

Paratransit Taxi Task Force – Meeting 2
June 15, 2023

Task Force 1 Recap

- At the first Paratransit Taxi Task Force meeting, a brief overview of the current system was provided, along with the federal requirements requiring system change, including full compliance with ADA public accessibility.
- We heard that paratransit taxi users chose to use the taxi service instead of the mandated paratransit van service because they believed the taxi service to be more timely, convenient, reliable, and flexible.
- Specific characteristics desired included: private rides, ability to travel throughout and outside of the county, ability for PCA's to accompany at no charge, door-to-door service, ability to make stops along the way, multiple ways to schedule (including appointment-based) and pay for rides, and driver training.

Analysis

Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reviewed the existing paratransit taxi service and modeled several alternative on demand transportation services in effort to satisfy the desired program characteristics outlined above and provide such service equitably to all eligible riders. The cost analysis ultimately included two models for the proposed on-demand service available to both ambulatory and non-ambulatory riders. None of the models proposed would continue the paratransit taxi service in its current form.

- The cost per ride was based off estimates for prioritizing private rides and ridership was based off riders currently qualifying for Transit Plus.
- **Proposed On Demand Model 1** estimates higher ridership using Transit Plus data from March 2023. There were 2176 unique riders, 69% of which are ambulatory and 31% of which are non-ambulatory. This estimate assumes all of these riders would use the on-demand service in a given month.
- **Proposed On Demand Model 2** estimates lower ridership by applying the proportion of ambulatory riders that currently use the taxi (18%) to non-ambulatory riders enrolled in Transit Plus, that would be able to use a wheelchair accessible vehicle, totaling 1101 riders in a given month.

Results – Changes to On Demand Service

- The differences in proposed and current on-demand services reflect both service enhancements and limitations due to budget constraints.
 - Service enhancements include the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles and service beyond the county border.

- Budget constraints would place limitations on service hours and the number of monthly rides (two rides per month), would increase the fare (\$10, up from \$4) and jeopardize the service's private ride model.
- Other enhancements are also not feasible, such as door-to-door service, an ability to make stops along the way, private rides, appointment-based scheduling, and multiple platforms to schedule and pay for rides. The incorporation of these additional characteristics would further raise total cost.
- Given the increased costs associated with wheelchair accessible service, the total cost estimates for Models 1 and 2 are \$1,170,240 and \$589,680, which are 3.7x and 1.9x higher than the current annual cost of the service, respectively.

Recommendations

Milwaukee County DOT and DHHS are recommending discontinuing the provision of the paratransit taxi service after the expiration of the contract (September 28, 2023) for the following reasons:

- The total annual cost of the service, after inclusion of wheelchair accessible vehicles, is projected to exceed budgeted tax levy funds available for use.
- Within the budgetary confines, any proposed on-demand service would not meet the preferences of the riders, especially in terms of limiting monthly rides, increasing the fare and not guaranteeing private rides.
- The provision of an on-demand service may detract riders away from other available transit services, including fixed route transit and mandated paratransit.
- Discontinuing the paratransit taxi service in its current form is not only mandated by the FTA, but also increases equity for all paratransit riders.

In lieu of creating a new program, we recommend exploring ways to promote existing transportation services (fixed route buses, Transit Plus vans and OATS vans) and continuing to advocate for increases in specialized transportation funds, which can be used to improve efficiency, response time, and level of service. In addition, we recommend exploring the use of any remaining 2023 taxi funds to provide services for paratransit riders. This may include travel training, and/or promotional Transit Plus van or fixed route bus rides through the end of 2023.