

# Uber, Lyft help seniors get around

*By Laura Berrios For the AJC*

Could online ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft help fill the transportation needs of metro Atlanta's seniors?

At least two counties think they might and have established low-cost, door-to-door services to test them out.

In Cobb County, Seniors Go is a new program where residents 55 and older can book Uber through Common Courtesy for a discounted fare of \$2 for the first 15 miles and 85 cents per mile after that. Seniors can go anywhere they want, but are limited to two round-trip rides a week.

Participants must be members of the Senior Citizen Council of Cobb County — membership fees are \$12 for a single and \$15 for a couple — and pay a one-time \$10 fee to get started. The council offsets ride-sharing costs, which typically run from \$15 to \$25 for a minimum fare trip.

“We wanted to make the service affordable so seniors will be able to get out and go to the grocery store or the theater and not be home-bound,” said council member Jane Galvin-Lewis. “We want seniors to be able to be independent.”

A similar program is being piloted in Fulton County, where a limited number of seniors use Uber to go to and from one of the county's four multipurpose senior centers at no cost to them. Rides are booked for them through the senior center.

Kenn Vanhooose, division manager for the Fulton County Office of Aging, said plans are to eventually expand the program so seniors can use it to go other places for a small fee.

“Seniors that have used it have absolutely loved it,” Vanhooose said. It allows them to get to and from the center quickly, instead of riding the senior center van, which can take up to an hour.

Vanhooose said he sees Uber and Lyft as viable transportation options, and ride-sharing is another resource they can offer to older adults who can no longer drive. “We know we'll never be able to provide all the transportation that seniors need,” he said.

Nationally, the average person will outlive their ability to drive by seven to 10 years, said Mary Blumberg, program manager of Strategic Planning and Development for the Atlanta Regional Commission's Aging and Health Resources Division.

In metro Atlanta, “once you stop driving, your whole world shrinks because you don't have a lot of options available,” she said. Transportation remains the No. 1 service requested by seniors, according to ARC surveys.

While Uber and Lyft work well for seniors who are mobile, ridesharing won't completely solve the transportation problem, Blumberg said. Access to these services is still spotty in rural and low-income communities where transportation needs are greatest.

Commuters need a patchwork of transportation options. ARC has established a one-click website, [simplygetthere.org](http://simplygetthere.org), for trip planning that shows all transportation options and costs. Plans are to eventually expand the features so you can book your trip and pay for it on the same site.

ARC also funds transportation voucher programs for older adults and those with disabilities, and sponsors seminars teaching seniors how to use public transportation. For the past 17 years, DeKalb County has tackled the most urgent transportation issue facing seniors — getting to and from the doctor's office.

The nonprofit I Care, which began in 1999, is a door-to-door service with volunteer drivers using their own cars to transport seniors to any type of medical appointment. The service is available weekdays from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. for DeKalb seniors ages 55 and older who qualify due to income or disability.

The organization serves around 290 clients a year, using 50 to 60 volunteer drivers whom Director Tom Simon calls the “heart and soul” of I Care. They make seniors feel comfortable, giving them service with a “personal touch” that they can’t get from using MARTA or taking a cab, he said. Many of the seniors have limited mobility, and a friendly chat with the driver could be the only time they’ve spoken to another person the entire day, Simon said.

Over the years, plenty of other counties and organizations have expressed a desire to start a similar transportation network. Simon shares how to get it started and keep it running, but as far as he knows, none have taken on the project.

“It is a daunting task to start, but once you get it going, it sustains itself,” he said.

Assistant Director Lori Webster said the organization would like to expand its services, and the need is there because seniors also want rides to the grocery store, to church or just getting out and about.

“The aging population is growing so quickly. It’s an important issue to address now,” Webster said.

### **Senior transportation options**

#### **Seniors Go**

Open to members of the Senior Citizen Council of Cobb County, ages 55 and older.

Common Courtesy Rides will book door-to-door Uber travel for members from any Cobb location up to 15 miles for \$2 per person per ride. There will be an 85-cent per mile charge after that. Riders are limited to two round-trip rides per week. Common Courtesy also arranges Uber and Lyft travel for other nonprofit organizations geared to seniors.

For more information: 917-374-3459, [seniorsgo.org](http://seniorsgo.org), [seniorcitizencouncilofcobb.org](http://seniorcitizencouncilofcobb.org), [commoncourtesyrides.org](http://commoncourtesyrides.org).

#### **I Care**

Door-to-door service using volunteer drivers to transport DeKalb County residents 55 and older to any type of medical appointment. Service is free and available weekdays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

I Care accommodates disabled seniors, and those who are ambulatory. Eligibility is needs-based due to medical or financial reasons.

For more information: 404-377-2273 (9 a.m.-2 p.m. Mondays-Fridays), [icareseiors.org](http://icareseiors.org).

#### **Atlanta Regional Commission Area Agency on Aging**

Seniors can plan their trip through the Simply Get There website ([simplygetthere.org](http://simplygetthere.org)) to see what transportation options are available and their costs. They can also get information about any assistance that might be available to them.