

Close

http://cumberlink.com/news/local/rabbittransit-plans-to-expand-uber-use-for-midstate-paratransit/article_0e4eae1-1cc0-58c3-b4f9-b4978ff90370.html

TOP STORY

RabbitTransit plans to expand Uber use for Midstate paratransit

Zack Hoopes The Sentinel Aug 15, 2017



In this Tuesday, January 2016 file photo, a driver displaying Lyft and Uber stickers on his front windshield drops off a customer in downtown Los Angeles.

BUY NOW

Associated Press

Area residents may soon be seeing Uber, Lyft and other commercial ride-share vendors helping out with public paratransit services.

RabbitTransit, the York-based public transit authority that operates Cumberland County's ride-share system, has begun using Uber in York County, and plans to introduce the program to other areas of the Midstate in the near future.

“What we're trying to do is build a toolbox that addresses the different situations we encounter,” said Rich Farr, executive director of RabbitTransit. “It has worked well, with certain limitations.”

While Cumberland County is part of Capital Area Transit for fixed-route bus service, the county partners with RabbitTransit for ride-share services. This encompasses a number of publicly funded transportation programs, mostly for the elderly and disabled.

RabbitTransit's major vector for such services are small buses, which can pick up and/or drop off several clients at a time, traveling between residential areas and common places of clients' work or medical appointments.

But with the region's diverse geography, Farr said it is sometimes preferable to use commercial services to make short runs in more urban areas, allowing RabbitTransit's bus drivers to provide service to more distant areas.

“Where it really works are more urban areas where we can take care of some shorter trips ... and free up our drivers for longer-range service,” Farr said.

Uber is currently only used in York County, but is expected to be introduced to the rest of RabbitTransit's Midstate service area in Franklin, Adams, Cumberland and Perry counties, as well as the northern service area of Union, Snyder, Northumberland, Montour and Columbia counties.

“We have plans to be able to use it in all 10 counties, eventually,” Farr said.

Thus far, RabbitTransit has ordered 25 trips per day — at the very most — from Uber over the past six months, Farr said. RabbitTransit provides an average of over 500 trips per day in the Midstate service area, according to its most recent annual report.

RabbitTransit is also working on a contract with Lyft, a ride-hailing platform similar to Uber. Such services typically operate by connecting an independent driver with a customer via a phone app. The service collects a certain percentage of the total trip cost as a service fee.

Under the contact with Uber, RabbitTransit is able to use a different booking system, provided by Uber, to schedule trips on a larger scale than would be available via smartphone. The agreement also allows RabbitTransit to pay by a more traditional billing system, rather than paying via credit card over the app.

This lends Uber to use for programs that are fully funded by state and federal grants, Farr said, as opposed to other services that require copay by the rider.

The use of Uber, Lyft and other such programs is also limited by the clientele — beneficiaries who are more able-bodied are conducive to using commercial services.

“For someone with a more severe disability or cognitive issue, it’s much better for them to be in our vehicle with our driver, who is trained to assist with that,” Farr said. “It really depends on the individual.”