

BLOOMBERG BARES PLAN TO BOOST ELDERLY

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With little more than two months before Election Day, Mayor Bloomberg yesterday unveiled 59 initiatives to improve the lives of seniors -- who just happen to be the city's most reliable voters.

Bloomberg conceded that his most ambitious proposal, which would transform 50 of 329 senior centers into full-service "wellness centers," would require \$25 million that the city hasn't budgeted yet because of the economy.

"That doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't be planning for new things," the mayor said in a campaign-like speech before hundreds of seniors in Downtown Brooklyn.

Aides later said the city hoped to line up private seed money so nonprofit groups could propose ways to revamp individual centers in phases.

Seniors who now rely on Access-a-Ride to get around would be provided with credit cards for use in regular taxis, where rides average \$20 instead of the \$60 the government pays for the service.

A pilot project in Brooklyn that uses school buses to transport seniors to supermarkets between classes is being expanded citywide.

"This is a great opportunity for a resource the city has already purchased to have the same drivers after they drop off the kids to go to a senior center and bring the seniors to a supermarket," explained Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs.

Senior advocate Bobbie Sackman applauded the mayor's new approach, the result of a yearlong study by the New York Academy of Medicine.