

## Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)

### September 29, 2015 Meeting Minutes

#### Meeting commenced at 5:15 PM

**PAC Attendees:** Lyudmila Demikhovskya, David H. DePorte, Ellen Rubin, Mindy Jacobsen, Miriam Kimmelman, Jean Ryan, Ken Stewart, Stan Weinblatt

**Excused Absence:** Thomas J. Coppola, John Moynihan and Stephanie L. White

**NYC Transit Staff Attendees:** Brandon Anderson, Tom Charles, Michael Cosgrove, Lynda Edmond, Donna Fredericksen, Eddie Griffith, Felicia Jones, Jamille Mills-DePaz, Denise Ann McQuade, Mary Ann O'Boyle, Fausto Polanco, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Ken Stuart, Mark Watkins

**Guests:** Frank Camp (Global Contact Services), Quemuel Arroyo, DOT, Victor Calise, Commissioner MOPD

**Announcements** – David DePorte, PAC Vice Chair, informed the PAC that Stephanie White, PAC Chair, was returning home after a hospitalization and that Fr. Bradley had retired, was moving to a warmer climate and had resigned his position on the PAC.

**Introductions** – David told the PAC attendees that since he is blind he would appreciate if those present would introduce themselves and provide their titles. He also asked attendees to raise their hand and asked to be acknowledged. Mary Ann O'Boyle, a Paratransit staff member, kept track of those wishing to be recognized for Mr. DePorte.

**I. Approval of Minutes** – David DePorte, PAC Vice Chair  
It was agreed at today's PAC Meeting that PAC members would communicate via listserv [AARPAC@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AARPAC@yahoogroups.com) to approve the July 21, 2015 PAC Minutes and individually call or email Denise Ann McQuade, PAC Liaison, with their approval and any corrections, disapprovals or abstentions on 10/9/15.

## **II. AAR Service Report – Vice President Thomas Charles**

The effect of the introduction of feeder service continues to diminish and we are beginning to see an increase in our registrant base. We expect this growth to continue.

The Vice President reviewed highlights of June 2015 versus July 2015 and July 2014 statistics.

- AAR registrants increased from 138,808 in June 2015 to 139,970 in July 2015, a 0.8% increase. However, registrants decreased 10.3% from 156,008 in July 2014 to 139,970 in July 2015.
- Trips completed decreased from 551,585 in June 2015 to 540,159 in July 2015, a -2.1% decrease. Comparing 543,676 trips completed in July 2014 to 540,159 trips completed in July 2015, there was a -0.6% decrease.
- Carrier no-shows in June 2015 were 2,140 and in July 2015 there were 1,496, a -30.1% decrease. Comparing 756 no-shows in July 2014 to 1,496 no-shows in July 2015, there was a 97.9% increase in no-shows.
- Total no-shows (carrier, customer and no-fault) in June 2015 were 14,529 and in July 2015 13,718, a -5.6% decrease. Comparing 10,580 total no-shows in July 2014 to 13,718 total no-shows in July 2015, there was a 29.7% increase in total no-shows.
- On-time Performance (OTP) increased from 88.2% in June 2015 to 90.9% in July 2015. Comparing OTP 92.7% in July 2014 to OTP 90.9% in July 2015, there was a -1.8% decrease in OTP.
- Appointments on time increased from 84.0% in June 2015 to 88.0% in July 2015. Comparing appointments on time 90.0% in July 2014 to appointments on time 88.0% in July 2015, there was a -2.0% decrease in appointments on time.

We have been studying OTP (trips arriving within the 30-minute of the scheduled pickup time) and appointments on time (trips arriving at or before a customer's scheduled appointment time). Traffic in the city

and construction have been causing much lower speeds in concentrated traffic corridors. Therefore, we will be further lowering traffic speeds in our scheduling of trips. The goal for OTP is 92% or better.

- Average Reservation answering speed was 34 seconds in June 2015, 30 seconds in July 2015 and 6 seconds in July 2014.
- Average Reservation talk time was 4 minutes 32 seconds in June 2015, 4 minutes 34 seconds in July 2015 and 4 minutes 23 seconds in July 2014.
- Average answering speed for Travel Services was 26 seconds in June 2015, 22 seconds in July 2015 and 4 seconds in July 2014.
- Average Travel Services talk time was 1 minute 21 seconds in June 2015, 2 minutes 20 seconds in July 2015 and 2 minutes 16 seconds in July 2014.
- Complaints were 3,115 in June 2015 and 2,656 in July 2015, resulting in a 14.7% decrease. Comparing 2,486 complaints in July 2014 to 2,656 complaints in July 2015 there was a 6.8% increase.
- There were 4.1 complaints per 1,000 boardings in June 2015 and 3.5 complaints per 1,000 boardings in July 2015, a 14.9% decrease. Comparing 3.3 complaints per 1,000 boardings in July 2014 and 3.5 complaints per 1,000 boardings in July 2015, complaints increased by 5.8%.
- Commendations were 573 in June 2015 and 567 in July 2015, a decrease of 1.0%. Comparing 429 commendations from July 2014 and 567 commendations from July 2015, commendations increased by 32.2%.
- Total boardings were 766,940 in June 2015 and 759,993 in July 2015, a 0.9% decrease. Comparing total boardings 761,813 in July 2014 and 759,993 in July 2015, there was a 0.2% decrease in boardings.

- The Vice President clarified that the decrease in boardings was due to summer service. In addition, when we compare the number of trips completed to boardings, we found 29% more PCAs and guests are traveling. We will monitor this so that it does not negatively impact service to customers with disabilities. We cannot limit guests unless they impinge upon customers with disabilities. Mr. Charles concluded his report.

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

#### **June 2015 US Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration’s “Reasonable Modification of Policy, New Final Rule”**

Mr. Charles discussed the Reasonable Modification of Policy with the PAC. Modifications have to be fair, reasonable and should not exceed service criteria. In general, reasonable modifications should **not** be:

1. a fundamental alteration of service
2. a direct threat to the health and safety of others
3. not needed by the requestor to use the service
4. an undue financial or administrative burden

For instance, origin to destination service is required. While many properties have a curb-to-curb policy, assistance beyond the curb may be required. NYCT is in compliance with this requirement and does provide assistance as needed to and from the door. However, there are reasonable limitations to the assistance that can be provided. Drivers cannot lose sight of the vehicle and leave it unattended. Also we cannot safely carry a customer up and down stairs. A brief discussion on these two examples ensued and it was understood that losing sight of the vehicle, which may have other customers on board, and carrying customers up and down flights of stairs would alter the service, pose a threat to safety and create an undue burden.

NYCT addresses all requests for service modifications and looks at them on a case-by-case basis. For instance, some outdoor areas in housing complexes are equipped for our vehicles to safely enter while others are not equipped for such vehicular traffic. When a questionable complex is

brought to our attention, we will send someone out to survey the location and determine if it is reasonable for us to enter the area. While we can safely enter some complexes, there are others where we cannot and the customer must be picked up and dropped off at the entrance to the complex.

#### **IV. PAC Topic(s) -**

##### **1) Certification/Recertification**

The PAC membership requested a briefing on the certification/recertification process and types of eligibility.

The Vice President explained that certification/recertification protocols are an individualized process where each applicant/registrant is independently determined to be eligible or ineligible for paratransit. In order to determine eligibility, every Access-A-Ride (AAR) applicant must undergo an in-person assessment that is pivotal in determining whether their condition prevents the use of regular fixed-route transit service.

Age is not a factor in the ADA criteria for eligibility, nor is a medical diagnosis. We also need to determine if an applicant travels with equipment such as crutches, canes, walkers, wheelchairs, air tanks, etc., uses service animals or requires the assistance of a personal care attendant (PCA). In person assessments allows us to establish a baseline assessment of the applicant's needs regardless of age.

Since an individual's condition changes over time, AAR customers are required to be recertified by undergoing another in-person assessment every five years. However, if something has changed in an AAR customer's equipment need or disabling condition, we can recertify the individual sooner.

This process is in full compliance with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act for the delivery of paratransit service.

**Types of Eligibility** – The Vice President proceeded to discuss the various types of Eligibility.

**Full** – AAR customer is eligible for all trips.

**Conditional** – AAR customer is able to take some trips but not others. These customers are eligible when specific conditions apply such as: Stairs restricted, Extreme Cold, Extreme Heat, Weather-related, Environmental Barriers, Unfamiliar Places (Navigational) and Distance.

**Temporary** – AAR customer has a broken leg, is undergoing chemotherapy, has had surgery and is convalescing from it for a short period of time and cannot use mass transit for a limited period of time.

**Continual** - This category 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.

Ms. Ryan inquired if applicants still have to bring photographs to Assessment Centers. Vice President responded, “No.” Those taking ID photographs have become proficient with the equipment and the room where the photographs are taken is accessible. Ms. Ryan also asked if the Assessment Centers were checked for ADA compliance.

Our Vice President responded that NYC Transit’s ADA Compliance staff checked the Assessment Centers for compliance.

Ken Stewart raised concerns about the questions asked during an assessment interview about the distance one could travel and being asked to walk up stairs. He felt the questions and being asked to climb stairs were irrelevant to determining if someone who is blind is eligible for AAR. He also asked why blind customers are not granted Continual eligibility. The PAC Liaison, Denise Ann McQuade, responded that someone who takes the fixed route for some trips is typically not granted Continual eligibility. Ms. McQuade inquired if Mr. Stewart had appealed his conditional eligibility determination within the 60 days of the eligibility decision. Mr. Stewart stated he was told he could not appeal. Our Vice President responded that we would look into the matter.

David DePorte - Mentioned that a Certificate of Blindness would also serve as verification of an individual's blindness.

Mindy Jacobsen – Asked if it was accurate that all assessment centers are accessible.

The Vice President responded that they were. He stated contracts were awarded in January 2015 that had stipulations that services could not be co-mingled. Previously, there had been some problems with Assessment Centers providing other services that interfered with AAR applicants and AAR customer who were being certified or recertified. The Assessment Centers are in Brooklyn (Coney Island Avenue and Throop Avenue), Queens (Woodhaven Blvd.), the Bronx (Hone Avenue), Manhattan (Maiden Lane), and Staten Island (Ellis Street). Eligibility Determination Unit staff make visits several times a month.

The Vice President advised the PAC that a bill was introduced in Albany that requires everyone over 80 years of age to be automatically eligible for paratransit service. As reported at the July 21, 2015 meeting, this creates a problem for AAR because we need to do in person assessments to determine a baseline assessment to determine if an applicant travels with equipment such as crutches, canes, walkers, wheelchairs, air tanks, etc., uses service animals or requires the assistance of a personal care attendant (PCA).

## **2) Communication**

The PAC membership discussed membership communication.

PAC members discussed how to ensure that all suggestions for topics are considered. Since all members do not participate on the Listserv (email management software), a number of suggestions were considered for improving member participation in choosing PAC topics. It was suggested that sufficient time be left at the end of the PAC meeting for PAC members to choose a topic for the next meeting. The Vice President noted that the PAC always runs out of time at the end of the meeting and suggest time be set aside at the beginning of the PAC meeting for this purpose. The possibility of communicating by teleconference was raised. Mindy Jacobsen mentioned she had a free teleconference service and that might

be a way for the PAC to choose a topic for PAC meetings. The PAC membership will follow up on this separately.

## **V. Member Feedback**

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

### **Performance and Evaluation (P&E) Training for AAR Drivers**

Since May 2015 PAC members Stephanie White, Jean Ryan and Ellen Rubin have volunteered to provide additional disability sensitivity training at the P&E classes provided by Paratransit.

Customer Relations Officer Kenneth Stuart - said that Paratransit had received positive feedback about the sensitivity training provided by PAC members.

Ms. Ryan and Ms. Rubin and Paratransit staff who participate in these P&E training sessions spoke about the positive reaction they received from the drivers and the positive feedback about the sensitivity training offered by the PAC was acknowledged. PAC members said that drivers brought up service problems caused by Shortcomings in dispatch.

### **Dispatch**

Luda Demikhovskaya asked if Paratransit has training for dispatchers. Ms. Demikhovskaya said AAR dispatching is more difficult than fixed route dispatching. Drivers complain about poor dispatching that puts customers on routes going in completely different directions, etc.

The Vice President responded that proper dispatch is an acquired skill. Paratransit is constantly working with dispatchers to improve their decision-making skills so they make the right decisions. Dispatch is an area that can always be improved.

Ms. Ryan offered that dispatchers play a vital role in AAR service and when poor decisions are made by dispatch the drivers, especially new drivers, are often afraid to speak up and say “no” to “add-ons.”

Ms. Rubin requested clarification as to when and why “add-ons” happen. Tom Charles explained that “add-ons” occur for a variety of reasons and gave a few examples as follows:



- If a route is running late due to traffic a proactive dispatcher will move trips from the late running route to a different route that has time available on it. This is done to properly service customers and get the original route back on schedule.
- If customer is at a medical appointment and the medical office is delayed, the customer may be unable to board the originally scheduled vehicle but still needs a trip back home. This customer would be accommodated and would be an “add-on” or insertion on an alternate route.
- If a vehicle was to breakdown while in revenue service the effected trips may be moved to other routes as “add-ons”.

### **Call Answering**

Ms. Ryan asked if it is still policy that agents are not supposed to pick up a call and place it on hold. Customer Relations Officer Kenneth Stuart responded “yes.”

Ms. Ryan moved to adjourn and Ms. Jacobsen seconded.

Meeting adjourned 7:00 PM