

**To:** Operations and Scheduling Committee

**Date:** 12/30/2021

**From:** Rashida Kamara Director of ADA and Specialized Services

**Reviewed by:** WC.

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**SUBJECT: One-Year Extension of the Choice in Aging Demonstration Project**

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### Background:

In response to a growing number of complaints from Choice in Aging regarding service failures, County Connection retained the Consulting Services of an ADA Paratransit expert to investigate, summarize and recommend best practices to improve service. Both County Connection's General Manager and Choice in Aging President and CEO, Debbie Toth agreed that insight from a neutral third party would be mutually beneficial in assessing the issues and making a recommendation to improve the paratransit experience.

As a result, the Board approved a six-month pilot project, in which Choice in Aging would retain the services of Silver Ride, a Transportation Network Company (TNC) company to transport passengers to and from their facility. The pilot included 24 passengers that were identified as having the most difficult time riding paratransit. These challenges included, long ride times (even when ride times were compliant with ADA standards, multiple stops, changing drivers and bumpy trips). These trips were especially difficult for passengers with cognitive issues, like Alzheimer's and continued to have a detrimental effect on their therapeutic time at Choice in Aging.

The cost with Silver Ride was \$34 per trip during the pilot project, while ADA paratransit trips cost \$46. By collaborating with Choice in Aging, County connection saved \$12 per trip.

### Ongoing Participation

Following the six-month pilot, staff was programmed to recommend the continued participation in the program with Choice in Aging with the option for same day booking. Unfortunately, effective March 16<sup>th</sup>, there was a Statewide shelter in place order issued by the Governor of California, due to the widespread of COVID-19. Social services like Choice in Aging were forced to close their doors. Since the onset of the pandemic and the slow removal of restrictions, County Connection continues to work with Choice in Aging in their reopening plan. As a result, passengers have started to return to in person participation and Choice in Aging would like to renew participation in the Silver Ride program.

As staff reviews the success of the pilot pre-pandemic it is clear the program reduced the cost of transportation to the Authority, provided excellent customer service to those in need and helped build a stronger relationship with Choice in Aging.

**Financial Implications:**

The cost per trip will be \$37.50. Prior to the pandemic, County Connection budgeted \$250,00 but only spent \$115,000 for the program. This year staff budgeted \$300,000 anticipating the program would ramp up this summer and operate for a full year. With the slow start staff anticipates the program expense at \$75,000 for the remainder of FY 22. The extension will not have an additional impact on the paratransit budget because it was included in the approved budget in anticipation of continuing the project.

**Recommendation:**

Due to the success of the pilot program, staff recommends continued collaboration with Choice in Aging through the Silver Ride program.

**Action Requested:**

Staff respectfully requests the Operations & Scheduling Committee forward the recommended one-year extension of the demonstration project to the Board for approval.