are geographically compact – only 25 square miles, but have a resident population that is over 193,000, and an employment base of 200,000. We are the 12th most dense county in the nation, following communities like the 3 New York boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx. For more than a generation, the County has sought to concentrate its land use decisions in a way that makes public transit useful and attractive to its residents. Specialized transportation services for elders were conceived and grew within this framework.

About transportation needs in an urban area: If people are unable to drive (or should not be driving) and cannot easily use public transportation, they can quickly become very isolated. Urban areas, especially this one, are highly transient, and people who live in large apartment building complexes can easily not know their neighbors. Conversely, elders who have lived in single family neighborhoods for many years may have outlived their nearby friends and their families have moved elsewhere. Without informal supports or transportation services, elders

may have no way to get to the grocery store, to health care appointments, to visit friends -- or just out. Being isolated behind four walls is not good for one's physical or mental health.

Arlington has had a few publicly funded transportation services for the past 25 years: transportation to the Older Americans Act funded senior nutrition centers, to our adult day health care program, and to grocery stores and medical appointments. The Arlington Chapter of the American Red Cross provided this service using their vehicles and volunteer drivers. Metrobus and Metrorail also have been available, as are a fleet of taxicabs. Over the years, we had come to rely on the taxicabs in Arlington to provide transportation to the senior nutrition centers and the adult day health care program. Because we are geographically so small and a big issue is traffic congestion, this is the most cost-effective form of transportation service we have. The transportation to the senior nutrition centers or the adult day health care program takes three or four persons to a cab, making the average actual cost less than \$4.00 per person per one-way trip. With the grocery shopping and medical transportation service, we knew from the Red Cross's monthly reports over the past ten years that they regularly received requests for transportation assistance which they had to deny due to insufficient numbers of vehicles and volunteers.

Service Enhancements

Senior Loops

Because we had no way to directly enhance the Red Cross program, we came up with a different solution to make their services more available to elders with no other viable transportation resources. We have four retirement apartments for low-income elders, financed by HUD or by low-income tax credits. More than 970 elders live in these buildings, and not one is in walking distance of a grocery store or drug store. These residents relied heavily on the Red Cross service. Because they are clustered, large groups of elders, we were able to substitute an alternative service to meet their needs. We contracted with a transportation provider to operate the "Senior Loop" for residents of these four buildings using a 16-passenger, wheelchair accessible van. The Loop is a middle of the day service that provides a continuous circuit for residents in each of the buildings to a nearby grocery store one day per week. The transportation provider is able to offer us a good price because this vehicle, which is used for early morning and late afternoon service for other Arlington County programs, would otherwise be unused during

the middle of the day. This service is extremely cost effective and time efficient because, with a large number of people living at a single location, they already are grouped together and can all be transported easily from the one location to the same destination in a van. By freeing the Red Cross from the responsibility of serving residents of these apartment buildings, their volunteer drivers can concentrate on using their sedans to transport residents of single family home neighborhoods, thereby increasing service in previously underserved areas.

Specialized Transit for Arlington Residents -- *STAR*

The largest increase in our ability to offer transportation assistance came as a result of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, WMATA, the public transit provider in this metropolitan area, was required to provide paratransit service to complement its regular public transportation services for people who have a “transportation disability.” So, WMATA developed a system, called MetroAccess, for people who were unable to use the bus or rail system because of a physical or mental disability. Many older people fit into this category, simply by not having the stamina to walk two to six blocks to a bus stop and wait for the bus in all kinds of weather. Since we had very limited transportation options available to older persons, this new service was a major boon to our system.

Subsequently, the Arlington County Department of Public Works developed and funds with local tax revenue, a program called *STAR*, Specialized Transit for Arlington Residents. *STAR* is Arlington’s pre-reserved trip service for persons who are eligible for and have been certified to use MetroAccess. *STAR*, which offers more personalized service at a lower cost than MetroAccess, is a system, not a fleet of vehicles. For the actual provision of service, *STAR* contracts with two private companies that use wheelchair accessible vans, and with a taxicab company. Except when it rains and traffic in the whole metropolitan area grinds to a halt, there is no shortage of vehicles.

Incremental Add-Ons

With *STAR* in place, we were able to identify small additional enhancements to the *STAR* program that could make a significant difference. With the active support of the Arlington

Department of Public Works staff, we initiated 3 such programs using federal Older Americans Act funds and funding from the Virginia General Fund: 1) *STAR* Assisted transportation, 2) Interim *STAR*, and 3) Temporary *STAR*.

1. *STAR* Assisted transportation. The *STAR* program provides curb-to-curb service -- that is, the rider gets to the door of the vehicle, and then the driver can help the person get into the vehicle. *STAR* Assisted Transportation is a door-to-door service. For this program, specifically chosen taxicab drivers, who were already driving for the *STAR* program, were provided additional training so that they could serve as escorts. The driver/escort takes riders from the front door of their house or apartment to the curb and assists the rider into the vehicle. Then, at the destination, the driver/escort assists the passenger out of the vehicle and to the door. Due to limited funds, this program is available only for health care appointments. The actual trip is financed by *STAR*, and we utilize our very limited federal and state funds for the assistance component only.
2. Interim *STAR*. Normally, it takes 30-60 days from the time a person submits an application for MetroAccess until s(he) is determined eligible, and, therefore, has access to the *STAR* program. Agency on Aging staff and volunteers have focused heavily on assisting people complete the MetroAccess applications, so we now have staff who have a well honed sense of whether a person will be certified as eligible for the program. We set up our own program, Interim *STAR*, that a person can use while awaiting final certification for MetroAccess, and told the *STAR* administrators that we would pay the bill. Interim *STAR* is only good for health care appointments in Arlington and nearby areas. This program is used mostly by elders who need the assisted transportation service. Because retroactive eligibility is conferred from the date that the application is filed, we, therefore, never actually had to pay for a single ride.
3. Temporary *STAR*. There are some people who have a transportation disability for only a short time. This need is always related to a health problem, such as, hip replacement, broken arm or leg, radiation or chemotherapy. As MetroAccess certifies only persons with permanent disabilities, we developed the Temporary *STAR* program to serve people for up to

three months to take them to health care appointments. In general, at the end of the three-month period, the users have either recovered or apply for permanent MetroAccess. We had funding for the past two years for this program, but regrettably, we no longer have the funding. We hope to restore the program at some time in the future.

Recent Developments

Thanks to community activism, effective July 1, 2003 the Arlington County Board enhanced our existing programs by adding two additional transportation programs for elders. The first is a subsidized taxicab voucher program, called "Super Senior Taxi," that will allow "super seniors," residents age 75 and over, to purchase for \$10.00, a coupon book valued at \$20.00, that can be used to pay for taxi rides. Each participant may purchase a maximum of 10 books per year. The three radio-dispatched taxicab companies that serve Arlington have agreed to participate in this program. The second addition to our array of transportation programs is service to the six senior centers in the County, that are not congregate nutrition sites, and therefore, never had any public transportation service that was viable for most elders.

To assure that we have a well-rounded approach to transportation, we are also participating in the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators GrandDriver program. This is an education and awareness effort to help prepare older drivers to "Get Around Safe and Sound" in their later years.

We think that we now have a solid framework for transportation services. *STAR* is the transportation focal point, and its office makes the individual arrangements for each passenger. Users of *STAR*, the Senior Loop, and the new Senior Center transportation program now all call the *STAR* office to arrange trips. Also, the *STAR* office staff is learning how to communicate in languages other than English, primarily Spanish, Vietnamese, and Russian. The transportation vendors for *STAR* are also the vendors for the Senior Loop, the senior centers, and the adult day health care program. Use of the same transportation providers makes for a highly coordinated, efficient service.

Challenges

Our challenges can be summarized as:

1. Assuring that older Arlington residents are aware of the services that already exist, and helping them access the services. Agency on Aging staff spends a great deal of time explaining the MetroAccess/*STAR* process and helping people apply for MetroAccess, because the MetroAccess application is long and hard for many elders to understand. Many applicants do not realize that following submission of the physician signed application, they will receive notice of a scheduled appointment to which they must go to be physically assessed for eligibility. Nor do they always understand that once having been certified eligible for MetroAccess, they can use *STAR*. This amount of information is simply too confusing and difficult to comprehend for the older people who call the County for help.
2. Helping more Arlington residents understand that the difficulties older people have in walking make them eligible for MetroAccess/*STAR*. Too many older people believe that one must use a wheelchair in order to be considered as having a transportation disability.
3. Funding to continue existing services as well restore the lost ones and further enhance the current programs, because there are still many people who are going without the service they need. This need includes being able to offer subsidies to persons with disabilities who are unable to afford the \$2.00 co-pay cost of a regular one-way *STAR* trip.

Collaborative Efforts

Over the years we have been able to achieve new programs because we have solid and sustained working relationships among all the stakeholders. These include several County departments (the Department of Public Works, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Resources, and the Department of Human Services), the non-profit agencies, including the Red Cross, the transportation vendors, and the involved community. The Arlington Commission on Aging -- the citizen advisory council required by the Older Americans Act and appointed by the County Board -- has sponsored a committee that has focused on transportation for the past 15 years. This committee has included as members all of the affected groups. In these meetings it was possible to brainstorm ideas, test feasibility, identify funding sources, and garner support. During the past two years, the sustained advocacy of the Senior Adult Council, participant

representatives of all of the senior centers, proved pivotal in adding the two most recent programs.

I have attached a Transportation Options Information Sheet that we distribute to older persons and their families to help them identify available services.



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Transportation Service Options for Seniors

Metro On-Call Service: A lift-equipped accessible Metrobus will be assigned to a specific route upon request. To arrange for on-call service, requests must be received by 3:00 p.m. on the day before service is required. Call Metrobus On-Call Service at **(202) 962-1825**.

Metro - Discount: Discounts are available to area residents age 65 and older and persons with disabilities. Metro identification cards are available at public libraries, County Senior Adult Clubs and Centers, and Arlington Commuter Stores (see Commuter Stores, below). Discount fare cards may be purchased at Metro Center, all Commuter Stores (see below), all Giant Food stores and all Safeway stores.

MetroAccess: MetroAccess is a regional paratransit service sponsored by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). It is "curb-to-curb" public transportation that serves people who are unable to use the bus or rail system as a direct result of a physical or mental disability. Eligible passengers may travel anywhere in the WMATA service area. The participating jurisdictions in this program are in Maryland; Montgomery and Prince George's Counties; the District of Columbia; and in Virginia; the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church, and the counties of Arlington and Fairfax. There are no restrictions on trip purpose. To become eligible, individuals must complete an application and be certified prior to booking trips. This service is available to people of all ages, however, there are no discounts available for seniors. The passenger fare for this service is \$2.20 per one way trip. **For assistance with the application process and filling out the required forms call the Arlington Agency on Aging at (703) 228-1700.** In Arlington MetroAccess service is provided by *STAR*. Please see the next paragraph for more information.

STAR (Specialized Transit for Arlington Residents): *STAR* is Arlington County's pre-arranged reserved trip service for persons with disabilities. *STAR* operates as part of the Arlington Transit system. People who are certified eligible under the MetroAccess program and reside in Arlington are automatically certified under the *STAR* program. Customers may call *STAR* (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays) to request a trip one to seven days in advance, or to set up a standing trip order. Trip service is available 5:30 a.m. to midnight 7 days a week, anywhere Metro Bus or Rail service is available. *STAR* provides service using white *STAR* minivans operated by Diamond Transportation Service and Red Top cab sedans and minivans. Passenger fares are \$2.00 per one way trip; a companion may ride along (space available) for another \$2.00 fare per person. For more information call **(703) 228-TRIP (8747)**.

Assisted Transportation Services: This service provides a driver/escort from the door of a home to the office of a health care provider. Eligibility for the program is limited

to individuals who are (1) age 60 or over, (2) Arlington residents, (3) certified eligible by MetroAccess, (4) *STAR* program participants, and (5) in need of a personal care attendant. This service is limited to health care appointments and visits to family members in a nursing home or assisted living facility. A short application and a home visit are required for this service. The fee for this service is based on income and is in addition to the *STAR* fee. The full cost for this service is \$10.00 for a one way trip. For more information call the Arlington Agency on Aging at **(703) 228-1700**.

Interim *STAR*: This service is limited to individuals age 60 or over in need of the Assisted Transportation Service but have not yet completed the MetroAccess application process. For more information call the Arlington Agency on Aging at **(703) 228-1700**.

Temporary *STAR*: This service is available for healthcare appointments if you have a temporary condition that prevents you from driving or using public transportation. Eligibility is limited to individuals (1) age 60 or older, (2) Arlington residents, and (3) individuals must obtain a physician statement detailing condition and estimated length of debility. Trips are restricted to inside the Beltway in Virginia, Washington D.C. and Fairfax Hospital Complex. Passenger fares are \$2.00 per one way trip. **Assisted Transportation Service** may be used in conjunction with **Temporary *Star***. For more information call the Arlington Agency on Aging at **(703) 228-1700**.

Commuter Stores: The Commuter Store has everything that is needed to make a commute an easy one, including reduced fare cards, taxi information and Red Top reduced fare coupon books, regional bus passes and tokens, one-day Metro passes, maps, timetables, carpool ride-matching services, bike routes, and paratransit information. **For more information call (703) 228-RIDE (7433)** or check out the website at www.CommuterPage.com, or visit one of the 4 Commuter Stores at:

Crystal City- located in the Crystal City Underground Mall, across from Hamburger Hamlet.

Rosslyn- located in Rosslyn Center, Mall level two, upstairs from the Rosslyn Metrorail Station.

Ballston- located in Ballston Common Mall, one block from the Ballston Metrorail Station.

STAR Office- located at 2928 Columbia Pike, 22204.

Wheelchair Accessible Taxi-Cabs: The taxi-cab companies that serve Arlington have 23 wheelchair accessible vehicles for use by patrons who require them. Patrons need to call the cab company and request a wheelchair accessible cab. Passengers are encouraged to call ahead whenever possible due to high usage of vehicles. The companies provide specialized training to the drivers who provide this service. The fare is set at the meter rate. The service is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Cabs may be requested up to two weeks in advance. For information, or to arrange for service, call for Red Top **(703) 522-3333**; -- TTY **(703) 522-3331**, for Blue Top **703-243-8294**.

Taxi-Cab Discounts: Three taxi-cab companies that serve Arlington offer a 10% discount to passengers 55 and older or disabled persons. Blue Top Cab Company offers a discount to older passengers who request the discount of the driver at the time of the trip. For information call **(703) 243-8294**. Red Top and Yellow Cab Companies sell coupon books at a 10% discount that are used as fare and turned in at the time of the ride. For information or to purchase call **(703) 525-0900**.

Super Senior Taxi (SST): Arlington residents age 75 and over may purchase, for \$10.00, a coupon book that can be used to pay for taxi rides valued at \$20.00. A maximum of 10 books per year may be purchased. For details, call the **Arlington Agency on Aging at (703) 228-1700**.

Senior Centers and Adult Day Care: Door-to-door transportation service is available to Senior Centers and to participants in the Madison Adult Day Health Care Center and the Alzheimer's Family Day Center in Falls Church. For information about the various transportation services, call the specific Center. For general information about senior centers, call (703) 228-4744.

American Red Cross, Arlington Chapter: This service is available to individuals age 60 and over for grocery shopping and medical appointments on a space available basis. Persons of any age with disabilities are eligible to use the transportation to medical appointments. This program utilizes volunteer drivers and Red Cross vehicles. For more information, call the Arlington Chapter at **(703) 527-3010**.

Senior Loops: This service provides weekly grocery shopping to residents of each of four retirement housing facilities {The Carlin, Claridge House, Culpepper Garden and Woodland Hill}. Residents request a registration form from the management of their residence. The form is forwarded to the *STAR* office and *STAR* staff schedules this service. Diamond Transportation Service provides the service using a wheelchair accessible van. There is no charge for this service.