

Seattle Department of Transportation

RIDE NOW STORIES OF IMPACT



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Transportation

The Seattle Department of Transportation piloted an on-demand ride voucher program for older adults and people with disabilities called Ride Now from March through June 2022. Some riders graciously shared stories of their experiences, including how they used their vouchers, what worked well for them, and what they found challenging. Thank you to these riders for sharing your stories with us!

For more information about Ride Now, visit our webpage:
www.seattle.gov/transportation/ridenow.

M S . B U L A K O T

This rider has language barriers and other health problems to get transportation services. She lives with her children who are very busy in their daily life. She said that it was very challenging for her to go to doctor appointments as it is a little bit far from her residence.

- Ms. Bulakot used the vouchers to go to Hospital and church. According to her these vouchers helped her a lot, especially to get to the doctor's appointment on time.
- She said that the vouchers have a positive impact on her life, and she wanted the program to be continued.
- She said that did not experience any challenge while using the vouchers. Most of the taxi drivers she contacted were Amharic speakers and this helped her a lot as she does not speak English.
- She is asking the SDOT or Metro leadership to continue this pilot program for longer time also by increasing the amount of the vouchers.

M R . F I S S E H A

- This rider has language barriers and other problems to get transportation services. He lives with his daughter who is working full-time. She does not have time to take him to different places. Thus, it is very challenging for him to go to church and other places.
- Mr. Fisseha used the vouchers to go to church, store, doctor appointment and DSHS offices to get different benefits. According to Mr. Fisseha these vouchers helped him a lot, especially to get to the areas where the bus services is not reached.
- He said that the vouchers have a positive impact on his life, and he wanted the program to be continued.
- The biggest challenge or barrier he experienced in using the voucher is the language barrier and because of this he was trying to get language support from other people. The other issue he mentioned is some taxi drivers are late and most of the time he waited for a longer time for the taxis to be arrived.
- He is asking the SDOT or Metro leadership to continue this pilot program for longer time so that people like him greatly benefit from the program.

JANICE

Why did you request Ride Now vouchers? What are your biggest barriers to transportation? (e.g., wheelchair access, language, cost, etc.)

Mobility challenged- walker, cost, rain, heat

**How did you use your vouchers?
Where did you go?**

Hospital, Primary Care, Physical Therapy,
Grocery Stores

What worked well for you? What positive impact or benefit did the Ride Now vouchers have? How did the vouchers make a difference in your life?

- The opportunity for a ride to and from appointments was so helpful as a senior I appreciated this. Less stress, appreciation
- You really, really helped me in a time crunch with my ride to hospital falling through and it was POURING down rain that AM and with a broken hip the ride now option was so wonderful--vouchers made available the day before!

What was the biggest challenge or barrier that you experienced in using your voucher(s)? How could the Ride Now pilot have worked better for you?

Receiving the voucher initially, after then everything was smooth



What would you tell Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) or Metro leadership about the value of or need for a longer-term program like this in the future?

- 6 voucher rides a month could greatly increase the quality of life for many seniors, mobility challenged persons.

"I appreciated the vouchers more than you can imagine."

J E A N



“The vouchers have really saved me a lot of money for doctors visits due to my surgery.”

April

This is Jean. She is a woman who does much for our community by getting free produce from farmers & gives it out to people within our neighborhood. These vouchers will help her as she readies for an upcoming surgery on her foot.

I used some of my vouchers for the first time today. I had a Dr appointment and decided instead of paying for parking I would use a couple of vouchers. It went really well, the drivers were very friendly and knew about the vouchers. They were also at my location to pick me up within minutes of my calling.

May

Jean was so grateful to have the vouchers in May that she asked if she could get them in June. Jean had surgery on her foot this month so she really needed the vouchers to get back & forth in June. Jean hopes that this program will continue and/or start anew.

Used them yesterday to get to my surgery. The driver was pleasant but it took over 30 minutes to pick me up.

Dispatch acted like they had no idea what I was getting at when I told them I was using a Ride Now voucher. They asked for the number on the voucher (which I had a hard time seeing at 6:30 am and no glasses). Finally got through to her what I was talking about.

Anyway, thanks again for your help and I got to my surgery and all is well.

KAREN

What are your biggest barriers to transportation? (e.g., wheelchair access, language, cost, etc.)

I don't have a driver's license and my severe chronic pain can make it very hard to walk to and to ride public transit, although I technically don't qualify for paratransit.

How did you use your vouchers? Where did you go?

I went to things I literally wouldn't have been able to otherwise - trips for pleasure to see friends, activism, small work gigs, healthy groceries, therapy & other doctor's appointments.

What worked well for you? What positive impact or benefit did the Ride Now vouchers have? How did the vouchers make a difference in your life?

These vouchers saved my life! I felt a sense of freedom that I haven't in a long time, knowing I could move about the city! One way they helped was not missing things I knew I would be late to, if I had already missed a bus from my disability. I cannot emphasize what a huge difference these vouchers made in my life, health, and sense of human dignity. I felt elated to know I had them to use when I needed to!!

What was the biggest challenge or barrier that you experienced in using their voucher? How could the Ride Now pilot have worked better for you?

Only the limited number - I think 12 vouchers would be the perfect amount per month. That takes into account medical appointments, with a few left over for other things.



What would you tell SDOT or Metro leadership about the value of or need for a longer-term program like this in the future?

A program like this would be crucial to the well-being of folks like me, both logistically for our health - as a tool for getting medical care and nutritious food - and for our sense of being included as valued members of the life of our cities.

M R . L I A N G

- Mr. Liang is the rider who received vouchers since the beginning of the pilot.
- I chose him because he's on wheelchair and he's not able to communicate in English.
- He lives in Renton but he goes to Chinatown from time to time. The vouchers provided him an option to commute to/from Chinatown directly.
- By using the vouchers, he was able to travel from home to Chinatown without transit from bus to bus.
- The biggest challenge and barrier for him was calling the Yellow Cab Center. Due to language barriers, he must find someone or through some organization that provides help services to make the call for him. The feeling of troubling someone, the extra time for waiting and explaining his itinerary, the unknown and uncertainty of 3rd party services, the miscommunication or misunderstanding between parties, etc. It all made the experiences even harder for him to use the vouchers/program.
- If an interpreter is provided through the Ride Now pilot, it would have worked and felt better for him.
- One thing that Mr. Liang would like to address to the program leadership is the publicity. He had experiences that some drivers are not willing to accept the vouchers or showed doubt on the vouchers (the drivers called the center for verification). He thinks it may be because the program is not well known even among taxi drivers. Therefore, a program like this in the future will need more publicity.

MICHELLE

Service Provider at a Shelter

How many people were you able to give vouchers to at your shelter?

I was able to give vouchers to 4 people (1 client received two sets of vouchers) who were elderly and/or disabled.

Were there any difficulties faced using them?

The response time on the wheelchair accessible taxis was inadequate and took a long time.

What was the feedback from the users that you received?

The clients found them useful and were able to get food needed, get to medical appointments, and to connect with support systems. They were appreciative of the help without excessive barriers to sign up, or qualification bureaucracy.



What would be your suggestions to improve for your participants?

Quicker response time or communication about the timeliness.

“Review 7/10 - Great program. Helps people achieve goals easier. Needs a longer expiration date. It would be beneficial to have this program long term.”

PAIGE



This is Paige. She is disabled & struggles to get around. Having these vouchers is a great benefit to her life.

"I took 2 long rides. One from Lake City to West Seattle. And the return from West Seattle to Lake City. The two drivers used very different routes. The first driver didn't seem sure about where he was going. The second driver was not familiar with Ride Now and was reluctant to accept the vouchers. He spoke to someone at Yellow Cab and they explained it to him."

S H A R O N

This is Sharon. Her husband normally drives them everywhere but he was recently diagnosed with cancer and they now need the help to get to & fro. They were very happy to get the vouchers & they will use them as much as they can!!! Their experiences are recorded below.

April

“Took a Yellow Cab to my doctor yesterday.

All went well - on time, no wait, really nice driver going.

Coming back - on time etc. but the driver had no idea about the vouchers, never heard of them. I made a call to dispatch and after a conversation with the driver, he was told to accept them which he did. He was not very good about handling this situation. Oh well, at least dispatch was on top of it.”

May

“Took a cab yesterday to the Billings School.

All went very well both ways, drivers were very nice, were here within minutes, and handled the vouchers fine.”



VICKI



April

This is Vicki. She, Johann (Service Dog), Thumper (Cat & KING) & I have been connected since we found out that Vicki & I have the same birthday. Vicki & I used to clean the streets when we both lived in the Little Brook part of Lake City & we both had mobility equipment to easily get around. Vicki has regular appts. outside of Lake City & struggles with the buses. These vouchers will help with all of those appts.

“The first ride went very well

- Cab arrived within 5 mins
- Driver was fully aware of voucher procedure, it was a pleasant ride
- Fare was around \$16, I gave him 2 vouchers
- The remainder of the second voucher and another \$3 went for tip total \$7
- He was friendly, I couldn't imagine nicer ride

The second ride wasn't so good

- The dispatcher was in such a hurry to get me off the phone, she wasn't really listening, she sent the order out without the information about the vouchers
- She amended the order to include the information about the voucher
- This resulted in piecemeal information to the driver, which upset him
- He didn't understand about the vouchers
- He told me I could only use one and would have to pay the rest
- He demanded the voucher right away
- At one point he said he wouldn't take me
- He talked to someone in dispatch who confirmed I could use more than one voucher
- He wasn't very happy about that and whined for most of the ride
- Not a pleasant ride

I guess you could call these the GOOD and the BAD.”

May

Vicki has been using the vouchers to get herself & her furry kids to the doctors/vets. These vouchers have helped her a lot.

"I took taxis to and from my doctor's office today. Both rides were fine.

The booking of the first ride was a problem, it booked by the automated system and I wasn't give a estimated arrival time. I called for a cab about 40 minutes before I needed to check in at my doctor's office. From my past experience that should have been plenty of time. However today after a frantic call to Yellow Cab (I waited 25 minutes before I called) I was told they hadn't found a driver for me yet and that I should call back in 15 minutes. As I was calling back the cab arrived at the time I was supposed to be checking in, I got to the doctor's office a few minutes late, luckily he was running behind.

The first cab was really good, he got me to my destination within a couple minutes of my appointment. I was grateful and gave him 2 vouches and a \$5.00 tip.

The second cab was at the pickup address within a couple of minutes. Traffic was heavier at this time (almost rush hour) so it took a little longer. I gave him 3 vouchers and a \$5.00 tip.

The only problem I had was automated booking system."

"Both drivers were great, they got me where I needed to be as quickly as possible."

X I A N G

Why did you choose this rider to receive vouchers? What are their biggest barriers to transportation? (e.g., wheelchair access, language, cost, etc.)

She is a member of the faith group I usually went to before COVID. The pandemic has limited her outing to the minimum for over two years. She wanted to go outside, but was not comfortable taking the bus. I, as many other members who care about the elders in the faith group, wanted to encourage her to go outside more and overcome the fear or discomfort.

How did this rider use their vouchers? Where did they go?

She called the Yellow Cab by herself for her trip. She used the service to go anywhere she wanted, like market, Chinatown, hospital, etc.

What worked well for this rider? What positive impact or benefit did the Ride Now vouchers have? How did the vouchers make a difference in their life?

The vouchers gave her a lot of incentives to go outside. She didn't want to waste any of them. Even on the last day of our program, June 30, she took a ride to her favorite place just because she had two vouchers that would expire soon. She felt so happy for that trip.

What was the biggest challenge or barrier that this rider experienced in using their voucher? How could the Ride Now pilot have worked better for them?

What bothered her most was the uncertainty about the service Yellow Cab would provide each time. Sometimes the driver showed up 1 hour later; sometimes, drivers were not happy with short distance; sometimes, they seemed not willing to take the vouchers. Once she gave the vouchers to the driver, the driver was angry and blamed her for not showing the vouchers in the beginning. He then called the dispatch center to verify the info while keeping her inside the taxi. The situation was quite embarrassing and unpleasant. She wishes the Yellow Cab drivers could have had more knowledge of the voucher program and provide the users a pleasurable riding experience.

She also would like to try the Uber/Lyft voucher option if someone can help her install the app and teach her step by step how to use it. She hopes Community Liaisons could take the task to help the elders with mobile options.

What would you or this rider tell SDOT or Metro leadership about the value of or need for a longer-term program like this in the future?

She likes the opportunity of going out with free vouchers, which improves her life quality at no cost and more importantly gives her sense of freedom in doing what she wants or going where she likes any time. She wishes our program could extend.

Why did you choose this rider to receive vouchers? What are their biggest barriers to transportation? (e.g., wheelchair access, language, cost, etc.)

She suffers from muscle weakness (Myasthenia Gravis) for years. With a strong will to survive, she goes to the gym by bus every day, swimming for one hour, and then takes the bus home. The bus journey is not easy for her, usually one hour each way with a transfer. The biggest challenge for her is that there is no direct bus to her daily destination. I feel she is the one who will benefit most from taxi vouchers.

How did this rider use their vouchers? Where did they go?

She used her vouchers to go to the gym.

What worked well for this rider? What positive impact or benefit did the Ride Now vouchers have? How did the vouchers make a difference in their life?

The vouchers helped pay for a direct ride from her home to the gym where she practices her muscle. The direct ride dramatically shortened the time and made a difficult journey very easy.

What was the biggest challenge or barrier that this rider experienced in using their voucher? How could the Ride Now pilot have worked better for them?

The barrier is language, language, language. She neither speaks English nor understands what the drivers say. She relied entirely on her daughter to book the ride. If her daughter is not available or doesn't have the patience to help her, she was not able to use the vouchers. Such experiences frustrated her a lot. In our most recent interview, she mentioned that she is not afraid of going out or taking taxi. If the yellow cab booking system can provide multi-language options, or the voucher program can help with booking, the elders with language barrier will have no problem in using vouchers.

What would you or this rider tell SDOT or Metro leadership about the value of or need for a longer-term program like this in the future?

She really needs a long-term program of taxi vouchers to support her recovery, extend her life, and to improve her life quality. Sometimes, when she felt extremely tired and painful after the daily trip to gym, or when her daughter showed no patience or willingness to help her use the voucher, depression, self-denial, and desperation filled her heart, which made all her struggles seem meaningless. The time I called her to tell her about our program and met her to give her the vouchers, she was so surprised and so happy because she felt somebody and even a government program remembers her and her difficulties, are willing to help her and make her life easier. She looks forward to using the vouchers again one day by herself!

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