

# Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

## ACCESS and other services provide reliable senior transportation

By Daniel Casciato  
For Pittsburgh Senior News

Later this month, the Port Authority will eliminate 29 bus routes and reduce its estimated \$80 million budget deficit by \$35 million for the 2007-08 fiscal year. While seniors are sure to be affected by the elimination of routes, Karen Hoesch, executive director of ACCESS, a program sponsored by Port Authority, wants to remind seniors that ACCESS is here to help. "If there is a change that affects seniors negatively with their bus service, ACCESS is a safety net for them," says Karen. "We still go anywhere in the entire county seven days a week, 365 days a year. So if the bus doesn't go where you live, it doesn't mean you can't get places."

ACCESS is a door-to-door paratransit service for seniors, people with disabilities and clients of human services agencies such as the Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging (ACAAA). An ACCESS vehicle picks up customers at their homes and takes them to their destinations. It operates from 6 a.m. to midnight; 24-hour advance notice is required.

Vehicles travel any destination up to 1.5 miles from the Allegheny County line. Last year, there were more than 1.7 million ACCESS rides. Anyone age 65 and older is eligible to ride ACCESS. Although fares vary, generally most people will pay about \$2.40 on average for a one-way trip. Fares will increase slightly in the new fiscal year beginning July 1.



Seniors will continue to have reliable transportation services.

There are other options for seniors if they don't want to ride ACCESS.

### OPT (Older Persons Transportation)

OPT, sponsored by the ACAA, is a low-cost, shared-ride service available to Allegheny County seniors ages 60 and older. OPT provides transportation for medical and health-related appointments, grocery shopping and senior center visits or activities within the county.

As a shared-ride service, OPT riders travel with others going in the general direction at the same time. OPT provides door-to-door service, including help getting on and off vehicles, and up and down as many as four steps. Service hours are 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Except for dialysis, chemotherapy/radiation or physical therapy, you are limited to two round trips per month for medical purposes if you are age 65 or older. If you are 60 to 64 years of age, you must receive prior approval from ACAA for all medical trips.

You may also use OPT for grocery shopping once a week in areas where shopping groups with a minimum of three riders are organized. If you are a Medical Assistance recipient, you are not permitted to use OPT for medical trips since Medical Assistance Transportation (MATP) is available.

### MATP (Medical Assistance Transportation Program)

MATP provides non-emergency medical transportation to Allegheny County residents who have a valid Pennsylvania DPW

Medical Assistance Card. MATP provides transportation for the purpose of receiving medical services. The transportation available may be:

- tickets or tokens to ride public transportation,
- mileage reimbursement for use of a private car, or
- paratransit services (for example, in a van).

Transportation services begin once the Allegheny County Assistance Office verifies your eligibility.

### Free Transit program of Port Authority of Allegheny County

The Free Transit program allows seniors to ride free on local public transportation (buses, trolleys and rapid-transit lines) during off-peak hours, weekends and certain holidays. Seniors must obtain identification cards, which are available free of charge from participating transportation providers.

The state provides funding that enables seniors to ride free on all fixed route systems simply by showing a Medicare card or senior citizen identification card available through the Port Authority. Port Authority has replaced more than half of its bus fleet with low-floor buses to make it easier for seniors to get on and off city buses. Many of their buses are also equipped with wheelchair ramps to accommodate those with disabilities. *PSN*

For more information about any of these transportation choices, call SeniorLine at (412) 350-5460.