

Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)

March 15, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Meeting commenced at 5:05 p.m.

PAC Attendees: Thomas J. Coppola, Lyudmila Demikhovskaya, David H. DePorte, Ellen Rubin, Jean Ryan, Ken Stewart, Stan Weinblatt

Excused Absence: Mindy Jacobsen

Absent: John Moynihan

NYC Transit Staff Attendees: Brandon Anderson, Thomas J. Charles, Thomas Chin, Michael Cosgrove, Donna Fredericksen, Eddie Griffith, Lynda Edmond, Felicia Jones, Patricia Ibarguen, Michael Levy, Denise Ann McQuade, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Russell Schmid, Kenneth Stuart, Chantal Sealy Walker

Guests: Quemuel Arroyo (DOT) and Alex Elegudin (TLC)

Introductions

David DePorte reminded the PAC and attendees that since he is blind he would appreciate if those present would introduce themselves and provide their titles. He also asked PAC members and attendees to raise their hands and ask to be acknowledged. Felicia Jones, a Paratransit staff member, kept track of those wishing to be recognized for Mr. DePorte.

Announcements – David DePorte, PAC Chairperson
Mr. DePorte reported that members of the PAC Selection Committee had all received cover letters and resumes from candidates for the PAC and we have an excellent selection of candidates to choose from.

Mr. DePorte reminded PAC members that they would be limited to one question or one comment at a time.

I. Approval of Minutes – David DePorte, PAC Chairperson

Mr. DePorte called for the approval of the January 19, 2016 minutes and asked if PAC members had any corrections or changes to the minutes. Ken Stewart moved to approve minutes and Ellen Rubin seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

II. AAR Service Report – Vice President Thomas J. Charles

Vice President Charles said he would be reporting on the December, 2015 statistics compared to December 2014 and November 2015 statistics.

- The number of AAR registrants increased from 143,026 in November 2015 to 144,692 in December 2015, a 1.2% increase. The number of registrants increased 2.6% from 141,061 in December 2014 to 144,692 December in 2015.

- Trips completed increased from 519,908 in November 2015 to 537,360 in December 2015, a 3.4% increase. There was a -1.1% decrease comparing December 2014 completed trips of 543,132 to 537,360 completed trips in December 2015.
- Carrier no-shows in November 2015 were 1,551 and in December 2015 there were 1,454, a -6.3% decrease. There was a 1.4% decrease in the December 2015 no-shows of 1,454 compared to December 2014 no-shows of 1,475.
- Total No-shows (carrier, customer and no-fault) in November 2015 were 13,215 and in December 2015 were 14,098, an increase of 6.7%. There was a -6.2% decrease in total December 2014 no-shows of 15,024 compared to 14,098 total no-shows in December 2015.
- On-time Performance (OTP) increased from 90.0% in November 2015 to 90.7% in December 2015, a 0.7% increase. There was a 0.5% increase in December 2014 OTP 90.2% compared to the December 2015 OTP of 90.7%.
- Appointments on-time increased from 83.0% in November 2015 to 85.0% in December 2015, a 2.0% increase. The percentage of on-time appointments was 84.0% in December 2014 compared to 85.0% in December 2015.

- Average Reservation answering speed was 38 seconds in November 2015, 33 seconds in December 2015 compared to 39 seconds in December 2014.
- Average Reservation talk time was 4 minutes 37 seconds in November 2015, 4 minutes 33 seconds in December 2015 compared to 4 minutes 28 seconds in December 2014.
- Average Travel Service answering speed was 27 seconds in November 2015, 21 seconds in December 2015 compared to 28 seconds in December 2014.
- Average Travel Services talk time was 2 minutes 26 seconds in November 2015 and 2 minutes 23 seconds in December 2015 and 2 minutes 21 seconds in December 2014.
- Complaints were 2,472 in November 2015 and 2,633 in December 2015, a 6.5% increase. Comparing 2,643 complaints in December 2014 to 2,633 complaints in December 2015 there was a 0.4% decrease.
- There were 3.45 complaints per 1,000 boardings in November 2015 and 3.53 complaints per 1,000 boardings in December 2015, a 2.1% increase. Comparing 3.51 complaints per 1,000 boardings in December 2014 and 3.53 complaints per 1,000 boardings in December 2015, complaints increased by 0.4%. The 2015 data indicates that complaints are trending slightly downward.

- Commendations were 462 in November 2015 and 850 in December 2015, an increase of 84%. Commendations were 473 in December 2014 compared to 850 in December 2015, a 79.7% increase.
- Total Boardings were 721,805 in November 2015 and 746,994 in December 2015, a 3.5% increase. In December 2014, Total Boardings were 752,762 compared to the Total Boardings of 746,994 in December 2015, a decrease of -0.8%.

Vice President Charles reported to the PAC that he appeared before the City Council last week and was questioned about AAR complaints and service. Vice President Charles reported he informed the City Council that approximately 50% of the total complaints are attributable to the Broker car service. Vice President Charles concluded his report.

PAC Comments

Thomas Coppola asked if the 144,692 registrants is the total number of AAR registrants?

Vice President Charles responded that this figure is the total number of registrants. Mr. Coppola said the number seems to be low. Vice President Charles responded that the number of registrants has actually been rising.

Mr. Ken Stewart asked if there was any reason why the January numbers were not presented. Vice President Charles responded that there is a great deal of information that must be gathered from our carriers, analyzed and checked for accuracy

before the statistical reports can be presented to the PAC. The reports are presented to the PAC as soon as possible.

III. Paratransit Topic – Vice President Thomas J. Charles

One of our major dedicated carriers, TransCare shut down its operations due to the financial problems of the parent company and filed bankruptcy under Chapter 7. TransCare consisted of multiple entities including local Ambulance service and had operations in the lower Hudson Valley region. While the closure of TransCare was sudden, there were signs of instability. For example, late last year TransCare delayed payroll by one day and In January the company's CEO abruptly left. In anticipation of TransCare possible closure of its operations, Paratransit had been reducing the TransCare fleet and redistributing a portion of TransCare's trips to other carriers.

As a dedicated Paratransit contractor, the Paratransit operation was self-sufficient and operating costs were being covered. This was verified by our own audits that were performed. However, other TransCare operations were having financial difficulties and all corporate funding was being centrally handled. This practice was negatively impacting Paratransit operations. As a result we met with the management of the parent company, confirmed their desire to continue operations and discussed the segregation of Paratransit's funding from other less stable TransCare operations. All dedicated Paratransit providers are required to have separate books and accounting systems.

In February, the Parent company was unable to fulfill the terms and conditions of the contract and decided to shut down all of TransCare. On Friday night, 2/26/16 TransCare closed its Paratransit operation.

At 4 am on Saturday morning, Paratransit moved all NYCT owned vehicles off TransCare's property. TransCare's scheduled trips were redistributed to other dedicated carriers and the Broker car service providers. The closure of TransCare coincided with an increase in demand. Paratransit maintained its practice of zero trip denials and full on-street service was maintained.

When we offered TCP a contract, they had been in operation for many years but their ambulette service caused this financial problems. In our future contracts the co-mingling of funds with other companies accounts will be strictly prohibited.

Mr. DePorte was aware that customers were being advised via a recording when calling into the 877-337-2017 number that the closing of TransCare would not affect service and asked how long will this information would continue to be part of the recording. Tom Chin responded that it was be removed that night, March 15.

Mr. Coppola inquired as to the ownership of the vehicles. Vice President Charles clarified that the vehicles are owned by NYCT and leased to the carriers. This was done to standardize the fleet and obtain economies of scale when purchasing vehicles.

Vice President Charles gave credit to TCP's employees. While understandably upset, all vehicles were brought back to the facility in an orderly fashion and the keys were returned.

Jean Ryan asked if we will be contracting with another carrier. Vice President Charles answered that we would not be seeking a new carrier at this time. We originally had planned for the long term and have existing capacity. Mr. Charles added that it would not make sense to bring on a larger 100 plus vehicle carrier as it takes time to cultivate a carrier and for them to learn Paratransit. We have assigned TCP's vehicles to existing carriers and even so, we still have to monitor the carriers to be certain they can manage that amount of vehicles.

Mr. DePorte asked about MVP's locations and MVT and their relationship. Vice President Charles responded, that MVP and MVT are related but have separate contracts. The MVP contract was awarded for 150 base vehicles and also included expansion of an additional 150 vehicles. MVP approached us and indicated that they had found a site in Manhattan for the expansion vehicles. A Manhattan based facility is hard to come by and provides certain operating efficiencies that we wanted to take advantage of.

IV. PAC Topic

Since Paratransit has up to 21 days to determine eligibility, how does Paratransit accommodate individuals who need temporary eligibility?

Vice President Charles explained that when we encounter an applicant with a temporary disability such as a broken leg and that individual must, for example, travel to work, we make an accommodation. However, some individuals approach us that are about to have surgery in the future. We do not grant temporary eligibility based on a future scheduled event like surgery as the situation may change and the procedure may not even take place.

Stan Weinblatt added that if someone has a broken leg we will send them an application but give them Temporary eligibility status.

Ms. Demikhovskysya mentioned that she knows someone who was told they had to wait 21 days. Vice President Charles responded that if the person was a candidate for temporary eligibility, the person should have asked to speak with a supervisor.

Mr. Stewart said he had someone coming from Africa to visit with him and the individual would need AAR service. Vice President Charles explained a visitor with a disability who is eligible for paratransit in another locale can use AAR for 21 days in New York City. Denise McQuade explained the instructions for eligible visitors to obtain paratransit service is under "Visitors' Information" on our web page and in the Guide to Access-A-Ride Service.

V. Old Business

Mr. Stewart asked when our newsletter would be published. Ken Stuart responded that we intend on issuing **On the Move** twice a year in a four-page format. Mr. Stewart spoke about various alternate formats saying that cassettes and USB are not too much in demand. Vice President Charles stated that we have a multi-year contract and we are planning to survey customers to determine their alternate format preferences. Mr. Stewart stated digital is more expensive and entities that use it ask that the digital cartridge be sent back. The Library of Congress has moved to digital. Vice President Charles stated that we will also look into Braille compared to Braille 2.

VI. New Business / Member Feedback

A free-ranging discussion of a variety of items transpired.

Non-Dedicated, TLC Regulated Service

Ms. Ryan inquired as to the use of Uber and Mr. Charles discussed Paratransit's interaction with non-dedicated, TLC regulated service.

Paratransit is working with the TLC on expanding the use of accessible taxis. The TLC has approved several vendors to participate in an e-hail program. These companies and resulting applications focus on an individual's booking of a trip and use of the service. Their business model is based on the premise that customer would have a smart phone and use their credit card. This model does not exactly lend itself to Paratransit. However, web based booking where we could

assist our customers and a corporate account to render payment for the trip may be model that could be used for Paratransit trips.

We reached out to several companies to see if we could explore a preliminary “proof of concept” of the web based booking and corporate account concept. Uber was quick to take to this model and in mid-November, Uber gave us cell phones and established a corporate account. Subsequently they provided web booking in a Bata version. We have reached out to other companies such as Arro and Way 2 Ride and they are showing us e-hail booking systems. Once we have established the proof of concept we will propose a more formal program as a pilot. Such a program may be useful in replacing the current taxi authorization and customer reimbursement system that is in place.

Ms. Rubin said it was her understanding such services will not take blind people with guide dogs. Vice President Charles stated that all vendors, including Uber know they have to be accessible. It’s a driver issue, not a business issue. Taking a guide dog is required by law and failure to do so will be addressed by the TLC.

Mr. DePorte offered that he had some limited experience with Uber and the three times he has used Uber, the drivers were extremely accommodating. Mr. Deport added that a Lyft driver told him that he is terrified of dogs but he knew it his responsibility to take them.

Mr. Stewart found the concept of using such services for some Paratransit trips interesting and thought there were cost benefits to doing so. Vice President Charles offered that we are looking at all boroughs and there are price points to be considered and some trips are more costly than traditional Paratransit service. Also there has to be a balance between the use of dedicated and non-dedicated service.

Quemuel Arroyo asked would e-hail services be used for real time service. Vice President Charles responded that for now we are pursuing on-street service issues but we are also looking at e-hail for subscription customers.

Ms. Ryan stated taxis are going out of business because of how these applications like Uber have been changing the market place. Ms. Ryan stated that trying to use an accessible vehicle is a disaster. According to Ms. Ryan Uber not interested in accessible service and the drivers of green cabs can only pick up in Manhattan to take customers to other boroughs or stay within outer boroughs. Meanwhile, hundreds of accessible cabs sit in garages because drivers don't want to pick up customers that use wheelchairs. Vice President Charles noted that he is seeing a shift in the taxi industry and the apps are gaining traction. Vice President Charles further noted he is seeing that brokers are using green accessible vehicles. Ms. Ryan added that green cabs and services like Uber are more expensive than local car services.

MV1s

Ms. Ryan asked how the MV1s are holding up. Vice President Charles responded that these were first-time production

vehicles and American General has been prescribing certain campaigns to maintain the vehicles in peak condition. So far they have been working out and American General has been adjusting their design / manufacturing processes.

Suspension Policies

Vice President Charles reported that the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) audits of other city's suspension policies indicated that the FTA considers suspensions longer than 30 days excessive. Therefore, we revised our suspension policies. Our new suspension policies provide for 1, 2, 3, and 4 week suspensions. Our new suspension policy will be placed on our website and will appear in the new Spring 2016 Guide to Access-A-Ride Service to be published in April.

Ms. Ryan said this change is a good one.

Mr. Stewart asked if the FTA had any comment about customers having to cancel their trips at least two hours prior to their schedule pick up. Vice President Charles said the FTA had no problem with our cancellation policy.

Multimedia

Ken Stuart informed the PAC that if members have twitter accounts they can follow-up with #nyctaar

Potential May 17 Meeting PAC Topic

Mr. DePorte asked the PAC if anyone had an agenda item for the May 17 meeting to propose. Mr. DePorte said he will try to get a conference call number so the members can select a

topic for the next meeting. Stan Weinblatt mentioned that the directions offered to drivers by the AVL M often is not the best way. Ms. Ryan asked if the system has been updated lately. Ms. Rubin stated she was on an AAR vehicle where the driver's personal GPS gave much better directions than the AVL M. Vice President Charles said we will take a look at our GPS and report on the mapping if the committee so desires.

Mr. DePorte called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Weinblatt moved for adjournment and Mr. Coppola seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.