



Office of the City Manager

INFORMATION CALENDAR

February 10, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager

Submitted by: Scott Gilman, Director, Health, Housing & Community Services

Subject: Fiscal Year 2027 Operational Changes to Berkeley Rides for Seniors and the Disabled

SUMMARY

This report outlines proposed operational changes to the City of Berkeley's Health, Housing, and Community Services Department's Berkeley Rides for Seniors and Disabled (BRSD) program funded through Alameda County Measure BB funds for Fiscal Year 2027 (FY 2027). BRSD is a supplemental transportation program that provides free taxi, accessible wheelchair and GoGo (Uber/Lyft) rides to eligible Berkeley seniors and disabled residents, facilitating access to essential health and social services. There is currently more demand for the program than available resources. To serve additional community members currently on the waiting list and beyond, additional changes must be made to the program.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

In FY 2025, the BRSD program faced budgetary constraints that required reducing the number of rides and how often ride vouchers were distributed. Council was notified of these issues via an Off-Agenda Report on March 10, 2025 (Attachment 1). Even after redesigning the program, demand continued to exceed what the FY 2026 budget could support. There are currently 170 applicants on the waitlist, the waitlist is now closed, and community members continue to ask to be enrolled in the program.

To keep the program sustainable and able to serve more people, BRSD will make the following changes starting July 1, 2026 (FY 2027):

- Fully transition the taxi scrip program allocations to GoGo (Uber/Lyft) and cease the taxi program
- Require a \$4 rider share of cost per ride
- Cap the City's contribution at \$16 per each GoGo ride
- Allow up to 24 GoGo rides per year and up to 32 wheelchair-accessible rides

- Provide additional rides for participants with high medical needs: 12 additional GoGo rides and 16 additional wheelchair-accessible rides; and
- Continue contracting with GoGo sole-source contract in this expanded capacity.

Other Alameda County cities that receive Measure BB funds are also facing similar challenges with taxi programs and many have stopped, or are considering stopping, their taxi scrip programs.

Taxi rides are much more expensive than GoGo rides, and the taxi program has extra costs such as printing taxi scrip booklets and staffing a weekly service day for drivers to redeem scrip. The program's design is also vulnerable to fraud. In addition, the taxi industry has changed significantly due to companies like Uber and Lyft and the number of taxis in Berkeley has dropped from about 110 in 2016 to only 22 in 2025.

Berkeley is also the only city receiving Measure BB funds that does not require riders to pay a portion of ride cost. For example, the City of Hayward requires riders pay the first \$4.00 of each ride up to 10 miles and \$6.00 for rides 11 to 20 miles; City of Fremont requires riders pay the first \$4.00 of each ride; City of Alameda requires riders pay the first \$4.00 of each ride; and City of Oakland will pay for the first \$8.00 of each ride and rider pays the remaining cost of the ride. The Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC) supports programs adding a rider share of cost to help address budget limits and waitlists.

These changes described above and summarized in the tables below will help BRSD continue supporting older adult residents, serve those on the waitlist, and accept new applicants in FY 2027 while staying within budget and in compliance with Measure BB.

Chart 1: FY 2026 Existing Distribution for Each Eligible Senior Rider and Projected Expenditures

Programs	Number of Riders	Annual Distribution Frequency	Semiannual distribution to Riders	Annual Total Per Rider	Anticipated Total Cost to City of Berkeley
Taxi Scrip Program	960	2	\$120	\$240	\$230,400
High Medical Need Taxi	59	2	\$240	\$480	\$28,320
Wheelchair Van	42	2	\$448	\$896	\$37,632
High Medical Wheelchair Van	11	2	\$448	\$896	\$9,856
GoGo	960	2	\$100	\$200	\$192,000
TOTAL					\$498,208

Chart 2: FY 2027 Distribution for Each Eligible Senior Rider and Projected Expenditures*

Programs	Number of Riders (up to)	Rider Share of Cost Per Ride	City of Berkeley Max. Contribution per Ride	Annual # of Rides Per Rider	Anticipated Total Cost to City of Berkeley
Wheelchair Van	50	\$4	\$24	32	\$38,400
High Medical Wheelchair Van	20	\$4	\$24	16	\$7,680
GoGo	1,200	\$4	\$16	24	\$460,800
GoGo High Medical Need	70	\$4	\$16	12	\$13,440
TOTAL	1,440				\$520,320

* Eliminating backend printing and security costs for the taxi program allows for a higher total program contribution.

BRSD staff attended the November 12, 2025, Commission on Disability meeting to present the proposed FY 2027 changes. Both commissioners and a member of the public generally supported the plan. They highlighted benefits such as reducing fraud, preventing fixed-rate overcharges by taxi drivers, addressing refusals to accept taxi scrip, improving evening and weekend availability, and gaining better service data from GoGo. They also noted that wheelchair users have other transportation options like East Bay Paratransit and AC Transit.

BRSD staff also attended a Commission on Aging Meeting on November 19, 2025, to review the proposed FY 2027 program changes. The commission was pleased with the effort that went into the recertification process that resulted in a significant reduction in member enrollment. They were supportive of a program plan that is fiscally sound and involved the community in the planning process. And they also noted an appreciation that GoGo would provide better service data for program planning.

Staff also gathered additional community input through tabling events at both the North and South Berkeley Senior Centers in December 2025 to share information with the community and hear their input. This input will be used to provide additional outreach and training.

BRSD will inform current participants about the changes through mailed notices, outreach at Senior Centers, the monthly Nugget newsletter, and the BRSD webpage. Taxi drivers will also be notified that the Taxi Scrip program is ending. All participants will receive written information about the changes in spring 2026, and updated details will be included with each distribution starting in FY 2027. Staff will collect and review participant feedback and monitor ride usage to guide future planning and budgeting.

The final Program Plan is due to ACTC in February or March of 2026. Once approved, the City will enter into a new contract with GoGo for FY 2027.

As Berkeley's senior population continues to grow, the current plan may not meet future demand; consequently, the program will undergo reviews throughout FY 2027 and future years. The program reserves the right to change the participant contribution, subsidy amounts by the City, or enrollment caps should Measure BB allocations be reduced, to ensure the program remains operationally sustainable amid rising demand.

BACKGROUND

The population of older adults in the City of Berkeley is projected to double by 2030, resulting in 1 in 5 adults being over 65 years of age. In recent years, the BRSD program has seen this population growth reflected in the number of enrolled riders and rides provided. Between July 2022 and Spring 2025, the number of enrolled riders increased by 54%, and total rides increased by 58%.

However, BRSD does not anticipate any significant increase in Measure BB revenue to continue to meet this demand. With the goal being to serve as many riders in our community as possible and with the anticipation of growing demand and limited revenue, the program made several changes in FY 2025 - 2026 (Attachment 1). BRSD first created a waitlist and then stopped accepting new applications in March 2025. In April 2025, the program also reduced the number of taxi and GoGo rides available to save costs.

BRSD also recognized that many people enrolled years ago may no longer need the service, and some riders had moved or passed away. To ensure the rider list was accurate, the program required all 1,756 enrolled riders to recertify by completing a new application between June and August 2025. As a result, enrollment decreased by about 47%, leaving 960 active riders.

Additionally, BRSD began a pilot program with GoGo in 2019, which has been largely successful. Key benefits include:

- GoGo rides cost much less than taxi rides
- GoGo offers a 24/7 call center. Riders can use an automated system or pay a small fee to speak with a live operator
- Although GoGo is used less frequently than the taxi program (while the taxi program is still in effect), riders have given positive feedback by phone and during recertification; and
- GoGo offers a safety feature that allows riders to add family or friends who receive text updates on pickup and drop-off locations.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identifiable environmental effects, sustainability opportunities, or climate impacts associated with the subject of this report.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Demand for this program continues to exceed the resources available. The changes described in this report will help manage costs and allow more people to participate while staying within budget. However, as the population of older adults grows, demand is expected to keep increasing.

Future alternatives include:

- Rather than requiring a rider share of cost, the program could continue with a GoGo and Wheelchair Van only program as proposed but could simply apply a 15% cut to all distributions. This alternative would be able to serve the same number of increased participants and would result in similar savings. However, this alternative is not in alignment with other jurisdictions and ACTC guidance to encourage a rider share of cost.
- Contracting directly with a Transportation Network Company (TNC) to provide on-demand rides. This could lower ride costs, though the amount of savings is still uncertain. Direct contracting may pose liability concerns, and some seniors may not have a cell phone or may not be able, or want, to use an app to request rides. To address this, BRSD could continue contracting with GoGo so riders without a cell phone can still book trips.
- Changing the cost-sharing model. BRSD could pay a smaller, initial fixed portion of each ride while participants pay the remainder. For example, if Berkeley paid the first \$8 of each of the 24 annual rides and the participant pays the remaining cost of the ride, the program could serve nearly twice as many participants.
- Exploring alternative funding sources to expand the program and meet more of the demand.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

The BRSD program is currently 100% funded through Measure BB Direct Local Distribution funding, which is distributed by the Alameda County Transportation Commission. The possible future actions assume that no additional funding is received.

CONTACT PERSON

Rhianna Babka, Manager of Aging Services, HHCS, (510) 981-5410

Attachments:

1: Operational Changes to Berkeley Rides for Seniors and the Disabled (BRSD)



Office of the City Manager

March 10, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager
 Subject: Operational Changes to Berkeley Rides for Seniors & the Disabled (BRSD)

This memo outlines key operational changes to the City of Berkeley's Health, Housing, and Community Services Department's Berkeley Rides for Seniors & Disabled (BRSD) program. BRSD is a supplemental transportation program that provides free taxi, wheelchair van vouchers, and GoGo (Uber/Lyft) rides to eligible Berkeley seniors and disabled residents, facilitating access to essential health and social services.

Historically, the program increased distribution amounts temporarily due to low usage and to comply with funding guidelines. However, a recent surge in applications (averaging 50 new applications per month), rising ride costs, and increased demand from an aging population have rapidly depleted program reserves. At the current distribution rate and frequency, the total annual distribution cost is \$2M. The total projected revenue for FY26 is \$865,049.

To ensure long-term sustainability and maximize service reach, distribution amounts and frequency will be reduced, beginning with the April 2025 distribution. Detailed changes are summarized in the tables below. This adjustment will allow the BRSD program to continue serving vulnerable residents within budgetary constraints.

Chart 1: Current Distribution for Each Eligible Senior

Programs	Annual Frequency	Amount	Annual Total
Taxi Scrip Program	3 times	\$200	\$600
High Medical Need Taxi	3 times	\$480	\$1,440
Wheelchair Van Program	3 times	\$448	\$1,344
High Medical Wheelchair Van	3 times	\$448	\$1,344
GoGo (Uber and/or Lyft)	3 times	\$160	\$480

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At its current operational capacity, BRSD will not be able to sustain itself past this fiscal year. In order to maintain the program, reductions to the BRSD will need to be made and applications will be either waitlisted and/or not accepted until space is available. BRSD program is currently at capacity. Planned reductions are as follows:

Chart 2: New Distribution for Each Eligible Senior

Programs	Annual Frequency	Amount	Annual Total
Taxi Scrip Program	2 times	\$120	\$240
High Medical Need Taxi	2 times	\$240	\$480
Wheelchair Van Program	2 times	\$448	\$896
High Medical Wheelchair Van	2 times	\$448	\$896
GoGo (Uber and/or Lyft)	2 times	\$100	\$200

It should be noted that the High Medical Need Taxi program has been significantly reduced due to existing transportation benefits available to Medi-Cal beneficiaries enrolled in Alameda Alliance or Kaiser Permanente. These health plans provide comprehensive transportation services for medical, dental, mental health, and substance use disorder appointments, as well as trips to pharmacies and medical supply providers. More information regarding this benefit can be found at alamedaalliance.org and kp.org.

The reduction in distribution will allow for a reassessment of program quality and utilization, providing valuable data to inform future program development. This approach will support long-term financial sustainability and enhance budget planning.

Currently, there are 1,650 Berkeley Seniors participating in the program. Each participant will receive written communication regarding these program changes beginning in April 2025. A letter with the updated changes will accompany each distribution being sent out in the next allotment. Staff will collect any feedback given and assess participant feedback while monitoring utilization rates to identify service gaps and inform future program budgeting and planning.

cc: David White, Deputy City Manager
 Mark Numainville, City Clerk
 Matthai Chakko, Assistant to the City Manager
 Jenny Wong, City Auditor
 Scott Gilman, Director, Health, Housing, and Community Services
 Tanya Bustamante, Deputy Director, Health, Housing, and Community Services

