



June 9, 2017

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Columbia Disabilities Commission

Subject: Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Taxi Grant Program Proposal

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council:

We wish to improve transportation opportunities for people with disabilities and to help in eliminating gaps in local service. This report to Council is the Disabilities Commission's request for a **Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) Taxi Grant Program** to improve on-demand transportation opportunities in Columbia for people who use wheelchairs. The proposed program would be managed by this Commission in coordination with City staff. In order to implement such a program, the Commission is requesting (1) for legislation to be passed establishing the program and (2) for annual funding to be appropriated.

There are extremely limited on-demand transportation opportunities for people in Columbia who use wheelchairs (and do not drive). If the person is relying on public transportation, then he or she is not able to travel any time after 7:00 PM, never on Sundays, and only with at least 24 hours' notice for Paratransit. Local service agencies that provide accessible transportation also frequently require at least 1 day notice, if not more. This is a major barrier for a person's professional, social, civic and even health-related opportunities.

Taxi service providers are not required to provide WAV taxis by law. The Commission invited several taxi providers to a meeting to discuss the issue. Based on this meeting, it is the Commission's belief that (a) there is a demand for added WAV taxis in Columbia, (b) taxi companies are interested in purchasing a WAV taxi and (c) new WAV taxis are not being purchased because of the vehicles' additional cost to purchase and operate.



After reviewing the issue, the Commission believes that the absence of WAV taxis in Columbia will continue unless action is taken. For this reason, the Commission proposes a WAV Taxi Grant Program (similar to other community programs around the country) with the purpose of providing just enough financial incentive to taxi companies to purchase, maintain and operate accessible taxis in Columbia.

WAV TAXI GRANT PROGRAM PROPOSAL

The Commission proposes that the City create a grant program in order to provide two \$10,000 grant opportunities for licensed taxi providers in Columbia on an annual basis. These grants must be used to purchase a new WAV taxi and to operate it in our community for no less than 3 years. Applications for the grant would include the proposed vehicle along with specifications, hours of operation, and fare. Each application would be provided to the Disabilities Commission for review. The Commission would make a recommendation for approval on any qualified applicant recipient to the City Manager and the City Manager would then approve or reject the recommendation.

Thank you for Council's consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Chuck Graham, Chair
Columbia Disabilities Commission