



August 25, 2016

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Columbia Disabilities Commission

Subject: Lift-Equipped Taxis in Columbia

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council:

There are no lift-equipped taxis in Columbia for people that use wheelchairs. The lack of accessible, on-demand transportation opportunities for people who use wheelchairs is a growing concern among communities across the country. Some municipalities are coming up with innovative solutions to this problem through incentives, regulations, or both. This report is the Disabilities Commission's request that the City further research this issue and find solutions to introduce lift-equipped taxis to Columbia.

Transportation plays an important role in enabling people to travel and live independently. Without adequate transportation, a person is limited in his or her professional, social and civic opportunities.

Persons in our community that use wheelchairs, and do not drive, commonly rely on public transportation (or a local organization's shuttle services) for transportation to work, medical appointments, grocery stores, social functions, community events and more. However, these people are limited to traveling only when public transportation is operating: never on Sunday, never after 7:00 PM, and only with one-day advance scheduling for paratransit riders.

One solution to improve independent travel for these persons is to encourage taxi providers to offer lift-equipped, accessible vehicles to provide 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week, on-demand transportation (an opportunity that non-wheelchair users currently enjoy).

The added cost to purchase a lift-equipped, wheelchair accessible van is believed to be the primary reason that local taxi providers do not own such vans in its fleet. To address this issue, some communities have created incentives including grants and pooled resources.



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Further, introducing lift-equipped taxis is consistent with the healthcare strengths of the community and the goal of medical tourism. If a person that uses a wheelchair flies in to Columbia airport, there are no taxis available to pick that person up. There are also no taxis to deliver passengers in wheelchairs to and from hospitals.

Transportation is a basic need for everyone. It is the Commission's hope that a solution exists to this issue in Columbia, and that we can improve independent travel opportunities for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Chuck Graham, Chair
Columbia Disabilities Commission