

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

ASSEMBLY, No. 4208

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: AUGUST 24, 2020

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 4208 (1R).

This bill reforms the State's system of providing paratransit services. The goal of the reforms is to better integrate the various types of paratransit service currently offered in the State, allow lower cost providers to provide more of the trips, and ensure that best practices are adopted across the State.

The bill requires the New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ Transit) to better integrate its paratransit services with other paratransit services. Under the bill, this is achieved by requiring NJ Transit to ensure that all paratransit service that it directly manages, administers, or supports financially, utilizes a software package that will be compatible with the software used by other paratransit providers. The bill requires NJ Transit to begin identifying regular and recurring trips, and to develop a system where other paratransit providers can complete those trips on behalf of NJ Transit if the provider can meet applicable federal standards, provide the trip at a lower cost, and protect customer safety. The bill also requires NJ Transit to redesign the Access Link program under a brokerage model that allows NJ Transit to realize cost savings when reducing the number of Access Link trips fulfilled by contract providers, and to share those savings with paratransit providers that meet minimum federal standards and successfully compete for regular and routine trips under this new system. The bill also encourages NJ Transit to shift some trips requested under the Access Link program to other State based programs, especially if those trip requests are not eligible under the Access Link program. This is intended to provide greater integration of paratransit service across the State, so that NJ Transit can allow paratransit providers to compete for regular and routine Access Link trips.

The bill requires the establishment of a best practices pilot training program for paratransit providers. The program is to be run by NJ Transit and a qualified community organization to be selected by NJ Transit. Under the first phase of the program, the qualified community organization and NJ Transit will develop a paratransit best practices training module. Under the second phase, NJ Transit is to select five

paratransit providers, upon application, to receive training in paratransit best practices under the pilot program. The qualified community organization will then provide the training to each of the five paratransit providers under a training contract with NJ Transit. The training will include modern trip making software, trip confirmation, scheduling, a mobile phone application for customers, dashboard camera safety technology, as well as agency-wide and individual employee training and guidance. Depending upon the success of phase two of the pilot, phase three will involve either revising the training module into a training program that other paratransit providers can adopt without direct training from the qualified community organization, or NJ Transit and the qualified community organization will determine some other method of integrating paratransit service so that paratransit providers meeting certain standards can compete for regular and routine paratransit trips. The second part of phase three involves the establishment of regional paratransit coordinating councils.

The bill creates new regional paratransit coordinating councils (coordinating councils). There are to be six coordinating councils divided geographically by county. Membership on the coordinating councils include the Division of Developmental Disabilities, NJ Transit, NJ Transit Access Link contractors from each service region, county government, county paratransit system operators, and several listed community organizations. The coordinating councils are to meet at least quarterly and share best practices. They are also required to establish a system to exchange information between paratransit providers and share budget information. The coordinating councils will replace the county based councils used to develop county plans under the Senior Citizen and Disabled Resident Transportation Assistance Program, but the councils may establish county level subcommittees for this purpose. The county plans also must now account for the efforts of this bill to integrate Statewide paratransit service under a unified platform and improve Statewide coordination across geography and across agency. The coordinating councils are also to be utilized by NJ Transit to develop its revised Access Link program so that the paratransit providers on the council can be used as a resource when allowing paratransit providers to compete for regular and routine Access Link trips. Finally the coordinating councils are to serve as a resource and develop materials to assist other paratransit providers in achieving the integration objectives in the first part of phase three of the pilot program, either through the revised training module or the alternate solution developed.

The bill requires NJ Transit to issue a report to the Governor and the Legislature at the end of the pilot program with information on the pilot program and a recommendation on whether or not to continue the pilot program, as well as an analysis of the decisions made about how to proceed with the Statewide integration required in the first part of

the third phase of the pilot program. The division and NJ Transit are also required to survey users about how their user experience is impacted by the pilot program and changes to the Access Link program, and report on how each have impacted paratransit users.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services finds that the New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ Transit) will realize increased costs in order to establish the paratransit best practices pilot program, restructure the Access Link program, and to staff and oversee the coordinating councils. These costs will restructure the provision of paratransit services in the State in a way that will generate savings for NJ Transit by reducing the cost of the Access Link program and for the Department of Human Services (DHS) by reducing the cost of paratransit trips funded by DHS and provided by community organizations. The magnitude of such costs and savings will depend upon the success of the pilot program and the implementation of a brokerage model for the Access Link program. The expected costs of the pilot program and paratransit coordinating councils are expected to be less than \$8 million. The cost of creating a brokerage model for Access Link will involve notable IT costs and depend upon how the model is developed. The paratransit best practices training program is structured in phases, which will only proceed if prior phases are successful. This mechanism will allow some costs of the pilot program to be averted if they are not successful in driving cost savings as intended.