

20. DISCUSS ENHANCING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY AT SENIOR CENTERS WITH A DEDICATED MID-SIZE BUS SERVICE
Applicable Area:

MIAMI BEACH

COMMITTEE MEMORANDUM

TO: Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee Members

FROM: Eric Carpenter, City Manager 

DATE: January 29, 2025

TITLE: DISCUSS ENHANCING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY AT SENIOR CENTERS WITH A DEDICATED MID-SIZE BUS SERVICE.

RECOMMENDATION

The City Administration (“Administration”) recommends that the Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee (“PSNQLC” or “Committee”) discuss this item and provide a recommendation on the implementation, including desired service parameters and funding considerations.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

At the June 26, 2024 City Commission meeting, at the request of Mayor Steven Meiner (“Mayor Meiner”), the Mayor and City Commission (“City Commission”) referred an item (C4 AR) to the PSNQLC to discuss enhancing public transportation accessibility and efficiency at senior centers with a dedicated mid-size bus service.

On November 16, 2020, the City of Miami Beach (“City”) launched the Freebee On-Demand Transit Service for Seniors (“Freebee Senior Service”). The Freebee Senior Service provides a free shuttle service for senior residents (65 and older) living in affordable housing facilities throughout the City and/or participating in any of the senior programs provided by UNIDAD, Jewish Community Services or Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Center. The Freebee Senior Service is currently provided to/from approximately 40 senior facilities located in South Beach, Middle Beach, and North Beach and the closest Publix supermarket or pharmacy. The Freebee Senior Service operates seven (7) days a week, from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., with two (2) Gem e6 golf-type electric vehicles (Attachment A). Senior residents are required to register with Freebee in advance to enroll in the service.

Since the inception of the Freebee Senior Service, the ridership data has consistently indicated that the majority (approximately 65%) of all requests citywide originate from Rebecca Towers residents. This statistic highlights the high demand for transportation services to/from this facility. To address this high demand effectively, Mayor Meiner’s proposal includes exploring the implementation of a dedicated mid-size bus service, equipped with the latest platforms to accommodate the mobility aids and necessities of senior residents.

It is worth noting that the Administration is commencing concurrent negotiations with the selected vendors for the implementation of a Citywide Municipal Transit Circulator Service to replace the current Miami Beach Trolley service which has been in operation since 2014. While all our current trolley vehicles in service (low-floor and high-floor) meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) requirements, including being equipped with electric wheelchair lifts, kneeling capabilities, and ADA ramps, the high-floor vehicles used for the Mid-Beach and North Beach loops are particularly inconvenient for senior passengers with mobility challenges and/or small carts due to the various steps required to board and disembark the vehicles. The forthcoming Citywide Municipal Transit Circulator Service is intended to provide a world-class, reliable, eco-

friendly, and customer-friendly service utilizing “next generation” low-floor transit vehicles that are more convenient for passengers, particularly our senior residents, to board and disembark.

In addition to the Freebee Senior Service and Citywide Free Trolleys, the Senior Enhanced Transit Services (“SETS”) program (Attachment B) has been a valuable resource for senior residents since its inception in 2007. The SETS program, managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, operates with an annual budget of \$50,000 and provides transportation for seniors aged 65 and older. The program focuses on connecting seniors to community organizations and offering opportunities for recreational outings, such as trips to local theaters, parks, museums, movies, and other cultural events. Its primary intent is to encourage healthy, active lifestyles that enhance the quality of life for senior residents.

SETS Program Highlights and Impact

- Type of Vehicle: Transportation is consistently provided using a school bus contracted through Franmar Corporation. The buses, typically Bluebird models with a 44-passenger capacity, ensure adequate seating and comfortable travel for participants.
- Events and Participation in Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2024:
 - A total of 24 events were organized in FY 2024, ranging from recreational trips to cultural outings and special gatherings.
 - The program engaged an estimated 3,500 attendees across these events, demonstrating its broad reach and significant impact on the community.
 - Notable events include the Senior Prom in July 2024, attended by 500 seniors, and the Senior Holiday Gala in January 2024, which saw 400 attendees. Smaller outings, such as trips to Adrienne Arsht Center, Botanical Gardens, and health fairs, typically accommodated between 30 and 90 participants.

Based on recent conversations with the Parks and Recreation Department staff, they lack the resources to expand the SETS program to include trips for essential needs such as grocery shopping. Additionally, the type of vehicles currently used for the SETS program (e.g. school buses) are not ADA-compliant vehicles. For example, the buses lack ramps and other accessibility features required for seniors with mobility aids or grocery carts, which further limits their usability for this purpose.

At the November 13, 2024 PSNQLC meeting, the Committee discussed this item and recommended to continue working with the Mayor’s Office to provide further input and refine a plan to enhance public transportation accessibility for senior residents through a dedicated mid-size bus service.

ANALYSIS

While the Parks Department staff has expressed that it is unable to expand the SETS program at this time due to limited resources, the SETS model offers a viable framework for creating a similar pre-scheduled service potentially utilizing the City’s current contracts with public transit providers (i.e. Limousines of South Florida (“LSF”) and Freebee) to meet the additional transportation needs of senior residents. Under this concept, senior centers could submit a request form specifying their residents’ transportation needs, such as the number of passengers, destination(s), and preferred schedule. These requests would be reviewed and approved by City staff in advance, ensuring efficient coordination with the senior centers and their residents. The new program could focus on providing safe and accessible transit vehicles equipped with ramps and ample space for groceries or other personal items, such as carts, catering to the unique needs of seniors.

However, it is important to note that the Transportation and Mobility Department does not currently have the resources to manage such a program. The successful implementation of this potential additional pre-scheduled transit service for seniors would require dedicated personnel to process ride requests, coordinate schedules with the senior centers, and accompany seniors on each trip

to provide assistance as needed. Additionally, the City's current contract with LSF and Freebee do not include personnel to fulfill these responsibilities.

Given these constraints, the Administration seeks input from the Committee to evaluate potential pathways for addressing the additional transportation needs of senior residents. Feedback on service design, resource allocation, and implementation strategies will help determine whether a new program modeled after SETS can be effectively pursued.

To ensure any proposed solution effectively addresses senior residents' needs, the Administration plans to survey major senior housing facilities in the City, such as Rebecca Towers, Stella Maris, Four Freedoms, and Council Towers. Feedback from these communities will provide valuable insights to guide the planning and implementation of a new or adapted on-demand transit service for senior residents.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

TBD

Does this Ordinance require a Business Impact Estimate?

(FOR ORDINANCES ONLY)

The Business Impact Estimate (BIE) was published on .

See BIE at: <https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/city-hall/city-clerk/meeting-notice/>

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

TBD

CONCLUSION

The SETS program, managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, has been a reliable resource for senior residents since 2007, fostering active lifestyles through recreational outings. However, its current scope and reliance on school buses without accessibility features limit its ability to address essential needs, such as trips to/from grocery stores. Additionally, the Parks and Recreation Department staff has indicated that it does not currently have the resources necessary to expand the SETS program for this purpose.

While expanding the existing SETS program is not feasible, the Administration sees potential in developing a new pre-scheduled service modeled after SETS to transport residents living in senior centers to/from grocery store(s). This potential program could allow senior centers to submit ride requests for essential trips, such as grocery shopping, using accessible, ADA-compliant transit vehicles. However, implementing such a program would require additional resources, including dedicated personnel to assist with coordinating and managing requests with the senior centers and accompanying seniors during the trips, which are not currently within the capacity of the Parks and Recreation or Transportation and Mobility departments, or its current contractors for senior transportation services.

To ensure any proposed solution effectively addresses senior residents' needs, the Administration plans to survey major senior housing facilities in the City, such as Rebecca Towers, Stella Maris, Four Freedoms, and Council Towers. Feedback from these communities will provide valuable insights to guide the planning and implementation of a new or adapted pre-scheduled transit service for senior residents.

This item is presented to the PSNQLC for discussion and input.

Applicable Area

Citywide

Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-17?

No

Is this item related to a G.O. Bond Project?

No

Was this Agenda Item initially requested by a lobbyist which, as defined in Code Sec. 2-481, includes a principal engaged in lobbying? No

If so, specify the name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s): N/A

Department

Transportation and Mobility

Sponsor(s)

Mayor Steven Meiner

Co-sponsor(s)

Condensed Title

Discuss Enhancing Public Transp. Accessibility & Efficiency at Sr Centers Mid-Size Bus Svc.

Attachment A – Freebee Gem e6 Vehicle





MIAMIBEACH

RECEIVED

2007 APR -4 AM 9: 22

CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # 078-2007

LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor David Dermer and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: April 3, 2007

SUBJECT: **SENIORS ENHANCED TRANSPORTATION SERVICE (SETS)**

I am pleased to inform you that the City of Miami Beach Parks and Recreation Department will soon commence the Seniors Enhanced Transportation Service (SETS) for resident seniors as proposed by Commissioner Libbin and approved by the Commission during the adoption of the 2006/07 budget.

The new Senior Transportation Program responds to one of the most common needs expressed by our seniors. The Senior Transportation Program will make it possible for community organizations to expand services to seniors to enjoy recreational outings such as trips to local theaters and other cultural events, visits to parks and museums or movies. The programs intent is to encourage healthy, active lifestyles for seniors that will improve their quality of life.

The transportation services will be provided by a company currently under contract with the City to provide bus services to our participants in the summer recreation programs offered by our Parks and Recreation Department. The City also has the option to piggyback with transportation providers for the County and the Board of Education. As this is an extension of our current bid for bus services (CMB bid #10-05/06) we have been advised by the Purchasing Director that a request for bid will not be required.

Non-profit or charitable organizations that regularly provide services to seniors will have the opportunity to take advantage of the program free of charge. Transportation will be provided for interested organizations to a destination of their choice. The program will be administered by the Parks and Recreation Department's administrative office. A list of potentially interested organizations will be compiled and each contacted via mail to inform them of the new service. A simple form will be completed requesting the services and either faxed or emailed back to the Department. The bus availability will be confirmed and the requesting agency will be contacted to confirm the request.

The guidelines that have been established for organizations wishing to participate are attached.

An effort is being made to keep this entire process as simple as possible and if issues do arise modifications will be made accordingly. The SETS Program is intended to be easy to use and to allow the broadest inclusion of users possible. The SETS Program will begin in early April following notification to the eligible organizations of the program, participation requirements and how to obtain the application forms to request services.

For further information on the senior transportation services or senior programming, please contact Kevin Smith at (305) 673-7730.


JMG/RCM/KS/JM/sam
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Attachment

c: Robert C. Middaugh, Assistant City Manager
Kevin Smith, Parks & Recreation Director
Julio Magrisso, Assistant Parks & Recreation Director
Gus Lopez, Director, Procurement Division

Senior Enhanced Transportation Service Guidelines

- Requests for transportation will not supplant any regular services provided by a sponsor organization. The purpose of the transportation assistance funding is to expand upon the available opportunities for senior citizens.
 - Requests for transportation will not be permitted to be a regularly scheduled service offered by the sponsor organization
 - Transportation services are intended for day cultural and recreational oriented activities, not for typical or routine errands such as grocery shopping or doctor visits.
 - Requests must be from a qualified 501(c)3 non-profit or charitable group.
 - Requests must be made 10 days in advance of the scheduled event and may be requested via fax, e-mail or in person at the 21st Street Community Center. The Park and Recreation Department will provide a trip confirmation within two working days of the organization request.
 - The sponsoring organization must provide the City with a certificate of insurance that provides adequate coverage for any person using the City provided transportation, including any family members, caregivers, chaperones or aides.
 - Each transportation request must be for a minimum of 10 senior citizens (age 65 and over) who are residents of the City.
 - Each request for transportation services must specifically identify if wheel chair capability is desired.
 - If a sponsor organization intends to include disabled or frail elderly, the application must also specify how the mobility and care requirements of such individuals will be addressed.
 - Each senior citizen may have a family member or caregiver participate in the event, but such number will not count towards the 10 person minimum. Each family member or caregiver must be identified by name in the application to the City.
 - Sponsor organization chaperones/aides are allowed and do not count towards the 10 person minimum. Each chaperone/aide must be identified by name in the application to the City.
 - Each sponsor organization must have one assigned person to be responsible for the event.
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- The person designated by the sponsor organization must provide a signed affidavit of receipt of service and confirmation of the hours of service and destination at the completion of the event. The affidavit of service verification must be provided to the City within 5 business days of the provision of services.
- Only the transportation expenses will be paid by the City. Any expenses associated with a sponsoring organizations staff or support personnel are the responsibility of the sponsor organization.
- Once contracted services are approved, no changes in the transportation service destination or hours may be made, unless authorized in writing by the City
- No food or beverages are permitted on the buses to be paid for by the City program
- While the purpose is to allow a wide variety of destinations under this program, the City reserves the right to refuse transportation services to inappropriate venues.

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MIAMI BEACH

COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Mayor Steven Meiner

DATE: June 26, 2024

TITLE: REFERRAL TO THE PUBLIC SAFETY AND NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY OF LIFE COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS ENHANCING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ACCESSIBILITY AND EFFICIENCY AT SENIOR CENTERS WITH A DEDICATED MID-SIZE BUS SERVICE.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

Please place on the June 26, 2024 agenda a referral to the Public Safety and Neighborhood Quality of Life Committee ("PSNQLC") to discuss enhancing public transportation accessibility and efficiency at Senior Centers.

Recent data reflects that a significant portion of all Freebee requests City-wide originate from Senior Centers such as Rebecca Towers, highlighting the need for more tailored transportation options at our Senior Centers.

To address this demand effectively, I would like for the Committee to explore the implementation of a dedicated mid-size bus service equipped with the latest platforms to accommodate senior residents' mobility aids and necessities.

The bus route would ideally connect key locations within Miami Beach focusing on areas of high demand and operate on a fixed schedule, providing senior residents with reliable transportation options for their daily needs. The utilization of eco-friendly vehicles would be desirable and should be explored.

The bus should have ample space within for the secure storage of shopping carts and other personal belongings, ensuring a comfortable and hassle-free travel experience. Moreover, the bus should be equipped with ramps and lifts to facilitate easy boarding and disembarking for residents with mobility aids such as walkers, canes, and wheelchairs.

The Administration should be prepared to explore various funding opportunities and grants for this service and investigate the possibility of obtaining refurbished buses from Miami-Dade County, which could provide a cost-effective solution.

This bus service specifically tailored to service Senior Centers would allow our seniors access essential services and run errands within the town, reduce dependency on individual vehicle usage, and enhance inclusivity by ensuring the transportation system caters to the diverse mobility needs of senior residents, including those utilizing walkers, canes, and personal shopping carts.

The Director of the Transportation Department should be prepared to address the Committee regarding this subject.

ANALYSIS

N/A

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

Does this Ordinance require a Business Impact Estimate?
(FOR ORDINANCES ONLY)

The Business Impact Estimate (BIE) was published on . See BIE at:
<https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/city-hall/city-clerk/meeting-notice/>

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

N/A

CONCLUSION

N/A

Applicable Area

Citywide

Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-17?

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If so, specify the name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s):

Department

Office of Mayor Steven Meiner

Sponsor(s)

Mayor Steven Meiner

Co-sponsor(s)

Condensed Title

Ref: PSNQLC - Enhance Public Transportation at Senior Centers w/ Dedicated Bus Service.
(Meiner)