

## Arlington studying a plan that would pay for your Uber to Metro

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*This post has been updated.*

Arlington County is looking to partner with transportation providers such as Uber and Lyft to offer residents rides from more remote residential areas of the county where bus service to Metro stations is limited.

The on-demand option would replace some fixed bus service in north Arlington.

“What we would be supporting is picking up residents in their neighborhood and taking them to one or two designated stops, most likely a transit station,” said Marti Reinfeld, the county’s interim transit bureau chief. “The county will subsidize that at some level.”

It could take a couple of years before such a program launches, but county transportation officials say they want to do so as soon as possible. Arlington joins a growing number of U.S. transit agencies that are exploring partnerships with the popular app-based companies to leverage their success and improve service to residents.

Nationwide, some transit providers have begun collaborating with Uber and Lyft in mutual marketing efforts. In some cases, deals involve discounts for transit users and the integration of the companies’ app into the public transit agencies’ websites. Uber has partnerships in Atlanta and Dallas where it markets itself as a connection to transit stations.

Lyft has worked with agencies in Denver and Los Angeles to incorporate its service in trip planning apps and just this week announced a deal with transportation provider American Logistics Company to provide paratransit services.

Transit agencies in Washington, Boston, New York, and Chicago have been in talks about bringing the app-based services on board as contractors to provide paratransit service at much cheaper costs than their current door-to-door operations provided to the elderly and people with disabilities.

The companies, which have become increasingly popular, have aggressively pursued such partnerships as a way, they say, to improve the efficiency and quality of transit.

“We are starting to enter these discussions with transit agencies to say, ‘tell us what you need from us,’” Emily Castor, director of transportation policy for Lyft, said earlier this year as she discussed a study on such partnerships commissioned by the American Public Transportation Association.

That report concluded there’s robust public support for marrying transit with ridershare and urges transit agencies to embrace ridershare as a way to make transportation more widely available to people of all backgrounds. It said that

embrace rideshare as a way to make transportation more widely available to people of all backgrounds. It said that “shared-use modes expand options for lower income households.”

In its plan, Arlington would be taking an extra step, offering the rideshare option as a supplement to its regular bus service.

Still in a very early planning stage, Arlington officials say they hope a program would be in place within a couple of years. County transportation officials say they have already discussed the idea with Uber and Lyft, but that more study is needed before a partner is selected.

The proposal is part of the county’s 10-year Transit Development Plan, which was approved by last month. It identifies three zones in north Arlington that would be considered for the on-demand service. These neighborhoods are currently served by Arlington Transit’s route 53, which according to the agency ranks among the least productive lines with about 10 passengers per hour.

An on-demand option would be more cost effective than running mostly empty buses on fixed routes, Reinfeld said.

In the initial phases of the program, the county would continue to use a bus route during the morning and evening rush hours when more people take transit but offer the on-demand option at other times. Ideally, Reinfeld said, it would be a carpool service such as UberPool or LyftLine. The plan is to eventually have the on-demand service replace the No. 53.

County officials said Tuesday that some neighborhoods in south Arlington are also being considered for the flexible transit option.

The service will be available to and from a Metro station. Depending on the zone where a rider is picked up, it would be to Ballston, East Falls Church or Courthouse Metro station.

Reinfeld said on-demand services could gain popularity, particularly as younger and wealthier populations settle on the urban, areas and lower income people are pushed out into less dense neighborhoods.

“Those areas are much harder and more expensive to serve with the traditional fixed route transit service,” she said. “We think that working with transportation network companies is a way to continue to provide service to all of our residents.”