

Office of the City Manager

ACTION CALENDAR  
October 14, 2003

To: Honorable Mayor and  
Members of the City Council

From: Weldon Rucker, City Manager

Subject: Taxi Permits for Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

RECOMMENDATION

That Council defers action on the request from the Commission on Disability, and the Commission on Aging, to issue 10 additional taxi permits for accessible taxis; and allow the City Manager to return on November 25, 2003 with a specific proposal for implementation.

DISCUSSION

The City Manager concurs in concept with the request, and has convened an interdepartmental team to complete the proposal, which will be part of the presentation on Berkeley Paratransit Services. There is currently authorization for 120 taxicabs to be permitted for operation in Berkeley. At this time, none of these taxis are accessible to people with certain disabilities, to the extent that a person using a power wheelchair or scooter is able to use the cab without transferring out of their mobility device. While there is alternative transportation available in the form of paratransit for people who are unable to use buses or other fixed-route transit options, it often requires a reservation made at least one day in advance. The advantage of taxis is they provide on-demand transportation, and are available for spur of the moment trips when needed or desired.

Issuing taxi permits to be used for accessible vehicles is more complex than it may first appear. Some of the concerns include:

1. Initiating the best programmatic and administrative approach to provide the service, including options for new and/or an expanded number of taxi permits, and the appropriate incentive to encourage applicants for these permits;
2. The definition of, and requirements for, an accessible taxi;
3. The possible service and fiscal impacts from demands on Berkeley Paratransit Services, both the Wheelchair-van Program and the Taxi Scrip Program, given current budget allocations; or what relationship, if any, there will be between an increase in demand for taxi scrip, to use for accessible taxis, and the service demands on the City's Wheelchair-van Program;
4. How to ensure that accessible taxis are actually available to benefit the people with disabilities using wheelchairs who need this service; and
5. What amendments to the Berkeley Municipal Code may be needed to implement this service, as well as administrative regulations necessary to enforce the expanded taxi community.

The following City departments are involved with addressing these concerns:

- Housing – Berkeley Paratransit Services: issues taxi scrip to eligible users; partly funded by Measure B tax dollars, as well as grants and the City’s General Fund.
- Finance – Customer Service: administers the Berkeley Municipal Code (BMC) ordinance regulating vehicles for hire; licensing and permitting of owners, drivers, and vehicles; and redeems taxi scrip submitted by drivers.
- Finance – Treasury: issues cash, under Council authorization, for use to redeem taxi scrip.
- Public Works – Disability Services: staffs Commission on Disability; monitors and supports programs and services for potential users of the recommended accessible taxis.
- Public Works – Corporation Yard: inspects all vehicles for taxi licensing.
- Health & Human Services – Senior Programs: staffs Commission on Aging; provides programs and services for some potential users of the recommended accessible taxis.
- City Manager’s Office – Neighborhood Services Enforcement Project: conducts field enforcement of taxi regulations and driver conduct.


RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

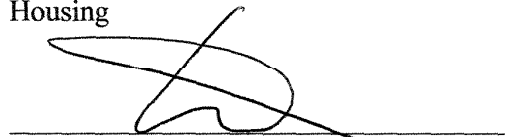
The City Manager supports the recommendation to provide accessible vans and taxis as soon as possible. However, the request from the Commission on Disability and the Commission on Aging has budgetary and program implications. Additional information is required and coordination of interdepartmental responsibilities needs to be resolved. The presentation on November 25, 2003, will allow further discussion and understanding of the financial implications and the programmatic complexities. A specific plan and schedule to address the recommendation will be presented at that time.

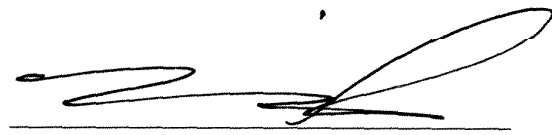
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