



PARATRANSIT TAXI TASK FORCE

MINUTES

Date: Monday, April 03, 2023

Time: 1:00pm – 2:30pm

Location: Independence First
540 S. 1st Street
Milwaukee WI 53204

Virtual: Zoom Meeting ID: 951 7876 5947
<https://zoom.us/j/95178765947>

Attendees:

Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Milwaukee County Department of Transportation
Felicia Clayborne, Disability Rights Wisconsin
David Buck, Public Relations Chair, Transit Plus Advisory Council
Brian Peters, Assistant Program Director, Independence First
Ben McKay, Interim Executive Director, SEWRPC
Jennifer Sarnecki, SEWRPC
Alena DeGrado, Transportation Coordinator, DHHS
Lisa Walters, Paratransit Customer Service Coordinator
Sandy Kellner, Administrative Officer, MCTS
Fran Musci, Director of Paratransit, MCTS
Mark Tillman, Executive Assistant, MCDOT
Barbara Beckert, Disability Rights Wisconsin
Steve McAuliff, Vision Forward
Cindy Bentley, Executive Director, People First Wisconsin
Daniel Idzikowski, Aging Unit Director, DHHS
Christopher Hiebert, Chief Transportation Engineer, SEWRPC
Marietta Luster, Administrator Aging and Disabilities Services, DHHS
Mike Bonk, Director, Office of Persons with Disabilities, DHHS
CJ Lang, Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Jim Kerlin, President & CEO, Beyond Vision
Connie Knutson, Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Grace Graves, Transit Plus Advisory Council
Jeff Sponcia, Transportation Program Planning Manager, MCDOT
Joan Schneider, Center for Deaf-Blind Persons
Kevin Fortune, Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Don Natzke, Emeritus, Milwaukee County and Transit Plus
Cheryl Orgas, Audio and Braille Literacy Enhancement

Overview of Milwaukee County Board Resolution

Pull together task force to look at options available.

FTA requirements:

- 1 Open van service to all riders. Wheelchair accessible vehicles necessary under FTA regulations (American United did not have van service)
- 2 Drug test drivers of the taxis.

PowerPoint Presentation – Status Update on Project Implementation

- Costs
 - The rider currently pays \$4 per trip
 - Milwaukee County/MCTS pay remainder (between \$4.01 and \$14.60)
 - Total current average cost is \$12.68 per ride.
- Current State
 - Contract with American United Transport (AUT) expires 5/31/23 but allows for a 120 day extension.
 - Current contract does not meet Americans with Disabilities Acts (ADA) and Federal Transit administration (FTA) requirements.
 - As an FTA regulated agency MCTS must adhere to all FTA requirements or risk jeopardizing federal funding.
 - MCDOT has submitted notice to the FTA of our intent to extend the current contract with AUT while working with the community to develop alternative solution to the current service mode.
- Interdepartmental Coordination
 - MCDOT and MCTS have been working with Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to determine if Aging and Disabilities Services would have the capacity to administer a revised program.
- Community Engagement
 - MCDOT and MCTS have been in on-going communication with representatives from Disability Rights Wisconsin, Independence First, Transit Plus Advisory Council, and the Milwaukee County Commission for Persons with Disabilities.
 - Paratransit Taxi Taskforce has been established per the 2023 Budget narrative.

Task Force Goals & Objectives, Purpose

- To come up with a reasonable approach to transition from MCTS Paratransit Taxi to a new service that allows us to do this while meeting FTA requirements.
- It is dependent on being able to identify funding so we can continue to function effectively.
- Establish parameters for RFP.

Task Force & Advisory Members Input to feed our Plan changes and implementation:

- 1. What features of the current Paratransit taxi service are most attractive to you?**
 - Ability for a person to call for a ride and for it to arrive within a specific waiting period.
 - To be able to travel across the county.
 - Not having to share a ride/stop, the ability to have a planned arrival time.
 - Use of a common Vendor, so vehicles are comparable and consistent.
 - Being able to get to a doctor's appointment where the bus system does not run in a timely manner.
 - Personal Care Assistant able to ride with.
 - Door to Door Service.
- 2. Why do you utilize the Paratransit taxi service as opposed to other on demand or paratransit options?**
 - It is very convenient.
 - Reliability to get to jobs and Dr. appointments.
 - Timeliness
 - Affordability with stipend.
 - Flexibility
 - Ability to have drop-off, e.g., child at daycare on way to or back from work.
- 3. What features of a new service would you like included or improved?**
 - Improve App. - Compatible with Android and MAC,
 - Website to schedule
 - Ability to schedule rides several months out.
 - Expand border outside Milwaukee County
 - Ability to pay with cash & credit card.
 - Better balance between supply and demand. Ability to respond to requests for services.
 - Training for drivers to provide assistance for riders.
 - Boston and Denver have integrated Uber/Lyft in their Paratransit systems.

Next Meeting dates and suggestions

- Independence First location is convenient.
- Continue to have hybrid meeting.
- Establish ground rules for meeting.
- Prefer to not have meeting on Monday.
- Survey Monkey is accessible.
- Milwaukee County Commission for Persons with Disabilities meets on 2nd Monday.

- Transit Plus Advisory Council meets on 3rd Tuesday.
- Transportation Advocacy Committee meets on the 4th Thursday from 1:30pm to 3:00pm.
- Original Contract was set to expire May 1st but was extended to the end of September.
- The plan is to have the RFP drafted to allow the Task Force ample time to review.

Comments

- Participants in the discussion highlight the importance of the paratransit taxi service for various reasons, including reliable transportation to work and medical appointments. Timeliness is crucial for medical appointments and work commitments. Some participants mention the need for a ride stipend to make the service affordable for those with limited funds. There are concerns about the current taxi service's responsiveness and willingness to accommodate passengers with mobility aids or service animals.
- Suggestions for improvement include enhancing the app's accessibility and scheduling capabilities, expanding the service beyond Milwaukee County, maintaining door-to-door service, and offering multiple payment options, including credit card payments. Additionally, participants stress the need for better balance between supply and demand to ensure fair responsiveness to ride requests.
- There was a suggestion to focus on driver training for better assistance to people with disabilities. They want drivers to be more aware of providing help to passengers from the van to the door, which seems to be an issue with taxi drivers. They also mention the importance of educating transit service users about all available options and understanding their implications. They suggest including people with disabilities in the training and reevaluating the new freedom program for transit plus eligible individuals. Additionally, they propose exploring the integration of rideshare programs like Lyft and Uber into the paratransit system, citing successful examples in cities like Boston and Denver.
- Brian Peters apologizes for the technology issues; it is not a common occurrence and will be resolved by the next meeting.
- Barbara Beckert emphasizes the importance of having a hybrid option and suggests working on refining it to make it more effective and accessible to all participants, both in-person and online.
- Barbara suggested the need to schedule a meeting to establish clear ground rules to ensure everyone has equal opportunities to participate, and to work out accessibility issues and issues with technology.
- Donna Brown-Martin agrees to continue with the hybrid option and apologizes for any difficulties with using Zoom, stating that the county is more familiar with Microsoft Teams.

Adjournment