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Senior buses to return

By [Uriah A. Kiser](#)

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PRINCE WILLIAM, Va.—Senior citizens stood and cheered Tuesday afternoon after the Prince William County Board of Supervisors voted to give back their buses.

The board voted unanimously to move \$30,000 in grant money to purchase two vans to be used to transport seniors to one of the two county senior centers in Manassas and Woodbridge.

Under the new plan, a van will be placed at both senior centers, operate four routes, take reservations one day per week and charge seniors \$1 each way to ride.

"For persons that live close to the [senior] center or on the main drag, and if the bus is passing their house every day, hopefully we will be able to pick them up, so some people we hope will be able to get more than two trips a week," said Prince William Area Agency on Aging Director Courtney S. Tierney.

A similar service that employed the use of five buses—costing \$150,000 annually—ended last year due to budget cuts. A widely unpopular voucher program was then instituted, allowing seniors a monthly stipend to take cabs or OmniLink's local bus service to their destinations.

For months, many seniors balked at the cost of taking the cabs, saying fares ate up too much of their voucher and limited their trips. Many seniors who live in the county's west end complained about the lack of OmniLink service there and said walking to a bus stop was inconvenient and dangerous.

Tierney told the board the voucher system would be discontinued to fund the new bus service, but vouchers that have already been issued will remain good until their printed expiration dates. The vans could be up and running by April.

While the vote was unanimous, excluding John T. Stirrup, R-Gainesville, who was absent from the

meeting, Chairman Corey A. Stewart, R-At-large, said the taxi voucher system still has its place in the county, and asked Tierney if she could apply for federal grant money to keep it going.

"The voucher system is critical, if a senior needs to make a medical appointment, the buses do not work for that sort of thing," said Stewart.

The bus service will cost county taxpayers \$118,000 and is not expected to be cut from next year's budget plan, a county official said. Supervisor Frank J. Principi, D-Woodbridge, allocated \$20,000 in discretionary funds to be used for small-scale transportation projects for the purchase of the vans.

The county sold all five of the old buses last year after the program ended and made \$28,255 on the sale. Tierney said her agency is in talks with the county's park authority to buy back one of the vans for \$17,500, plus the cost of added improvements.

Jim Bryant, owner of Manassas Cab Company, which participates in the county's voucher program, said he wants to continue working with the county on a voucher program. The voucher system was never fully funded to be successful, he said.

"The voucher program was grossly underfunded, which creates an environment where people become upset," said Bryant.

Gainesville resident Bobbie Henderson, who doesn't drive, is just happy to have the buses back.

"I've been praying that it would happen. This has been my third time coming here to the board trying to get the buses back, and we did it," she said.

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