News

Stafford receives federal grant to expand senior medical transportation

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Stafford has received a federal transportation grant that will fund the purchase of a new paratransit vehicle, expanding medical transportation options for seniors and residents with mobility limitations.

The funding was awarded through the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program, commonly referred to as Section 5310, a program overseen by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and administered in Connecticut by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT).

The program provides financial assistance for projects that improve transportation access for older adults and individuals with disabilities, particularly in areas where traditional public transit does not adequately meet their needs.

"Section 5310 funds are apportioned among the states and designated recipients by a formula which is based on the number of older adults and people with disabilities in each state according to the latest available U.S. Census data," the FTA's webpage states.

According to the FTA, Section 5310 funding can be used for capital expenses such as accessible vans, mobility management projects and other transportation services designed to enhance independence and access to essential destinations. In Stafford's case, the funds will be used to purchase a paratransit van as part of the town's senior services.

The Stafford Senior and Community Center currently offers transportation services for residents age 60 and older and for individuals with disabilities. As outlined on the town's website, these services include curb-to-curb transportation for medical appointments, errands and essential services within Stafford and surrounding communities, including Willington, Tolland, Somers, Enfield and Vernon. Transportation is typically provided on a scheduled basis and is subject to vehicle availability.

Town materials indicate that the addition of a new paratransit vehicle will increase capacity for medical trips, which remain one of the most frequent and critical uses of senior transportation services. Medical transportation is especially important in rural and small-town areas, where limited fixed-route transit and longer travel distances can pose barriers to accessing health care.

Groups like the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, a coalition administered in cooperation with the FTA, promote the availability and accessibility of transportation options for older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers. It's due in part to resources and training programs that support 5310 programs in states like Connecticut.

"Section 5310 grantees have flexibility in how they use funds to support the older adults and individuals with disabilities in their communities," the group states on its webpage. "However, all funded projects must be included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan... This ensures that services are responsive to local needs and priorities."

The Section 5310 program was created to address these types of transportation gaps. The FTA identifies access to health care, employment and community services as core goals of the program, particularly for populations that may no longer be able to drive or use conventional transit systems. Funds are distributed through state agencies, which evaluate local applications based on demonstrated need and program eligibility.



A close-up of a ramp used by paratransit vehicles in order to make them wheelchair accessible. Paratransit vehicles are often used for medical transport, especially in rural areas with limited public transportation. PHOTO BY @FIELDS5695 ON PINTEREST

Nearby communities, including the Town of Willington, also provide senior services that may include transportation assistance for medical appointments and essential trips. Willington's Senior Services program, as described on the town's website, works to support older residents through coordination of services and referrals, including transportation resources where available.

"CT DOT conducts a competitive selection process for the Section 5310 grant program. Each year, application materials are made available to eligible recipients, which are reviewed and prioritized for award by CT DOT and the Regional Councils of Governments," their 5310 application states.

Northeastern Connecticut's participation in the Section 5310 program reflects a broader statewide approach to improving mobility for aging populations. The state continues to administer federal transit funds to municipalities and service providers that offer specialized transportation, particularly in areas without extensive public transit networks.

Stafford's new paratransit van is expected to become part of the town's transportation fleet once procurement and delivery are complete.

As Connecticut's population continues to age, programs like Section 5310 play a growing role in supporting local transportation infrastructure. For Stafford residents who rely on town-provided transportation, the additional vehicle is expected to improve scheduling flexibility and access to essential medical care.

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