



BERKELEY CITY COUNCILMEMBER
TERRY TAPLÍN
 DISTRICT 2

CONSENT CALENDAR

July 8, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin (Author), Councilmember Brett Blackaby (Co-Author), Councilmember Igor Tregub (Co-Sponsor), and Mayor Adena Ishii (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Letter in Support of Continued Funding for Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a letter in support of expanding funding for the Berkeley Rides for Seniors & The Disabled (BRSD) to continue open enrollment for Berkeley residents and distribute to Supervisor Nikki Fortunato Bas,

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

None.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

In June of 2007 Berkeley launched a program with financial support from Alameda county to subsidize mobility services for senior and the disabled residents of Berkeley. The program allotted monthly stipends to pay for private transportation options. Participants in this program have used it for the better part of two decades and have relied on the program to travel to and from doctor's appointments, attend events and outings, and continue to live an active life in the Berkeley community.

Costs of transportation with less mobility can appear in exorbitant and unexpected ways. While driving on its own can be expensive, the additional costs of adapting a vehicle for driver's without motor functions in their legs always carry additional expenses. Basic hand controls generally cost a minimum of \$2,700¹ for the most basic of accessibility and can run ten times that for more intuitive controls. This case is under the assumption somebody can still use a car. A wheelchair-accessible van can run \$80,000 for a new vehicle modified with adaptive equipment². While public transit can be more cost effective purchasing a vehicle, it only works if places somebody needs to go are near transit. Living near transit comes at a premium³ and there can be additional costs to find a space that has the necessary infrastructure to accommodate somebody

¹<https://www.unitedaccess.com/us/en/mobility-products/wheelchair-vehicle-driving-aids/primary-hand-controls-for-cars-wheelchair-vans.html#accordion-fe08847b72-item-a952e88cf3>

²<https://www.nhtsa.gov/vehicle-safety/adapted-vehicles>

³<https://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-and-research/intersectional-policy-work/housing-and-transportation#:~:text=Housing%20near%20transit%20is%20in%20high%20demand%2C,average%20th an%20similar%20homes%20further%20from%20transit.>

with mobility needs. Households containing an adult with a work-disability are estimated to require, on average, 28 percent more income.⁴

The Center for Independent Living opened in 1972 was the first independent living center in the country, organized and operated by persons with disabilities. It has operated for 50 years in Berkeley and has continued to advocate and uphold disability rights to a high standard of living. Ed Roberts, the founder of the Independent Living Movement lived and advocated for disabled rights in the City from 1962 when he was admitted to UC Berkeley to his death in 1995. Sixteen percent of Berkeley is made up of people over 65. As they continue to age, staying mobile in the community helps improve long term health outcomes as well. These residents also tend to live disproportionately in North Berkeley and the Berkeley Hills where there is less accessible public transportation. Many senior Berkeley residents are on a fixed income and as such additional support can be a lifeline in months where that amount does not go as far.

Having a program that supports seniors and disabled transportation programs ensures that we are able to create more access to the city and to the resources people need. The program has been historically funded by the county. Given the situation of the Berkeley budget, the county should continue to fund this program.

BACKGROUND

In March of 2025, city staff announced that BRSD would reduce distribution frequency and amounts. This would reduce the total amount allocated annually by 48%. The program enrollment will be held at 1,650. Only allowing people to join the program once others leave. This reduction of service and flatline of new offerings leaves the vast majority of eligible residents who did not hear about the program in its early days unable to receive benefits.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with the recommendation.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Berkeley is committed to equitable and considerate programs to assist those who are most in need.

CONTACT PERSON

Terry Taplin, Councilmember, District 2, (510) 981-7120, ttaplin@berkeleyca.gov

Attachments:

- 1: Letter to Supervisor Fortunato Bas
- 2: Operational Changes to Berkeley Rides for Seniors & the Disabled (BRSD) from Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

⁴<https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/extra-costs-living-with-disability-brief.pdf>



BERKELEY CITY COUNCILMEMBER
TERRY TAPLÍN
DISTRICT 2

April 23, 2025

Supervisor Nikki Fortunato Bas, Alameda County Board of Supervisors
1221 Oak Street, Suite 536, Oakland, CA 94612

RE: Berkeley Rides for Seniors & the Disabled

Dear Supervisor Fortunato Bas,

I am writing to respectfully urge your continued support and funding for the Berkeley Rides for Seniors & Disabled (BRSD) program, which plays a vital role in ensuring mobility, independence, and access to essential services for hundreds of our community's most vulnerable residents.

The BRSD program provides subsidized transportation options—including taxi, wheelchair van, and on-demand ride services—for low-income seniors and people with disabilities in Berkeley. These services are crucial for those who cannot access transportation through Medi-Cal or other programs, and who may otherwise be isolated from necessary medical care, social services, or daily needs.

Berkeley has long been a national leader in advancing the rights of people with disabilities. From the birth of the disability rights movement on the UC Berkeley campus to the establishment of the nation's first Center for Independent Living, our city has consistently championed policies that break down barriers and promote full civic participation for all residents. The BRSD program continues in that proud tradition by removing transportation as a barrier to independence and dignity for our disabled neighbors.

Berkeley is also committed to supporting older adults in aging in place. Our policies and programs aim to ensure that seniors can remain in their homes and communities safely, independently, and comfortably. Transportation is a cornerstone of that vision—without it, aging in place becomes untenable. By funding BRSD, we uphold our promise to make Berkeley a city where people can grow older without sacrificing their mobility, autonomy, or connection to community life.

As noted in the City of Berkeley's March 2025 public memorandum, the program is currently serving 1,650 participants and receiving approximately 50 new applications per month. Rising ride costs and a recent surge in demand have created a sustainability challenge, with projected funding (\$865,049 for FY26) falling well short of the \$2 million required to maintain the current level of service. As a result, the City is being forced to reduce both the frequency and value of transportation vouchers beginning in April 2025.

While these operational changes are necessary under the current budget constraints, they risk undermining the program's impact and leaving many seniors and disabled residents without reliable transportation. BRSD fills a unique gap for those unable to rely on friends, family, or standard transit services.

Ensuring the continuity and expansion of this program aligns with our shared commitment to equity, public health, and aging with dignity. I urge you to continue advocating for other funding sources to support this indispensable program. With additional county support, we can stabilize BRSD and continue providing life-enhancing mobility to those who need it most.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Supporting the BRSD program not only addresses an

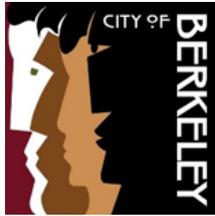


urgent and growing mobility need—it also upholds Berkeley’s longstanding legacy as a national leader in both disability rights and aging in place. From pioneering the independent living movement to advancing innovative, community-based supports for older adults, Berkeley has set a standard for equity, dignity, and accessibility. Continued funding for BRSD is a tangible way to carry that legacy forward, ensuring that our most vulnerable residents are not left behind. Thank you for your time and attention in this matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Terry Taplin".

Councilmember Terry Taplin
Berkeley City Council, District 2



City Manager's Office

March 24, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Subject: Operational Changes to Berkeley Rides for Seniors & the Disabled (BRSD)

To maximize the number of people served and adapt to changing dynamics, we will be adjusting voucher distribution frequency and amounts for seniors and people with disabilities who use Berkeley's Rides for Seniors & Disabled service, which is run through the Department of Health, Housing, & Community Services.

The program is funded through Alameda County Measure BB and provides free taxi, wheelchair van vouchers, and GoGo (Uber/Lyft) rides for low-income Berkeley seniors and disabled residents to provide access to health care and social services.

Medi-Cal, which provides a variety of medical services for adults with limited incomes, offers transportation to and from appointments for services covered by Medi-Cal. In addition, Medi-Cal beneficiaries enrolled in Alameda Alliance, the public, not-for-profit managed health care plan for people of lower income in Alameda County, or Kaiser Permanente can already take advantage of those programs' broad-ranging transportation benefits.

Berkeley Rides for Seniors & Disabled (BRSD) is an additional option for low-income seniors or people with disabilities who are unable to get transportation from those health care programs, friends, family or neighbors, or from AC Transit, BART or shared mobility tools such as electric bikes and sit-scooters – all transit systems that have low-income options.

Seniors people with disabilities enrolled in the BRSD program currently receive distributions of voucher books three times over the course of a fiscal year, which starts July 1. Participants are sent different types of vouchers based on eligibility (for example, High Medical Need participants must meet eligibility criteria certified by their primary medical provider). Participants use portions of those vouchers, coupons, or taxi scrip to pay for individual rides.

Previously, the BRSD program increased distribution amounts temporarily due to low usage and to comply with funding guidelines. We are now adjusting the program to take advantage of complementary private and public-sector services while also adapting to a recent surge in applications (averaging 50 new applications per month) and rising ride costs.

The total projected revenue for FY26 is \$865,049. However, at the current distribution rate and frequency, the total annual distribution cost would be \$2 million.

To ensure long-term sustainability and maximize service reach, distribution amounts and frequency will be reduced, beginning with the April 2025 distribution. Detailed changes are summarized in the tables below. This adjustment will allow the BRSD program to continue serving vulnerable residents within budgetary constraints.

Chart 1: Current Distribution for Each Eligible Senior

Programs	Frequency of annual voucher distribution	Amount	Annual Total
Taxi Scrip Program	3 times	\$200	\$600
High Medical Need Taxi	3 times	\$480	\$1,440
Wheelchair Van Program	3 times	\$448	\$1,344
High Medical Wheelchair Van	3 times	\$448	\$1,344
GoGo (Uber and/or Lyft)	3 times	\$160	\$480

The BRSD program is currently at capacity and will not be able to sustain itself past this fiscal year without changes. To maintain the program, applications will be either waitlisted and/or not accepted until space is available. Planned reductions in voucher amounts are also necessary. New amounts are as follows:

Chart 2: New Distribution for Each Eligible Senior

Programs	Frequency of annual voucher distribution	Amount	Annual Total
Taxi Scrip Program	2 times	\$120	\$240
High Medical Need Taxi	2 times	\$240	\$480
Wheelchair Van Program	2 times	\$448	\$896
High Medical Wheelchair Van	2 times	\$448	\$896
GoGo (Uber and/or Lyft)	2 times	\$100	\$200

Demand for the High Medical Need Taxi program has been significantly reduced as Medi-Cal beneficiaries enrolled in Alameda Alliance or Kaiser Permanente can already receive comprehensive transportation services for medical, dental, mental health, and substance use disorder appointments, as well as trips to pharmacies and medical supply providers. Alameda Alliance members can use [this flyer about transportation services](#) to learn how to request transportation. Kaiser members should visit kp.org.

Individuals who have Medi-Cal receive transportation to medical, dental, mental health, or substance use disorder appointments, and to pick up prescriptions and medical supplies. Medi-Cal beneficiaries can learn more on the state [Department of Health Care Services transportation services page](#).

The reduction in distribution will allow for a reassessment of program quality and utilization, providing valuable data to inform future program development. This approach will support long-term financial sustainability and enhance budget planning.

Currently, there are 1,650 Berkeley Seniors participating in the program. Each participant will receive written communication regarding these program changes beginning in April 2025. A letter with the updated changes will accompany each distribution being sent out in the next allotment. Staff will collect and assess participant feedback while monitoring utilization rates to identify service gaps and inform future program budgeting and planning.

Transit, shared mobility discounts available to Berkeley Seniors

Seniors can qualify for and take advantage of discounts for trains, buses, electric scooter, and e-bikes.

- Bay Area Clipper offers a Senior card. Seniors over the age of 65 receive 50% off AC Transit fares and 62.5% off BART fares. [Apply online, in person, or by mail](#).
- Lime provides standing and seated electric scooters in Berkeley. Lime provides a micromobility program which provides [discounted rides to qualified individuals](#) who receive Medicaid, Social Security Supplemental Income, and a reduced transit program, such as a Clipper Senior card.
- Bay Wheels (Bay Area's docked bike share program) offers [reduced-rate memberships](#) at \$5 for the first year. Ride e-bikes at \$.05 per minute with a max payment of \$1 under the Bay Wheels for All membership. Bay Area residents who qualify for CalFresh, SFMTA Lifeline Pass, or PG&E CARE can sign up.

Operational Changes to Berkeley Rides for Seniors & the Disabled

March 24, 2025

Page 4

cc: David White, Deputy City Manager
Scott Gilman, Director, Health, Housing, and Community Services
Tanya Bustamante, Deputy Director, Health, Housing, and Community Services
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Matthai Chakko, Communications Director/Assistant to the City Manager
Jenny Wong, City Auditor
Farimah Brown, City Attorney