

## Big boost for Contra Costa's one-call paratransit plan

\$1 million grant will help make scheduling rides seamless, even make some rides free



Deborah Stott, 72, of Bay Point, takes part in a demonstration of the paratransit shuttle's wheelchair lift during a Contra Costa Transportation Authority media event in Walnut Creek, Calif., on Friday, May 31, 2024. CCTA detailed its expanding transportation services for seniors, low income residents and those with disabilities. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)



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WALNUT CREEK — Paratransit regulators in Contra Costa County are developing a one-stop, seamless transportation system for seniors and people with disabilities — thanks to a sizable federal grant.

The \$1 million U.S. Department SMART grant recently awarded to the Contra Costa Transportation Authority will over the next year allow the agency to develop the “One Call, One Click” system. The aim is to bring together 24 accessible transportation services in the county into one database so users only have to make one phone call to schedule a ride.



Contra Costa Transportation Authority Executive Director Timothy Haile speaks during a media event in Walnut Creek, Calif., on Friday, May 31, 2024. (Dai Sugano/Bay Area News Group)

“With this grant we are getting people where they need to go and getting them to medical appointments and giving them services they didn’t have before and truly providing access and mobility to all,” said Tim Haile, the executive director of the transportation authority, at a news conference Friday.

Through the grant, seniors and people with disabilities will also get 10 free rides a month in the county. Officials said many paratransit users have been missing critical medical appointments because they have to pay \$5 a day for ride services.

Also, people who use paratransit currently have to contact their bus operator for paratransit rides, which requires advance notice and is restricted to certain hours. They have to use a separate service to navigate public transit options and another to use taxis, Lyft or Uber.

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Officials said transportation is often cited as a major barrier for residents. Medical appointments

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The grant will be used to help design an easy-to-use system that will streamline services, significantly reduce ride times, make more rides available on evenings and weekends and give riders access to more geographic areas.

Local resident Pello Smith said he has used paratransit for at least a decade to get around.

“It’s been a lifesaver for me for everything I have to do: doctors appointments, shopping or going on a friendly date with my wife,” Smith said from his wheelchair Friday.

He’s been using a service called One Seat Ride, which has reduced his travel time from Antioch to Walnut Creek from about an hour to 22 minutes.

The “One Call, One Click” program will make getting around even easier for Smith and others, Haile said.

In issuing the grant, federal officials considered complaints from paratransit users as well as figures from the California Department of Aging about the county’s aging population. In the next 15 years, the older adult population in Contra Costa County is predicted to grow by more than 30,000 people, many of whom will lose mobility and need paratransit ride services.