



Herbert Willsmore

Willsmore correspondence to George Lansford

January 17, 1972

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Herbert R. Willsmore
2725 Haste Street #301
Berkeley, California 94709
January 17, 1972
Mr. George W. Lansford
Equipment Coordinator
California Department of General Services
Dear Mr. Lunsford:

I have been asked to respond to the questions in your letter dated December 20, 1972, to Mr. John Pards of the Oakland District Office of the Department of Rehabilitation concerning purchase of a van for my use. You listed six main points of concern. I will try to answer the questions you raised on these issues. In addition you have drawn up a set of specifications and requested justification if any changes are needed. In order to adequately meet my needs certain changes in these specifications will be needed. The need for the items or changes I will deal with here are related to either the peculiarities of my disability or the nature of the modifications to be made by Robin Aids.

Point #1

The Beauville is indeed the top of the line of the Chevrolet sports vans. Phil Niles, the vehicle consultant at Robin Aids has pointed out to me that the base price of the Beauville includes insulation and a superior grade of paneling (side trim). Insulation must be ordered as an accessory at additional cost with the two less expensive models which Chevrolet offers (Chevy Van and Sport Van). The standard paneling (side trim) available with these models is nothing more than a heavy paperboard and would certainly not withstand bumping and scraping of a wheelchair(s). Mr. Niles has assured me that all things considered, the Beauville is the most economical package. You may want to confirm this for yourself, however. His number at Robin Aids in Vallejo is (707)643-1785.

Point #2

The need for purchase of the Chevrolet van as opposed to Ford or Dodge involves the installation of the Adjustable Height Floor mentioned on Purchase Estimate Form #121-352 dated 12/6/72. This allows the driver to lower himself to eye level with the windshield while remaining seated in his wheelchair. In the same process the wheelchair is automatically secured safely to the floor. Installation of the Adjustable Height Floor requires extensive cutting and welding of the frame of the van. Robin Aids recommends the Chevrolet van for several reasons. They have had experience working with all three makes (Ford, General Motors, and Dodge)

and have found that the Chevrolet van will accommodate the Adjustable Height Floor with considerably less cutting and alteration to the frame and body than the Ford or Dodge. This means fewer man hours and lower cost and the

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structural strength of the vehicle is not reduced. Mr. John Bickford who works at Robin Aids and is the originator of this and other custom modifications made a trip to the Chevrolet plant in Detroit and worked with the engineers there to develop the technical design and specifications for the Adjustable Height Floor. The tooling, jigs, etc. which Robin Aids uses in doing the modifications are all geared toward the Chevrolet Van. To get these modifications done on a Ford or Dodge would cost considerably more than what Robin Aids now charges to do the Chevrolet.

Point #3

The 3/4 Ton vehicle is necessary in my situation. The additional weight of the tailgate lift and other modifications necessitates a much stronger suspension system and frame than is offered in the 1/2 Ton series. The first vans which Robin Aids modified some years ago were 1/2 Ton vehicles. It was found that within a short period of time the springs began to sag. An attempt was made to solve this problem by installing additional spring leafs and overload springs. This proved to be a less than satisfactory solution. They have since used the 3/4 Ton. The Chevrolet 3/4 Ton offers an independent rear suspension system as standard equipment. The 1/2 Ton does not.

Another problem with the 1/2 Ton is that the braking system would not withstand even normal use under the heavy weight load. On hot days there were many instances of brake fade with the 1/2 Ton. The 3/4 Ton offers larger rear drums with more shoe surface. In addition, power disk front brakes are standard equipment on the 3/4 Ton but are an additional cost option on the 1/2 Ton. In the interest of safety in vehicle handling and braking capabilities, I hope you will agree that the 3/4 Ton is the wiser choice.

Point #4

I presume the main goal of the Department in this situation is to provide me with the means to get to and from a job. Whereas at present I require someone's assistance getting myself and my wheelchair into and out of a car, with this vehicle I will be able to travel independently. At present I receive welfare payments under the State's Aid to the Disabled program. The career field for which I am preparing, City and Regional Planning, offers a salary which will make me completely self-supporting. The savings to the State in welfare payments plus the taxes I will be paying make the purchase of this vehicle an economically sound proposition.

Point #5

The need for air conditioning is related to my disability. In February of 1966, I was involved in an auto accident in which I suffered a severe spinal cord injury from a broken neck. The damage to my spinal cord left me a quadriplegic with total paralysis in my legs and partial paralysis in my arms and hands. One of the manifestations of my particular disability is malfunctioning of the body's temperature regulating system (perspiration glands, etc.). Because of this I cannot tolerate high temperatures for long periods of time without developing heat prostration.

Point #6

The tilt telescoping steering wheel will be necessary also because of my disability. Since some of the muscles in my arms and shoulders are paralyzed, I do not have full range of motion. This makes it necessary for the steering wheel to be positioned very close to my chest and at a very specific height. The tilt telescoping steering wheel accomplishes

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this and enables me to safely handle the vehicle.

The changes needed in the set of specifications which you have drawn up are as follows:

BRAKES: Power assisted with disk type front brakes.

WHEELS: 15 inch. The Chevrolet 3/4 Ton van offers 15 inch wheels as standard equipment.

TIRES: 8 ply, 15 inch

BODY: Two right side doors should not be required since General Motors offers a single sliding door as standard equipment.

Factory air conditioning cannot be used because of the modifications to be done by Robin Aids. Please check with John Bickford on this point. His phone number is (707) 643-1785.

I hope I have given you the information you need in order to proceed with the purchase of this vehicle. Given the special circumstances in this situation, I hope that your department will agree to sole source purchase. Robin Aids in Vallejo has in stock a vehicle which will adequately meet my needs. It is available at a price considerably below dealer suggested retail price. If I can be of any further assistance please feel free to call me at (415) 841-5880 or (415) 841-4776.

Sincerely Yours
Herbert R. Willsmore