

'Taxi' service to debut for West Milford elderly, disabled

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[WEST MILFORD](#) — Seniors and the disabled who find it daunting to get around in the roughly 80-square-mile township will soon have a low-priced taxi option.

Help will be available through the EZ Ride Community Cars program, which provides a discounted door-to-door taxi service for senior citizens and disabled residents. Community Cars already operates in 11 communities in [Bergen County](#), but this is the first such program in [Passaic County](#).

The service will help meet a need for public transportation in the township. The local government owns and operates a bus on just one, 29-mile bus route five days a week. Keith Knudsen, director of the Department of Community Services and Recreation, said that at meetings of the township's Transportation Advisory Committee, some residents had complained about spotty and insufficient bus service.

He altered the bus route and changed driver schedules two years ago to deliver more consistent service, but busing remains limited. The bus, which averages 20 to 40 passengers daily, makes 15 stops including a

housing community for older adults, the Hillcrest Community Center, and two supermarkets.

"We did improve bus service, but it's still not hitting all areas," he said. "You can't run an economical bus service in a town of this size."

Seeing a need for more transportation, Knudsen enlisted support of the mayor and Council and pursued a deal with Meadowlink, the non-profit that operates EZ Ride's Community Cars program. Meadowlink supplies the car, insurance and gas cards. The municipality must recruit volunteer drivers and generate enough money — about \$70 a week — so the program is self-sustaining. Community Cars participants pay \$5 for a 10-mile trip, and 50 cents for each additional mile. For shared rides, the cost is half that. Knudsen still is recruiting volunteers and expects rides to start in about two weeks. For information on the program including how to volunteer, call 973-728-2861.

Community Cars begins as a three-month pilot program and will continue after that if it is successful. Depending on need, the program could expand to include people of all ages, Knudsen said.

In [West Milford](#), four people have signed up to be volunteer drivers, and 35 people have requested applications to become riders. Mary Ann Terracino, 73, who hopes to use the service to get to shopping malls, said many seniors now have to rely on relatives and neighbors to get around.

"Hopefully," she said, "enough people will do this."