

Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)

March 21, 2017 Meeting Minutes

Meeting commenced at 5:05 p.m.

PAC Attendees: Thomas Coppola, David H. DePorte, Edward S. Friedman, Ellen Rubin, Ketrina Hazell, Tucker B. Salovaara, Ken Stewart, Sharada Veerubhotla, RueZali Watkins, Stanley Weinblatt

PAC Attendees by Teleconference Call: Jean Ryan, Lyudmila Demikovskaya, John Moynihan

Absent: Mindy Jacobsen

NYC Transit Staff Attendees: Brandon Anderson, Michael Cosgrove, Lynda Edmond, Eugene Griffith, Felicia D. Jones, Steven LoPiano, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Kenneth Stuart, Chantal Sealy Walker

Guests: Frank Camp (GCS), Alex Elegudin (TLC), Uwvie Obodo (PCA for Tucker B. Salovaara), Quemuel Arroyo (NYC DOT)

Prior to the meeting, PAC members were able to board the new Ford Transit vehicle which was outside of 33-00 Northern Blvd

Announcements – Kenneth Stuart

Mr. Stuart announced the newly published “*On the Move*” newsletter that was recently sent to AAR customers. He described the new version as still informative but entertaining with more pictures, modern look and a general tone that makes it more readable. Ms. Rubin and Ms. Veerubhotla stated they received a cassette version and asked if it would be available electronically. Mr. Stuart explained that the publication team is working on it. Ms. Veerubhotla would like it attached to an email if possible.

Ms. Demikovskaya commented about an ADA regulation regarding pictures in publications. The blind are unable to see pictures, so therefore a description must be provided. Mr. Stuart explained that it applies to publications deemed essential (e.g. Guide to AAR Service, AAR application) and since “*On the Move*” is not considered one, that particular regulation does not apply. However, he stated that “*On the Move*” is intended to be customer friendly and AAR will see what can be done about adding descriptions. Feedback about this and other AAR publications may be sent to Shirley Teran-Marty.

Mr. Stewart mentioned that he had not yet received a copy of the publication. Mr. Stuart informed him that about 150,000 copies were mailed out, but not all on the same day so he should receive his soon.

Introductions – David H. DePorte, PAC Chair

Mr. DePorte informed the committee that some PAC members will participate in the meeting by phone. He reminded PAC members of housekeeping rules including to raise hands if they had comments or questions. Mr. DePorte explained to PAC members that this committee is not for the purpose of discussing their detailed experiences on Access-A-Ride and, if needed, to file a formal complaint through the AAR Comment Line; PAC Liaison Ms. Teran-Marty will handle these issues.

I. Approval of Minutes – David H. DePorte, PAC Chair

Mr. DePorte called for approval of the January 17, 2017 minutes and asked if PAC members had any comments, questions or revisions. Mr. Friedman stated that at the last PAC meeting, former PAC member Ms. Ragozino had suggested the meetings be recorded and her suggestion was not documented in the January minutes. After brief discussion, Mr. Stuart replied that it will be added.

II. AAR Service Report – Vice President Steve LoPiano

As requested by the PAC, VP LoPiano provided a summary of the Paratransit Report.

Registrants increased 2.2% comparing 144,692 registrants in December 2015 to 147,847 registrants December 2016.

Trips requested decreased 1.7% comparing 657,662 Trips Requested in December 2015 to 646,164 Trips Requested in December 2016.

Early Cancellations increased 6.6% comparing 85,142 Early Cancellations in December 2015 to 90,761 Early Cancellations in December 2016.

Trips Scheduled decreased 3.0% comparing 567,491 Trips Scheduled in December 2015 to 550,334 Trips Scheduled in December 2016.

Trips Completed decreased 3.3% comparing 537,360 Trips Completed in December 2015 to 519,664 Trips Completed in December 2016.

Customer No-Shows decreased 5.5% comparing 9,557 Customer No-Shows in December 2015 to 9,034 Customer No-Shows in December 2016.

Carrier No-Shows decreased 53.0% comparing 1,454 Carrier No-Shows in December 2015 to 683 Carrier No-Shows in December 2016.

Total No-Shows decreased 13.8% comparing 14,098 Total No-Shows in December 2015 to 12,148 Total No-Shows in December 2016.

On Time Performance increased 1.1% comparing 90.7% On Time Performance in December 2015 to 91.8% On Time Performance in December 2016.

Appointments On Time increased 2.0% comparing 85.0% in December 2015 to 87.0% in December 2016.

Late Trips by Carrier decreased 23.3% comparing 37,409 Late Trips by Carrier in December 2015 to 28,684 Late Trips by Carrier in December 2016.

Complaints decreased 0.7% comparing 2,612 complaints in December 2015 to 2593 complaints in December 2016.

There was a 1.8% increase in complaints per 1,000 completed trips comparing 4.90 in December 2015 to 4.99 in December 2016.

Commendations increased 36.1% comparing 507 Commendations in December 2015 to 690 Commendations in December 2016.

Total Boardings decreased 2.5% comparing 746,994 Total Boardings in December 2015 to 728,044 Total Boardings in December 2016.

PAC Comments

Mr. Stewart commented that the AAR service report was informative and the figures are very encouraging. VP LoPiano credited this to the hard work and improvements of the Paratransit team including the Broker team headed by Eugene Griffith. Mr. Arroyo wanted to know what operational changes were responsible for the improvements. VP LoPiano explained that several changes have been made including:

- Modifications to ride times so customers are not picked up excessively early on appointment trips.

- Adjustments were made to speed restrictions so that better on-time performance is provided.
- Providers are encouraged to “turn back” trips to the AAR Command Center in a timely fashion if unable to satisfactorily handle them.

There has been a lot of progress and customers are having better experiences.

Discussion of the Ford Transit vehicle

Mr. DePorte opened discussion of the new vehicle. Mr. Weinblatt commented that when entering through the steps, someone is likely to hit their head due to low clearance. Mr. Weinblatt continued by saying he does not like a front lift because he would need to be backed into the vehicle, which is not easy for him or the driver. He also stated that the vehicle is very narrow.

Mr. Salovaara commented that it was difficult to get around with wheelchairs inside because it was narrow. Ms. Watkins mentioned she liked the vehicle, but it is narrow. Turning around is tricky so you would have to back onto the lift.

Mr. DePorte was not in favor of the vehicle. He liked the seat cushions and stated they were comfortable. However, he still did not like the vehicle height when using the steps. Mr. DePorte stated that there is a gap along the side of the vehicle and chair which he didn't understand. Ms. Veerubhotla stated he may be referring to a wheel well.

Ms. Rubin commented that she did not have a chance to board, but did hear from others that if you are ambulatory you can hit your head while entering.

Mr. Coppola commented on the narrowness of the vehicle and it was difficult to negotiate past a wheelchair to get off. He also mentioned that typically when the lift is up he uses it as support to get by, but stated there is no railing to hold onto in this vehicle. One

would have to hold the mechanism when using the lift and it didn't feel safe. He did not like that the windows didn't open and commented there was no emergency exit. The overhead handrail should be on the other side.

Ms. Stewart agreed with comments about the low head room and nothing to hold on to. He did find the seats comfortable and likes the position in terms of the wall because it gives more clearance for getting around the wheel wells.

Ms. Watkins commented that she liked the vehicle and feels her expectations and experiences might be influenced by riding in minivans. She stated that people will love this van because it's hard to deal with the seats in the minivans. She noted that it is very important to discuss the issue of no emergency exit.

Mr. DePorte wanted clarification as to what Ms. Watkins was referring to as a minivan. It was confirmed that she was referring to the MV-1's. Mr. DePorte stated that so far the comments have not been very favorable, however he greatly appreciated the opportunity to test the vehicle.

Mr. Stuart clarified the exit features of the Ford Transit vehicle. He explained that besides using the lift or front door, customers can exit through the rear door which is the emergency exit. He stated that this vehicle was approved by the New York City Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and complies with their safety regulations.

VP LoPiano stated to the PAC members that he really appreciated their comments which will be brought back to the manufacturer. He also stated that AAR will continue to scour the market to see what's out there and to have more vehicles brought in to test.

Ms. Ryan stated that she was unable to try the vehicle and asked for a description. Mr. Stuart provided a brief description to help Ms. Ryan have a better understanding; Ms. Ryan thanked him.

Ms. Veerubhotla wanted to know if certain factors will be taken into consideration when scheduling. For instance, will it be part of scheduling that only certain customers will use this vehicle? Mr. LoPiano responded that it is very difficult to schedule certain vehicles for individuals. However, comments and concerns will be reviewed before the vehicle is considered for further purchases.

Ms. Watkins inquired if the vehicle was just to look at or will it be tried in the city. VP LoPiano stated that the vehicle will be tested in service. In addition to obtaining feedback from customers, it needs to be road tested for its operability, ride performance and maintenance.

III. Paratransit Topic – Ken Stuart: Description of the Customer Relations Unit including the complaint process

Mr. Stuart explained that Paratransit Customer Relations is comprised of several groups and provided details about each as summarized below.

Reservations

One of the Customer Relations groups is Reservations which is the first point of contact for most people when they book a trip. It is headed by Patricia Ibarguen and, in years past, took only reservations. However, there has been much cross-training so almost all associates are now capable of handling both reservations and same-day issues. Reservations alone total 10,000 to 15,000 calls each day. Mr. Stuart introduced Mr. Frank Camp of Global Contact Service (GCS) who discussed staffing, stating there is currently a total of 684 Customer Service

Representatives (CSR) with about 500 associates scheduled on the busiest days, Tuesday and Wednesday.

Publications

Publications include printed material related to Paratransit and those aspects of the MTA.info website concerning Accessibility and Access-A-Ride. The Guide to Access-A-Ride Service is considered an essential publication for Paratransit customers/applicants and is an excellent reference guide providing information about Access-A-Ride service.

Forms such as the AAR application and related materials are also considered essential. The “*On The Move*” newsletter that was recently distributed will have two to three mailings per year. Donna Fredericksen is currently handling publications and is the liaison to our Corporate Communications team that helps with design and printing publications and the website.

Outreach

The outreach effort encompasses presentations to the community (e.g. Borough President events, Community Boards, senior centers, dialysis centers) and Travel Training. Meetings range from simple presentations of information to detailed discussions of service. Donna Fredericksen and Shirley Teran-Marty lead the presentations and Michael Levy oversees the Travel Training program. In this program, AAR customers receive instructions on how to use the fixed-route system that gives them more mobility and flexibility.

Customer Communications

The group is directed by Lynda Edmond and has a staff of 9 full-time individuals. The stated mission is to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to the comments and concerns from customers about AAR service. Customers may register a complaint, commendation or other comments through our AAR

Comment Line, land mail or the MTA.info website. The Comment Line is directed by Felicia Jones and is open Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm; and approximately 80-85% of all comments come in through this channel.

Ms. Edmond of Customer Communications explained how complaints are received, assigned and investigated. Customers may receive a telephone call or letter from a staff member informing them that their concern is being handled.

Mr. Stuart stated 15% to 20% of all of the comments that come in are commendations, usually about drivers but sometimes staff. He also mentioned the three most common complaints are vehicle no-shows, late pickups and driver issues.

Mr. Salovaara asked what the percentages are for complaints being resolved. Mr. Stuart replied that we respond to 100% of the complaints. The timeliness of the response could be anywhere from a couple of days to about four to five weeks. VP LoPiano added that if sufficient information is provided, the complaint gets resolved fairly quickly. Sometimes there is not enough information and we are unable to follow through.

Mr. Coppola asked about what is being done to improve Broker service or vouchers especially in Staten Island. Mr. Griffith, the Director of Broker Services, explained how they reach out to customers the day after their trip and ask about their service: was it on time, was the operator courteous and competent, and about the condition of the vehicle. Mr. Griffith explained they conduct mystery rides to check on safety, customer service and the condition of the vehicles.

VP LoPiano added that no matter what type of vehicle or AAR service you use, all complaints are investigated. Mr. Coppola asked how we handle unsubstantiated claims. VP LoPiano

explained that GPS helps us investigate claims and we also get statements from those involved.

Ms. Watkins had a comment about the letters that we send to customers. She stated that they are very often vague and suggested that in the response letter we should include bullets of what the customers actually said. Ms. Edmond responded that depending upon the circumstances some letters sent are more perfunctory in nature and others go deeper into the details of the complaint. She acknowledged understanding Ms. Watkins' request for bullet points on the letters.

Mr. Stewart asked what is the most efficient way to call in a complaint. Mr. Stuart explained having the customer's ID number, date and time traveled or Trip ID (nine digit number) helps.

Before addressing the PAC topic, Mr. Stuart moved on to address Mr. Friedman's request about having a transcript or an audio recording of the PAC meetings. Mr. Stuart explained the PAC is an advisory committee and not a regulatory body and/or public hearing. The purpose of our minutes is to lay out what was discussed and not word-for-word transcript. Our minutes are publicly available on our website. We review the minutes on the Paratransit side and all of the committee members review them and may make comments. In terms of transparency and vetting, every member of the committee has the opportunity to read what's there. If they feel it's incomplete or inaccurate, modifications are requested and made. Mr. Friedman thanked Mr. Stuart for his comments and stated that he respectfully disagrees with his response and the Paratransit point of view.

IV. PAC Topic – PAC Membership

Mr. DePorte asked for a show of hands for people who wanted to comment on PAC membership. Mr. Friedman commented that

Ms. Ragozino was no longer with the PAC and wanted background on that decision. Mr. Stuart replied by explaining the PAC guidelines and that she is not an AAR customer nor a member of a disability organization. Her relationship with United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) had ended and at that time she resigned from the PAC.

Mr. Friedman stated that her leaving was not discussed among the PAC members. Mr. Stuart explained that this situation is different from removing someone due to attendance or lack of performance or not contributing. Ms. Ragozino currently does not meet the standards to be on the PAC.

Mr. Stuart stated there is a vacancy and we are in the process of reaching out to different organizations. Resumes will be distributed to the selection committee once the interview process begins.

Ms. Watkins wanted to know about the PAC guidelines and how she can attain them. Mr. Stuart replied that it is available on our website, MTA.info.

Mr. DePorte stated there are other membership issues to discuss and we can review these at the next meeting. PAC members should let him know if they want it on the Agenda for the May meeting.

Discussions and Member Feedback

There was no additional discussion and member feedback.

V. New/Old Business

There was limited time to discuss new/old business and Mr. DePorte asked if anyone had ideas for the next PAC topic. Ms. Watkins suggested discussing emergency procedures when there has been an accident at night and people with severe disabilities are waiting for another vehicle to pick them up. Mr. DePorte will put it down on his list.

Mr. DePorte stated that we were out of time and any other items can be addressed at the next meeting.

Closing

Mr. Weinblatt moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Salovaara seconded the motion. Motioned carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:00pm.