



Disabled Patrons and Personal Attendants Will Ride Metro System Free Starting Sept. 1

(July 12) Beginning Sept. 1, some disabled persons and their personal care attendants will begin riding Metro Bus and Metro Rail lines for free. It's part of a two-year demonstration program aimed at giving disabled patrons more transit options and saving some \$1.6 million a year by encouraging them to use fixed-route transit instead of more expensive curb-to-curb paratransit services.

Currently, some 37,000 disabled persons - including wheelchair-bound patrons - use Access Services, Inc. (ASI), for transportation. Approximately 24,000 of those also are eligible to use personal care attendants.

With ASI's Access Paratransit ridership growing 25 to 36 percent annually since 1995, its 400 leased vans and 900 contracted taxi sedans are fully loaded during peak service hours. The high rate of usage - 1.7 million boardings a year - sparked a recent protest in which some disabled patrons complained about long waits for pickups and poor service.

Attendants ride free

Operating under a \$43.5 million annual agreement with the MTA to provide paratransit services, ASI charges a distance-based fare of \$1.50 to \$4 for a one-way trip. The attendants ride free on paratransit services as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Although the disabled pay only a 45-cent fare on MTA-operated lines, their attendants must pay full fare - an apparent disincentive to use MTA services. Most of those eligible for ASI services use fixed-route transit less than twice a month. The MTA Board approved the free-fare demonstration at its June meeting.

"By offering a free fare," says Scott Greene, transportation planning manager, "we're encouraging them to try the rail system and the bus system, which has improved vastly with better lifts, low-floor buses and driver sensitivity training."

The curb-to-curb service provided by ASI costs about \$20 per trip, while a trip on a fixed-route service requires only about \$1 in subsidies. The MTA estimates that some 85,000 patrons who use ASI services each year will switch to Metro Bus or Metro Rail to take advantage of the free fares.

Savings of \$1.6 million

The MTA hopes to shift at least five percent of ASI riders to Metro Bus or Metro Rail. Even though the disabled patron and personal attendant would pay nothing, the MTA could save \$1.6 million a year, even considering a \$76,000 loss in annual farebox revenues.

Diverting five percent of ASI riders each day to Metro Buses or Metro Rail would mean about 275 more boardings of disabled persons, including about 100 in wheelchairs. With the Metro system currently handling 300 to 400 wheelchair boardings a day, another 100 is considered manageable.

"We think the typical Access Paratransit passenger who takes advantage of the free-fare demonstration will be more mobile, perhaps persons who are blind or have hidden disabilities like epilepsy or diabetes," says Greene.

Persons eligible for ASI services carry photo ID cards. Sample ID cards will be distributed to all operating divisions and to the LAPD and Sheriff's deputies prior to the start of the demonstration, Sept. 1.

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