



1425 K Street NW • Suite 200 • Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 347-3066 • (202) 737-7914 (Fax) • (202) 347-7385 (TDD) • Toll-free (866) 528-6278

The Changing Paradigm for Paratransit FACT SHEET #2

Making Paratransit “Part of the Family”

Transportation stakeholders including researchers, paratransit operators, policymakers, funders, and disability and older adult advocates have adopted the view that people with disabilities and communities benefit when paratransit is fully included in the family of services provided by public transportation systems. Transit operators embrace paratransit by varying degrees. For example, Port Authority Transit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania includes paratransit as a normal and routine part of service. Other providers view themselves primarily as fixed route systems willing to provide paratransit services.

What Keeps Transit Operators from Fully Embracing Paratransit?

- **Lack of awareness of people with disabilities**
William Millar, President of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) noted that social responses to and attitudes about disabilities have formed over hundreds of years. Until Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), society marginalized people with disabilities. Although great strides have been made since passage of the ADA, the historical attitude still affects decisions made about services for people with disabilities.
- **The view that paratransit is excessively expensive**
When a paratransit trip costs \$30 compared to the typical \$3 or \$5 price of a transit ride, operators perceive that money is being wasted on paratransit. The notion that paratransit cost-per-trip is excessive presents a cultural barrier to full inclusion of paratransit in the family of services.
- **The competing paradigms of paratransit and mass transportation**
Mass transit focuses on serving the largest number of people, while paratransit focuses on serving people with special needs. This difference leads to divergent ways of thinking about routes, costs and efficiency. This presents another conceptual barrier.

- **Paratransit employees are undervalued**

According to Richard DeRock, General Manager at Link Transit in Wenatchee, Washington, the average yearly turnover rate for paratransit operators (drivers) is as high as 50%. This is in large part because paratransit systems are often affiliated with social service agencies, not public transportation systems; therefore, the salaries of paratransit operators are much lower than their transit counterparts.

- **Difficulty coordinating public transportation and paratransit systems**

Funding sources often segregate clients into categories, making it difficult for transit systems to integrate all forms of transportation. Some transit agencies are being asked to incorporate human service transportation into their operations, yet the funding to do so is not always fully allocated by human service agencies. This puts pressure on the system to serve more people with less money.

Effectively coordinated systems may result in a greater use of paratransit, which could mean higher operational costs for many transit systems. In this case, coordination may be viewed as a double-edged sword and result in no impetus to integrate paratransit into the family of services.

- **Public transit agencies often do not have the power to make changes**

Federal government, states, and counties control the funding that gets to transit and paratransit systems. Because of restrictions on the spending of these funds, transit operators say it can be difficult to integrate the two systems.