

Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)

July 21, 2015 Meeting Minutes (as amended and accepted October 9, 2015) Lyudmila Demikhovskaya, David H. DePorte, Ellen Rubin, Mindy Jacobsen, Miriam Kimmelman, John Moynihan, Jean Ryan, Ken Stewart, Stan Weinblatt

Meeting commenced at 5:15 PM

PAC Attendees: Tom Coppola, Lyudmila Demikhovskaya, David H. DePorte, Ellen Rubin, Mindy Jacobsen, Miriam Kimmelman, Monica Miroxian, John Moynihan, Jean Ryan, Ken Stewart, Stephanie L. White

Absent: Fr. James Bradley and Stan Weinblatt

NYC Transit Staff Attendees: Brandon Anderson, Tom Charles, Tom Chin, Michael Cosgrove, Lynda Edmond, Donna Fredericksen, Eddie Griffith, Pat Ibarguen, Felicia Jones, Denise Ann McQuade, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Bobby Samuel, Russell Schmid, Mark Watkins

Guests: Frank Camp (Global Contact Services)

I. Approval of Minutes – Stephanie White, PAC Chair

Ellen Rubin moved to approve the March 17, 2015 Minutes and the May 19, 2015 Minutes with corrections. Page 1, Ellen Rubin's name was listed twice in the Attendance section of both the March and May 2015 Minutes. Delete the second listing of "Ellen Rubin" in both minutes. May Minutes, Page 3, Section III. Paratransit Topic, second paragraph, line 4, change the year "1010-12" to "2010-12." May Minutes, Page 6, "Web Site Accessibility," second line, change "Ellen Rubin" to "Mindy Jacobsen." Ken Stewart moved that the March 17 and May 19, 2015 Minutes be approved and Mindy Jacobsen seconded the motion. The Minutes were approved with the noted corrections.

II. AAR Service Report – Vice President Thomas Charles

Registration is stable at about 3,000 applications per month. The effect of the introduction of feeder service is diminishing and we should see the registration base grow. Trip volume and demand are relatively consistent.

In February and March 2015 the carrier no-show rate increased from 3% to 4%. Winter weather also affects the trip demand: 11,352 Saturday trips in March 2014 versus 10,742 in March 2015. The number of cancellations increased because of winter storms. Early cancellations were 94,019 in February 2015 and 95,234 in March 2015. Late cancellations were 17,852 in February 2015 and 19,803 in March 2015.

The Vice President reviewed highlights of March 2015 versus April 2015 statistics.

- AAR registrants increased from 136,070 in March 2015 to 136,693 in April 2015.
- Trips completed decreased from 561,517 in March 2015 to 558,795 in April 2015.
- On-time Performance increased from 87.5% in March 2015 to 89.9% in April 2015. Weather is a significant factor in OTP.
- Total No-Shows decreased from 16,159 in March 2015 to 14,104 in April 2015.
- On-time performance based on appointments increased from 80.0% in March 2015 to 85.0% in April 2015.
- Average reservation answering speed was 1 minute and 22 seconds in March 2015 and 35 seconds in April 2015.
- Average reservation talk time was 4 minutes 34 seconds in March 2015 compared to 4 minutes 32 seconds in April 2015.
- Average answering speed for Transit Services was 58 seconds in March 2015 compared to 27 seconds in April 2015.
- Average Travel Services talk time was 2 minutes 23 seconds in March 2015 compared to 2 minutes 19 seconds in April 2015.
- Complaints were 3,826 in March 2015 and 3,140 in April 2015, a - 17.9% decrease.

- There were 5.0 complaints per thousand boardings in March 2015 and 4.1 in April 2015, an 18.5% decrease.
- Total boardings were relatively consistent at 769,511 in March 2015 and 774,742 in April 2015, a 0.7% increase.
- Commendations were 409 in March 2015 and 418 in April 2015.
- The Vice President clarified that answering speeds improved as the weather improved and total boardings includes AAR customers, guests, and PCAs.

III. Paratransit Topic – Vice President Thomas J. Charles

The Vice President reported on NYC Transit's response to the City Council's requests from the April 23 Hearing. The City Council questioned if the PAC was a functioning advisory body.

Subsequent to the April 23 City Council Hearing, the following have been implemented in response to requests:

- 1) A list of the PAC Members, including their affiliations and borough of residence are on the website, www.MTA.info
- 2) Approved Minutes of PAC Meetings are on the website
- 3) PAC Guidelines are on the website
- 4) PAC Membership Criteria are on the website

Jean Ryan commented that she was at the hearing before the City Council Transportation and Aging Committee and stayed until the end.

The PAC did not agree to a formal public comment period prior to PAC meetings. The PAC cited negative experiences in the past and felt that sufficient feedback was being given to them through organizations, the community and their own experiences. In particular, PAC Chair Stephanie White stated that she receives a great deal of feedback from AAR users. Tom Charles also discussed a growing tendency among some public officials to require that anyone elderly be automatically eligible for AAR

service. A NY State bill has been sponsored to make everyone 80 years or older automatically eligible for paratransit service. This is a problem for AAR because we need to know the needs of those applying for service. For example, does the applicant have Alzheimer's and require a PCA?

Tom Charles explained that our recertification protocols are an individualized process where each applicant/registrant is independently determined to be eligible or not. Age is not a factor in the ADA criteria for eligibility, nor is a medical diagnosis. There are important reasons for in person assessments, especially the elderly when there is a diagnosis of any stage of dementia and/or Alzheimer's. We also need to establish a baseline assessment regardless of age. Every Access-A-Ride applicant must undergo an in-person assessment that is pivotal in determining whether their condition prevents the use of regular fixed-route transit service. This process is in full compliance with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act for the delivery of paratransit service.

There is an eligibility category called "Continual". This is considered for individuals who cannot use regular NYC Transit buses or subways under any circumstance and whose disability is determined unlikely to improve and likely to become more severe. Customers who have continual eligibility do not need to be recertified every five years and do not have to return to an assessment center. Instead, these customers are sent a form every five years requesting current information in order for AAR to verify and update records. For reasons stated above, this category is not universal nor is it for every registrant.

A discussion followed about the problems such legislation would cause and the importance of PAC members sharing their concerns with their legislators.

IV. PAC Topic – Operational Issues

1) How does AAR calculate on-time performance (OTP) if the estimated time of arrival (ETA) changes?

Miriam Kimmelman opened the discussion by asking if the pickup time changes when an ETA does. David DePorte responded this is inaccurate. Tom Charles offered to explain how ETAs work.

ETAs are calculated by the AAR scheduling and dispatch system and updated with real-time information available through the Automatic Vehicle Location Monitoring (AVLM) devices on vehicles. There are some exceptions such as when newly deployed vehicles have pending installation. ETAs are a dispatch tool and do not change the stated pickup time for a customer nor impact OTP. To be considered on time, an AAR vehicle must arrive within the 30-minute wait-window that starts at time of stated pickup. For example, if a customer has a 9:00 AM pickup with a 9:40 AM ETA, the vehicle must still arrive between 9:00 AM and 9:30 AM to be considered on time.

AAR is in the process of adding AVLM to 200 new vehicles.

2) Equipment Classification System. Are motorized/power wheelchairs that fit in a 30" x 48" envelope scheduled on MV-1 vehicles?

Tom Charles explained that originally MV1s were considered to have two wheelchair positions but NYSDOT regulations now limit them to one wheelchair position. As such, customers are excluded from MV1s if they travel with a guest or PCA who also uses a wheelchair. Customers using an oversized wheelchair, a wheelchair scooter or specially have required a lift cannot be scheduled on a MV1.

The Equipment Categories are:

- Support Cane
- Artificial Limb/Prosthesis
- Braces
- Crutches
- Double Wheelchairs
- Lift Required
- Oversized wheelchair
- Oxygen tank
- Respirator
- 2 Seats ambulatory
- Wheelchair
- Walker
- Wheelchair Scooter

V. Member Feedback

The PAC provided feedback on AAR service based on their experiences and the experiences of their constituents. Open dialogue ensued.

- **Feeder Service**

David DePorte asked for clarification of feeder service. Tom Charles explained that feeder service has been in play for some time and, as a result, some customers have not recertified. Most AAR customers are receiving door-to-door service. Now that trip volume and demand have stabilized, we anticipate future demand to increase.

- **Reservations**

Luda Demikhovskaya stated that when she calls Reservations between noon and 1:00 PM, her call isn't picked up right away. Rather, she hears a recorded response saying, "Thank you for calling." Tom Charles responded that on some days there are service interruptions, but when they occur the queues are usually brought back to normal fairly quickly. Mr. Charles said there is higher call volume between 3:30 PM and 5:00 PM and we will suggest to customers to call earlier for a reduced wait time.

- **Eligibility**

Ken Stewart inquired as to how we monitor our customer base to know which customers no longer use AAR due to moving away or passing away. Tom Charles explained that customers who have not used AAR in 24 months are sent a letter asking if they still need the service. From those mailings, we learn of deaths and those who have moved. Another way we learn of deaths and customers who have moved away is by returned "On The Move" paratransit newsletters. Those who are merely not using the service are put into inactive status; their eligibility has not been cancelled and they can return to using the service upon request.

- **Scheduling**

John Moynihan discussed his experiences when taking AAR to a cross-jurisdictional transfer location between New York City and Westchester at 4340 Boston Road (at Ropes Avenue/IHOP) and needed to allow 35-45 minutes to make this transfer.

Jean Ryan offered that problems like John's arise when one has to take multiple Paratransit trips in a day. She had a trip within Manhattan and was picked up an hour after the scheduled time and completely missed her meeting. Her return pickup to Brooklyn was going to be 90 minutes late. She was going to miss a medical appointment. She opted to take a fixed-route bus home.

Ms. Demikhovskya offered that Members from DIA and other groups she represents have commented about waiting for an hour in the heat. Additionally, she noted that she now has to allow for longer travel time when making reservations. Tom Charles offered that we having been reducing dependency on broker service which may have had an impact on schedules. Other factors affecting travel time are NYC construction, lower fuel costs that encourage more individuals to drive, Vision Zero, and car services such as Uber bringing more vehicles on the road.

- **IVR Pending Vehicle Arrival Notifications**

J. Ryan and D. DePorte – Both said they didn't receive IVR notification of an impending arrival of vehicle recently. T. Charles explained that we recently experienced telephone system software problems. The latest update will be done on Thursday, July 23.

- **Comment Line**

Stephanie White asked if customers should report to AAR when another passenger is distracting the driver. Ken Stewart offered that the driver be encouraged to report such a customer.

Tom Charles responded that many drivers submit incident reports and they are followed up. Furthermore, customers should report such issues to the AAR Comment Line for appropriate follow-up.

Felicia Jones reminded all that the Comment Line was option #8.

Ms. Ryan inquired if the Comment Line was busy. Felicia Jones reported that the busiest times are lunch and 3:30 PM. It's usually than a two-minute wait to reach a Comment Line associate. Talk time is typically 4-5 minutes. Tom Charles added that we have recently increased staff on the Comment Line.

- **Language Line**

John Moynihan asked why customers need to press # 1 for English instead of having English be a default. Mr. Charles offered that this was a Title VI requirement and those who need a language other than English or Spanish are connected to a Language Line service.

Ellen Rubin asked if the recorded message advising customers to press #2 for Spanish is actually recorded in Spanish? Mr. Charles replied yes and further explained the Language Line service.

- **Travel Services**

Ms. Rubin raised concern about times when a customer is waiting for a vehicle in another borough that will arrive too late for the customer to reach her/his destination. Tom Charles informed the PAC of the emphasis being placed on carrier dispatchers to transfer trips to AAR Travel Services when they know the customer cannot be picked up on time. This allows Travel Services to use their auto-reschedule software to help find another vehicle for the customer or to authorize the use of taxi or car service.

Ms. Ryan offered that some dispatchers believe there is an incentive to hold onto trips even when they know they cannot perform them in a timely manner. It was explained there is no such incentive and that dispatch is a current area of focus.

Mr. Stewart asked whether carriers know they are being evaluated and Tom Charles confirmed that carriers are aware.

Meeting adjourned 7:00 PM