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MBTA to improve service for people with disabilities

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 4, 2012 05:41 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The MBTA plans to launch a new on-demand taxi program for people with disabilities that will offer service "over and above" what's offered by its current program, the RIDE.

The new program will offer "same day" service, which the T says would be an upgrade from the RIDE's current requirement that its customers call at least one day before to schedule trips, said MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo. The new service could also run between 1 and 5 a.m., a stretch of time when the RIDE does not currently operate.

The pilot program is expected to become available to the public in fiscal year 2014.

Currently, the RIDE is the T's paratransit, shared-ride service that offers door-to-door transportation via lift-equipped vans to people who cannot use general

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to-door transportation via lift equipped vans to people who cannot use general public transportation some or all of the time, due to physical, cognitive or mental disability.

The MBTA plans to use federal grant money to help pay for the cost of creating and running the new program.

State transportation officials [announced](#) Monday that the department's new Community Transit Grant program has awarded a total of more than \$5.8 million to [22 different applicants](#) across Massachusetts, including [regional transit authorities](#), private bus companies and other transportation providers.

Among them, the MBTA will receive a total of \$389,707 in grant funding over the next three fiscal years, officials said.

The T applied was awarded the amount it requested through a competitive process, Michael Verseckes, spokesman for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation said in an e-mail.

The MBTA's grant was awarded under the Federal Transit Administration's "[New Freedom](#)" program, he said. The initiative provides federal funding to new public transportation services and alternatives designed to assist people with disabilities beyond the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The first year of the three-year grant will go toward paying for planning the pilot program, Pesaturo said. During the planning process, the T "will likely" request advice from customers about how to fully develop the program.

The second and third years of the grant will be allocated to help cover the program's operations costs, according to the agency's spokesman. The T has committed a \$282,955 local share to help fund the program.

As part of [fare and service changes](#) across the MBTA that will begin July 1, the cost of the RIDE will rise from \$2 per ride to \$4 per ride for trips within Boston and some of the closer suburbs. Trips in outlying suburbs will cost \$5 pr ride.

"The services provided with New Freedom Program funds cannot replace and/or restore services which were cut," Pesaturo said.



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“The funds cannot be used to purchase taxi vouchers, but may be used to enter into contracts with taxi companies to provide subsidized services beyond what the MBTA currently provides -- such as same day service and early morning service,” he added.

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