

## **Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)**

### **January 19, 2016 Meeting Minutes**

**Meeting commenced at 5:15 p.m.**

**PAC Attendees:** Thomas J. Coppola, Lyudmila Demikhovskaya, David H. DePorte, Mindy Jacobsen, Ellen Rubin, Jean Ryan, Ken Stewart

**Excused Absence:** John Moynihan and Stan Weinblatt

**NYC Transit Staff Attendees:** Brandon Anderson, Tom Charles, Tom Chin, Michael Cosgrove, Donna Fredericksen, Felicia Jones, Pat Ibarguen, Michael Levy, Denise Ann McQuade, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Russell Schmid, Ken Stuart,

**Guests:** Frank Camp (Global Contact Services), Inat German and Nick Kaminsky (MOPD), Carlos Duque 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.

Vice President Thomas Charles informed PAC that Commissioner Victor Calise was sending Inat German and Nick Kaminsky to represent MOPD and Carlos Duque and Alex Elegudin were representing TLC.

#### **Announcements –**

David DePorte spoke about PAC member, Miriam Kimmelman's, passing and the huge loss this was to the PAC as was the loss of the PAC's Chair, Stephanie White, in October. Ken Stuart, spoke of Miriam's contribution to the PAC as did Jean Ryan.

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

## **I. Approval of Minutes** – David DePorte, PAC Acting Chair

Mr. DePorte called for the approval of the November 17, 2015 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 Charles

Before proceeding with the Service Report, Vice President Tom Charles inquired if PAC members had received feedback from constituents concerning previous PAC meeting minutes that are now posted on-line. PAC members responded that they had not received feedback from constituents.

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

There has been a slight increase in AAR registration for the last few months and anticipate seeing a single digit increase in the registrant base for 2016.

- The number of AAR registrants increased from 142,564 in October 2015 to 143,026 in November 2015, a 0.3% increase. However, the number of registrants decreased 0.5% from 143,802 in November 2014.
- Trips completed decreased from 558,621 in October 2015 to 519,908 in November 2015, a 6.9% decrease. There was a 0.8% increase in November 2015 completed trips compared to 515,778 completed trips in November 2014. (Around the holidays, there is a decrease in AAR customers booking trips.)
- Carrier no-shows in October 2015 were 2,023 and in November 2015 there were 1,551, a 23.3%% decrease. There was a 10.6% increase in November 2015 no-shows compared to 1,402 no-shows in November 2014.
- Total No-shows (carrier, customer and no-fault) in October 2015 were 15,130 and in November 2015 were 13,215, a 12.7% decrease. There was a 0.1% decrease in total November 2015 no-shows compared with 13,227 total no-shows in November 2014.

- On-time Performance (OTP) increased from 88.7% in October 2015 to 90.0% in November 2015, a 1.3% increase. There was a 0.3% increase in November 2015 OTP compared to the November 2014 OTP of 89.7%.
- Appointments on-time increased from 81.0% in October 2015 to 83.0% in November 2015, a 2.0% increase. The percentage of on-time appointments was 82.0% in November 2014 compared to 83.0% in November 2015
- Average Reservation answering speed was 36 seconds in October 2015, 38 seconds in November 2015, and 39 seconds in November 2014.
- Average Reservation talk time was 4 minutes 36 seconds in October 2015, 4 minutes 37 seconds in November 2015 and 4 minutes 28 seconds in November 2014.
- Average Travel Service answering speed was 23 seconds in October 2015, 27 seconds in November 2015 and 28 seconds in November 2014.
- Average Travel Services talk time was 2 minutes 24 seconds in October 2015 and 2 minutes 26 seconds in November 2015 and 2 minutes 21 seconds in November 2014.
- Complaints were 3,032 in October 2015 and 2,612 in November 2015, a 13.9% decrease. Comparing 2,471 complaints in November 2014 to 2,612 complaints in November 2015 there was a 5.7% increase.
- There were 3.93 complaints per 1,000 boardings in October 2015 and 3.62 complaints per 1,000 boardings in November 2015, a 7.9% decrease. Comparing 3.45 complaints per 1,000 boardings in November 2014 and 3.62 complaints per 1,000 boardings in November 2015, complaints increased by 4.8%. However, 2015 figures indicate that complaints are trending downward.
- Commendations were 712 in October 2015 and 507 in November 2015, a decrease of 28.8%. November 2015 commendations increased by 9.5% when compared to 463 commendations from November 2014.
- Total boardings were 771,463 in October 2015 and 721,805 in November 2015, a 6.4% decrease. There was a 0.8% increase in November 2015 boardings compared to the total boardings of 715,956 in November 2014.

- Almost 30% of trip boardings are PCAs and guests and this has been climbing. We continue to monitor the number of PCAs and guests traveling so that they do not negatively impact service to customers with disabilities. We cannot limit guests unless they impinge upon capacity to service customers with disabilities.
- No shows as a percentage of scheduled trips went down in November 2015 compared to October 2015. There has been an improvement in On Time Performance, 90.0% in November 2015, 88.7% in October 2015 and 89.7 in November 2014. The improvement in OTP indicates that carrier dispatchers are monitoring routes and making better decisions.

Researching traffic congestion and checking actual ride times has led us to change speeds at certain times of the day in certain boroughs. Scheduling is dynamic. Our goal is to have trips arriving on time 90% of the time and AAR is working with carrier dispatchers to use all the tools at their command to make good decisions. We work with carriers to keep appointments on time and make adjustments using AVLM to maintain service. If the carriers are unable to perform the trips and maintain the service the Command Center must be notified.

The volume of calls is approximately 10,000,000 annually. Answering all these calls and taking down the information about a trip correctly is a significant achievement. Call volume increases near the end of the reservation period. To reduce possible wait time, we have informed our customers to call before 3 p.m.

Vice President Thomas Charles concluded his report.

### **PAC Comments**

Tom Coppola asked for a definition of dispatch and its function. Vice President Thomas Charles responded that between 8 pm and 9 pm Paratransit Scheduling sends carriers their schedules for the following day. Each dispatcher carrier monitors roughly 15 routes which are comprised of 8-10 trips. The dispatcher makes decisions such as moving trips or adding customers to a route to keep the service running on time. Auto Reschedule is a tool that assists dispatchers in identifying routes where trips can be placed without violating our scheduling parameters. Should carrier dispatch be unable to relocate a late running trip, they are to contact the Command Center for assistance in addressing the issue.

Ellen Rubin requested the definitions for each of the three separate categories of no-shows. Vice President Thomas Charles offered the following:

- **Customer No Show** – The vehicle arrives within the 30-minute waiting period and waits five minutes and the customer does not appear for or declines the trip. Dispatchers are asked to call customer prior to driver leaving.
- **Carrier No Show** – The carrier does not arrive at the scheduled pickup location during the scheduled pickup window and the trip is not provided.
- **No-Fault No Show** – A No Fault No Show can include circumstances beyond a customer's control that prevents a customer from meeting and boarding the vehicle, e.g., unexpected elevator breakdown, medical appointment takes longer than anticipated (this cannot be a regular occurrence), sudden illness or accident that occurs less than two hours prior to scheduled pickup.

Carriers are responsible for no shows within their purview and customers are responsible for no shows within their control. Even when a no-show is beyond a carrier's control, steps should be taken to ensure service is provided to the customer.

Routes are monitored in real time via GPS by our automatic vehicle location monitoring system (AVLM) – We monitor and track trips. Carriers are held accountable for their performance and our contracts provide for the application of liquidated damages and credits for performance deficiencies.

Mindy Jacobsen inquired that if you believe a vehicle will be so late, can you request a taxi? Vice President Thomas Charles responded that you couldn't because dispatching is dynamic and processes are in place to address late running vehicles. We can't assume a trip will be late prior to the trip. However, customers can call for their vehicle status.

### **III. Paratransit Topic – Vice President Thomas J. Charles**

Paratransit AAR projects within the proposed MTA Capital Budget - The Capital program focuses on funding long-term investments in our transportation system. For Paratransit, AVLMM upgrades, fare media and vehicles are part of the Capital program. The proposed Capital program is still pending final approval. Mr. Prendergast, the MTA Chairman, is confident the Capital Plan will be approved. We hope to hear that the Legislature passes the budget in the spring.

#### **AVLMM Upgrades/Fare Media**

The MTA plans to move ahead from a cash system to cashless base system. In the future, MetroCard fare payments will be made using a contactless system, e.g., smartphones to process fare transactions. Subways and buses will use a smartcard or third-party card and AAR will also access this technology. Subways and buses will use a closed loop card for fare payment. The closed loop cards will only be usable in buses and subways. AAR is considering an open loop system based on a cashless cell phone app and or contactless card that can be used for buses, subways, dedicated paratransit, livery, taxi and black car types of transportation services which will provide our customers with many options to travel. A device will be embedded in their AAR card.

As part of the Capital program, AAR proposed to upgrade and expand our AVLMM system which will allow for contactless fare collection. Other upgrades such as the IVR system and tablet devices will enable AAR to keep current with new technologies and portability. This is a design/build project; the process is to design the system, approve it and then create it.

Ms. Rubin inquired about the accessibility of contactless technology. Vice President Thomas Charles assured the PAC that any fare media implemented by AAR would have accessibility incorporated into its design.

Luda Demikhovskaya asked if tablets would be for drivers only or for customers, too. Vice President Thomas Charles said we don't envision the need for customers to have tablets. Ms. Demikhovskaya added that her ambulette service uses tablets and customers sign the tablet to authorize payment.

Ms. Ryan added that if AAR gets tablets, then customers should use technology to pay.

## **Vehicles**

New vehicle purchases are also part of the Capital program. For accessible vehicles, AAR has been acquiring the purpose-built MV1 and single-rear wheel E350 cutaway with a slimmer body. A prototype of an electric accessible vehicle lower to the floor will be available to test in the spring. Battery technology needs to be improved and the use of this type of vehicle will require the installation of charging stations. There is movement throughout the country to develop and use alternative fuel sources such as in electric vehicles.

Ms. Ryan inquired as to the timing of AAR's purchase of new vans. Ms. Ryan added that the old vans provide a rough and bumpy ride and using them can be painful, especially when taking several trips a day. Vice President Thomas Charles responded that while we are vigilant about maintenance, many of the older vans have reached the end of their product life cycle and will be retired. AAR has 70 accessible MV1s and 200 narrow bodied cutaway vans on order.

Ms. Demikhovskaya asked if we sell old AAR vehicles. Vice President Thomas Charles responded that vehicles are sold at auction when retired. Some vehicles are sold for parts and some can still be used for non-AAR applications.

Ms. Jacobsen offered that being able to connect with electric vehicles may be difficult due to the fact that electric vehicles are very silent. Ms. Jacobson offered that there should be some sort of white noise on these electric vehicles so we can hear the vehicle arrive.

Vice President Thomas Charles indicated that we have thought about this but the vehicles we have looked at do not come with a factory installed device to make a sound to alert individuals who are visually impaired that the vehicle is nearby. However, we are looking for an aftermarket installation of such a device.

Ken Stewart informed the PAC that in 2017 a law will require audible sound on otherwise silent vehicles. Mr. Stewart said he has worked to have New York City Parks install audible sound on their vehicles.

Ms. Ryan offered that all people rely on sound and that this was an issue five years ago when electric cars came out.

## **IV. PAC Topics**

### **1. The PAC requested a discussion of trip cancellations and occurrences where a cancelation may not be recorded for subscription and demand trips.**

The PAC was concerned regarding possible incidences where cancellations are not being properly recorded. Vice President Thomas Charles responded that an error on the part of Reservations or Travel Services staff could result in a cancelation not being recorded. When such a situation is brought to AAR's attention, tapes of the call are reviewed to determine if an error was made. Global Contact Services (GCS) management follows up on errors. Random performance checks are also part of the GCS quality assurance program.

Mr. Stewart inquired about calls to option "6." He was informed that option 6 is for Subscription Service, which must be called to request subscription service and to put a subscription trip on hold for a period of time. Same-day cancellations must be made two hours prior to the schedule pick-up time. Customers may make a same-day cancellation by accessing option "5", Travel Services. This information is on the MTA.info website and in "The Guide to AAR Service."

Ms. Donna Fredericksen mentioned that when AAR does an outreach event, we review information in the Guide and distribute copies to attendees. Mr. Stewart asked if we will mention this in the "On the Move" publication and Ken Stuart said "Yes."

Mr. DePorte said he urges customers to bring issues to AAR's attention in order that service can be improved. Customer Relations Officer Ken Stuart said that we review complaint information with carriers and respond with a letter, telephone call or e-mail to those who have a concern. We also ask customers to register commendations when they receive particularly good service from drivers. Vice President Thomas Charles noted that we recently received 700 commendations in a single month – highest number we have ever received.



## **2. Are AAR drivers allowed to carry a walker upstairs while customer walks upstairs independently?**

Vice President Thomas Charles responded that by contract drivers are precluded from providing assistance beyond one contiguous step. Drivers cannot go into residences or lose sight of their vehicles. Should a customer need additional assistance over what AAR provides, customers can apply for Personal Care Attendant (PCA) status. PCAs travel for free.

## **V. Member Feedback**

### **Selection Committee**

A question was asked about the composition of the PAC Selection Committee. Vice President Thomas Charles responded that the selection committee is comprised of the PAC Chair, MOPD Commissioner (currently Victor Calise), VP Thomas Charles and TK Small, a disability rights attorney. The committee will be convening shortly.

### **Late Appointments**

Ms. Jacobsen mentioned she has heard from several students who had late drop-off issues. Vice President Thomas Charles advised Ms. Jacobsen to please provide PAC Liaison Denise Ann McQuade with names and trip dates and we would investigate.

### **Subscription Service via Taxi**

Mr. Stewart asked if an AAR customer can take taxis for subscription trips. Vice President Thomas Charles responded this is what the pilot Pre-paid Debit Card Program was about. The bank that had provided these cards decided to discontinue the business and finding a satisfactory alternative issuer has proved challenging. The TLC has approved E-hail apps and AAR has started a limited test of the concept with UBER; the use of apps looks promising.

The PAC indicated some experiences with these providers were not favorable for persons with disabilities. Vice President Thomas Charles said for customers using wheelchairs, we are hoping that accessible taxis will be viable option.

There will be more to follow on this topic.

## **VI. New Business**

Ken Stewart moved that David DePorte be made the official PAC Chairperson. Tom Coppola seconded the motion. Mindy Jacobsen called for other nominations several times and Luda Demikhovskaya nominated Ellen Rubin. Ms. Rubin declined the nomination. The motion was unanimously approved and David DePorte accepted the position of PAC Chairperson. All present congratulated Mr. DePorte.

There was a motion to close the meeting and it was seconded and the meeting was adjourned by unanimous acclimation at 7:00 PM