

## **Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)**

### **November 17, 2015 Meeting Minutes**

#### **Meeting commenced at 5:05 PM**

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

**Excused Absence:** Mindy Jacobsen

**Unexcused Absence:** John Moynihan

**NYC Transit Staff Attendees:** Brandon Anderson, Tom Charles, Tom Chin, Michael Cosgrove, Steve Danso, Lynda Edmond, Kevin Flores, Eddie Griffith, Felicia Jones, Pat Ibarguen, Michael Levy, Denise Ann McQuade, Shirley Teran-Marty, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Russell Schmid, Ken Stuart,

**Guests:** Frank Camp (Global Contact Services), Quemuel Arroyo, DOT

#### **Introductions** –

David DePorte reminded the PAC and attendees that since he is blind he would appreciate if those present would introduce themselves and provide their titles. He also asked PAC members and attendees to raise their hands and ask to be acknowledged. Felicia Jones, a Paratransit staff member, kept track of those wishing to be recognized for Mr. DePorte.

#### **I. Approval of Minutes** – David DePorte, PAC Acting Chair

Mr. DePorte called for approval of the September 29, 2015 minutes and asked if PAC members had any corrections or changes to the minutes. Mr. Stewart questioned the use of the word “properties” on page 4, 2nd paragraph, 2nd line. He was informed by Vice President Charles that transit agencies are referred to as properties. Mr. Stewart asked that on page 4, Section III. Paratransit Topic, third paragraph second line, second sentence, we add “outdoor areas” to the sentence: “For instance, some outdoor areas in housing complexes.

Ellen Rubin moved to approve minutes and Miriam Kimmelman seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously as amended with the understanding that Jean Ryan and Denise Ann McQuade will confer about Ms. Ryan's corrections in the near future.

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

There has been a steady decline in AAR registration for the last few months but now we are seeing an increase in the registrant base and we believe this trend will continue.

September is typically a peak month with vacations ending and schools reopening. This September posed several travel challenges. Specifically, the Pope's visit, UN General Assembly Sessions, and the US Presidential visits to NYC were among the special events that effected travel in NYC this September. When diplomats travel from place to place, frozen zones are declared and these changes are not announced in advance. With so many dignitaries attending various events in the city, AAR customers had deterred travel in September but we are anticipating a rebound in October.

The Vice President reviewed highlights of August 2015 versus September 2015 and September 2014 statistics.

- AAR registrants increased from 140,364 in August 2015 to 142,752 in September 2015, a 1.7% increase. However, registrants decreased 6.0% from 151,827 in September 2014.
- Trips completed decreased from 527,622 in August 2015 to 518,732 in September 2015, a 1.7% decrease. There was a 4.3% decrease in September 2015 completed trips compared to 542,257 completed trips in September 2014,
- Carrier no-shows in August 2015 were 1,063 and in September 2015 there were 1,826, a 71.8%% increase. There was a 53.4% increase in September 2015 no-shows compared to 1,190 no-shows in September 2014.
- Total no-shows (carrier, customer and no-fault) in August 2015 were 12,358 and in September 2015 were 13,963, a 13.0% increase. There was a 16.6% increase in total September 2015 no-shows compared with 11,977 total no-shows in September 2014.

- On-time Performance (OTP) decreased from 92.1% in August 2015 to 89.9% in September 2015. There was a 2.2% decrease in September 2015 OTP compared to the September 2014 OTP of 90.0%.
- Appointments on-time decreased from 89.0% in August 2015 to 84.0% in September 2015. This was roughly the same in September 2014.
- We have been studying OTP (vehicles arriving within the 30-minute of the scheduled pickup time) and on-time drop offs based on scheduled appointment times. Traffic in the city and construction have been causing much lower speeds in concentrated corridors. Therefore, we will be further lowering traffic speeds in our scheduling of trips. The goal for OTP is 92% or better.
- Average Reservation answering speed was 14 seconds in August 2015, 23 seconds in September 2015, and 26 seconds in September 2014.
- Average Reservation talk time was 4 minutes 31 seconds in August 2015, 4 minutes 30 seconds in September 2015 and 4 minutes 26 seconds in September 2014.
- Average answering speed for Travel Services was 9 seconds in August 2015, 19 seconds in September 2015 and 20 seconds in September 2014.
- Average Travel Services talk time was 2 minutes 19 seconds in August 2015 and 2 minutes 25 seconds in September 2015 and 4 minutes 5 seconds in September 2014.
- Complaints were 2,422 in August 2015 and 2,847 in September 2015, a 17.5% increase. Comparing 3,029 complaints in September 2014 to 2,847 complaints in September 2015 there was a 6.0% decrease.

- There were 3.25 complaints per 1,000 boardings in August 2015 and 3.94 complaints per 1,000 boardings in September 2015, a 21.1% increase. Comparing 4.04 complaints per 1,000 boardings in August 2014 and 3.94 complaints per 1,000 boardings in September 2015, complaints decreased by 2.5%.
- Commendations were 578 in August 2015 and 596 in September 2015, an increase of 3.1%. September 2015 commendations increased by 55.2% when compared to 384 commendations from September 2014.
- Total boardings were 744,925 in August 2015 and 723,120 in September 2015, a 2.9% decrease. There was a 3.6% decrease in September 2015 boardings when compared to the total boardings of 750,440 in September 2014.
- When we compare the number of trips completed to boardings, we found 29% more PCAs and guests are traveling. We will monitor this so that it does not negatively impact service to customers with disabilities. We cannot limit guests unless they impinge upon capacity to service customers with disabilities.

Mr. Charles concluded his report.

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

#### **Call Center Operations**

Global Contact Services (GCS) was awarded a contract in December 2012 with an April 21, 2013 start date that coincided with the previous contract's end date. Performance under the previous contract had been degrading and became worse as the end of the contract approached. GCS started earlier than planned in order to supplement performance. Under the ADA, Paratransit must offer reservations 365 days a year and best practices require calls to be answered within 180 seconds. The Call Center takes 14 -15,000 calls daily in Travel Planning and 8 -9,000 daily calls in Travel Services. For New York City, we have to answer calls very quickly to keep pace with the incoming call volume.

For the last three years of the previous contract, answering speed was averaging roughly 3 minutes. Some months, the longest answering time was as high as 6 minutes. Considering 9 million annual trips, the volume of calls being processed in the call center is unrivaled by any other Paratransit properties. The call center is charged with answering phone calls quickly, taking accurate information and confirming the itinerary. Travel Planning is averaging roughly 4 minutes and 20 seconds talk time per call and Travel Services is averaging 2 minutes and 20 seconds. To address the volume of calls, we need to keep the calls flowing, conduct business and move on.

Two unions recently competed to represent GCS staff. One of the unions went to the National Labor Review Board (NLRB). The NLRB ultimately recognized the Transport Workers Union Local 100 (TWU) as the successful Collective Bargaining Unit. Various allegations were also brought to the MTA Board's attention in October which prompted internal reviews of the Call Center. The allegations have not been substantiated and the collective bargaining process between the TWU and GCS is underway.

There have been sporadic claims of bed bugs dating back to the previous contract. However, there has never been evidence of an infestation at the call center. There is a 7 day per week cleaning schedule, routine extermination service and protocols should there be any signs of infestations. An expert entomologist recently inspected the facility and saw no evidence of infestations although he informed us that sporadic bugs could be brought in unknowingly by staff. He offered suggestions to help avoid any future issues.

Wages will ultimately be determined through the collective bargaining process. GCS management is currently required to maintain the status quo until collective bargaining is completed. NYC Transit is not part of the collective bargaining process.

GCS is contractually required to provide appropriate service and as such, attendance and accuracy are critical. GCS has provided very good service as evidenced in recent Customer Satisfaction Surveys. Agents are competent and professional. Rules are clearly communicated.

The TWU indicated they were moving to take a strike vote but later informed us that instead they would meet with Global on Friday, November 20 with the hopes of furthering negotiations on a Collective Bargaining Agreement. In the event of a job action AAR would continue to operate. In such event, GCS is required to keep the Call Center operating. Additionally, there are subscription trips that do not require reservations and customers may book trips through the "Manage My Trip" portal via the internet. Luda Demikhovskaya asked about if there were strike contingency plans. The Vice President explained that GCS has a plan that supports service even in the event of a job action.

Collectively, GCS has 600 staff persons working in the 24 hours/ 7 days a week Call Center which has roughly 250 work stations. The seating configuration is currently being looked at with the intent of increasing the number of work stations. This will be accomplished by converting cubicle workstations to a bench style work station. Jean Ryan asked Vice President Charles for clarification on work station conversion. The Vice President explained the differences between cubical space and bench style work stations, which are more customary in call centers.

Stan Weinblatt said it is his understanding GCS workers get \$10 starting. The Vice President responded that there is a 90-day probationary period at \$9+ per hour. After probation, the rate goes up to \$10+ and continues to increase over time. Albany has been pursuing a minimum \$15.00 per hour rate and announced that State employees will be brought to this salary by 2018. This will come into play during the collective bargaining between GCS and the TWU and in other areas of Paratransit contracted out service.

It was further added that GCS employees receive five paid sick days, a week of vacation, five paid holidays, health insurance, dental, & vision coverage, a robust health plan to which workers contribute to.

Kenneth Stewart moved that that the PAC wished to expresses its great appreciation of the GCS employees for their competence and efficiency in responding to telephone customer requests.

Tom Coppola seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

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

##### **Suspensions and Appeals**

The PAC was concerned that no-shows and late cancellation suspensions may be based on the same volumes for heavy and light users of the service. The Vice President stated the language talks about “pattern and practice” and that the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) requires focus on a “pattern and practice” in such policies. The Vice President explained that missed trips are flagged when a customer reserves seven or more trips within any month and no-shows and/or late cancels 30% or more of those scheduled trips. The records of any customers that fall into this category are reviewed for possible suspension. Notices go out in the second or third week of the month to inform customers of the negative impact of no-shows and late cancels on the service. Also, this notice is to advise customers that continued no-shows and late cancellations will lead to suspension.

Suspended Customers have the right to appeal and bring other facts and circumstances to our attention for consideration. Appeals can be made in person or by writing. About 200-300 suspensions are appealed in a month with 50% of them being successfully appealed.

Customers demonstrating excessive missed trips may be suspended for a reasonable period of time. Those with repeated violations will receive progressively longer suspensions.

The policy is available on our web site. We send warning notices out, give a lot of consideration to appeals, have progressive suspension periods and focus on the top tier of customers that have a pattern of No-shows and Late Cancels. The intent is not to suspend but to limit the instances of No-shows and Late Cancels to the extent possible as they negatively impact service.

Miriam Kimmelman stated she believed you must cancel two hours before your pickup to avoid a late cancellation and Mr. Stewart suggested reiterating the two-hour cancellation policy in the next “On The Move.”

AVLM has helped clear up the instances of disputed no-shows. Mr. DePorte stated that AVLM will show exactly where the driver is. Drivers need to look at the manifest to make sure they are at the appropriate pick up location. Mr. Stewart stated we should let drivers know that we know

where they are located. The Vice President confirmed that drivers are aware that the AVL system shows their exact location and added that even though drivers push a button called performed, our system still records their actual arrival at the location.

## **V. Member Feedback - Customer Relations Unit**

Tom Coppola inquired as to the functions of the Customer Relations Unit (CRU). Kenneth Stuart, Customer Relations Officer, responded that the CRU is responsible for outreach to our customer base and potential customers. This involves providing presentations to organizations serving individuals with disabilities, senior centers, independent living centers, AARP, schools, senior groups at synagogues and churches, colleges, hospitals, and staffing tables at fairs where we distribute information about AAR, etc. This year customer relations participated in 137 such outreaches. The CRU staff coordinates updates to publications like the *Guide to Access-A-Ride Service*, *How to Apply or Recertify for Access Ride Paratransit Service*, *Drivers and Customers Can Make Everyone's Ride Better* and Access-A-Ride Metrocard brochures. The CRU also updates materials on the AAR website, administers a Travel Training program, responds to questions and complaints in a timely manner and also operates the AAR comment line where complaints, questions and commendations are made by customers.

Mr. Coppola stated that in 15 years of traveling on AAR he's made two or three complaints and only received form letters. Ken Stuart of the CRU explained our Right Now System in which we record, track and respond to 3 to 4,000 complaints, questions and commendations each month. All this information is also categorized and put into reports for dissemination in order that AAR staff and contractors can use this feedback to help improve service.



## **VI. New Business**

Mr. DePorte suggested the January PAC Agenda item be a discussion concerning proper trip cancellation procedures of long term and short term subscription trips and advanced reservation trips. Mr. DePorte wants to understand the process and how we ensure that the trips are actually cancelled. The Vice President said he would check with the appeals section to see if they are noting instances where customers claim their trips were not appropriately cancelled.

Jean Ryan suggested that the PAC Selection Committee do telephone interviews of all applicants to the PAC. Stan Weinblatt agreed. The Vice President assured the PAC that it has been standard practice for the PAC Selection Committee to interview PAC applicants.

Mr. Stewart congratulated Mr. DePorte on his chairing of the meeting. There was a motion to close the meeting, it was seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 PM.