



A Worker Cooperative

P.O. Box 8305 • Madison, Wisconsin • 53708-8305  
Telephone (608) 242-2000 • Fax (608) 242-2009  
Web: [www.unioncab.coop](http://www.unioncab.coop) • E-mail: [info@unioncab.coop](mailto:info@unioncab.coop)



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## Accessible Taxi Service Recommendations to the Transit and Parking Commission

Presented by Paul Bittorf, Business Manager  
Union Cab of Madison Cooperative  
and representative to the Dane County Specialized Transportation Commission

### Key Points

- The City of Madison has relied on Union Cab for 24-hour accessible taxi service for over 20 years through the Cooperative's Union Transit wheelchair van service in the 1990's to present with wheelchair ramp equipped minivans.
- An April 30, 2015 report from the office of the City Attorney and Metro Transit states, "There is no legal requirement that the City have ordinances that mandate accessible taxicab service", but that is not the limit of the conversation that should occur in providing this essential public service to the community.
- Demand for accessible services is growing rapidly in Madison and Dane County at a time when the City of Madison appears to be relinquishing responsibility for this need as stated in the April 30 report, "Passenger and transportation companies will adapt quickly to the transitioning regulations (or lack thereof) requiring individuals to find ways to vet transportation suppliers on their own."
- There are possible solutions to the current situation that would allow the City of Madison to protect it's reputation for providing for people with disabilities that have not been given consideration.
- The so-called failure of the accessible taxi services market to develop has not been limited by demand, rather it is the supply of available vehicles that can be afforded by Union Cab.
- The need for cost equivalency between services for both passengers needing the wheelchair service and those who do not makes the cost of on-demand, for-hire metered services too expensive for any transportation operation.

### ***Current Situation***

Union Cab's fleet of accessible taxi vehicles is rapidly deteriorating. We have six vans available, but 3 of these are in need of replacement as soon as possible. Two of them have approximately 400,000 service miles, and the other is a lemon that has had a troubled history of mechanical failures. At any time in the immediate future our fleet might be permanently reduced to 3 vehicles. Cost of replacement on the used vehicle market is 3-4 times the normal price we pay for a standard taxi. We are looking at ways to leverage money to make some purchases, but revenue losses to the TNC competition are undercutting our budget and causing hardship.

Efforts to replace aging vehicles through the New Freedom grant program is no longer possible due to the Federal Department of Transportation decision to shift New Freedom money to the 5310 Grant Program. 5310 Grants are not available to Union Cab because we are disqualified for not being a non-profit, and for not having status as the sole contract provider for the 24-hour on-demand accessible taxi service with local government. We learned this in 2014 when our request for New Freedom funding was denied at the local, State, and Federal levels.

Union Cab is no longer be able to provide on demand accessible service. At this time we typically encounter periods during the day when we fail to accomodate accessible transportation requests because of the limitations of our accessible fleet. Accessible transportation requests encompass all facets of people's lives and are not limited to trips for medical appointments. We encounter people in wheelchairs needing to go to and from the airport, the grocery store, school, church, nights out on the town, and sporting events. There are weddings, other social events, and sometimes even funerals. Limitation to medical needs is due to the priority to serve these requests first at the expense of all other requests.

Because of Union Cab's connections to the community that needs such transportation and the frequent requests we have received from various groups to expand our accessible services, we believe that this market could be developed with community support. It would also require the City of Madison and Dane County to raise awareness of the availability of the accessible taxi service in line with other ways the exceptional quality of life here in the region is promoted. Union Cab recognizes its role in providing accessible taxi service and does not want to leave the citizens of Madison and Dane County in a lurch.

Recent meetings with the City Attorney, Metro Transit, City Engineering, and several local transit managers focused on the role of the various participants in providing accessible taxi services. Information presented by Union Cab at this meeting along with statistical data requested from our billing office were used to effect in in the April 30, 2015 report. We are gravely concerned about the suggestion in this report on page 6, *Budget Issues* that states;

If Metro Plus absorbed an estimated 5,000 wheelchair accessible trips (Cash & Credit card trips, assuming county would absorb account trip portion), staff estimates an additional \$351,000 in additional costs to the city.

This suggestion would strip Union Cab of its current rides entirely, regardless of the stated need for Union Cab to continue to provide accessible taxi service per ADA regulations. The members of Union Cab wish to know, for very good reason, if this is the stated intent of City officials? How have we moved so quickly from having an agreement for Union Cab as a provider of accessible services at the request of the City of Madison to being cut adrift? We have hesitated to have this discussion so as not to cause public alarm.

***Possible Solution***

The City of Madison has set aside \$5,000,000 for Cooperative Development. Union Cab is preparing to forward a proposal for an accessible taxi service cooperative that would feature entirely accessible vehicles. By having no variation in pricing, the ATS Cooperative could focus on demand from customers requiring this service and charge rates that allow the venture to operate at a minimal profit, or perhaps even as a non-profit.

Receiving grant money from the City would create a contractual status for Union Cab that would allow us to qualify as the City-certified provider of the accessible taxi service. This then would further allow for the application of New Freedom 5310 Grant money to assist with vehicle purchases and administrative costs.

Please understand that this concept is not fully developed and will need more time and research to make it happen. Earliest possible availability of the Cooperative Development grant money would be January 1, 2016. Preparations should begin now if we are to apply for a grant.