

Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)

October 5, 2023

Meeting Minutes

PAC meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom.

1. Welcome from PAC Leadership

Meeting was called to order by Chairperson RueZalia Watkins at 5:10 p.m.

2. Confirmation of participants and approval of minutes

PAC Members

Thomas Coppola, Luda Demikhovskaya, Ketrina Hazell, Jose Hernandez, Billy Mitchell, Mark Anthony Phifer, Jean Ryan, Tucker Salovaara, Sharada Veerubhotla, RueZalia Watkins.

Regrets – Sharlene Kraft

Absent – Ellen Rubin, Mindy Jacobson

MTA/NYCT Paratransit

Frank Camp, Kevin Flores, Tammie Francisque, Donna Fredericksen, Eugene Griffith, Simone Harvard, Patricia Ibarguen, Nathasha Parris, Chris Pangilinan, Scott Pantano, Tejpal Prajapati, Beverlyn Richards, Jayashri Srinivasan-Cuffey.

Chairperson R. Watkins acknowledged the previous meeting minutes were approved.

T. Salovaara requested an accommodation to have a legend on the Dashboard.

3. AAR Service Updates / Dashboard AAR Report

A summary of the July 2023 operating statistics from the Paratransit Report (pg. 9) was sent to PAC members and reviewed by VP Chris Pangilinan.

PAC Member Discussion and Feedback

T. Salovaara: How is the AAR command center quality control being managed? How many Paratransit staff are working from home?

VP Pangilinan: Approximately 75% of GCS operators are working from home, and there are no plans for this to change. There is a quality assurance program in place. GCS is conducting evaluations monthly to ensure calls are being answered and issues are addressed. Calls are monitored daily.

L. Demikhovskaya: Long hold times (15-20 minutes) have been reported. Customers must call back to secure a reservation.

VP Pangilinan: AAR takes 30,000 reservation calls per day. Approximately 96-97% have been answered on average within 60 seconds. There may have been some outlier calls during peak times, specifically in July and August. However, improvements were made in this area since then. Incidentally, according to the AAR Customer Satisfaction Survey, the calls aspect of the process is highest of AAR's ratings with 85% of customers generally satisfied.

F. Camp: GCS currently has close to 1000 associates. Occasionally, at the end of the day when volume is high, agents take between 1500-2000 calls every 30 minutes. This could result in long wait times. However, during the month of September average speed of answered calls was within 32 seconds for over 800,000 calls.

K. Hazell: The dashboard accounts for the number of calls taken. What about calls not taken due to long waits (dropped calls)? Is this data available?

VP Pangilinan: Yes, that data is available. 96% of calls were answered, so 14% were likely abandoned calls, which can happen at the end of the day.

J. Ryan: Maybe an average is not the best measurement to capture and report this data. Paratransit may want to consider measuring the number of unsuccessful attempts to reach AAR at the end of the day.

S. Veerubhotla: Also, AAR may want to consider shifting additional operators toward the end of the day to address the volume.

Chair Watkins: In addition, callers tend to get stand by time or no driver is available, or a substitute driver. So, having the capacity to book a real trip at the end of the day, and determining the carrier, is also a part of this discussion that can be addressed later.

4. Paratransit Topic:

Update on E-Hail Pilot Program

VP Pangilinan: Providing an update of Paratransit's onboarding of new on-demand customers. The team assisted with transitioning approximately 730 customers from Phase I to Phase II by mid-August. You may recall, Phase I originally consisted of 1,200 customers. Since that time 200 or so are either not with us or not with AAR anymore, so that number is down to 1,000. Some aren't active but were notified that if they wanted to come across to Phase II the window was extended through the end of September. Now that the phase I group is over, AAR will add up to as many people as possible to get 3,600 total in the Phase II program. We have already sent out 1,200 letters and emails to customers and will continue to send out 600 per week for the next three weeks to fill up the remaining numbers of eligible customers. In September, approximately 7,300 trips were taken, that's 14 trips per customer (High Volume 19 trips per customer, Distance 10 trips per customer). Other stats: 5% of our trips are assigned to WAV vehicles. Of the five providers, Uber and Lyft have provided the vast majority of trips (6500 of 7400 trips). The rest are CTG and ARRO, with Driver's Cooperative performing just a few trips.

Regarding accessibility of the program: Uber, Lyft and CTG have been reported by customers to be screen-reader compatible, and Uber and Lyft have the greatest number of WAVs. CTG has been the best with phone options to reserve a vehicle.

Chair R. Watkins: Please clarify "CTG is the best with phone access." Does that mean CTG is the only provider with phone access?

VP Pangilinan: Vehicle availability for Driver's Cooperative is low (20-30 min wait time). Therefore, CTG is the only option right now to book by calling.

S. Veerubhotla: Even though CTG, a current broker service provider, has a relationship with MTA, the price point for Uber trips seems more affordable than Lyft and CTG. CTG does not have enough vehicle availability, and Lyft's prices are high. Driver's Cooperative is non-responsive and keeps reporting they will be starting to take trips by phone, but they have not started yet. How is AAR addressing these concerns?

VP Pangilinan: Mr. Harvard and his team are constantly holding the vendors accountable to ensure they are delivering availability and reliability to our customers. Our position is that we will let the vendors compete for our customers based on best customer service and best prices. Paratransit will evaluate the program in six months (March 2024), and at that time next steps will be determined.

J. Ryan: Reporting on behalf of PAC Member, Ms. Kraft. She was frustrated that she couldn't get information about Phase II registration, including how to navigate only one provider (CTG) accepting phone-in reservations. Unlike others, she was not afforded the opportunity to compare prices with a single option. Another customer, who is also blind, could not get any answer at Driver's Cooperative. Is CTG's call volume (overage) being routed to agents in Moldova?

S. Harvard: Will investigate this with CTG. However, any concerns should be reported to the AAR comment line, so that issues may be addressed.

Chair R. Watkins: Issues with phone access (and other issues) should be prioritized, and it is the PAC's hope that AAR is taking these concerns seriously.

M.A. Phifer: Would it be possible for PAC members to have a direct line to AAR when constituents seek our support for resolving AAR concerns?

Chair R. Watkins: Several topics of concern (ex: PAC members acting on behalf of constituents re AAR issues, and on-demand availability to persons with wheelchairs that cannot fit into broker vehicles) are important topics that can be addressed at a later date.

K. Hazell: Would Paratransit consider a rollover program for unused trips in a prior month, and possibly have a set price for any number of trips per day / transfers (i.e., same as buses)?

T. Coppola: What were the successes of Phase I that prompted AAR to move onto Phase II?

VP Pangilinan: It was very popular. The focus was “how do we preserve that good part of E-hail and find the way to expand it?” And, of course, examine aspects that were not as popular, but at the same time find a way to make it affordable to all participants. Considerations will be given to either expand or make it more useful based on 6-month evaluation data.

S. Veerubhotla: Is this raw data, and from where is it originating?

S. Harvard: The data is coming directly from vendors. That information is being reconciled with AAR to ensure the data is accurate.

S. Veerubhotla: How will a 6-month program be evaluated if 1/3 of the people have not yet been enrolled (considering holidays are approaching, etc.).

VP Pangilinan: The projected number may not reach the totals intended to be enrolled. However, that should not negatively affect the data.

S. Harvard: No matter what the total number of customers enrolled and using Phase II by March, VP Pangilinan will still be able to accurately assess the program based on the number of customers enrolled at that time.

L. Demikhovskaya: She has two disabilities: legally blind and a mobility disability. Due to the size of her motorized wheelchair, she cannot be considered for on-demand, which is unfair. Dedicated service is her only option, even in the event of an emergency. This is not comparable service that is available for non-disabled customers, and it should be under ADA.

Chair R. Watkins: This point is well-taken, and the concept of flexibility and access should be considered for everyone.

J. Ryan: Expressed concerns about safety in broker vehicles. Drivers are not properly trained and oftentimes do not have proper equipment to secure a wheelchair. Also concerned about addressing driver behavior.

Chair R. Watkins: Would like to revisit broker concerns at a later date, including the issue of vehicle cleanliness.

VP Pangilinan: Feedback for broker providers is a priority. Providers will work with PAC and NYCT to improve customer experience (with cleanliness being just one area of concentration). Other providers will follow in this effort.

Chair R. Watkins: Asked for clarification on what changes will be made to scheduling of broker trips.

E. Griffith: Trips are assigned to broker companies. Some schedule and filter trips to their affiliates. Other brokers may have a different process. Working on improving delivery on appointment times.

VP Pangilinan: What will be different to broker and dedicated will be the scheduling engine. We plan to release an RFP (Request for Proposals) in the next 3 months or so. This announcement to the market will explain Paratransit is seeking a solution to help schedule trips more efficiently, not just the day before but during the same day. The idea is to cut down the time of trips and make trips more direct and more efficient. This is likely going to be a two-to-three-year process to get installed and up and running.

- 1) Providing more information
- 2) Booking trips more easily
- 3) Vehicle tracking
- 4) Shared rides with more direct routes

S. Veerubhotla: Will the new system be accessible to all customers with different disabilities?

Watkins: Two to three years seems like a very long time. Can an interim solution be implemented?

VP Pangilinan: Yes. Paratransit is investigating an interim solution. It will not be as good as the long-term offering but will be an improvement on the

current scheduling system. We are working with a vendor to have that installed in the next 6-months.

S. Veerubhotla: Will there be some level of dedicated vehicles set aside for customers who cannot use on-demand (since the Pilot does not service customers who are unable to benefit from the program).

T. Salovaara: Inquired about the status of hiring additional drivers.

S. Harvard: There is currently no issue with driver shortages. We have been able to schedule trips on less routes (which doesn't stretch the system trying to locate drivers), to maintain service, even with the increase in on-demand. Nevertheless, there is still a push to continue hiring.

VP Pangilinan: All iPad's have been installed. Drivers now have electronic turn-by-turn directions (replacing paper manifests used in the Spring). This is helping with reliability and capacity. Electric vehicles are slowly being added to the fleet. NY Governor's mandate is to have electric fleets by 2035. We will go slow and test as we go.

J. Hernandez: Drivers have had their own equipment for years, using Google maps, etc. Trip optimization needs to be prioritized over iPads.

VP Pangilinan: iPads are already installed (and they are using Google maps), so now MTA can shift energy to the software side.

J. Ryan: How is MTA going to optimize electric vehicles when there hasn't been an ADA vehicle made yet.

VP Pangilinan: Some vehicles will be upfitted (gasoline blue and whites). And a few more vehicles will be delivered, electric off the assembly line, fitted and tested.

S. Pantano: First one was produced off the line, Fenton Mobility (e-transit Ford factory van with sliding lift and will be scheduled to deliver to AAR by December). Another converted van will be scheduled by December.

J. Hernandez: One concern about safety re: electric vehicles (fire, etc.).

VP Pangilinan: Paratransit shares these concerns and is making every effort to ensure safety in bringing on electric vehicles.

5. PAC Topics:

Fare Free Bus - Buses

PowerPoint images of free bus routes per borough was shared.

Chair R. Watkins: Expressed concerns about how to explain this to community groups regarding where the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile cuts off.

S. Harvard: The $\frac{3}{4}$ mile trip was an internal measurement used to expand it to more customers. What is more important is to inform customers that these fixed routes are free.

New Business

Look at quality-assurance.

Application process.

Electric Vehicles.

J. Ryan moved to adjourn. It was seconded.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM.

Paratransit Report

Statistical results for the month of July 2023 are shown below.

Paratransit Operations - Monthly Operations Report Service Indicators							
Category	Performance Indicator	Current Month: July 2023			12-Month Average		
		This Year	Last Year	% Change	This Year	Last Year	% Change
Ridership	Total Trips Completed*	625,418	529,618	+18.1%	599,758	487,745	+23.0%
	Total Ridership	918,852	773,269	+18.8%	864,470	695,484	+24.3%
On-Time Performance	Pick-up Primary 30 Minute	96.0%	97.0%	-1.0%	95.8%	93.8%	+2.0%
	Pick-up Primary 15 Minute	86.0%	88.0%	-2.0%	86.8%	82.5%	+4.3%
	Pick-up Broker 30 Minute	95.0%	94.0%	+1.0%	93.8%	90.5%	+3.3%
	Pick-up Broker 15 Minute	82.0%	81.0%	+1.0%	80.2%	75.4%	+4.8%
	Appointment OTP Trips Primary - 30 Min Early to <1 Late (On-Time)*	40.0%	n/a	n/a	49.5%	n/a	n/a
	Appointment OTP Trips Primary - Early*	54.0%	n/a	n/a	42.8%	n/a	n/a
	Appointment OTP Trips Broker - 30 Min Early to <1 Late (On-Time)*	39.0%	n/a	n/a	40.2%	n/a	n/a
	Appointment OTP Trips Broker - Early*	53.0%	n/a	n/a	49.7%	n/a	n/a
Ride Time	Ride Time Variance Performance: Actual Trip Duration vs. Planned Trip Duration - At or Better Than Plan	83.0%	83.0%	0.0%	81.4%	80.2%	+1.3%
	Average Actual Trip Duration in Minutes	36	36	0.0%	37	36	+1.1%
	Max Ride Time Performance Primary	98.0%	98.0%	0.0%	97.8%	98.1%	-0.3%
	Max Ride Time Performance Broker	99.0%	99.0%	0.0%	99.0%	98.6%	+0.4%
Customer Experience	Frequent Rider Experience Primary*	83.0%	n/a	n/a	85.0%	n/a	n/a
	Frequent Rider Experience Broker*	83.0%	n/a	n/a	90.3%	n/a	n/a
Provider No-Shows	Provider No-Shows per 1,000 Schedule Trips Primary	0.51	0.80	-36.3%	0.83	2.50	-66.8%
	Provider No-Shows per 1,000 Schedule Trips Broker	1.94	3.70	-47.6%	3.91	5.15	-24.1%
Customer Complaints	Passenger Complaints - Transportation Service Quality Per 1000 Completed Trips	3.7	1.8	+105.6%	2.2	4.3	-48.5%
	Passenger Complaints - Non-Transportation Service Quality Per 1000 Completed Trips	1.0	3.4	-70.6%	3.3	3.3	-1.0%
Call Center	Percent of Calls Answered	93.0%	95.0%	-2.0%	94.6%	90.9%	+3.7%
	Average Call Answer Speed in Seconds	50	62	-19.4%	70	141	-50.3%
Eligibility	Total Registrants	176,797	171,236	+3.3%	174,555	167,442	+4.3%

*NOTE: The reporting of Drop-off On-Time Performance and Customer Experience metrics resumed in September. The yearly data comparison is not available due to the temporary suspension of appointment time booking of trips associated with the COVID-19 pandemic which started in March 2020. Consequently, the last year's 12-Month Average rate for these two metrics cannot be calculated.

Note: 1) The percentage comparisons are the percentage point change instead of the percentage change.
2) Trip data and resulting metrics are preliminary and subject to adjustments.