



City of Cambridge

Department of Human Service Programs

51 Inman Street Cambridge Massachusetts 02139 498-9076

TO: Robert W. Healy

FROM: Jill Herold *J.H.*
Assistant City Manager for Human Services

SUBJECT: Transition of DART Elderly Transportation
Service to Operation by SCM, Inc.

DATE: September 30, 1983

As of October 1, the DART (Dial-A-Ride Taxi) program for elders, previously run by the Council on Aging, will be operated by SCM, Inc., a private non-profit corporation formed in October of 1981 to provide elderly and handicapped transportation in Cambridge, Somerville and Medford. SCM, Inc. has handled scheduling and dispatching for DART since mid-July of this year.

Pressures Toward Regionalization

The decision to move to a regional transportation system, such as SCM, was influenced by the need of service providers, funding sources, and clients for special transportation that would be efficient, stable in the face of funding contingencies, and simple for riders to use. Somerville/Cambridge Elder Services, Inc., the local home care agency which is DART's major funding source, indicated two years ago that it expected DART to regionalize as quickly as possible. The Massachusetts Department of Elder Affairs, subsequently restricted grants for transportation to agencies that were or planned to be regional in scope. The Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, which supplies most of the lift-equipped vehicles used in non-profit special transportation also decided to fund only region systems; this meant that Cambridge would be unable to augment its aging stock of modified vans without a regional umbrella. Essentially, all DART's funding sources required the program to regionalize.

Service Changes Resulting from Regionalization

From the rider's viewpoint, the basic change which has occurred in the transition to SCM is the switch from taxi cabs to lift-equipped vans. The use of vans requires that several passengers share each vehicle, and sometimes occasions longer trips, as riders are picked up and dropped off. To utilize the van's carrying capacity, prescheduled shuttle services is offered to some common destinations, such as Boston hospitals; riders are asked to assist by scheduling their appointments to fit the shuttle's timetable.

continued

TO: Robert W. Healy
September 30, 1983
Page 2

Service Changes Resulting from Regionalization -- continued

Since SCM's fleet of vans is relatively small, there are some destinations outside the immediate metropolitan area which SCM does not serve; nevertheless, SCM's service area is larger than that of the DART cabs, which covered only Cambridge and certain Boston hospitals. SCM provides service from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., a net increase of 1½ hours per weekday over the preexisting service, which ran from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. However, SCM does not provide weekend service, which two or three DART riders have used steadily.

Some features of the scheduling process have changed. For instance, riders may schedule an SCM trip from one day up to one week in advance, whereas taxi reservations were taken only on the previous day. Since the SCM service is based on ride-sharing, the rider who calls to arrange a trip gives the scheduler the time he wants to be at his destination, rather than the desired pick-up time, which may vary depending on other passenger's needs. Return trips are no longer scheduled in advance; when the rider is ready to return, he calls SCM and a van is dispatched.

Finally, the cost of most trips is lower for SCM riders: the fare charged is 50¢ for trips in Cambridge, Somerville, and Medford, or to the Massachusetts General Hospital, and \$1.00 outside this area, whereas the taxi fare was \$1.00 for all trips.

In all other respects, the DART program has not changed under SCM's management.

Financial Effects of Regionalization

The financial argument for regionalization has been borne out by SCM's first six months of operation. The total cost per trip for an ambulatory rider in the DART program has declined from \$6.10, for a taxi dispatched by the Council on Aging, to \$3.50 per trip using SCM vans. The cost of a single trip for a wheelchair-bound client decreased from \$17.60 to \$4.50. Shared trips and other operating efficiencies have enabled SCM to hold the level of service in the DART program relatively constant, despite a 28% decrease in Elder Services funding from the past year.

At the same time, Cambridge has, by its support of SCM, helped to create a major public resource which is owned and controlled by the community. SCM's fleet of lift-equipped vehicles represents a permanent capital investment of over \$200,000 in the development of transportation for the elderly and handicapped.

continued

TO: Robert W. Healy
September 30, 1983
Page 3

Transition-period Problems and Remedies

The transition to regionalized service has not been uniformly smooth, and consumer complaints have been received by SCM and by other agencies. Some dissatisfaction can be traced to the use of vans and trip-grouping by SCM, and to unfamiliar procedures; these difficulties should respond to on-going educational efforts by SCM and the Council on Aging. Of graver concern are complaints reflecting inappropriate handling of clients on the telephone, contradictory information provided by SCM scheduling office and late vehicles. These issues have arisen in Somerville and Medford as well as Cambridge, and have concerned all three cities' representatives on SCM's Board of Directors.

The Board has responded to these problems through an extended series of meetings between its Personnel Committee and the corporation's Director, scheduling staff, and drivers. As a result, one driver whose performance while assigned to Cambridge was questionable has been replaced; the scheduling staff has been expanded and restructured to allow better handling of phone calls; physical and procedural changes have been made in the scheduling office; and a decrease in waiting times has been achieved. The current Cambridge driver, recruited through the Council on Aging's Elder Hire employment service, has many years' knowledge of the city and is doing well.

The Council on Aging will continue to monitor closely the effects of these and other operational changes at SCM on the quality of service provided to Cambridge elders.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
Tel. 498-9011

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

October 3, 1983

To the Honorable, the City Council:

With respect to Awaiting Report Item No. 27 relative to problems that have arisen with the DART elderly program since its transfer from Cambridge to the Cambridge, Somerville and Medford consortium, enclosed please find copy of a report from Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mbf
Enc.

Agenda Item Number Two *S-542*

Re: response to Awaiting Report Item No. 27 regarding problems that have arisen with the DART elderly program since its transfer to the Cambridge, Somerville & Medford consortium.

In City Council,

October 3, 1983

10/3/83
Placed on File