

OVERVIEW

The Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program is provided primarily for individuals who are mobility and developmentally impaired, at-risk children and senior citizens. This service was established for individuals who do not have access to any other means of transportation, including public bus service, because of age, disability or income. It is also provided to those who do not receive services from a sponsoring agency. A “sponsoring agency” is an agency that pays for transportation services for its clients such as Medicaid.

This Rider’s Guide is designed to help riders understand Lake County’s paratransit service, which operates under the name of Lake County Connection.

This document will provide riders with a wealth of information about the policies and procedures that will help riders use the service with the greatest amount of ease. This guide is also available on audiocassette and may be obtained by calling Lake County Connection at (352) 326-2278.

The Lake County Board of County Commissioners contracts with MV Transportation Inc. (MV) to operate Lake County Connection.

The Transportation Disadvantaged Program provides transportation service for eligible individuals. It is funded through the following agencies: Lake County Board of County Commissioners, Florida Department of Transportation, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Agency for Health Care Administration (Medicaid), Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD), Mid Florida Community Services and Elder Affairs.

Lake County Connection provides more than 675 scheduled passenger trips per day, using a variety of vehicles specifically equipped to transport individuals with various disabilities. Due to the high demand for this special transit service, it is important that each passenger carefully follow the guidelines established under this program.

Cooperation and flexibility from riders will allow Lake County Connection to meet each passenger’s needs more effectively and efficiently.

PASSENGER CALL CENTER

Lake County Connection Call Center handles all applications for service and processes all reservation requests, which includes the scheduling and dispatching of all scheduled trips.

To contact the Lake County Connection Call Center, please call (352) 326-2278 [*Florida Relay voice: (800) 955-5770; TTY: (800) 955-8771*]. Reservations may be made Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For Medicaid after-hour services or for after-hour hospital discharges, please call (352) 988-8525. For all emergencies, dial 911.

When calling the Call Center, choose from one of the following options or simply remain on the line and the call will be answered in the order in which the next available customer service representative received it.

- Press “3” to speak with a dispatcher to schedule, confirm or cancel a trip (*The best time to schedule a trip or travel is between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.*)
- Press” 105” to speak with the Operations Manager
- Press” 106” to speak with the General Manager

All other comments about Lake County Connection should be reported to Lake County Public Transportation Division at (352) 742-6580.

If an issue remains unresolved after contacting the Lake County Public Transportation Division, you may contact the Florida Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged Helpline at (800) 983-2435.

ELIGIBILITY & OPERATIONS HOURS

Individuals who are interested in using Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program must apply for services by completing an eligibility application. To receive an eligibility application, call (352) 326-2278 or download an application at www.lakecountyfl.gov.

Provide all of the required information as requested on the application. Incomplete information will result in an application being denied.

Applications are evaluated and eligibility is determined based upon Florida Statutes, Chapter 427, , the sponsoring agency guidelines and upon the ability of the client to use the fixed-route bus system (LakeXpress).

Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program is available Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Transportation service is provided on Saturdays for dialysis treatment and hospital discharges only. No service is provided on the following observed holidays*:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

**Other holidays may be observed if approved by the Board of County Commissioners.*

Individuals who live along the fixed route (LakeXpress) and are not able to utilize the fixed route must complete an Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Application.

MAKING A RESERVATION

Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program is a limited-ride program with reservations taken on a first-come, first-served basis. Passengers must make reservations at least two business days prior to the date service is being requested.

For example, if a passenger is requesting transportation on Monday; reservations will need to be made no later than 5 p.m. the Thursday before.

Transportation services are available for Lake County residents only, unless arrangements are made with another Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC). Due to the limited availability of daily trips, all trips are prioritized based on the following needs:

- Critical medical care
- Other medical
- Nutritional (Grocery shopping, meal sites and food stamps)

To make a reservation, please call the Lake County Connection Call Center at (352) 326-2278.

- Passengers may schedule trips from 2 to 14 days in advance.
- Passengers may schedule up to three round trips with one phone call.
- Passengers will be limited to no more than three round trips in a given day.
- There is a minimum one-hour stay for all appointments.

When making a reservation, have the following passenger information ready:

- Client's name.
- Home address.
- Whether the passenger uses a wheelchair or other personal mobility device (See page 11 regarding wheelchairs).
- Home telephone number, work or cell phone number.
- Birth date (*An adult must accompany any child under age 15*).
- Whether there are any other special considerations.
- Whether a service animal will be accompanying the passenger.
- Date transportation is needed.
- The time of the appointment or time the passenger needs to be at their destination.
- The time the passenger will need to be picked up for their return trip.
- The destination address, zip code and telephone number.
- The general purpose of the appointment.
- The drop-off and pick-up location (When making a reservation, give staff detailed information about the location. However, at larger facilities, such as hospitals, staff may request that the passenger wait in a common pick-up area that has been prearranged with the facility).

- An escort or companion is permitted to travel with the passenger. Please inform the reservationist at the time of making a transportation arrangement if an escort will be accompanying the passenger. All escorts must be at least 16 years of age and will not be charged a fare.
- Users of this service must provide their own child restraint devices and the device must meet the requirements of the Florida Child Safety Seat Law.

A “standing order” is for passengers who travel to the same place at the same time on the same day *or days* of the week.

If a passenger has a regular appointment that he or she goes to, the passenger may want to ask the reservationist to submit a standing order for service.

Request for service may or may not be granted depending on the funding source for the trip. A passenger cannot change a standing order more than once per month or this privilege may be revoked. However, personal circumstances may arise that may require a change. If your situation changes, notify the a reservationist immediately at (352) 326-2278.

If a passenger has a standing request and will not be using it for one or multiple days, contact Lake County Connection to cancel or suspend services to avoid having a “no show” recorded in his or her file.

Lake County Connection relies on the cooperation of all its passengers to make the system run smoothly. If a passenger must cancel a trip, it is important to immediately inform Lake County Connection Call Center at (352) 326-2278 at least two hours before the scheduled pick-up time. Failing to call at least two hours in advance will cause you to be considered a “no show.”

Because so many people depend on the Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program, changes in a person’s scheduled return time are very limited. If a passenger is ready to return more than two hours earlier than originally scheduled, he or she may call and ask for an earlier pick-up. Every attempt will be made to honor such a request, but because vehicles are multi-loaded, there is no guarantee it will be honored.

For any emergency, call 911.

Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program cannot provide same-day service or assume liability if a passenger is in a distressed situation.

Reservations for ADA service can be made one day in advance.

ESTIMATED PICK-UP TIMES

When calling to schedule a trip, the reservationist will provide the caller with two estimated pick-up times for all round trips. The first estimated pick-up time will be from the passenger's home to their destination. The second estimated pick-up time will be the return time from the passenger's destination back to their home.

Each pick-up time is the start of a one-hour window. A passenger should expect the driver to arrive within the one-hour window. A passenger will need to be ready to travel at any time within that one-hour window. Schedules are developed to allow passengers to get to their destinations on time when they are picked up within the pick-up window.

Pick-up times may be negotiated with riders to allow more efficient scheduling. Pick-up window adjustments of up to one hour may be required. Each estimated pick-up time includes:

- The one-hour window
- Additional time for the trip distance
- Additional time for peak periods (rush hour)
- Additional time for other passengers scheduled on the vehicle
- Additional "negotiated" time of up to one hour if necessary

Multi-legged trips will be treated as round trips with multiple return (*second, third, etc.*) windows based on requested return times.

Please wait patiently at least one hour past the scheduled pick-up time before calling Lake County Connection Call Center at (352)326-2278.

The driver may arrive up to one hour after the scheduled pick-up time and still be considered "on time" as long as the passenger arrives at their destination on time. Please remember the pick-up time is based on factors such as the time the passenger needs to reach their destination, traffic delays, inclement weather conditions and multi-loading of other passengers.

The one-hour return window does not apply to dialysis passengers. It is the goal of Lake County Public Transportation that all dialysis passengers are picked up within 30 minutes of their scheduled return pick-up time.

FARES

The driver will collect fares from each passenger when they board the vehicle. The reservationist will remind each passenger of the amount of his or her fare. The fare will be based upon the requirements of the agency sponsoring the trip.

Passengers must have the exact change because drivers do not carry money and are not allowed to make change or to stop for passengers to get change. Fares must be paid in advance for each trip. All fares are expected to be paid at the time of service, unless in rare circumstances prior approval is granted. Drivers do not accept tips. Please notify Lake County Connection if any driver asks for or accepts a tip.

The fare for the Lake County Public Transportation Disadvantaged Program is as follows:

- Within Lake County — \$2 each way
- Orlando — \$5 each way (*This service is provided for medical appointments only on Tuesday and Thursday. The bus will depart Orlando at 2 p.m.*)
- Gainesville — \$10 each way (*This service is provided for medical appointments only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The bus will depart Gainesville at 2 p.m.*)

“NO SHOW’S” & TARDINESS

Lake County Public Transportation Disadvantaged Program is a shared ride system; therefore, it is important that each passenger is ready to board the vehicle when it arrives. It is the County’s policy that the drivers wait only five minutes for a client to board the vehicle because there are other passengers waiting for their scheduled ride. If a vehicle arrives to pick up a passenger and he or she is not there or does not board the vehicle by the scheduled time, the passenger will be considered a “no show.”

If a passenger places a child or other property on a vehicle and returns inside their home and causes the bus to wait longer than five minutes, then the passenger’s transportation services will be suspended for 10 days.

Multiple “no shows” will result in a suspension of the client’s transportation service. The steps leading up to a suspension of service are as follows:

- The first “no show” is recorded in the client’s file and a door hanger is placed on his or her door.
- A second “no show” within 90 days of the first “no show” will result in a letter being sent to the passenger stating that their next “no show” will result in a 30-day suspension
- A third “no show” within 90 days of the first “no show” will result in a 30-day suspension
- A fourth “no show” within 90 days of the first “no show” will result in a 60-day suspension

Clients may appeal their “no show” if they have information that is contrary to that is noted above. In addition, if a client is a “no show” for the outgoing trip then his or her return trip will automatically be cancelled. When the driver arrives to a destination to pick up a client, he or she will be given the same information that the client supplied to the reservation staff.

While waiting for the bus, please do not leave the area. If a driver is unable to find a client within five minutes of arriving, or if a client does not cancel a trip at least two hours before the scheduled pick-up time, the client will be considered a “no show.” If the driver is late, the client will not be considered a “no show.”

Repeat “no show” offenders may be assessed a “no show” fee.

SUSPENSION FROM SERVICES

Passengers may have their transportation services suspended for violating the following conditions and any other policy that can be detrimental to the welfare of the program, other passengers, staff or the public.

1. **Verbal Abuse:** Verbal abuse is defined as any oral presentation that is offensive to another passenger, transit employees, public, elected or appointed official or Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) staff.
2. **Disruptive Behavior:** Disruptive behavior is defined as a passenger who engages in violent, seriously disruptive or illegal conduct directed at other passengers, transit employees, the public, elected or appointed official or CTC staff.

Such conduct includes but not limited to: threats or fear of physical or verbal abuse; unlawful harassment; including unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, or physical behavior having sexual or racial connotations; unauthorized use of equipment on the vehicle; voluntarily and repeatedly violating vehicle-riding rules, including smoking in the vehicle, eating or drinking without prior medical approval, or defacing equipment or property.

3. **Dangerous Behavior:** Dangerous behavior is defined as any threat or action that could cause direct or indirect physical harm to the driver, vehicle, other passengers, to one's self, the public and elected or appointed official.
4. **Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is defined as any action that may cause direct or indirect physical harm to a passenger, driver or other staff.

The driver may refuse transportation to an individual or a group that defies these rules, behaves offensively or could endanger the safety, health, welfare or comfort of other passengers.

5. **Untimely Cancellation Notice:** Any scheduled trip that is not cancelled at least two hours prior to the scheduled pick-up time is considered a late cancellation.

Late cancellations will result in the following suspension schedule being imposed:

- Ten cancellations in a calendar month – written warning via letter
- Eleven cancellations in a calendar month – 14-day suspension
- Twelve cancellations in a calendar month – 30-day suspension

If the passenger cancels when the driver arrives then the passenger will be considered a “no show” and is subject to the “no show” suspension policy as previously stated.

Suspensions will not be imposed for circumstances that are beyond the passenger's normal control. Examples of situations beyond the passenger control are:

- A sudden personal emergency

- Sudden or worsening illness
 - Death in the passenger's immediate family
 - Inability to get through Lake County Connection phone lines (several reasonable attempts must be taken first)
 - Late arrival of the vehicle
 - Disruptive behavior caused by a disability
6. Providing False Information: Providing false information on the application for services or regarding the nature of a trip.
 7. Service Animals: Do not interfere with a service animal without the permission of the owner.
 8. Other Actions: Other actions not specified but that is determined by the CTC to be an interruption to service.
 9. Failing to submit an application: Clients may be suspended for not recertifying or providing additional information to determine if the client qualifies for services.

SAFETY TIPS & PASSENGER RESPONSIBILITIES

The Lake County Public Transportation Division offers the following safety tips:

- Wait in a safe, well-lit location while waiting for the vehicle.
- Choose a pick-up and drop-off location that allows the driver to not lose sight of his or her vehicle when assisting you to or from the door
- Let the vehicle come to a complete stop before approaching it.
- Allow the driver to assist you in boarding and un-boarding from the vehicle.
- Ask for special boarding assistance if you need it, we are here to serve you.
- Always wear your seat belt.

Passengers of the Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program are responsible for the following:

- All personal belongings are the responsibility of the passenger.
- Passengers must load and unload their own belongings.
- Bringing an approved child safety seat for your child or children less than 5 years of age.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke in the vehicle.
- Use a headset for personal video or audio equipment so it does not distract the driver or fellow passengers.
- Disruptive behavior can cause a passenger from being suspended from service.
- Shirts and shoes are required to utilize this service.
- Drivers are prohibited from making special requests.
- Drivers are not permitted to make any unscheduled stops.

Passengers are requested to respect their fellow passengers by maintaining a good standard of personal cleanliness and hygiene as well as to practice common health courtesy when traveling with such illnesses as the common cold.

Passengers are expected to maintain cleanliness and health standards that do not jeopardize the health, safety or welfare of other passengers, drivers and themselves.

Passengers are requested to not wear strongly scented personal care products while on the vehicle. This will help ensure that the vehicles are accessible for passengers with multiple chemical sensitivity or environmental illnesses.

DRIVERS

The drivers are employees of MV Transportation Inc. (MV) and are trained by MV according to Lake County and MV specifications and guidelines. Drivers must have a safe driving record, pass a criminal background check, pass a Department of Transportation physical and test negative for drugs and alcohol.

Drivers are trained in defensive driving, passenger sensitivity and how to safely transport individuals with special needs. Drivers are selected based on their ability to provide the specialized service needed to serve the citizens of Lake County.

Drivers are not required to carry the passengers' belongings, assist wheelchairs up or down more than one step, push wheelchairs through grass or sand or to lift the passenger into or out of a mobility device.

Drivers are expected to:

- Be courteous
- Drive safely
- Wear a seat belt
- Securely tie down wheelchairs
- Wear a photo identification attached to their uniform that can be seen easily by the passenger
- Be properly uniformed
- Make a good faith effort to find a client (*horn honking to notify a client of arrival is not acceptable*)

Traffic delays, tight schedules, weather conditions, passengers running late and other factors can cause stressful situations that could affect the quality of service for clients.

If a driver or passenger acts in an unreasonable manner (*or contrary to company policies and procedures*), report the problem immediately by calling Lake County Public Transportation Division at (352) 742-6580.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Lost Items

If a passenger loses a personal item and believes it may be on a Lake County Public Transportation vehicle, call the Lake Connection Call Center at (352) 326-2278. If the item is found, the passenger may be asked to travel to a central pick-up point to retrieve it. If the item is not located on the vehicle, Lake County Public Transportation Division, MV Transportation and its employees will not be held responsible for its replacement.

All lost and found items will be subject to Florida Statute 705.103 and will be held for 90 days.

Wheelchair Service

Lake County Public Transportation Division's Transportation Disadvantaged Program service is "door-to-door" unless otherwise noted. When making a reservation, be sure to mention if the client has any of the following concerns:

- Difficulties walking
- Uses a mobility device or a wheelchair

The passenger must provide wheelchairs and mobility devices, and the passenger must be on the ground floor at the time he or she is to be picked up.

A wheelchair is a mobility aid designed for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered. Lake County Transportation Disadvantaged Program vehicles are equipped to transport "common wheelchairs" which do not exceed 30 inches in width and 48 inches in length measured 2 inches above the ground, and do not weigh more than 600 pounds when occupied.

Service Animals

Lake County Public Transportation Disadvantaged Program will accommodate any service animal trained to work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability, including, but not limited to: guiding individuals with impaired vision, alerting individuals with impaired hearing to intruder or sounds, providing minimal protection or rescue work, pulling a wheelchair or retrieving dropped items.

Passengers are asked to refrain from interfering or petting a service animal without prior permission from the animal's owner.

Oxygen Requirement

Traveling with oxygen equipment is permitted, but the equipment must be small enough so that the driver does not have to assist with the loading and unloading of it. The safety and use of this equipment is the sole responsibility of the passenger.