

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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SEWRPC Staff Memorandum

RESPONSES TO PARATRANSIT SERVICE QUESTIONS

March 21, 2024

At the request of the Paratransit Taxi Task Force at the March 14, 2024, meeting, Commission staff reviewed previous research to address several questions. The following responses are based on a review of the same-day paratransit service providers previously researched and additional reports where applicable.

Are the number of trips limited?

Based on the six taxi voucher programs researched, all limit the number of trips by capping the number of vouchers that can be purchased within a month. For example, the IndyGo Access taxi program provides vouchers through a lottery system and limits the monthly purchase to one \$35 bundle, which is about 10 rides. The Anne Arundel County taxi program limits the number of rides by allowing riders to purchase no more than 15 books of vouchers per month at a value of \$10.00 per book. The Essential Trip Card program operated by the San Francisco MTA subsidizes about two to three round trips per month for eligible participants.

Of the eleven supplemental same-day paratransit services researched, four limit the number of trips. The limits vary with 60 trips per month for the same-day services in Kansas City and Denver; and four and eight trips per day for the Nashville and Chicago programs, respectively. The Ride Flex program in Boston determines limits based on frequency of usage, with an occasional rider provided two trips per month to start.

Are the types of trips limited?

Of all the services reviewed, only one appears to limit trip types. The Essential Trip Card administered by the San Francisco MTA limits trips to essential services like going to the grocery store, pharmacy, or a necessary medical visit. The San Francisco MTA does not appear to verify destinations, rather, eligible customers who pay \$12.00, are given a monthly maximum of \$60.00 for taxi trips on a debit card.

Are private trips available?

Of the six taxi voucher programs researched, all provide private or individual rides.

Of the eleven supplemental same-day paratransit services researched, nine provide private rides. For example, Connexion Plus in Jacksonville, Florida offers private rides to paratransit eligible customers at a cost of \$6.00 per trip (paratransit fare is \$3.00). Trips must be requested two hours before pick-up and are limited to 15 miles.

What are the response times?

The operators that offer taxi voucher programs refer riders to participating taxi companies and therefore, do not indicate response times for each company on their websites.

Of the eleven supplemental same-day paratransit programs researched, four indicate that rides must be scheduled in advance, with three requiring that passengers call at least two hours prior and one requiring that passengers call at least one hour ahead. The three providers that require a two-hour advance call include JTA Connexion Plus (Jacksonville, FL), OC Access (Orange County, CA), and WeGo Access on Demand (Nashville, TN). COTA On Demand in Columbus, Ohio requires that riders call at least one hour in advance.

Response times were addressed in the Transit Cooperative Research Program's (TCRP) report titled, *Alternative Services by Transit Agencies: the Intersection of Regulation and Program*.¹ This report noted that the response time requirement can be the most challenging to meet. The requirement states that on-demand services must provide people with disabilities, including wheelchair users, with the same level of service as those who are ambulatory. This means that a paratransit rider requiring a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) must have an equivalent response time as a paratransit rider who can use a sedan. The report indicates the two ways to address this requirement are (1) to ensure there are enough WAVs available; and if that is not possible, (2) to impose a one- or two-hour advance reservation policy for all riders.

Are reduced fares offered for low-income riders?

Of the same-day paratransit and taxi services researched by the Commission staff, none of the programs have a sliding scale fare based on income. Rather, the fares are subsidized up to a certain amount or number of miles, with the remaining cost of the trip covered by the rider. This is consistent with the research included in the TCRP report,² which found that the most common service model is a provider-side subsidy with multiple providers. The provider-side subsidy model has the rider paying a base fare, the transit agency subsidizing the remaining portion up to a certain amount, and the rider paying the overage.

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Provision of Alternative Services by Transit Agencies: The Intersection of Regulation and Program*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26860>. (last accessed 3/21/2024).

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Provision of Alternative Services by Transit Agencies: The Intersection of Regulation and Program*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26860>. (last accessed 3/21/2024).

How do transit agencies administer reduced fare programs?

Commission staff also reviewed a study of means-based fare programs, titled, *Comparison of Reduced-Fare Programs for Low-Income Transit Riders*.³ The research reviewed 50 of the largest transit agencies for low-income reduced fare programs and found that 17 of the 50 agencies provided an income-based fare. For those large transit agencies that administer a reduced-fare program, the agency must determine eligibility through an enrollment process that verifies if household income is at or below a certain percentage of the federal poverty level, and prior qualification in programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT). The administrative task includes a renewal process to regularly update the income information of participants.

The study found that using an external administrator can reduce both the cost and complexity of operating a low-income reduced-fare program and are likely favored by smaller agencies because of the high administrative costs associated with running a reduced-fare program internally.

Specifically, the research notes that these externally administered reduced-fare programs allow a low-income individual to pick up a transit pass for free or at a reduced rate from a participating social service or non-profit organization. This allows an individual to be considered “eligible” for the program given their prior eligibility for that organization. The study also found that the transit passes are typically sold at a discount from the transit agency to the participating organization. The three transit agencies that have an externally administered reduced fare program include VIA Metropolitan Transit (San Antonio, TX), Capital Metro (Austin, TX), and Charlotte Area Transit System (Charlotte, NC). Details about the administration of these externally managed programs were not in the research due to limited information online regarding the relationship between the organizations and transit agencies.

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³ Darling; Carpenter; Johnson-Praino; Brakewood; and Turley Voulgaris. 2021; *Comparison of Reduced-Fare Programs for Low-Income Transit Riders*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03611981211017900> (last accessed 3/21/2024).