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## A SURVEY ON THE USE OF TAXIS IN PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS

**Easter Seals**  
**Project ACTION**  
ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITY®  
TRANSPORTATION IN OUR NATION



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### Project Team and Advisory Committee

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- Harold Morgan, director of research and education, Taxicab, Limousine and Paratransit Association (TLPA), Washington, D.C.
- Raymond Nelson, vice president of Veolia-Yellow Transportation of Baltimore, Md.

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

Transit authorities have contracted with taxi operators to provide paratransit services since the 1970s when transit authorities first started offering paratransit services to members of the general public. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the first Federal legislation to “prohibit discrimination on the basis of handicap in any program receiving Federal assistance,”<sup>1</sup> was largely responsible for the initiation of many of these paratransit services. The Section 504 provisions have now, of course, been augmented and expanded by the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The US DOT regulations implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) include a requirement that “public entities operating fixed route transportation service available for the general public also provide complementary paratransit services to persons unable to use the fixed route system.”<sup>2</sup> Under the ADA, paratransit is not a substitute for fixed route service but a supplement for persons who are unable to use the fixed route system. These “complementary paratransit services” may be provided in a number of ways, and taxi operators have, in many communities, provided paratransit services that meet or exceed ADA requirements.

This report describes the variety of ways in which taxi operators can assist transit authorities by providing paratransit services for persons with disabilities. Based on expert interviews, case studies, surveys, and other methods, this report reviews the extent to which taxis support paratransit programs in various communities and discusses the features that characterize the most successful taxi-aided ADA paratransit programs.

### STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING OR CONTROLLING PARATRANSIT COSTS

Transit authorities offer ADA complementary paratransit services through a variety of different service models. These service models range from the transit authority providing all of its own complementary paratransit services using its own drivers and vehicles to the other

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Transportation issued its final rule on “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Handicap in Federally-Assisted Programs and Activities Receiving or Benefitting from Federal Financial Assistance” on May 31, 1979. See *Federal Register* 44:106, page 31442-31460.

<sup>2</sup> See “Transportation Services for Individuals with Disabilities,” *Federal Register* 56:173, September 6, 1991, p. 45621-45641.

extreme -- contracting with other providers for the full range of management and operational services of their ADA complementary paratransit services.

Nationally, the costs for ADA paratransit services are becoming a larger percentage of overall transit authority costs. While the ADA paratransit percentage of overall transit authority costs is often about 15 percent of transit authority budgets, in some communities these paratransit costs now constitute 25 percent or more of the transit authority's budget. Paratransit costs are increasing at a significantly higher rate than fixed route transit service costs. In the face of these escalating costs, transit authorities are pursuing a variety of actions in an effort to control ADA paratransit costs. The six most common strategies can be summarized as follows:

One of the first strategies to be implemented was the effort to **improve driver training** for fixed route transit drivers. Activities in this area include passenger sensitivity, disability awareness training, assisting passengers, deploying bus kneeling features, calling out bus stops, and even including passenger assistance procedures in driver "work rules."

A second strategy is to **provide travel training** for both existing and newly certified paratransit eligible customers. This strategy has been utilized for more than a decade by numerous transit authorities. There is a renewed emphasis on travel training because of the benefits of expanding trip and travel options for riders. This recognition has given rise to more extensive travel training, including having travel trainers going to the homes of ADA eligible customers and providing trip training for their most common destinations.

Another strategy is to **determine eligibility for services on a trip by trip basis**. This is may be undertaken in conjunction with travel training. This process takes place during the trip booking request process. Once an ADA eligible individual designates their trip origin and destination, the transit authority's software looks at an overlay of the fixed route bus and rail services. If the trip can be accommodated using these modes, the caller is given the trip information for the fixed route system including stop locations and times. Some transit authorities have software systems in place that can schedule a significant percentage of trips, based on trip by trip eligibility, to fixed route services.

A fourth strategy that is emerging is to **allow ADA eligible individuals to ride the mainline services at no cost**. The logic of this strategy is quite straight forward: on a per trip basis, the transit authority incurs no new marginal costs, may forego some of fare box revenue, and may save \$20 or more in cost per paratransit trip. The actual savings will, of course, be the difference between the fare box revenues not collected and the costs of ADA paratransit trips not made.

The fifth strategy is **to use taxi services to reduce the cost of typical ADA paratransit costs**. In many communities, ADA paratransit services offered by taxi operators are less expensive than those provided by transit authorities. In such cases, it makes sense for the transit authority to execute contracts with one or more taxi providers to provide at least some of the required ADA paratransit services. At this time, the percentage of ADA paratransit services provided by taxi operators varies greatly across the U.S.

The sixth strategy is to **provide non-ADA paratransit services with taxis to reduce ADA trip demand**. Typical ADA service criteria requirements include (among others) prior day reservations (usually 5 pm or earlier) and a fare not to exceed two times the standard mainline bus or rail service. Many transit authorities have successfully implemented non-ADA taxi services that are “above and beyond” typical ADA service standards. Implemented under contracts between the transit authorities and the taxi vendors, these agreements typically allow an ADA-eligible individual to contact the taxi vendor for a ride on a same-day basis. The passenger pays the standard ADA paratransit fare, but the transit authority underwrites the trip cost above the typical one-way ADA fare up to a set limit. For example, a taxi metered trip of \$20.00 might require the passenger to pay the standard ADA fare of \$2.00; the transit authority would then pay for the next \$13.00 (this amount varies depending on the transit authority), and then the rider would have to pay any amount in excess of \$15.00 (in this case, the rider would pay an additional \$5.00, for a total out of pocket cost for the trip of \$7.00, not including any tip). For shorter trips, the rider pays no more than they might pay on a typical ADA paratransit van (in this example, \$2.00); for longer trips, the passenger’s share of the total payment could be considerably higher. This tradeoff of having “on demand” service, which is often provided on an exclusive-ride, same-day basis, is a trade-off that many passengers are willing to make. The savings to the transit authority would be the difference between the amount of the fare that they subsidize (in this example, \$13.00) and their one-way cost of typical ADA service (in this example, \$20.00). This calculation shows a savings of over 30 percent. (For the analysis to be completely accurate, one would have to factor in an increase in trip demands generated by being able to make same day reservations. Unfortunately, there are no empirical data to assign a precise number to this increase in demand. Despite the lack of definitive data, it appears that the strategy of offering non-ADA paratransit services with taxis will provide the transit authority with significant savings.)

To summarize, taxi-provided paratransit programs have played a critical role in many communities across the nation in offering cost savings and other benefits. Numerous benefits have been recorded to transit authorities, taxi operators, taxi drivers, and customers. But while the use of taxis in paratransit service has been advantageous in many instances, some communities have experienced disadvantages. These mixed results of taxi use in paratransit programs have raised questions among transportation professionals. There is an obvious need to identify factors associated with successful taxi paratransit operations in order to guide transportation officials who wish to replicate the successes of other programs in their own communities. This report illustrates key success factors related to taxi paratransit programs and how such programs can benefit all parties involved.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The overall goal of this project is to provide actionable information to individuals and organizations in local communities to help them understand and assess quality of service and cost variables associated with the delivery of taxi paratransit compared to conventional ADA paratransit service. To achieve this goal, this study contained several research questions. By answering these questions, this report illustrates best practices in taxi paratransit programs and easy-to-replicate tips for other communities.



These key questions are:

- What are the major characteristics of taxi provided paratransit programs?
- What are the advantages of using taxi provided paratransit programs?
- What are the disadvantages of using taxi provided paratransit programs?
- What are the success factors (conditions or activities) in taxi paratransit programs?
- When do customers use taxi provided paratransit services vs. regular paratransit services?
- What are the best ways to improve taxi provided paratransit programs?

## **STUDY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

The survey on the use of taxis in paratransit programs adapted multiple data collection strategies such as expert interviews, review of written materials, and case studies which include site visits and focus groups.

### **Expert Interviews**

Expert interviews with key staff in transit authorities, taxi companies, and brokerage agencies were conducted via telephone or email. Most interviews were done via telephone; some were initiated with an email survey followed by the telephone follow-up interviews. Telephone interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes to 75 minutes. Often, a second contact was made via telephone or email to revisit some of the issues addressed during the first interview. Key senior staff were responsible for conducting interviews throughout the study.

### **Review of written documents**

Some interviewees provided additional materials for this study. Written documents such as contracts between transit authorities and taxi companies, program statistics, brochures, and programs' websites were reviewed to assist the research team in understanding the operations of the taxi paratransit programs. Community web sites were visited online before and after interviews to cross reference information.

### **Case Studies**

Based on the interview results, case study sites were selected. Sites were selected for their ability to provide in-depth information on factors contributing to the success of taxi-supported paratransit services and on the promised level of cooperation of taxi and transit operators. They were also been selected based on their potential to provide differing examples of customer service methods, driver training, contract and rate structure, cost data, types of ADA paratransit trips, trip length, fleet composition, and general community demographics. Key selection factors for case study sites were:

- The level of potentially useful data available at each site, especially regarding relative levels of success in terms of service quality and costs.
- The anticipated level of cooperation from the transportation authorities, taxi companies, and riders.
- The ability to generate lessons for other communities in terms of operations and practice.
- The advice and recommendations of the project Advisory Committee and Project ACTION.
- A secondary list of factors, including geographic dispersion, relative size of the communities, and community demographics.

For each case study, a number of unique tasks were completed. Activities during site visits included meeting with transit authority staff members, touring the paratransit call center, meeting with paratransit drivers, touring the taxi company facilities, meeting with key staff in taxi company facilities, observation of taxicab paratransit operations, interviews with accessible cab drivers, and visiting additional facilities specific to each site. In addition, focus groups were conducted with customers who recently used taxi provided paratransit services. Seven focus groups were conducted across four cities. In most cases, the research team provided information on how to recruit focus group participants and the local transit authority recruited focus group participants.

Chapter 3 provides more in depth information on case study results from five cities. Copies of the materials for the site visits are included in the appendices.

## **Survey of Transportation Professionals**

Several strategies were used to create potential candidate cities for interviews. Project team members compiled a list of 40 plus candidate cities based on the wealth of knowledge on geography, population, and service statistics of the taxi industry. In addition, inputs from the project advisory committee, names of transit authorities that operate major paratransit programs provided by American Public Transportation Association (APTA), online resource such as Paratransit Watch (<http://paratransitwatch.blogspot.com/2007/03/american.html>), and recommendations from interviewees all supported efforts to select interview sites. The list was periodically modified based on the team members' consensus, the availability of taxi paratransit programs, and interviewees' willingness to participate in the survey.

Four members of the project team completed 42 interviews, representing 29 cities. In eighteen of twenty- nine cities, one interview was conducted. The interviewees were affiliated with either local transit authorities or brokerages. Two interviews were completed in nine cities, where one interview was typically completed with the local transit authority or transportation broker and another interview was completed with a taxi operator. (In Denver, one interview was done with an ADA manager and another with an Executive Director of the transit authority.) In Arlington and Houston, three interviews were conducted.

# 2

## FEATURES OF TAXI PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS

This Chapter highlights results from interviews with taxi and transit industry experts. Characteristics of taxi paratransit programs are described, including performance statistics, program costs, histories, and future expectations. In addition, benefits and problems associated with taxi paratransit services are described in detail.

### MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF TAXI PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS

#### Annual Volume of ADA Paratransit Trips

The size of ADA paratransit operations varies across cities. In Des Moines, Iowa, less than 20,000 trips are provided annually. In the Chicago area, 2,737,500 ADA trips were reported annually. Table 1 below describes the reported annual ADA trip volumes among the cities studied, grouped by annual ADA trip volumes.

**Table 1:**  
**ANNUAL ADA PARATRANSIT TRIPS**

<i>Volume of Annual ADA trips</i>	<i>Cities</i>	<i># of cities</i>
< 500,000 trips	Des Moines, Pomona Valley, El Paso, Cincinnati, Madison, Daytona Beach, Kansas City, Bremerton, Louisville, Pee Dee Region, Salt Lake City	11
500,000 ~ 1,000,000 trips	Cleveland, Dallas, San Jose, Palm Beach, Baltimore, Honolulu, Denver	7
1,000,000 or more trips	Houston, King County, Portland, Miami, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington DC (Arlington), Boston, Pittsburgh,	10
No data provided	Philadelphia	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>29</b>

## **Proportion of Taxi-Provided ADA Trips**

In one third of the study cities (10), less than 5 percent of the ADA trips were provided by taxis; eight of 29 cities did not use taxis as part of their ADA programs. Seven communities reported taxi usage of between 5 and 20 percent of their ADA services. In four cities, taxi use was greater than 20 percent of all ADA paratransit trips. In Madison, Houston, and San Francisco, taxi involvement was substantial, with 25 percent, 55 percent, and 56 percent, respectively. In Kansas City, all ADA paratransit services are provided by taxis. Data reported by the interviewees appear in Table 2.

## **ADA Paratransit Costs per Trip**

Determining accurate paratransit costs is a challenge: because some operators typically exclude overhead and administrative fees from their cost accounting, costs reported at one site may not be comparable to costs reported at another site. Some of the costs reported are as follows: for ADA paratransit trips provided by the transit authority or its contractors, \$13.90 in San Francisco, \$44 in Denver, and an average cost for an ADA paratransit trip was \$26.46. The taxi-provided ADA paratransit trips are often less expensive than this average. For example, cities reported dollar amounts of the taxi-provided ADA paratransit trips ranging from \$11.22 in San Francisco, where SFMTA uses taxicabs on their paratransit service for some ADA services but mostly for services beyond ADA requirements, to \$39.78 in Seattle (King County, Washington). Most of the taxi-provided ADA paratransit trips cost less than \$20; the average cost was \$17.60.

While calculating actual cost of taxi paratransit trip is not as straightforward as one would expect, the five case study sites described in Chapter 3 provided more detailed information about their taxi paratransit program cost. Detailed discussion about cost structure on these four sites can be found in Chapter 3.

## **Taxi Paratransit Program Histories**

In many cities, taxi involvement in paratransit services dates back many years. The Pomona Valley taxi program has operated since 1974. Some cities have experienced different levels of taxi involvement over the years. In Miami, taxis played a major role in the history of ADA paratransit services but are no longer used for paratransit services. Louisville had not experienced success in a taxi program in the past but they are now increasing their use of taxi-provided paratransit services. The Pee Dee region has had no use of taxis in their paratransit program. Overall, the majority of the interviewees stated that taxis always played a role in paratransit history.

**Table 2:**  
**TAXI PROVIDED PARATRANSIT CHARACTERISTICS**

<i><b>City</b></i>	<i><b># of paratransit trips ( per year)</b></i>	<i><b>% of ADA trips by taxis</b></i>	<i><b>Paratransit cost ( per trip)</b></i>	<i><b>Taxi-provided paratransit cost (per trip)</b></i>
Denver	985,500	5.50%	\$44	\$12
San Francisco	1,200,000	55%	\$13.90	\$11.22
Madison	261,361	25%		\$17
Daytona Beach	263,640	1%	\$24.75	meter rate
WMATA (DC)	1,500,000	5%	\$35	\$21
Houston	1,108,311	56%	\$20.86	\$20.86
Baltimore	936,000	3%	-	sedan rate (hourly rate)
Palm Beach	900,000	less than 1 %	-	taxis cost 30% of the paratransit trip
Minneapolis	1,360,000	<b>none</b> but offer premium same day taxi	\$22	Partial reimbursement for rides between \$7 and \$20
Louisville	375,000	12.80%	\$28.08	\$14.00
Pittsburgh	1,700,000	less than 20%	\$21.00	\$15.00
Kansas City	273,895	100%	\$23.30	\$21.02
Massachusetts Bay	1,600,000	1.50%	\$31.49	-
Chicago	2,737,500	less than 5 %	\$30	paid on hourly basis
Salt Lake City	495,000	less than .001%	\$38	\$13.50
King County, WA	1,118,400	less than 5%	\$36.15	\$39.78
Portland, OR	1,140,804	10%	\$23	\$27
El Paso	222,540	7%	\$ 27- \$ 40	\$ 7-\$ 11
Honolulu	936,000	10%	\$31.59	\$20.00
Des Moines	19,341	1%	\$18.51	\$21.00
Bremerton, WA	290,000	2%	\$22.00	\$25.00
Pomona Valley, CA	115,000	16% - 20 %	\$14.52	\$20.71
Miami	1,660,000	-	-	-
Dallas	720,000	-	-	-
San Jose	780,000	18%	\$20	less than \$20 (depends on the distance)
Cincinnati	234,396	-	\$31	-
Philadelphia		-	\$26	-
Cleveland	510,180	-	-	-
Pee Dee (SC)	420,000	-	-	-

## **Future Expectations**

When asked about future taxi use for paratransit services, 12 out of 29 cities predicted they were likely to increase the taxi use or to have strong continued taxi involvement. Another 14 cities indicated they would have just about the same amount of taxi services. A few mentioned taxi use would decline in the future. Of those who expected declines, several mentioned improved dispatching technology will advance the efficiency of the traditional paratransit program, thus requiring less reliance on taxi paratransit services. Others who predicted a continuation of the same level of taxi involvement stated that paratransit drivers' union would not allow the Transit Authority to increase contractual work with outside vendors such as taxicab companies. Overall, many transit authority officials forecast an increase in taxi paratransit work. Even those who predicted less or the same amount of work in the future did so based on rationales other than dissatisfaction with service quality of the taxi paratransit services. Table 3 summarizes taxi program histories and expectations.

## **BENEFITS OF USING TAXIS**

Paratransit and taxi experts who were interviewed for this study indicated several major benefits of using taxis for paratransit services. This section highlights responses from the transit authorities or brokerages and how they view the advantages of using taxis in their programs.

Taxi-provided paratransit programs have played a critical role in many communities across the nation. While the use of taxis in paratransit service may offer numerous benefits to transit authorities, taxi operators, taxi drivers, and customers, some communities have found disadvantage of using such services. The mixed results of taxi use in paratransit program raise questions to many transportation professionals. In particular, factors associated with successful taxi paratransit operations are of interest to many community transportation officials who wish to replicate success of other programs. This report illustrates key success factors related to taxi paratransit programs and how such programs can benefit all parties involved.

### **Benefits and How They Come About**

This study demonstrates that taxi paratransit services offer a variety of benefits to the transportation industry. Transit authorities or brokerages reported flexibility as number one benefit of using taxis: 20 out of 29 cities reported flexibility as major benefit. The second frequently reported benefit was that taxis were good at difficult times. Seventeen out of 19 cities reported taxis can be used for off peak hours, peak hours, and weekend trips or hard to reach areas. Almost 50 percent of the respondent mentioned taxis saved money for them. In many cities, transit authorities were able to save money by employing taxis for paratransit ride requests. Other frequently mentioned benefits were quick response, increase service quality and wide area coverage. Table 4 describes the complete list of benefits of using taxis reported by transit authorities or brokerages.

**Table 3:**  
**TAXI PARATRANSIT PROGRAM HISTORIES AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS**

<i>City</i>	<i>ADA Taxi History</i>	<i>Future Expectations</i>		
		<i>Expected to increase</i>	<i>Will remain the same</i>	<i>Will decrease</i>
Denver	minimal role for last 10 years	X		
San Francisco	a large role since 1983		strong continued role	
Madison	always had a role	X		
Daytona Beach	had a role since 1995	X		
WMATA	always have a role		X	
Houston	always had a role		X	
Baltimore	had a role one and off	X		
Palm Beach	heavy taxi use until 2000	X		
Minneapolis	a larger role 15 years ago	X		
Louisville	not successful in the past, now a significant role	X		
Pittsburgh	reduced since 2006	X		
Kansas City	had a role		will always have a role	
Massachusetts Bay	had a bigger role in the past	[ will depend on the RFP results ]		
Chicago	a minimal role in the past	[ no answer ]		
Salt Lake City	had a greater use of taxis in 2000		X	
King County	taxi script program since 1978		X	
Portland, OR	have played a role			X
El Paso	supplementing paratransit		X	
Honolulu	10% of taxi involvement		X	
Des Moines	very minimal		X	
Bremerton	had a role		X	
Pomona Valley	involvement since 74		X	
Miami	a major role in the history		X	
Dallas	played 15% role in the past	X		
San Jose	involvement for 30 years		X	
Cincinnati	used for an overflow before		X	
Philadelphia	no recent history of taxi use		X	
Cleveland	no longer uses taxis	maybe		
Pee Dee	No history		X	

**Table 4:  
REPORTED BENEFITS OF USING TAXIS FOR ADA PARATRANSIT  
SERVICES**

<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Details</i>
<b>Operational benefits</b>	<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There when you need it</li> <li>Same day service is possible</li> <li>24/ 7/ 365 service</li> <li>Convenience</li> <li>After hours service</li> <li>Quick response</li> <li>Demand responsive trips</li> </ul> <p>Good at difficult times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergencies &amp; breakdowns</li> <li>Peak periods, nights, weekends</li> <li>Trips that don't fit into regular routes</li> <li>Add-on or will call trips</li> <li>Safety net for service peaks</li> </ul> <p>Wide area coverage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can cover large geographic area</li> <li>Can cover non-urban sections</li> <li>Can cover hard to reach areas</li> <li>Fills gaps in coverage</li> </ul>
<b>Service quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Riders like the direct, exclusive ride</li> <li>Customers appreciate having alternative option</li> <li>Taxicabs are appreciated by the riders</li> <li>Having taxis allows TA to have a good customer service</li> <li>Increased customer satisfaction</li> <li>Provides reliable/ high quality service</li> <li>Eliminates/reduces trip denials</li> </ul>
<b>Drivers' steady income</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steady year-round income for drivers</li> </ul>
<b>Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Easier and safer to serve mobility device users</li> <li>Can use accessible minivans to remove physical barriers and cover hard to serve areas</li> </ul>



## PROBLEMS USING TAXIS

Transportation officials also shared their complaints about taxi provided paratransit programs. Some officials mentioned current problems and issues; others shared their experiences in the past or concerns that they heard from other communities. Thus, some of the items listed in this section may include perceived as well as actual problems of taxi paratransit programs.

Many officials expressed their concerns over service quality issues. Seventeen out of 29 communities reported service quality problems that were primarily related to taxi drivers. Other common concerns were fraud, difficulties in monitoring service, and lack of driver training. Again, some of these items are only perceived problems as some of the cities did not have any taxi paratransit programs but reported concerns anyway.

**Table 5:**  
**REPORTED PROBLEMS IN USING TAXIS FOR ADA PARATRANSIT SERVICES**

<i>Problems</i>	<i>Details</i>
<b>Service quality:</b>	Low quality performance
<b>Driver quality</b>	Late Rude Bad attitude Safety concerns Cannot control independent contractors Large variations in service quality among drivers Specific trip performance Drivers unwilling to take short trips ADA riders not picked up if a “better ride” shows up Driver resistance to serve ADA eligible individuals
<b>Operational issues</b>	Accessible vehicles are not cost-effective: shorter life; higher capital cost Transit authority does not want to supply vehicles to taxi operators Drivers don’t make enough income Liability issues, including insurance costs
<b>Fraud</b>	By drivers Riders selling scrip to non-ADA-certified riders
<b>Cost</b>	Taxi fares are “too high”
<b>Lack of training</b>	No control over training

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<b>Difficult to monitor</b>	Hard to maintain proper oversight Lack of control
<b>Others</b>	Jurisdictional conflicts re taxis involving airports, cities, territories, etc. Conflicts between taxi drivers Need for larger dispatch facilities Tend to have large taxi demand by convenience Full compliance by all providers with TA requirements (insurance) Getting paid by the broker timely or at all Not the easiest group of riders to serve High taxi driver turnover One local taxi owner and lack of taxi competition Management won't follow policies Contracting agency wants employee drivers not independent contractor drivers Difficulty with broker High degree of complaints Lower productivity of the rest of the system Lack of ownership from the taxi vendor in high quality services Difficulty of cognitively impaired riders to use taxis Concern for passenger safety Dropped calls: cab drivers accepting a dispatched paratransit trip and then not picking it up Taxi drivers not accepting paratransit calls (dispatcher had to cajole drivers) Taxi providers report some administrative issues with TA/broker etc. Customers don't feel safe in taxis Taxi companies not following FTA drug testing requirements

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# 3

## IN-DEPTH CASE STUDIES

The overall goal of this project is to provide actionable information to individuals and organizations in local communities to help them understand and assess quality of service and cost variables associated with the delivery of taxi paratransit compared to conventional ADA paratransit service. Therefore, sites were selected with an eye towards obtaining the best information possible on successful applications of the use of taxis in ADA paratransit services. This research identified the quantitative and qualitative factors that contribute to and serve as measures of successful transit authority use of taxis for paratransit services. Chapter 3 focuses on the identification of the relative importance of key variables creating or explaining the relative levels of success of the various taxi-supported ADA paratransit services.

### SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

Sites were selected for their ability to provide in-depth information on factors contributing to the success of taxi-supported paratransit services and on the promised level of cooperation of taxi and transit operators. These sites were also selected based on their potential to provide examples of customer service methods, driver training, contract and rate structure, cost data, types of ADA paratransit trips, trip length, fleet composition, and general community demographics.

The key selection factors for case study sites were:

- The level of potentially useful data available at each site, especially regarding relative levels of success in terms of service quality and costs.
- The anticipated level of cooperation from the transportation authorities and riders.
- The ability to generate lessons for other communities in terms of operations and practice.
- The advice and recommendations of this project's Advisory Committee and PROJECT ACTION.

A secondary list of factors was also considered in site selection, including geographic dispersion, relative size of the communities, and community demographics.

The sites that were selected are, in alphabetical order:

- Arlington, Virginia: part of the Washington, DC metro area and served by WMATA's MetroAccess program, the taxi provider in Arlington is Red Top Cab.

- Daytona Beach (Volusia County), Florida: Volusia County Transit contracts with two cab companies.
- Houston (Harris County), Texas: the Metropolitan Transit Authority operates their METROLift program and contracts with Yellow Cab who has 160 accessible vehicles.
- Madison, Wisconsin where Madison Metro contracts with 4 vendors for a portion of their paratransit services; one of the 4 vendors is a cab company.
- San Francisco, California: the City contracts with a broker who subcontracts to a paratransit vendor and a variety of taxi companies; every taxicab driver in the city transports ADA passengers; 100 accessible cabs are in use.

Detailed information on each of these sites is provided in the individual narratives.

As can be seen, these sites are geographically distributed across the country. Arlington County and Madison have the smallest populations at just over 200,000 each; the Houston metro area has the largest population at nearly 4,000,000 persons. Service areas range from very small (26 square miles in Arlington County) to very large (1,729 square miles in Harris County). Of the group, Arlington County has the highest per capita income (\$37,706) and the lowest percent of the population in poverty (7.1 percent). Harris County has the highest percent black (19 percent), the highest percent below poverty (16.8 percent), and a relatively high percentage of persons who speak a language other than English at home (36 percent). Madison has a high college student population, a very low percent black (5.8 percent), and 15 percent of the population is below poverty. San Francisco has a relatively high per capita income (\$34,556) and a very high percentage of persons who speak a language other than English at home (45.7 percent). Volusia County has the lowest per capita income of the group at \$19,664 and a moderate proportion of persons below poverty (11.2 percent).

Some of the key features of each taxi-supported ADA paratransit program, listed in order of size from the smallest to the largest, are as follows:

- **Arlington, Virginia:** Red Top Cab is committed to serving a growing ADA paratransit market. Taxis are seen as integral part of accessible services. Extensive training for drivers and passengers is provided.
- **Madison, Wisconsin:** Madison Metro has transitioned more and more services to the private sector over the years and continues to receive very positive feedback regarding services provided by their taxi vendor. Note that Madison is a “shared ride” taxi system that may be more conducive to adapt to a shared ride paratransit model of service.
- **Daytona Beach (Volusia County), Florida**
  - Excellent communication between agencies & stakeholders.
  - Great relationship between independent contractor taxicab drivers & paratransit users.
  - Positive attitude of independent contract taxi drivers.
- **San Francisco, California**
  - Paratransit work embraced by Independent Contractor Drivers.

- 100 accessible taxis in the city of 744,000 persons represents a huge percent of the taxi fleet.
- The local Paratransit Coordinating Council is very inclusive of agency, providers, users, and other stake-holders.
- Comprehensive data collection processes exist.
- **Houston (Harris County), Texas**
  - Very large taxi industry involvement via 5 separate taxi companies.
  - Unusually high commitment from Independent Contract drivers as evidenced by 160 accessible Yellow Cabs.
  - Paratransit service interfaces with other agencies to serve users.
  - Large number of program components.

## IN-DEPTH SITE REPORTS

### Arlington, Virginia

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) is a multi-jurisdictional, quasi-governmental agency that provides public transit services for the District of Columbia, the cities of Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax and the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun and political subdivisions in Virginia located in those counties, and the counties of Montgomery and Prince George's in the State of Maryland and their political subdivisions. WMATA provides bus (Metrobus), subway (Metrorail), and paratransit services (Metro Access) throughout much of the metropolitan region of 5.3 million persons, which is the eighth-largest metropolitan area in the country.

Arlington is a densely populated urban county of about 208,000 persons in an area of 26 square miles. Located directly across the Potomac River from Washington DC, Arlington is a component of the central portion of the Washington DC metropolitan area. It is among the most densely populated jurisdictions in the country with a population density of about 8,060 persons per square mile. About 35 percent of Arlington's racially, ethnically and culturally diverse population includes Hispanic/Latino, African- American, Asian or multi-racial residents.

### *Paratransit Operations in the Metropolitan Area*

While this case study is only of operations in Arlington County, it is important to understand the regional context to understand the Arlington operations. Metro Access provides a shared-ride call-in service on one-day notice. The per trip cost is \$2.50 if the termination point is within 3/4 of a mile of a regular bus stop; beyond 3/4 of a mile, there is an additional charge, and service is only available for a short distance beyond the normal bus service area. Metro Access service is generally available during the times of day that bus or rail service is offered for authorized disabled patrons anywhere within the area served by WMATA. Metro Access services are overseen by MV Transportation, Inc. of Fairfield, California, and operated by

contractors for WMATA. Customers call MV, the broker, to request a ride. Customers cannot request a taxi; MV does all the vehicle assignments.

### ***Paratransit Operations in Arlington County***

Red Top Cab Company has been serving Arlington County since 1964. They have been providing paratransit services since the implementation of the ADA legislation 14 years ago; they had no relationship with Metro before that. They are currently providing ADA paratransit services in taxi vehicles under a contract with MV Transportation, who is under contract to Metro. MV operates some services and also subcontracts other services, such as those performed by Red Top. No other operator in Northern Virginia is currently providing the range or extent of services that Red Top provides; one other operator is now operating dedicated vehicles. About 3 percent of Red Top's annual business, about 4,000 rides per month, is the ADA paratransit service. Red Top has 365 taxi cabs that can be used in ADA paratransit services, 40 of which are accessible taxis.

Red Top had been transporting seniors for years, so the current arrangements came about from conversations between the transit authority and their company. Red Top also provides a "Beyond ADA" service for Arlington County known as STAR. They decided to participate in providing some of the ADA paratransit services in Arlington because

- They were already providing similar services to Arlington residents.
- They needed to maintain their client base: "These were our customers. We are a community-oriented company."
- They saw these services as both an opportunity and a matter of defending their business. "You snooze, you lose."

Prior to serving paratransit passengers, taxi drivers receive sensitivity training, door to door passenger assistance training, wheelchair passenger assistance training, package handling training.

Red Top sees the following major reasons for using taxis for ADA paratransit services in their community:

- Taxi services work; they provide reliable, high-quality, cost-effective services.
- Customers love the taxi services because of the direct trips and exclusive rides.
- Operational flexibility combined with a high service level. "Taxis are good for the trips that the broker cannot route efficiently."
- They provide back-ups for breakdowns and add-on trips.

### ***Key Messages from Arlington***

The Red Top Taxi Company offers unique success strategies from the taxi contractor's perspective. It is known for its high level of service. Red Top places a high priority on the quality

of their services that are tailored to the needs of their clients. To ensure driver quality, the management offers extensive training. Examples of driver training are sensitivity training, door to door passenger assistance training, wheelchair passenger assistance training, and package handling training. Red Top also assigns experienced taxi paratransit drivers to ADA paratransit services. Drivers are paid on a meter basis plus \$2.00 for ambulatory trips and \$5.00 for wheelchair rides. Red Top understands the importance of maintaining the market, how to manage independent contractor drivers, and to develop strong working relationships. Red Top expects to continue its 15 to 20 percent of the Arlington ADA paratransit market for the foreseeable future, but has some concerns about potentially increased levels of regulation.

Their messages for other taxi operators around the country include the following suggestions:

- Make a commitment to maintaining your market share.
- Carefully and constructively manage independent contractor drivers.
- Develop strong working relationships with partners in paratransit services, such as the transit authority and brokers, especially in resolving complaints.
- Establish a high level of credibility with riders and partners.
- Maintain contacts at the highest levels in the respective organizations.

## **Madison, Wisconsin**

Madison is the Capital of Wisconsin and the home of the University of Wisconsin. The operations of State Government and the University System have a significant impact on how the area functions. The City of Madison is responsible for control and management of Madison Metro Transit operations. Its service area of 64 square miles and total trip volume of less than 66,000 annual trips makes this a relatively small ADA operation.

As is typically the case when the Transit Authority operates the call center function and contract the service or parts thereof to outside vendors, the Transit Authority determines how much service is assigned to various contractors based on contractual requirements. In Madison's case, they maximize the efficiency on their own vehicles and then attempt to do the same for the other contractors. They also recognize that there is an economic benefit to them to contract rides to the taxi vendors. The demand outsourced to the taxi vendors is kept to a certain range to assure quality of service. Demand in Madison also varies considerably based on when the University is in session and on the weather. This presents some additional operational challenges.

### ***Paratransit Operations***

Madison Metro provides some ADA paratransit trips using its own vehicles and drivers. Besides the ADA paratransit services Metro provides, Metro contracts with three, or sometimes four, outside vendors for ADA trips. History has demonstrated to management that a level of competition and multiple providers has reduced the risk for Metro. Metro operates the eligibility, call center and scheduling functions.

Badger Cab is the only taxi company among the vendors providing paratransit trips. (There are three other cab companies in Madison.) Badger Cab provides about 25 percent of all ADA paratransit trips in Madison, which is equivalent to about one-third of the outside contracted work. The other vendors are contracted on an hourly basis; Badger Cab is the only vendor compensated on a flat per trip rate regardless of trip length. Badger in turn pays its drivers on a metered basis, which is what the drivers prefer. Badger uses standard sedan-type taxi vehicles, which means that the company does not serve persons who cannot easily transfer from a wheelchair to ride in a standard sedan.

Badger Cab is the only cab company in Madison that operates on a shared ride basis. The other cab companies offer only exclusive ride metered service, which is the typical taxi industry model. According to this model, passengers are picked up from their originating address and taken directly to their destination without any deviations. The customer pays a charge according to the taxi meter rates that are typically regulated by the local jurisdiction. Most taxi meter rates are strongly correlated to distance traveled; some meter rates also account for time spent in the cab.

The shared ride model of service allows Badger Cab's driver to pick up passengers in addition to the initial passenger; each of the additional passengers may have their own unique destinations. Thus, a variety of disassociated customers may be on the same taxi at the same time. Shared ride service allows Badger to quote lower rates to Madison Metro. This is largely due to Badger's ability to have Metro's riders co-mingled with other taxi riders in a totally integrated fashion. This shared ride model certainly presents its challenges: in their focus group, Metro drivers reported that some clients did not feel comfortable riding in the same taxi as Metro riders, although other customers were quite comfortable with Metro's riders and appreciated the lower shared ride fares. The shared ride service characteristic allows for a significantly lower cost for Metro than if Badger provided ADA services on an exclusive ride basis.

Consistent with Metro's wishes, Badger Cab proposed a flat rate charge to Metro regardless of trip length. This flat rate proposal had to take in account that the drivers were quite committed to their zone rate fare schedule. Badger analyzed trip activity and its flat rate proposal met the economic concerns of all parties. Had Badger been only willing to submit its standard zone rate fares to Metro, it is unlikely that Metro would have awarded a contract to Badger. Because the administrative cost to Metro to determine how to compensate each trip within a 64 square mile area with 300 zones would have been a burdensome administrative expense. The flat rate compromise seems to have worked for all parties involved. Members of the taxi driver focus group felt that the system works well for them and also made them work at being highly efficient.

Over the last decade, Madison Metro has continually increased the percentage of services contracted out to outside vendors. Approximately 20 percent of the contracted services are now provided by the taxi vendor, Badger Cab. This increase in taxi utilization has proven to be cost effective and allows the system maximum flexibility.



### ***Rider Focus Group Results***

Focus group participants had a distinct preference for Badger Cab over any other ADA paratransit vendor for several reasons. First, travel times with Badger Cab are more predictable than with the other ADA vendors, and the focus group participants liked the higher level of predictability. Second, riders believed that Badger's drivers were more considerate and more flexible than Metro's typical paratransit operators. Interviews with management and drivers indicated that Badger staff had a commitment to quality services for Metro's disabled passengers.

Customer surveys were performed in two small group sessions. Based on almost universal comments from the rider focus group participants concerning the reasons cited previously, they had a distinct preference for Badger Cab over the other vendors. Interviews with management and drivers from Badger Cab staff demonstrated a genuine commitment to serving Metro's customers at a very high service level. A small (not statistically significant) sample of Badger Cab riders also indicated rider savings of about 25 percent over metered cabs.

### ***Key Messages from Madison***

Metro implements its paratransit strategy with a strong customer service emphasis and a healthy dose of competition. This strategy helps them reduce costs and at the same time reduce the chances for service deficits. Their one taxi ADA paratransit vendor, Badger Cab, provides a significant level of service on a daily basis. Metro also uses the cab company to respond to last minute trip requests. With a flat rate per trip payment, the taxi contractor is certain of amount they will receive for each trip and the transit authority avoids the administrative burden of calculating variable per trip reimbursement amounts. Madison Metro management clearly understands that good service can only be accomplished by having very good relationships with its vendors. The extremely well qualified management staff at Madison Metro understands the cost benefits and the healthy competition that taxi utilization has on their system. They are also mindful of their commitment to high quality service to their customers and they continually monitor service outcomes to maintain high customer satisfaction.

### **Daytona Beach (Volusia County), Florida**

Volusia County in northeast Florida has a population just under ½ million people. The County has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, adding more than 20 percent of its current population this decade. Twenty percent of its population is classified as disabled, and twenty-two percent as elderly. The County covers an area of 1,432 square miles and is roughly the size of the State of Rhode Island. The County has a very unusual settlement pattern: all of its population centers are along the outer boundaries of the county with very little population in the center. The population centers are either on the extreme eastern end of the county next to the Atlantic Ocean or on the extreme western boundary near the St. Johns River, with no population centers in between. This unusual pattern means that many people have to travel across county to receive services, and that public transit finds it difficult to serve some people, particularly those living in the western part of the County, in the evening hours and on weekends.

Volusia County's transit system, headquartered in Daytona Beach, is called VOTRAN. VOTRAN provides transportation to all urban areas of the county with a fleet of fixed route buses, four trackless trolleys and 44 paratransit vehicles. VOTRAN's staff has grown to more than 200 employees, including drivers and mechanics. All city transit buses are accessible, and all VOTRAN drivers have special training in personal assistance. Additional service is provided through contracts. VOTRAN's key functions are creating policy and monitoring the operations of its transit services, all of which are contracted to the McDonald Transit Associates management company.

### ***Paratransit Operations***

The county's paratransit service is called VOTRAN **Gold Service**. VOTRAN, via the management company, runs its own fleet of county-owned vehicles, and provides much of the paratransit service on its own. It also sub-contracts with local lift-van and taxi companies to provide additional paratransit services. VOTRAN **Gold Service** is pre-scheduled, shared-ride, door-to-door, ADA transportation in which riders are picked up in either lift vans or taxicabs. Reservations are booked from one to seven days before the day of the trip, and service is provided within one hour of the requested pick-up time. VOTRAN Gold transports about 22,000 trips on a monthly basis and about 264,000 trips on an annual basis.

VOTRAN pays its taxi subcontractors the standard meter rate of \$2.20 for the first 1/10 mile then \$.20 each 1/10 mile. There is an additional \$0.50 fuel surcharge and \$1.00 additional for trips between 6 pm and 6 am. The per-trip average fare is about \$12.00. VOTRAN currently transports about 3,000 trips per year with taxicabs.

The Gold Service utilizes two taxicab companies as part of the Gold Service, Yellow Cab and Southern Komfort Cab. Southern Komfort is currently transporting over 80 percent of all taxicab paratransit trips. Unlike Madison, Houston, or San Francisco, in Daytona Beach a taxicab cannot be specifically requested, but knowledgeable riders know how to schedule in a manner that will produce a taxicab: they know that trip requests on nights, weekends, or from more remote locations are more likely to receive taxicabs. In fact, most riders knew how to set up a request that would result in a taxicab being sent. Several riders explained that, if one schedules a trip during the evening hours or a trip that involves a fringe geographic area, one is highly likely to receive a taxicab instead of a paratransit vehicle. That is especially true if a weekend trip request is for weekend hours or involves a fringe geographic area.

As Volusia County grows and becomes more developed, VOTRAN foresees taxicabs playing more of a role than they currently do. Low ridership in rural areas can often be served best and most cost-effectively by taxicab service. To this end, VOTRAN is actively recruiting more taxicab companies to service these remote areas.

## ***Focus Group Results***

**Quality of the taxi provided transportation.** The focus group participants were very satisfied with drivers from one of the participating taxi companies, Southern Komfort Taxi. They said drivers are friendly and punctual. Some mentioned that it is easy to become familiar with the drivers since it is a small company. Many persons in the focus group thought that service from the other taxi company has deteriorated over the years.

**When to use a taxi and when not to use it.** Unlike Madison, Houston, or San Francisco, in Daytona Beach a taxicab cannot be specifically requested, but, as explained above, knowledgeable riders know how to schedule in a manner that will produce a taxicab. Suggestions from individuals included the following:

- Use city buses whenever he can during the daytime.
- Use buses for anything on the main line, lift vans for destinations off the main line, and taxis for remote areas or at night.
- Use taxis at night.
- Use taxis when returning home at night. “I don’t feel like stopping other places on the way home.”
- Get a taxi if you miss your original ride due to a medical appointment running late.
- Use taxis when going out on weekend evenings.

### **Benefits of using taxis.**

- Personal nature of the service, more attention from driver.
- The fact that you generally ride alone, which gets you to your destination more quickly.
- Taxi drivers are very professional.

### **Disadvantages of using taxis.**

- The man said there were no disadvantages.
- One woman said the only disadvantage is if a less desirable taxi vendor shows up, then their drivers are usually not as dependable or as nice as drivers of the other vendor.

### **Comparison between taxis and other types of services.**

- Focus group participants stated that the service provide by one taxi vendor, Southern Komfort Taxi, was as good as the service provided by the paratransit lift vans.
- Focus group members felt that the other taxi vendor provided a lower quality of service than is available from the lift van.

### **Focus Group Recommendations for the Volusia County taxi program.**

- Leave it alone; it's fine the way it is.
- Eliminate the vendor with poorer service.
- VOTRAN should provide some training for taxi drivers.
- Put some accessible cabs on the road.

### ***Key Messages from Daytona Beach***

A well-run paratransit system that concentrates on executing the fundamentals, with an eye toward on-time performance, staff training, and continuous improvement, can often deliver a more satisfying product to the public than another service with all the new bells and whistles. The secret to success in transportation is the fulfillment of expectation levels: a high level of rider satisfaction is a clear demonstration of well-run services.

One prominent observation from this site was the taxi company's positive attitude. Taxi company managers have an enthusiastic and positive approach to paratransit taxi service; this approach is instilled in drivers and is a large part of the reason for the company's great relationship with VOTRAN. Both transit and taxi personnel confirmed that there is a great relationship among all parties involved. In other words, one of the main reasons for their program's success was the good relationship VOTRAN had with its vendors, and the healthy attitude that local independent contract taxicab drivers had toward transporting paratransit trips. The taxi contractor mentioned that taxi drivers are trained to understand paratransit trips can make up an important portion of their total trip portfolio. This fact contributes to the fact that the drivers and passengers have an excellent rapport.

It should be noted that, while VOTRAN does not allow users to directly request cab drivers be sent, many riders are knowledgeable enough about service patterns to know that, if they request a ride at a certain time and in a certain place, they are very likely to receive a taxicab for their trip.

### **San Francisco, California**

Many people who live and work in San Francisco are dedicated public transit users. The San Francisco Municipal Transit Authority (SFMTA or Muni) has provided paratransit services for more than 25 years. Besides creating policy and monitoring its subcontractors, SFMTA directly provides administrative services such as user certification, trip eligibility, and participation in oversight processes such as quality assurance, customer service, and user feedback.

SFMTA currently contracts with a paratransit broker, Veolia Transportation of Lombard, Illinois, to manage the transportation portion of their ADA program. Veolia contracts with van and taxi companies to provide the actual rides. ADA Access (for ambulatory persons) and Lift-Van (for persons who use wheelchairs) are pre-scheduled, ADA-compliant van services

providing door-to-door transportation. ADA Access and Lift-Van are both shared-ride services. Reservations are booked from one to seven days before the day of the trip, and service is provided within one hour of the requested pick-up time. This traditional paratransit service is currently contracted by Veolia to a company called Mobility Plus.

### ***Paratransit Operations***

SFMTA uses taxicabs on their paratransit service for ADA services and services beyond ADA requirements. For ADA paratransit services, Mobility Plus uses taxicabs to backup a large portion of its lift van service. The amount of backup trips varies daily, but can total well over 500 trips per week. In this program, the lift van contractor, Mobility Plus, decides whether or not to assign a taxi company to a specific trip.

For services beyond ADA requirements, SFMTA also offers a direct-to-the-public paratransit taxi, offered as a demand response curb-to-curb service. This is not an ADA service, but riders reported that it better meets their transportation needs than the ADA services. Riders on paratransit taxi service (which has no specific program name) are pre-certified and provided with a monthly budgeted allocation of taxi scrip, which can total as high as \$330.00 per month. The eligible users may call any taxicab company they choose, but two large companies (Yellow Cab and Luxor Cab) transport more than 80 percent of the taxicab paratransit trips.

SFMTA prohibits all taxicab companies and all taxicab drivers from refusing trip requests from disabled riders. To that end, many companies deploy a certain percentage of their fleet as wheelchair accessible taxicabs. There are more than 100 accessible taxicabs currently operating in San Francisco. Personal contacts with drivers demonstrated a driver population that was enthusiastic about their paratransit clients.

Due to San Francisco's relatively small size and hilly geography, taxicab transportation plays a much greater role in the daily lives of city residents than in many other cities. That dynamic is also reflected in the paratransit taxicab program. Many ADA-eligible paratransit riders consider taxi rides are more desirable than traditional services. In fact, one taxi vendor (Luxor Cab) is actually transporting more paratransit trips daily than the lift van paratransit vendor, Mobility Plus. Luxor takes from 800 to 1,000 paratransit trips daily while Mobility Plus averages about 750 trips per day. This practice benefits the transit authority, since the fully allocated cost of a trip on the traditional paratransit system is approximately \$40.00 while the same trip in a taxicab costs \$15.00 to \$18.00.

Another unique aspect of SFMTA's paratransit program is the fact that all contractors work closely with a consumer advisory group called the 38-member Paratransit Coordinating Council (PCC) in planning and monitoring door-to-door van and taxi services. The PCC is comprised of van and taxi consumers, representatives of agencies serving seniors and individuals with disabilities, transportation providers, and government entity representatives.

## ***Focus Group Results***

**Quality of the taxi provided transportation.** The riders were mostly satisfied with the services. But they made comments about needing better and more frequent training for taxicab drivers. Sensitivity skills were one of the issues they wanted to see improvement from the drivers. Most felt comfortable riding in cabs and felt that cabs were relatively clean and comfortable.

### **When to use a taxi and when not to use it.**

- Individuals who lived near bus routes take the bus when their destination is near the same route.
- Several riders preferred a lift van when going to an unsafe neighborhood or in crowded situations. They felt less vulnerable with larger vehicle in unsafe area. Visibility offered by the Lift Van makes it easier to return home from a crowded venue, when they might not make the connection with their cab driver so easily. At night, they felt safer in a large vehicle with a well-trained driver.
- All said they never use a taxicab on Friday nights or when conventions are in town.
- Some avoid taxis for long trips, since they feared that the round-trip cost could be more than their monthly taxi scrip budget.
- Other suggestions from individuals included the following:
  - Use a taxi to go some place for the first time as a way to learn details about the location. The cabs sometimes can get into the location more easily than a larger vehicle. One blind individual reported that when she is alone with the cab driver, she can ask him questions as a way to learn details about the location. Once having acquired this knowledge, she uses a lift van or a bus.
  - If you have a disability that affects you more acutely on certain days, use taxis when the disability makes bus travel difficult.
  - If getting in and out of the lift van is uncomfortable, such as on steep hills, use a taxi instead of the lift van.
  - If other transportation falls through, taxis are a great backup plan, since taxis can be accessed on a demand response basis.

### **Benefits of using taxis.**

- Independence due to the existence of such a service.
- Convenience of access and flexibility of taxicab service, especially in the demand/response aspect.
- Ability to contact a specific company, even a specific driver.
- Privacy of travel, which includes receiving personal service from driver.
- Simplification of travel; taxis usually take you directly to destination, without stops for other riders, or having to transfer, as in a bus or train.
- The lift van is sometimes late and crowded with other riders.
- Unlike a city bus where you may or may not find seats, taxi paratransit guarantees that you will have a seat.

### **Disadvantages of using taxis.**

- Inconsistent level of service from drivers overall.
- Lack of driver sensitivity by some drivers, including rude behavior.
- Erratic response times from certain companies.
- Many drivers speak English poorly, and/or have poor communication skills.
- Drivers are independent contractors, and companies can't control drivers' behavior.
- Some cabs are small and difficult to access with larger wheelchairs or with service animals.
- Inability to get a cab on a Friday or during other busy periods.

**Comparison between taxis and other types of services.** The majority felt that, although there are reasons for using other transit options from time to time, there was really no comparison: the taxicab service was preferable to any other form of transportation available.

- Taxis are more convenient to use.
- Taxis get you there more quickly.
- Taxis provide more privacy and personal service.
- Lift Van drivers are more highly trained and provide a more professional service than many taxicab drivers, but cannot give the personal service of a taxicab driver.
- Buses and rail are excellent, but to take those services, one has to live near a bus stop or rail station, and the bus or train must stop near the rider's destination. In other words, the opportunities to use those two excellent services are limited for many disabled persons.

### **Recommendations for San Francisco's taxi program.**

- Upgrade training for drivers.
- Establish recertification or renewed license processes for drivers to assure they have received the latest training techniques.
- Upgrade the paratransit ID Card to a debit-style card.
- Build accessible taxicabs in such a way as to accommodate different styles of wheelchairs.

### ***Key Messages from San Francisco***

In San Francisco, independent contractor taxi drivers understand the value that paratransit trips can add to their overall portfolio of business, and the transit authority program allows those drivers to achieve real benefits from paratransit services. These are two key building blocks of a successful paratransit taxi program. Each taxicab driver that was interviewed reported that the work provided by the paratransit taxi program was the type of work that continued year-round, was not subject to seasonal change, and was not affected by downturns in the overall economy. This resulted in a very positive attitude on behalf of these drivers when a taxi paratransit call was dispatched. This positive attitude usually resulted in good service to the user, and the users often kept lists, with contact information, of drivers that they preferred.

Many of the taxi drivers in San Francisco are enthusiastic about their paratransit clients. Many drivers are contacted directly by users ordering trips, and some drivers reported they carry so many paratransit users that they sometimes go all day without being dispatched to a conventional taxicab call.

## **Houston (Harris County), Texas**

Houston is the third largest City in the United States. With a service area of 750 square miles, an annual MetroLift ridership of about 1.3 million ADA passengers and 19,000 eligible riders, Houston's MetroLift paratransit Program is the largest program examined in this study. In Houston, every city bus, train, shuttle vehicle, and paratransit vehicle is accessible, as are the 160 contracted taxicabs, according to METROLift's ADA Administrator.

### ***Paratransit Operations***

Houston's MetroLift is the only program examined that manages both a typical ADA paratransit contractor and a typical ADA taxi vendor under the same contract, providing a unique opportunity to evaluate services and costs under the same contractual operating specifications. In addition, Houston Metro manages the eligibility, call center and dispatch functions. They also require a staff member of each contractor to be present in the Houston Metro dispatch center. The operating characteristics and services of the two provider types are identical. The paratransit subcontractor operates lift vans supplied by METRO and the taxi company offers accessible taxicab minivans with rear loading ramps.

Yellow Cab's fleet of 160 accessible taxicabs used for MetroLift is believed to be the largest such taxi fleet in the United States. Yellow Cab Company, the ADA taxi vendor, provided over 550,000 annual one way trips in 2007 alone. Approximately 45 percent of the total ADA paratransit services are provided by the taxi vendor.

Metro manages many of the facets of the operation with its own staff. Rider eligibility, information/referral, call center, radio communications, and dispatching functions are all performed by Metro staff at their main office. In addition, Metro supplies the vehicles for its paratransit contractor. Metro does not provide the accessible taxis for Yellow Cab.

The Yellow Cab accessible taxis are assigned routes in the same fashion as the paratransit contractor and are also compensated on an hourly basis just as the paratransit contractor. They have, as expected, quoted different hourly rates. This is one of the only such systems in the US where the taxi vendor is operating on an hourly basis and is being dispatched by the Transit Authority. The taxi vendor and the paratransit vendor each have a manager stationed in the Transit Authority's office if intervention is necessary between the Transit Authority dispatch staff and the vendor's driver.

Houston MetroLift also manages a service above and beyond ADA required service. Operated by several taxicab companies, this service, called the MetroLift Service Plus or MSP,



allows the rider to call the taxi vendor directly for service. MSP is a direct-to-the-public paratransit taxi, offered as a demand response curb-to-curb service. This is not an ADA service, but many riders find that it better meets their transportation needs. Riders on this program are pre-certified and have the ability to call any one of five different taxicab companies that participate in the MSP program. With distance-based fares, these trips may well cost the rider significantly more than MetroLift service but offer greater flexibility to the rider. The user who wants to ride in the MSP (beyond-ADA) program has a choice of which company to use for their trips. Metro feels that this flexibility promotes competition and lets the rider go with whomever is supplying the best service. Plus, MSP saves money for Metro as opposed to a standard paratransit trip. On the MSP service, the customers pay the first \$1.00, METROLift then pays up to \$8.00 of the fare, and the customer pays any amount over a \$9.00 meter fare. Metro's fully allocated operating cost per paratransit trip is \$20.86, but Metro's average MSP trip subsidy is \$5.08. (One reason that the MSP subsidy is relatively low is that riders usually schedule taxicabs when trips are relatively short in distance due to the fact that the rider pays any amount over \$9.00, which would be the case for longer trips.)

### ***Cost Comparisons of Alternative Services***

Houston's MetroLift program provides a wonderful opportunity to provide an analysis of services and cost both on an hourly basis and a per trip basis. Most often, an analysis of two different types of service providers requires a number of assumptions regarding the service specifications. In Houston's case, both taxi and paratransit providers are operating under the exact same contract and contract specifications. Since Metro provides many of the operational functions of the organization, one can focus on the hourly cost of operating the vehicles for each of the two vendors and then add back the cost of the vehicles for the paratransit provider in order to obtain highly reliable hourly costs for the two operators.

In the Houston MetroLift situation of essentially identical services and operating procedures, there is a very strong basis for considering cost differences between paratransit and taxi operations. The fully allocated cost per hour for the paratransit van service is \$42.65 and the fully allocated cost per hour for the ADA taxi service is \$32.10. The paratransit van cost of \$42.65 is nearly 33 percent than the ADA taxi paratransit service. If this figure is adjusted by the differential in productivity per hour of 1.74 passengers per hour for paratransit vans versus the passengers per hour figure of 1.61 for taxis in ADA service, the 7 percent differential in productivity would still result in a 26 percent savings for taxi provided paratransit services for this program. Based on the differential in bonus payments to the paratransit vendor, this productivity differential is largely already accounted for in the higher bonuses paid to the paratransit vendor. Considering the productivity differences and the bonuses, the differential in costs remains nearly a 30 percent savings. This is a sizeable savings to Houston Metro. The overall result is that the ADA paratransit service provided by the accessible taxis in Houston are both more cost effective and also more satisfactory to the riders in terms of customer service and sensitivity.

Houston Metro also uses other strategies to reduce overall paratransit costs. It offers a "premium above ADA service" to ADA eligible individuals, the MetroLift Subsidy Program

(MSP). This premium service offers greater flexibility for the rider at a higher than ADA cost and at a lower per cost trip for Metro.

In a further effort to reduce ADA paratransit costs, for MetroLift riders who were deemed eligible before 2008, rides are free of charge for all of Metro's fixed route services. Ride shifting from ADA service to mainline routes has a net savings of close to \$20.00 per trip for Metro.

MetroLift is also expanding its Travel Training activities. In addition to typical travel training, more community outreach is taking place. Metro also provides free passes to Special Education teachers to enable them to take students out on Life Skill Classes. This activity provides an orientation to mainline Metro services and reduces the demand for typical ADA paratransit services.

### ***Focus Group Results***

**Quality of the taxi-provided transportation.** METROLift usage ranged from 45 to 90 percent of all trips for these focus group participants. Every focus group attendee that said that he or she preferred, by a wide margin, the METROLift taxicab service over any of the alternative services: they liked the pre-arranged taxi more than the service provided by the demand response taxi (MSP) or the paratransit vans.

- The majority of the focus group members thought the METROLift service as a whole was very good or good.
- All respondents thought that services provided by a METROLift taxicab were very good, which was a higher rating than for the MSP service.
- All felt the METROLift taxis arrived on a more timely basis than the MSP service.
- One person mentioned the need for better taxicab seating configurations to accommodate the disabled. She complained about many cabs not being big enough to accommodate her unusually large wheelchair. (This issue was also raised in San Francisco.)
- Most were fairly satisfied with the reservations process, though several mentioned long wait times when scheduling trips.
- Most riders felt the reservations staff was generally knowledgeable, though some staff were not and needed better training.

### **When to use a taxi and when not to use it.**

- Use the bus system if you live near bus routes and when your destination is also on that route.
- Do not use the bus system if your destination requires a transfer.
- Use taxis when going to an entertainment event.
- Use the MSP taxi for shorter trips.
- Use MSP when you needed a ride on the spur of the moment. In fact, the young man at the focus group called a cab to pick him up to go back to work when the session was approaching its close.

**Benefits of using taxis.** The focus group participants listed these benefits in order of importance:

1. There is more dignity in this mode of travel. Riders feel more like general population.
2. Personal nature of the service, more attention from driver.
3. The fact that you generally ride alone, which gives more privacy and gets you to your destination more quickly.
4. Can communicate with driver directly on MSP program.
5. Lift van is sometimes late, and crowded with other riders.
6. Lift van process sometimes creates a spectacle, which is embarrassing in front of friends and neighbors.
7. Ramp taxi drivers are just as professional as lift van drivers.

**Disadvantages of using taxis.** The focus group participants listed these disadvantages in order of importance:

1. While METROLift taxi drivers are excellent, many MSP drivers need to be re-trained.
2. Some MSP drivers lack sensitivity toward disabled people.
3. The MSP service is very expensive since Metro pays only \$8.00.
4. Some taxis are uncomfortable to ride in and some are not properly configured for larger wheelchairs.
5. One rider felt that she couldn't trust the MSP service to be reliable.

**Comparison between taxis and other types of services.**

- The METROLift taxicab service was preferable to the METROLift van.
- One rider said that the taxi service was 90 percent better than the vans, not because of the drivers, but because of the nature of the service model.
- There was a stigma involved in riding the lift van, but none with the ramp taxi.
- As good as the Lift Van drivers are, they cannot provide the personal service offered by a taxicab.

**Recommendations to improve paratransit services in Houston.**

- Upgrade the training for drivers for the MSP service, including sensitivity training.
- Require taxi companies to acquire or convert more vehicles that could accommodate larger or more unusually shaped wheelchairs.
- Ask manufacturers to create accessible vehicles in their factories.
- Create wider wheelchair beds for cabs with wheelchair ramps.
- Purchase vehicles with more comfortable and larger back seats.

***Key Messages from Houston***

The transit authority views the delivery of paratransit services as one of providing a high level of service to their customers, and local taxicab companies have adapted their delivery

model to meet evolving community needs. Staff at MetroLift were highly experienced and motivated individuals and were clearly committed to high quality service. Focus group comments indicate that the ADA taxi service is well received by its riders, and an analysis of respective costs indicates that the taxi service is less costly than identical services provided by a paratransit operator.

# 4

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL TAXI PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS**

### **KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL TAXI PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS**

There are significant commonalities among cities that have successful taxi paratransit programs, and also among cities that did not report successful use of taxi paratransit services. This Chapter briefly discusses key factors affecting the success of the utilization of taxis in paratransit programs.

The key components of successful services seem to be these:

- A shared vision of service and quality among transit authority and taxi operator personnel.
- A commitment and commitment to quality services by taxi companies.
- A good working relationship among all parties and stakeholders involved.
- A facilitation of competition among paratransit providers by the Transit Authorities.
- Close attention paid to driver training and regulation issues.

In an interview with Cal Marsella, General Manager of the Regional Transportation District (the public transit authority) in Denver, Colorado, Mr. Marsella summed up the success factors for ADA taxi paratransit services in the following terms:

“The success stories tend to have certain characteristics, starting with the taxicab companies having good relationships with not only the contracting agency, but also with their own driver fleets. Next, the compensation provided to both the taxi company and to the taxicab driver should be fair, equitable, and structured to encourage participation. It’s also important that the agency contract with more than one taxi company. This dynamic will not only create competition between companies, but will also insure that the user has a choice of which company to ride with. Lastly, it helps when the taxicab companies provide extra training to those drivers that will participate in the paratransit service.”

### **Good Relationships Are Critical**

Taxi operators should also have a good working relationship with their drivers, customers, and the community. The skill/mind set necessary for a good working relationship

with the transit authorities should translate into similar good working relationships with the other partners. Efforts to develop good working relationships with the transit authority have to be reciprocated by the transit authority. Past problems have often made transit authorities suspicious of this relationship if fraud or other issues have tainted past experiences. (Poor experiences can sometimes continue to strain relationships for years after they occur.) These relationships must be founded on the principle of mutual benefit to all the stakeholders. If there is no appreciation for the mutual benefits, there will be limited opportunity for taxi paratransit involvement.

A good pricing system is needed so that the drivers will make money and will be paid on an equitable basis. For example, some companies pay their driver a flat fee for each trip taken, while the transit authority is paying the taxi company a mileage fee. That is not equitable for the driver, and will discourage drivers from participating. Some taxi companies are so concerned about the independent contractor issue (and are so afraid of how the IRS perceives the company/driver relationship) that they fail to properly educate their taxicab drivers on the monetary benefits of conveying paratransit trips.

### **Driver Training Should be Integrated into Other Considerations**

Tony Ciullo of Southern Komfort Cab in Daytona provided the following statement: “We have a great attitude toward this work that we instill in our drivers. We totally understand the value of this work to our success as a business.” John Lazar of San Francisco’s Luxor Cab said: “We treat ADA paratransit service as a valued and important part of our company’s business. This concept is taught and ingrained into our drivers to the point that our entire driver roster values the opportunity to take paratransit trips. Since the driver is paid the metered rate, since the average trip is \$15.00 to \$18.00, and since the drivers are compensated immediately upon cashiering, the entire system is both rider and driver friendly.” Lazar also said that the following best practices would help other taxi-provided paratransit services around the country: strong driver education, emphasis on a positive personal philosophy, and acceptance of all people, despite differences in age, race, ethnicity, language, and culture. Finally, do not make this type of trip an economic hardship for the driver.

### **Transit Authorities Should Strive to Contract with More than One Taxicab Company**

Look at the success stories: Houston has 5 taxi companies involved, Daytona has 2, Denver has 3, and San Francisco has every taxi company in town on their paratransit program. Competition ensues; the rider calls the company of their choice, and the best companies (based on driver service and behavior) end up getting the bulk of the business. Note that in San Francisco survey, although there are 33 different cab companies and about 6 or 7 large companies, 80 percent of the paratransit trips are covered by two companies that are seen as providing the best services.

If the transit authority sees the mutual benefit of having taxi paratransit services as part of their service, they can facilitate competition by formatting Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for paratransit services in such a way as to promote proposals from taxi operators. Enlightened RFPs would include an appreciation of taxi/driver compensation levels essential for sufficient driver involvement, minimizing paper work for both the company and driver, and processing payments in a timely fashion. Inherent in successfully developing these RFPs is understanding that taxi operations are primarily based on meter rate compensation. It is true that some communities have zone fares, but these communities are the exception. If the transit authority develops an RFP that uses some other reimbursement mechanism, they will need to “do the numbers” to be sure that the numbers work for both the taxi company and taxi drivers. This may include establishing a percentage of overhead to be retained by the taxi company. Financial incentives are essential to quality outcomes. These RFP criteria and hence incentives will certainly depend on the demographics of the community.

Service incentives in RFPs might be best structured consistent with the operational benefits already enumerated. These would include:

- Same day service,
- 24/7/365 (after hour service) availability,
- peak period coverage,
- service to hard to reach areas,
- long/short trips (depending on the circumstances),
- “guaranteed ride home,”
- reducing trip denials,
- serving emergencies,
- breakdown coverage, and
- a system to respond to “Where is my ride?” calls from customers

Communities that have extensive taxi paratransit involvement seem to understand the “taxi dynamic” and what it takes to facilitate competition. **The transit authority bears the primary responsibility of understanding how to make this “key variable” work.**

## **A Shared Vision and Commitment to Quality Service is Needed**

This responsibility falls mainly on the taxi company and, in turn, their drivers. The transit authority can certainly help facilitate this key variable by assisting with driver training, streamlining regulations, and enhanced communication systems. The preponderant burden however, remains with the ownership or management of the taxi company.

There are two primary facets to this shared vision and commitment to quality service. One facet is **the taxi company’s appreciation that taxi paratransit services can be a financially attractive segment of their business.** A second underlying facet seems to be that the ownership or management of the taxi company feels that **the paratransit rider deserves quality services.** Neither of these two facets of this key variable is sufficient; both need to be recognized and implemented.

To effectuate this philosophy, the taxi company has to implement a number of strategies, including:

1. Develop and implement extensive and meaningful driver training.
2. Structure driver compensation at levels sufficient to effectuate quality outcomes.
3. Process driver compensation in a timely fashion.
4. Create high standards for service.
5. Monitor service outcomes.
6. Follow up on complaints.
7. Remove drivers from service that do not meet quality standards.
8. Build positive relationships with their customers, the transit authority, and the public at large.

Due to the independent contractor nature of the typical company/independent driver relationship, taxi operations present a more complex set of variables than a typical company/employee relationship. Hence, the above strategies have to be extremely well thought out and communicated clearly.

## **A QUICK LISTING OF KEY POINTS**

### **Taxi Companies Need A Shared Vision and Commitment to Quality Services**

- A commitment of the owner/manager to provide high quality services to ADA paratransit customers.
- An appreciation by the taxi owner/manager that ADA services can be a financial beneficial portion of their business.
- A sense that this ADA service will be of benefit to the rider, the community at large, and to the company.
- Develop and implement extensive and meaningful driver training.
- Structure driver compensation at levels sufficient to effectuate quality outcomes.
- Process driver compensation in a timely fashion.
- Create high standards for service.
- Monitor service outcomes.
- Follow up on complaints.
- Remove drivers from service if they do not meet quality standards.
- Build positive relationships with their customers, the transit authorities and the public at large.

### **A Good Working Relationship among all Parties Involved is Needed**

- Good working relationship between transit authorities and taxi companies.
- Good working relationships between taxi companies and their drivers.



- Good working relationship between taxi companies and their customers and communities.
- Mutual benefits for all stakeholders.

### **Transit Authorities Need to Facilitate Competition**

- Work with multiple taxi providers.
- Allow riders to choose their provider.

### **Close Attention Must Be Paid to Driver Training and Regulation Issues**

- Additional training for taxi drivers.
- Make sure taxi drivers are in compliance with regulations.

# 5

## **BENEFITS FROM TAXI PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS**

Taxi paratransit programs can create win-win situations for all parties involved, but this will not be possible without contributions from a wide variety of stakeholders. What can be done to make this work? What can one do to take advantage of these benefits? This chapter describes benefits that taxi-provided paratransit programs bring to the communities and what is required to maintain these benefits. Successful taxi paratransit programs create benefits to a very wide range of stakeholders: transit authorities, taxi companies, taxi drivers, and the riders themselves.

### **BENEFITS TO TRANSIT AUTHORITIES**

Earlier sections of this report discussed the benefits and problems of taxi-provided paratransit programs. Some transit authorities had concerns about using taxis in their paratransit program: they either include taxis in their service model as a last resort or completely exclude taxis from their services. Other transit authorities wanted to increase the taxi involvement and just could not get enough of taxi business for their operation. Successful programs demonstrated how communities overcame some of the initial problems and built strong working relationship among all parties involved.

#### **Cost Savings**

Transit authorities that have been using taxis for their ADA paratransit program point out one of the significant advantages is that of **cost savings**. With all things being equal, it is reasonable to assume any transit authority would be interested in delivering their services with maximum cost efficiency. As discussed in this report, using taxis can be a great way to reduce overall paratransit costs. Some communities have seen cost savings of 30 percent or more in ADA paratransit trips provided through taxi contracts. In particular, when taxi services are used for ADA paratransit trips and also some of the beyond ADA services where the riders bear a greater proportion of the costs of the trips, the cost savings to transit authorities become quite significant.

## Increased Service Flexibility and Quality

Another major benefit of using taxis for paratransit programs is that of the potential for **increased service quality**. Many transit officials reported that taxis allowed them to serve their clients better. Taxis can supplement transit authorities by taking last minute requests, serving hard-to-reach areas, covering off/peak time rides, and filling in for vehicle breakdowns. All of these features allow transit authorities to respond to their riders promptly, reliably, and conveniently. Several transit authorities indicated taxi-provided paratransit program improve their image of good customer service.

## Key Considerations for Transit Authorities

The following kinds of issues should be explored for each locality to determine (a) if a taxi paratransit program is appropriate or (b) how an existing program might be improved.

- **How are payments to taxi companies structured? Are taxi drivers happy with the payment method?** Communities where taxis primarily take short trips would welcome flat fee service. However, many taxi drivers perceive meter rate as a fair business deal. Others may prefer to receive payment by hourly rate or mileage basis. Contractors should be asked which method they prefer and it should be determined which payment structure would work best for the transit authority, administratively and financially.
- **Have the training modules available to paratransit drivers been offered to taxi drivers?** Some properties raised concerns about low quality of taxi service and lack of training. If training materials are readily available for paratransit drivers, these materials should be used for the taxi drivers who are ready to work with paratransit clients. By arranging training events, it can also be an opportunity for transit authorities to explain the service standards and expectations to taxi drivers.
- **Will taxi drivers be compensated for time spent for additional training?** Taxi drivers would rather spend their time on income-producing activities: this generally means driving rather than attending a meeting. Make sure taxi drivers are compensated for their time if they are required to attend training.
- **Have conversations with taxi companies been initiated about concerns regarding taxi paratransit customers?** As long as the contract brings good revenue for them, the taxi industry should appreciate the paratransit riders. Keeping up open communication channels with taxis help transit authorities evaluate the process. With fair business deals, it should not be necessary to cajole taxi operators to work with transit authorities.
- **Is there more than one taxi company to provide services?** There are advantages to working with multiple contractors: transit authorities will have a better sense of productivity and performance across providers. If multiple providers who meet service and quality criteria cannot be currently found, ways to help them qualify as contractors should be developed.

- **Are incentives provided for taxi drivers who take paratransit calls?** In addition to standard payment procedures (such as the typical meter rate fee), in certain communities taxi drivers receive extra monetary rewards such as pick-up fees that might be \$2.00 for ambulatory riders and \$5.00 for wheel chair users. From the taxi drivers' point of view, the meter rate does not distinguish between paratransit clients and other riders. However, when offered extra cash for taking paratransit trips, cab drivers have an extra motivation to serve paratransit riders. Transit authorities should still save money even after paying the extra cash to taxis due to the significant cost discrepancy between standard paratransit costs and taxi provided paratransit costs.

## **BENEFITS TO TAXI COMPANIES**

### **Multiple Kinds of Benefits for Companies**

Taxi company representatives provided several key perspectives. First, it is important to remember that, just like any other corporation, revenue generation is the major goal of the taxi company. Second, to taxi company owners, their customers are not just the passengers but also their taxi drivers. Having a large number of taxi drivers who routinely take paratransit trip requests within their company can only mean one thing: a certain portion of their cab drivers are almost guaranteed steady work for them. Third, taxi company owners who understand the nature of paratransit trips from business standpoint are likely to look for an opportunity to work with transit authorities. Paratransit trips are one way of increasing the company's trip portfolio, just like any other types of rides. As one respondent, a prominent leader in the taxi business, reported, "The key has been to get the local government and the transit authority to recognize that the taxi program needs support rather than mandates." Taxi companies will need to make an effort to create a working relationship with the transit authorities and take advantage of joint success.

### **Key Considerations for Taxi Companies**

The following kinds of issues should be explored to determine (a) if a taxi paratransit program could be a viable business opportunity or (b) how an existing program might be improved.

- **Will taxi operators get paid for the administrative work that will be required?** Taxi operators can ask transit authorities to pay for additional administrative time and build this cost to the contract.
- **Who is going to be responsible for driver training?** Taxi operators can work with transit authorities to initiate training events.
- **Will the taxi drivers paid for their time spent on the training?** Taxi operators should ensure their drivers that time spent in training will be compensated.

- **How would the general public view accessible cabs if these vehicles are acquired as part of the regular vehicle fleet?** Acquiring accessible vehicles could be a great way to publicize a taxi company for the work it does as a community partner. Accessible vehicles create an image that is more user-friendly than the average taxicab. Non-paratransit passengers are likely to also appreciate the features of accessible vehicles.
- **Is the taxi company ready for all the work needed to get into the paratransit business?** That's a question that only the taxi operator can answer. It may require some initial work, such as training events, writing proposals, and studying contractual terms, but the work required can lead to a very steady, long run income generating relationship. Most importantly, taxi operators need to have a vision that they can make such relationships work. Communications with the transit authorities are needed to assess overall program performance; communications with the drivers are essential to make sure that all of them are satisfied with the work they do. Some drivers may be reluctant to provide paratransit services but others will enjoy taking paratransit riders. The taxi operator's job as a leader is very important: great leadership from taxi companies has helped to create productive and rewarding working relationships among all stakeholders in local paratransit services.

## **BENEFITS TO TAXI DRIVERS**

### **Expanded Opportunities for Drivers**

Paratransit trips are not very different from typical demand-responsive taxi trips. Paratransit trips may be pre-scheduled or repetitive, but riders still pay the agreed-upon amount for the taxi service as defined in the contract. In several communities, some taxi drivers are so popular among the paratransit riders that the drivers' daily schedule is routed 100 percent by paratransit requests. Some paratransit riders schedule their trips around their favorite taxi driver's availability. Some taxi drivers who enjoy taking this type of request because it is a steady income source. Some taxi cab drivers prefer to serve paratransit riders because it is less unpredictable: they know that a typical paratransit trip is not a late night pick-up from the bar. Taxicab services are very much appreciated, according to riders.

Communities that have successful taxi paratransit programs tend to hire drivers very selectively. They may hire only very experienced and qualified drivers for this work. They may have a more rigorous customer service process defined by the contract. All of these efforts yield to positive results: more business opportunities and higher quality services. Most professional drivers would be happy to bring more revenue and to increase their customers' satisfaction. Working with paratransit program can also be a great way to get formal/informal training about a number of customer service issues and at the same time secure a steady workload.

## Key Considerations for Taxi Drivers

For taxi drivers thinking about potential paratransit work, these questions may be of interest:

- **Where can drivers get more information about taxi paratransit programs?** There are many resources available to drivers, including brochures about taking individuals with special needs or paratransit customers. Drivers can also ask their taxi companies owners about these programs and ask for further guidance from them. Easter Seals Project Action provides resources such as *The Americans with Disabilities Act and You: Frequently Asked Questions on Taxicab Service* and *The Taxicab Pocket Guide*. These documents are available on Easter Seals' web site at [http://projectaction.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ESPA\\_taxi\\_resources](http://projectaction.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ESPA_taxi_resources).
- **What can drivers learn from training?** Training programs highlight the skills and ideas needed in order to work with paratransit riders and discuss them to the taxi company management. These skills may be a value even to those drivers who do not sign up for paratransit programs because one never knows who will be the next passenger and what kinds of assistance they may need.

## BENEFITS TO RIDERS

Paratransit riders who use taxis typically use multiple travel modes. While riders in some communities are not able to choose which mode they use, riders in other communities have opportunities to choose their own travel modes. As reported by participants in the focus groups conducted for this study, nearly all focus group members preferred taxis instead of other paratransit options. The riders who chose taxis over standard paratransit services mentioned several benefits. Riders like the direct and exclusive ride and appreciate having this kind of option. Their wait time may be shorter and taxis are typically very responsive for trips scheduled at the last minute. While service quality does vary across drivers, riders generally like the personalized service that taxi drivers can offer.

### A Typical Focus Group Perspective

In San Francisco, focus groups of riders ranked the key benefits of using taxis for ADA paratransit services as follows:

1. Personal independence due to the existence of such a service.
2. Convenience of access, especially in terms of the typically quick response to a ride request.
3. Flexibility of taxicab service, also especially in the demand/response aspect.
4. Ability to contact a specific company, even a specific driver.
5. Privacy of travel, which includes receiving personal service from the driver.

6. Simplification of travel — the rider is usually taken directly to his or her destination without stops for other riders or having to transfer, as is common with trips by bus or train.

## **Some Personal Stories**

In **San Francisco**, a blind paratransit rider — an independent lady who is very active both civically and socially, attending many local functions and events — enjoys using Metro's lift van paratransit service and feels comfortable with this service for trips to familiar places. She uses the paratransit taxicab service for places new to her, as she needs to check out the lay of the land, the entrances, exits, curbs, doors, ramps, railings, walls, and any other aspects of the venue she must navigate. Were she to use the lift van for unfamiliar destinations, she would face two problems:

- The size of the van often prevents it from getting close to the building entrance.
- The multi-loaded nature of the lift-van often precludes the driver from providing her with much individual attention at the drop off point.

Therefore, when she travels somewhere for the first time, she uses the taxi paratransit service. In this manner, she gets as close as possible to the main entrance. She also uses the driver as an information source. He can describe the obstacles she may encounter on her journey into the building. For this user, the service provided by the taxicab is much more than just a trip from here to there.

In **Daytona Beach**, a rider who is a retired veteran enjoys his regular Thursday night trip to the VFW. Thursday is Spaghetti Night and this gentleman enjoys his plate of pasta while visiting with his friends, listening to music, and trading stories. At first, he utilized the VOTRAN ADA paratransit lift van service, but he found that the vehicle for his trip home never showed up at the same time because the driver's route had several pickups. Sometimes the van would arrive before the gentleman was ready to leave, which left him feeling that he had not enjoyed his most important social occasion of his week. After explaining his situation to the taxi company and the drivers, he found that they could more easily accommodate his request for a specific return time. By switching to the taxicab service, he now was able to enjoy his evening and bid a proper farewell to his friends. The change has improved this gentleman's quality of life.

# 6

## CONCLUSION

### FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

When asked about future taxi usage for paratransit services, respondents in 12 out of the 29 cities contacted for this study predicted that their communities were likely to increase the taxi use or to have strong continued taxi involvement. Respondents in another 14 cities indicated they would continue to have just about the same amount of taxi services as they do now. Only a few respondents thought that taxi paratransit in their cities use would decline in the future. Some of those persons who expected declines expected that improved dispatching technology will advance the efficiency of the traditional paratransit program, thus requiring less reliance on taxi paratransit services. Others who predicted same level of taxi involvement stated that paratransit drivers' union would not allow their transit authority to increase contractual work with outside vendors such as taxicab companies. Overall, many transit authority officials forecast an increase in taxi paratransit work. Even those persons who predicted less or same amount of work in the future did so based on rationales other than dissatisfaction with service quality of the taxi paratransit services.

### SUCCESS FACTORS

The key components of successful ADA taxi paratransit services seem to be these:

- A shared vision of service and quality among transit authority and taxi operator personnel.
- A commitment to quality services by taxi companies.
- A good working relationship among all parties and stakeholders involved.
- A facilitation of competition among paratransit providers by the transit authorities.
- Close attention paid to driver training and regulation issues.

Communities that can create these kinds of conditions can achieve great benefits by including taxis as part of their strategic mix of cost-effective ADA paratransit services. Communities that have extensive taxi paratransit involvement seem to understand the “taxi dynamic” and what it takes to facilitate competition. The transit authority typically bears the responsibility to make this key variable work.



**APPENDIX A:**

**COMMUNITIES**

**WHERE INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED**

## Appendix A: Communities Where Interviews Were Conducted

<i># of interviews</i>	<i>Cities</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	Bremerton, WA Boston, MA Chicago Suburb, IL Des Moines, IA King County, WA Louisville, KY Palm Beach, FL Pittsburgh, PA Pomona Valley, CA Portland, OR Salt Lake City, UT <b>Cincinnati, OH*</b> <b>Dallas, TX*</b> <b>Miami, FL*</b> <b>Minneapolis, MN*</b> <b>PeeDee Region, SC*</b> <b>Philadelphia, PA*</b> <b>Cleveland, OH*</b>	* No taxi-provided ADA services at this time
	<b>18 cities</b>	<b>18 interviews</b>
2	Denver, CO Kansas City, MO Madison, WI El Paso, TX Honolulu, HI San Francisco, CA Baltimore, MD Daytona Beach, FL <b>San Jose, CA*</b>	* No taxi-provided ADA services at this time
	<b>9 cities</b>	<b>18 interviews</b>
3	Arlington, VA Houston, TX	
	<b>2 cities</b>	<b>6 interviews</b>
0	Norfolk, VA Detroit, MI	Contacted but no interview was completed due to lack of taxi use
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>42 interviews</b>

**APPENDIX B:**

**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR  
TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

## Appendix B:

### Survey Questionnaire for Transit Authority

1. At this point in time, ADA paratransit services in your area are.....

**(Choose the one answer that best describes your situation.)**

Your Answer \_\_\_\_\_

- a) Operated solely by the transit authority. *(If 'a', go to question 2)*
- b) Operated by both the transit authority and outside vendors
  - % of trips provided by the transit authority \_\_\_\_\_
  - % of trips provided by outside vendors \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Operated solely by a single outside vendor that provides all of the services themselves.
- d) Managed by a single outside vendor that provides some of the services themselves and contracts with other subcontractors that provide the balance of the services.
- e) Managed by a single outside vendor that operates solely as a manager or broker and in turn contracts with other vendors for all ADA services.
- f) Managed by the Transit Authority (or some other quasi-government entity) who then contracts out with one or more transportation vendors.

***(If 'b' through 'f', go to question 4)***

2. **(If operated by the transit authority only, please answer question 2)**

Did you ever use taxis to provide some of the ADA paratransit services?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**(If 'Yes', go to question 3. If 'No', you may stop answering the questions here.)**

3. If you used taxis for ADA paratransit services in the past, why did you discontinue contracting with taxi agencies?
4. What factors led to the decision to contract out for some of the service?

5. Who performs each of the tasks listed below?

- a) Eligibility determination: \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Call center (booking & reservation): \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Scheduling or routing: \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Dispatching of drivers: \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Initial complaint handling: \_\_\_\_\_
- f) Complaint analysis/follow up: \_\_\_\_\_
- g) Monitoring of complaint handling: \_\_\_\_\_
- h) Provide some or all of the trips: \_\_\_\_\_

6. ***(If not managed by a single outside vendor, go to question 7; otherwise please***

***continue with question 6)***

You have indicated that you contract with a single outside vendor to **manage** your ADA paratransit services. How do you compensate this vendor to provide the services?

***(Choose only one answer.)***

**Your Answer** \_\_\_\_\_

- a) Flat contract dollar amount per year (capitated rate)
- b) Flat unit trip rate (regardless of type of vehicle used to provide the services)
- c) Cost of service paid to outside vendors plus a flat management fee
- d) Cost of service paid to outside vendors plus a % of these costs for a management fee
- e) Other \_\_\_\_\_ ***(Specify)***

7. Excluding the riders fare, how and in what amounts do you compensate your **transportation providers?**

- a) On primarily an hourly basis: What is your average hourly provider compensation rate for 2008? \$\_\_\_\_\_/hr
- b) On a per trip basis: What is your average per trip compensation received by the vendor for 2008? \$\_\_\_\_\_/trip
- c) Other \_\_\_\_\_ ***(Specify)***

8. What is your current cost per trip for **fixed route** transit services?

Customers pay \$\_\_\_\_\_ Your fully allocated operating cost per trip is \$\_\_\_\_\_

What is your current cost per trip for **paratransit-provided ADA services?**

Customers pay \$\_\_\_\_\_ Your fully allocated operating cost per trip is \$\_\_\_\_\_

What is your current cost per trip for **taxi-provided ADA paratransit services?**

Customers pay \$\_\_\_\_\_ Your fully allocated operating cost per trip is \$\_\_\_\_\_

9. Do these rates for transportation vendor vary depending on the type of vehicle used (bus, van, taxi, sedan, etc.)? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

***(If Yes)*** Please specify the compensation by vehicle type.

10. Does the transit authority supply the vehicles?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_ ***(Go to question 12)***

11. ***(If the transit authority provides the vehicles)***

What types of vehicles are provided for the contractor(s)?

***(Choose all that apply.)***

**Your Answer** \_\_\_\_\_

- a) Buses   b) Vans   c) Sedans   d) Other \_\_\_\_\_ ***(Specify)***

12. Does the transit system (or contract agency) supply the fuel for any of the services?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

***(If Yes)*** Would you please explain the fuel supply process?

13. Where do customers call to request taxi paratransit services?

**Your Answer** \_\_\_\_\_

a) Customers directly call the taxi paratransit providers (Taxicab companies)

b) Customers call the call center

c) Other \_\_\_\_\_ **(Specify)**

What is the reason for using your current choice [a, b, or c]?

14. Can a taxicab be requested by a user?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

15. Can a rider request not to be sent a taxi?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you use an ID card for taxi paratransit service?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Is your ID card a Smart Card that can be scanned by a Mobile Data Terminal in the taxicab?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If your ID card is not a Smart Card, do you plan to start using Smart Cards?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

What do you see as benefits of using or not using ID card?

17. What is your policy on passengers who might accompany an ADA-certified rider?

18. To what extent do taxi drivers go through training prior to serving paratransit passengers?

19. In your area, how many taxi companies are participating in taxi-provided ADA paratransit services? \_\_\_\_\_

20. How many total taxis are used in your taxi-provided ADA paratransit service? \_\_\_\_\_

Of those, how many of these vehicles are accessible taxis? \_\_\_\_\_

21. In your opinion, what would motivate taxi operators to convert non-accessible vehicles to accessible ones?

22. How many one-way trips does your paratransit service complete?

on a monthly basis? \_\_\_\_\_

on an annual basis? \_\_\_\_\_

23. How many of these trips could be conveyed in a taxicab? Monthly \_\_\_\_\_ Annually \_\_\_\_\_

24. How many are actually conveyed in a taxicab? Monthly \_\_\_\_ Annually \_\_\_\_
25. How long has your area had a paratransit service? Since \_\_\_\_  
 How long has your area had a taxi-provided ADA paratransit service? Since \_\_\_\_
24. How large is your service area? \_\_\_\_\_ square miles
25. What is your productivity per hour? \_\_\_\_\_ rides/service hour (not revenue hour)
26. What has been the role of the taxicab in the history of your paratransit service?

**We would like to discuss the following issues with you by telephone.**

### **Telephone Interview Questions**

1. What are the major reasons/ benefits for using taxis for ADA paratransit services in your community?
2. What are the concerns or difficulties you have experienced in operating taxi paratransit services?
3. If your taxicab vendor(s) provided quality service that was comparable to that of your paratransit vendor(s), would you be inclined to increase their participation in your program?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
*(If Yes)* In what ways would you increase their participation?
4. How are the fares calculated? Provide further explanation based on the question 7 and 8.
5. In what ways would you consider your taxicab program successful?
6. What parts of your program do you think could be successfully replicated in other communities?
7. What role do you see taxicabs playing in your paratransit program 5 years from now?
8. In your opinion, what are some of the other communities that succeed in using taxis as part of their ADA paratransit program?
9. Is there anything you would like to share with us? What's unique about your program?  
 Do you have any best practices that you feel would help other paratransit services around

the country?

10. Where can we get further information about your agency?

Would you please provide us with a copy of your contract with your transportation vendors?

Would you provide us with brochures explaining your taxi-provided ADA paratransit services?

11. If you contract out for some or all of your ADA services, would you please share with us the names of those contractors and their contact information?



**APPENDIX C:**

**SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR  
TAXI CONTRACTORS**

## Appendix C:

# Survey Questionnaire for Taxi Contractor

Westat, a research corporation located in the Washington, D.C. area, is conducting a transportation study for Easter Seals Project Action. Our team includes Jon Burkhardt and Joohee Yum of Westat and transportation consultants, Joe Rubino and John Doherty.

We would like to invite you to participate in our survey to examine how taxis are used in paratransit programs. Transit authority in your community has given us your name and recommended that we talk to you. Your participation is very important as information you provide to us will benefit transportation providers across the nation.

For the purposes of this survey, we are asking that your responses to the questions posed relate **only to services your organization provides under contract with the Transit Authority** which provides the mainline bus services in your area. This should include services provided as a comprehensive strategy to mitigate costs for traditional paratransit services. We would ask your responses **exclude** services rendered outside of the mainline bus service area and any services you provide to other Transit Authorities in adjoining jurisdictions.

If your organization provides services for adjoining transit jurisdictions, we would ask you to either report this information separately on a second questionnaire form or describe the other services at the end of this questionnaire.

Please fill out the survey question on page 2 to 4 and return it to us via email. Once you complete the survey, we would like to follow-up with you for a brief telephone interview regarding the questions appearing on page 5.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

## Taxi Contractor Questionnaire

1. Are you currently providing ADA paratransit services in taxi vehicles?  
Yes (If 'Yes', skip to Question 3) ..... 1 ☐  
No ..... 2 ☐
2. Did you participate in taxi-operated ADA paratransit services in the past?  
Yes (Go to Question 2a) ..... 1 ☐  
No (If 'No', you may stop answering the questionnaire.) ..... 2 ☐

2a) (If you answered 'Yes' to Question 2) Why did you discontinue working with paratransit agencies?

(If you answered 'No' to Question 1 or Question 2, you may stop answering the questionnaire here. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.)

XX

3. What is the name of the agency you are under contract with?
4. In your area, how many other taxi contractors also provide ADA paratransit services?  
Your Answer:
5. For the past 12 months, what percentage of your annual business was the ADA paratransit service?  
Your Answer: %
6. Who initiated the dialogue that led to your participation in these ADA taxi services?  
Transit authority/ Paratransit Contractor or Broker ..... 1 ☐  
Your company ..... 2 ☐  
Both ..... 3 ☐
7. What factors led to your company's decision to participate in providing some of the ADA paratransit services in this area?
8. Explain how your company is compensated for the ADA paratransit services that you provide.  
8a) If paid on a meter basis, what is your average provider compensation

rate in 2008?  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_/meter

8b) If paid on a per trip basis, what is your average per trip compensation rate in 2008?

\$ \_\_\_\_\_/trip

8c) If paid on an hourly basis, what is your average hourly provider compensation rate in 2008?

\$ \_\_\_\_\_/hour

8d) On average, how much additional rider fare revenue do you collect per trip?

\$ \_\_\_\_\_/trip

8e) Other

\_\_\_\_\_(Specify)

9. Do these service rates vary depending on the type of vehicle used (van, taxi, or sedan etc.)?

Yes .....1 ☐

No (If 'No', skip to Question 11).....2 ☐

10. (If 'Yes' to Question 9) Please specify the compensation by vehicle type.

11. Does the transit authority supply the vehicles?

Yes.....1 ☐

No (If 'No', skip to Question 13).....2 ☐

12. (If 'Yes' to Question 11) What types of vehicles does the transit authority provide for you? (Choose all that apply.)

Vans .....1 ☐

Sedans.....2 ☐

Other

\_\_\_\_\_(Specify)

..... 3 ☐

13. Does the transit system (or contract agency) supply the fuel for any of the services?

Yes.....1 ☐

No (If 'No', skip to Question 15).....2 ☐

14. (If 'Yes' to Question 13) Would you please explain the fuel supply process?

15. Where do customers call to request taxi paratransit services?

Customers directly call the taxi paratransit provider.....1 ☐

Customers call the transit authority's call center.....2 ☐  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
**(Specify)** .....3 ☐

16. What is the reason for using the current choice described in Question 15?

17. Does your company use a passenger ID card for taxi paratransit service?  
 Yes.....1 ☐  
 No **(If 'No', skip to Question 19)** .....2 ☐

18. **(If 'Yes' to Question 17)** Is the passenger ID card a Smart Card that can be scanned by a  
 Mobile Data Terminal in the taxicab?  
 Yes .....1 ☐  
 No.....2 ☐

19. What do you see as benefits of using or not using an ID card?

20. What is your company's policy on passengers who might accompany an ADA-certified rider?

21. What kind of training do taxi drivers receive prior to serving paratransit passengers?

22. How many taxi cabs are used in the ADA paratransit services that your company provides?  
 22a) Of those, how many of these vehicles are accessible taxis? \_\_\_\_\_

23. In your opinion, what would motivate taxi operators to replace non-accessible vehicles with accessible ones?

24. How many one-way ADA paratransit trips does your company complete?  
on a monthly basis? \_\_\_\_\_  
on an annual basis? \_\_\_\_\_
25. What is your productivity per hour? \_\_\_\_\_ rides/service hour (not revenue  
hour)
26. How long has your area had a taxi-provided ADA paratransit service? Since \_\_\_\_\_
27. What has been the role of the taxi industry in the history of paratransit services in your  
community?
28. In your community, are taxis now used more or less frequently for ADA paratransit  
services than they were in the past?

**We would like to discuss the following issues with you by telephone.**

### **Telephone Interview Questions**

1. What do you see as the major reasons for using taxis for ADA paratransit  
services in your community?
  
  2. What are the concerns or difficulties your company has experienced in operating taxi  
paratransit services?
  
  3. How would you rate the quality of the transportation services that your company is  
providing in relation to the quality of services provided by the transit authority's ADA  
paratransit program?
- Same as the transit authority.....1 ☐
- Better than the transit authority .....2 ☐
- Not as good as transit authority.....3 ☐

4. How are the fares calculated? Please provide further explanation based on Question 8 as it appeared on page 2.
5. What role do you see taxicabs playing in paratransit services in this community 5 years from now?
6. In your opinion, what are some other communities that successfully use taxis as part of their ADA paratransit programs?
7. Do you have any best practices that you feel would help other taxi-provided paratransit services around the country?
8. Transit authorities in a number of U.S. cities say that they are no longer using taxicabs as part of their paratransit services because of service quality issues. Is your company doing anything to ensure that service quality stays at a satisfactory level, and that taxicabs remain a part of local paratransit?
9. Is there anything you would like to share with us? What's unique about your program?

**APPENDIX D:**

**EXAMPLE OF SITE VISIT PROTOCOL:**

**SAN FRANCISCO**



## **Appendix D:**

### **Example of Site Visit Protocol: San Francisco**

#### **SITE VISIT TO SAN FRANCISCO, CA BY JOE RUBINO**

Host: Marc Soto, Veolia General Manager

Pre-visit Tasks:

- Contact Marc Soto re: dates, schedules, activities, and contacts at the transit authority.
- Contact the transit authority official(s) identified by Marc Soto and book appointment.
- Contact John Lazar of Luxor Cab regarding taxi company site visit and set up observation tour with paratransit taxis.

#### **TASKS CONTEMPLATED**

- Meeting with local transit officials to discuss PROJECT ACTION project, the San Fran paratransit service, and to elicit their input and their comments
- Meeting with broker (Veolia) and interviews with top managers to elicit their input and their comments
- Site tour of Veolia brokerage, including meetings with paratransit managers, IT/communications staff, Customer Service/Quality Assurance staff, Call Center staff, and prolonged observation of brokerage at work
- Meeting with members of Focus Group(s), featuring attendees picked by transit or brokerage staff, with attention paid to assembling a diverse cross-section of users
- Site tour of Luxor Cab Co, including meetings with top managers, Customer Service/Quality Assurance staff, Call Center staff, and observation of paratransit taxicabs at work
- Meeting with selected taxi drivers for Q/A, featuring drivers picked by brokerage staff, or perhaps drivers selected by Focus Group members.

Based on these activities described above, site visitors will complete a written report.

# FOCUS GROUP INSTRUCTIONS

## What is a Focus Group?

“A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion (Richard Krueger, Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, 1988).”

## Focus Group Set Up by Host

It may seem that we are asking a lot to our host. But we are in fact serving a lot of people by conducting this study. We are serving their riders, by collecting information on their needs and experience. We are also serving the local Transit Authority and taxi operators by providing customer feedback and overall evaluation. We can tell folks that we will share any significant findings with them (whether they are the TA or the brokerage or taxi contractors). Be mindful that we won't share any customer information with them to protect participants who volunteered information to our study.

### Location:

- 1st choice: Transit Authority's conference room
- 2<sup>nd</sup> choice: Alternative/ neutral location other than taxi contractor's office

**How many:** Try to recruit 10-12 participants and hopefully you will get 8-10 participants. We are hoping to conduct two focus groups at each site.

Once agreed, please document the information below.

1<sup>st</sup> Focus Group

Date and time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Focus Group

Date and time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

## Recruitment Strategy

- To what extent can your host help you with recruiting participants?
- Ask your host to recruit groups of individuals who use taxi paratransit services.
- If your host is not able to recruit focus group participants on your behalf, ask for the list of potential focus group participants (perhaps a list of 30 customers who recently used taxi paratransit within 2 months, ask for their names and contact information). Taxi operators should have this information. If permission required from the Transit Authority,

please go ahead and request that. Once the contact information is available, Westat can provide support for recruitment.

## Things to consider

- Is transportation needed for the focus group participants? If so, please ask the host to arrange this. If absolutely necessary, Westat can reimburse for the transportation cost.
- It is estimated that focus group discussions will last between 1 hour and 1 hour and 30 minutes.
- We do not provide monetary incentives to the participants. But please tell them their input is valuable to us and it will eventually help improving the services they receive.
- We need to make sure we provide accessible materials to our customers. Any written materials (thank you letter, notes etc.) with large font? Need interpreter?

## Criteria for recruitment

Focus group participants must have experience using taxi-provided paratransit services. Ideally we would like to have some individuals who exclusively use taxis, some who use both taxi and dedicated paratransit services. Any information on special needs (i.e., individuals with hearing impairments who need interpreter services) should notify project team members so that arrangements can be made in advance (if possible).

We would like to have diverse participants (i.e., customers who use taxi provided paratransit services for different reasons, individuals with different kinds and levels of disability, different age groups, race, gender and geography).

We would include individuals who can communicate independently (lack of cognitive impairment) and engage in lively discussion. Occasionally, we may invite PCAs or caregivers as substitutes if taxi paratransit customers can not represent themselves.

## Moderator's role:

For focus groups, it's always best to have two staff per group. (One moderator, one note takers) However, you will be running the group discussion on your own. At the beginning of the focus group, please notify the participants that the session will be recorded but that their identity will not be revealed. Please bring the tape recorder, batteries, and tapes with you. **TEST YOUR RECORDING EQUIPMENT BEFORE YOU TRAVEL.** If you have two tape recorders, it wouldn't hurt to use both of them; sometimes one fails and the backup becomes very handy.

Easter Seals wants digital photos highlighting key system features (i.e., dispatch center, special training facility, vehicle mockup for travel training, taxi drivers assisting passengers at the destination). Please see if you can take such photos. **Test your camera equipment before you travel.**

Please have your moderator's guide with you. Familiarize yourself with the moderator's guide and some techniques you may want to use.

The Moderator's Guide follows.

## **Information that we seek:**

The purpose of the focus groups will be to determine **what works and why** in the eyes of the actual users of the transportation services. Please attempt to get in-depth information on the key customer assessment measures of transportation services: acceptability, accessibility, adaptability, affordability, availability, alternatives, overall assessments, and outcomes.

# **FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Hello, my name is Joe Rubino. I am a member of transportation research team where we conduct a study on taxi-provided paratransit services for Easter Seals Project Action. Our team members are working in Maryland, Wisconsin and I flew from Florida to be here today. We are very interested in hearing your experience as transportation consumers. **Thank you for joining me today.**

## **CONTENT AND TOPICS**

We conducted a series of interviews with transit authorities and taxi providers in regards to paratransit services. Based on the interview results, we are making site visits to learn more about services provided by each locality. It is very important for us to hear from you all who use paratransit services. I will be asking you questions about your experiences with ADA paratransit services provided by taxis.

## **FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURES**

I would like to briefly explain how we are going to do this today. I am interested in all your comments. There are no right or wrong answers. The group does not have to arrive at a consensus (or agree) on any of the issues. I want to hear everyone's opinion. My job will be to make sure that all the questions are covered. I will not offer an opinion on any of the topics that we will discuss today. I'm here to listen and to learn from you.

## **TAPES & ANONYMITY**

Since I will not be taking notes during the discussion, the session will be audiotaped. The tape will help me summarize our discussion at the end of this study. For that reason, I am asking you that only one person speaks at a time.

The report that is generated by this project will not identify the opinions of any specific focus group participant. The information and opinions you share with me today will never be identified with your name.

## **QUESTIONS START HERE**

1. Let's go around the table and tell me your name and how you get here today (mode of transportation).
2. Please tell us a little bit about your experiences using taxi-provided transportation.

Probes:

How often do you use taxi provided transportation? /Where do you visit using taxi provided transportation?/ How long have you been using this?

3. What are the benefits to you of using taxi provided transportation?

(Summary probes)

It seems that you see A, B and C as major benefits of using taxi provided service. How would you rank them? Would you list 3 major benefits in priority order?

4. What are the disadvantages to you of using taxi provided transportation?
5. How would you describe the quality of the services you receive through taxi provided transportation?

Probes:

Anything you want to share about your drivers?

How about on time performance?

How comfortable are you when riding in taxis? (Clean? Feel safe? )

6. When do you use taxi provided transportation, and when do you not use it?
7. Tell me about your experience with the reservations process.

Probe:

What was your experience like with reservation agents? Were they professional, knowledgeable, helpful to you?  
Are you able to book trips when you need rides (day, time)?  
How flexible were they in accommodating your ride requests?

8. How would you compare your taxi transportation services with those services offered by regular paratransit vans or buses?
9. What would be the best ways to improve the taxi-provided paratransit services?
10. Overall, are the ADA taxi paratransit services working to your satisfaction? Why or why not?

## **CLOSING**

We've come to the end of the discussion. Do you have any questions or further comments that you'd like to add?

Thank you so much for participating in the focus group. Your comments have been very helpful to us.

**APPENDIX E:**  
**SITE VISIT COVER LETTER, MADISON**

## **Appendix E:**

### **Site Visit Cover Letter, Madison**

Dear Ms. Martin,

It was very nice to speak to you on the phone the other day regarding the team's paratransit study on behalf of Easter Seals Project Action. As I explained, Madison is one of 4 cities in the country chosen for an onsite more in depth visit. The cities chosen all demonstrate healthy and robust ADA paratransit programs which have successfully included taxicab trips as part of their overall service offerings.

I have attached to this e-mail two documents, including:

- Focus Group Moderator's Guide
- Our survey protocols which include a detailed list of our desired activities during the site visit.

As you can see from the activities, several items must be initiated in the near future

1. Establish the best time of day to gain maximum Focus Group participation (AM, PM, Evenings, perhaps two of the three options)
2. Set suggested possible dates for the Focus Group sessions. For starters I have listed two dates (Oct 20<sup>th</sup>, or 21<sup>st</sup>) These may be optimistic and are only a starting point
3. Generate a list of regular ADA Taxi riders
4. Develop a random selection process (I will explain in greater detail below)
5. Create an invitation to potential members of the Focus Group
6. Call potential Focus Group members to invite them to participate, mail invitations at the same time with details regarding date, time, and location
7. Confirm dates, times, and location

**NB:** I would like to conduct the site visit during the week of October 20th.or November 3<sup>rd</sup>. I think that a day and one-half would be more than sufficient for the site visit; although it may be possible to complete it all in one day is every thing falls in place.

Finally, I will provide a thorough description of how we will conduct our Focus Group discussions, which are the most important components of our site visits

#### **Focus Group(s):**

Obviously, we need our focus groups set up by our host(s), since the group(s) will be made up of local paratransit users. We hope that this is not too much to ask. We feel that we are in fact serving a lot of people by conducting this study.

- We are serving your riders, by collecting information on their need and experience.
- We are also serving the Madison Metro as well as the paratransit operators in your area by providing customer feedback and overall evaluations.



- We assure you that we will share any significant findings with your organization, although we will not share the names of the Focus Group members associated with any specific comments
- We can also assure you that we won't share any customer information to protect participants who volunteered information to our study via the focus group.

### **Focus Group Recruitment Questions**

- Can you help us with recruiting participants? If so, to what extent? If you don't have the time or personnel, can you share the names of recent (2 months) frequent users of the service along with contact information? If this information resides at the taxi vendor level, could you provide a release letter so that we can obtain the list from them?

Let me explain how we, or your staff (if time permits) will perform the selection process.

1. We would suggest randomly selecting fifty names of frequent users of taxi ADA service.
2. We would ask that you begin listing the person name in the first column, in the subsequent 11 columns; we would ask you to check whether that individual is:
  1. Younger than 25 years of age
  2. 26 to 65 years of age
  3. Over 65 years of age
  - 4a. Female
  - 4b. Male
  5. Uses the service primarily for employment purposes
  6. Uses the service primarily for sheltered work or day care purposes
  7. Uses the service primarily for education purposes
  8. Uses the service primarily for medical purposes
  9. Uses a walker or cane when traveling
  10. Uses a wheelchair when traveling
  11. Is visually impaired

**N.B. This may at first seem like a daunting task. Items 1,2,3,4(a & b),9,10, and 11 will be available on your eligibility screen and the other four items can be obtained by contacting a knowledgeable dispatcher at your taxi company. The total time will likely take less than a minute per person. Obviously, there will be more than one column indicated for each individual.**

**After the first 20 persons are listed, we would ask that you review the 11 columns to be sure we have representation in all categories. If so, simply proceed through the first 30 names. If some categories are not represented after going through the first 20 persons, we would ask you to go down the remaining list of 50 names and then add additional names only if they would fall in an unrepresented category. Once 30 names (in total) are listed the selection process is complete.**

### **Things to consider when assembling the Focus Group**

- Is transportation needed for the focus group participants? Can you arrange this?

- It is estimated that focus group discussions will last between 1 hour and 1 hour and 30 minutes.
- We do not provide monetary incentives to the participants, but we can tell them their input is valuable to us and it will eventually help improving the services they receive.

I know that I have sent you a lot of information, but I hope it is clear and understandable. A couple of final thoughts:

- I can conduct the site visit on any days on the week, including Saturday if it easier for things like the Focus Group or the taxicab observation.
- These events can occur anytime, so there is no particular order in which they have to occur.
- I am very self directed; so much of my observational time can be done with staff that you appoint or on my own.

If this is all agreeable, can we please start by choosing dates and then we'll go from there? Please call or email me at the number below if you have any questions.

I will do my best to make this process as painless as possible.

Thanks.

Regards,

John Doherty