Paratransit Advisory Committee (PAC)

September 27, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Meeting commenced at 5:05 p.m.

PAC Attendees: Lyudmila Demikhovskaya, David H. DePorte, Edward S. Friedman, Ketrina Hazell, Mindy Jacobsen, Ellen Rubin, Jean Ryan, Tucker B. Salovaara, Ken Stewart, Sharada Veerubhotla, RueZalia Watkins, Stan Weinblatt

Absent: Thomas J. Coppola, John Moynihan, Marisa Mia Ragozino

NYC Transit Staff Attendees: Brandon Anderson, Tom Chin, Michael Cosgrove, Donna Fredericksen, Lynda Edmond, Eddie Griffith, Patricia Ibarguen, Felicia D. Jones, Shirley Teran-Marty, Steven LoPiano, Diane McFarlane, Denise Ann McQuade, Tejpal Prajapati, Cassandra Lubin-Richards, Russell Schmid, Kenneth Stuart, Chantal Sealy Walker

Guests: Quemuel Arroyo (DOT), Carlos Duque (MOPD) Inat German (MOPD), Alex Elegudin and Frank Camp (GCS), Uwvie Obodo (PCA for Tucker B. Salovaara)

Introductions – David H. DePorte, PAC Chair
Mr. DePorte reminded the PAC and attendees that since he is blind he would appreciate if PAC members present would introduce themselves and that attendees provide their affiliations and titles.

In addition, Mr. DePorte 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.

Mr. DePorte reminded PAC members that they would be limited to one question or one comment at a time.

Announcements – PAC Chair David H. DePorte
Mr. DePorte informed the committee that Russell Schmid Paratransit staff member wished to address the PAC. Mr. Schmid informed the Committee that he was retiring on November 4 after 23 and a half years with Paratransit. All thanked Russell and wished him well on his retirement.

I.   Approval of Minutes – PAC Chair David H. DePorte
Mr. DePorte called for the approval of the July 19, 2016 minutes and asked if PAC members had any corrections or changes to the minutes. Hearing none, Ken Stewart moved to approve minutes and Ellen Rubin seconded the motion. Minutes approved unanimously

II.   AAR Service Report – Vice President Steve LoPiano
As requested by the Committee, Vice President LoPiano provided a summary of the Paratransit Report.

Registrants increased 4.0% comparing 139,970 Registrants in July 2015 to 145,621 registrants in July 2016.

Trips scheduled decreased 4.1% comparing 569,319 Trips Scheduled in July 2015 to 545,975 Trips Scheduled in July 2016.

Trips completed decreased 4.0% comparing 540,159 Trips Completed in July 2015 to 518,417 Trips Completed in July 2016.

Customer No-Shows decreased 14.7% comparing 9,017 Customer No-Shows in July 2015 to 7,692 Customer No-Shows in July 2016.

Carrier No-Shows decreased 66.6% comparing 1,496 Carrier No-Shows in July 2015 to 500 Carrier No-Shows in July 2016.

Total No-Shows decreased 24.0% comparing 13,718 Total No-Shows in July 2015 to 10,426 Total No-Shows in July 2016.

On Time Performance increased 3.6% comparing 90.9% On Time Performance in July 2015 to 94.5% On Time Performance in July 2016.

Appointments on Time increased 3.0% comparing 88.0 % in July 2015 to 91.1% in July 2016.

Late Trips by Carrie decreased 47.4% comparing 36,337 Late Trips by Carrier in July 2015 to 19,118 Late Trips by Carrier in July 2016.

Complaints increased 14.7% comparing 2,659 complaints in July 2015 to 3,051 complaints in July 2016.

There was a 17.9% increase in complaints per 1,000 boardings comparing 3.50 complaints per 1,000 boardings in July 2015 to 4.12 complaints per 1,000 boardings in July 2016.

Commendations increased 3.3% comparing 569 Commendations in July 2015 to 588 Commendations in July 2016.

Total Boardings decreased 2.7% comparing 759,993 Total Boardings in July 2015 to 739,718 Total Boardings in July 2016.

PAC Comments
Jean Ryan asked why total boardings are going down. Vice President Steve LoPiano responded that ridership had dropped in 2014 and has remained flat at about 6.4 million annual trips.

III.   PAC Topic – Frank Camp, GCS
The process and accuracy of information supplied by Travel Services concerning vehicle location and ETAs

How a call is handled by Travel Services depends on several factors such as which type of service, broker service, vouchers or Access-A-Ride the trip was assigned to. In addition, consideration must be given to the type of vehicle that the customer is able to use. When a customer calls Travel Services, a Customer Care Associate (CCA) answers the call, the CCA looks at ADEPT for information about the customer's trip. If the customer is on Broker service, the CCA does not have access to specific information concerning the trip. In such cases, the customer is referred to the Broker responsible for his/her trip.

If the customer's trip was scheduled with a Dedicated Carrier, the CCA can view the status of the trip on ADEPT. If a particular route is running late, it is color coded red on screen. ETAs are not given unless asked for. However, the location of a vehicle is given and the CCA can use AVLM to locate the vehicle. Information about customer particulars and trip particulars are in ADEPT, as well as notes from customer calls entered by other CCAs and notes entered by carrier dispatchers.

Ken Stewart asked what the CCAs see when they look at the screen. Mr. Camp responded the CCA sees a grid type map. There is a 2 minute delay that occurs between pings that signal the vehicle's location as it moves along its route. The most accurate information that CCAs can provide is the vehicle's location.

During the 30-minute waiting period, customers may be placed on hold when calling for an update on the vehicle's arrival time so the CCA can check AVLM to see if the vehicle is in another borough. You'll be asked at the 30-minute mark if you want to wait for the vehicle or want a taxi. After the 30-minute waiting period, the CCA

will call the carrier unless the vehicle is a few blocks away. They will offer a taxi or search for another vehicle in the area that can pick you up.

A Presentation regarding how AVLM works was given by Tejpal Prajapati of NYCT. ADEPT currently does not provide updated ETAs based on the vehicle's GPS position but relies on the last trip activity on the route. Essentially, ADEPT currently does not use the most up-to-date vehicle location to calculate ETAs. This presentation will be sent to PAC members.

Discussion/Member Feedback:
ETAs

Edward S. Friedman asked if AVLM is able to ping data every two minutes, "What is preventing more up-to-date ETA information from being supplied?" Tejpal responded that AVLM and ADEPT are two different systems and ADEPT predates AVLM. ADEPT currently does not take advantage of the 2 minute pings when calculating ETAs. We are looking into enhancing ADEPT to better take advantage of the current AVLM information enabling more accurate ETAs.

Ms. Ryan said that when she inquires about a vehicle, she is told where the vehicle is but not if there are other pickups or drop offs prior to the vehicle arriving at her location. Ms. Ryan suggested providing this additional information.

RueZalia Watkins said she asks if there are pickups before or after her pickup and David DePorte said he does that, too. Vice President LoPiano agreed it is not enough to know where the vehicle is. However, if you have a computer or cell phone you will be able to look up information concerning your vehicle through "Where is My Trip" which will show where your vehicle is and the pickups/drop offs to be made while the vehicle is enroute to your location.   .

Mr. Friedman suggested that along with providing streets the neighborhood should also be integrated into the system.

David DePorte cited a recent experience concerning an inquiry made to Travel Services. David was in the Lobby of his building and he called Travel Services and asked where his vehicle was. The Customer Care Associate told him that the vehicle is on the Bruckner and the driver expected to arrive in half an hour. However, the vehicle arrived in 10 minutes.

Vice President LoPiano responded, "Your experience is similar to others. When the system is updated it will be more accurate." With "Where's My Trip" if you have a computer or cell phone you will be able to look up information concerning your vehicle. We are also looking to put Broker vehicles on the same system. This will give us a feed from their GPS and our system will continuously update.

Robo-Calls
Ellen Rubin said she noticed that she is not getting robo-calls announcing that the vehicle is near until she is in a vehicle. Tejpal informed the PAC that there was a technical problem with the system last week and it was being addressed. Vice President LoPiano said the system enhancements expected in mid-2017 will improve the accuracy of the robo-calls.

Lyudmila Demikhovskaya asked if robo-calls are coming from Paratransit that tell customers to "come outside your vehicle is here." Confirmed with Scheduling Officer Thomas Chin that calls advising customers that their vehicle is outside are made by the Carrier Dispatcher or the vehicle's driver.

Interaction with CCAs
Ken Stewart asked what is the best information to give Travel Services, your AAR ID number, name, telephone number?

Sharada Veerubhotla asked is there a proposal to educate the public about why questions are asked when they call Travel Services.

Paratransit advised that the CCA asks for your name and AAR ID number when you call and then you inform the CCA what you're calling about. All this information is in the Guide to AAR Service and on our webpage http://web.mta.info/nyct/paratran/guide.htm.

General
Tucker B. Salovaara said I understand that you're trying to rebuild the system but sometimes drivers turn off the system. Vice President LoPiano responded that dispatchers monitor routes and make sure the units are on. Systems can go down while in service but this is rare. We have a procedure that carriers are to test the system in vans and a vehicle should not be fielded if the AVLM is not working. We are looking at possible backup systems for the vehicles that are phone or tablet based.

Mindy Jacobsen said she is hoping someone is looking over the routes because routes are not direct and this increases travel time. Vice President LoPiano responded that we are looking into scheduling engines that will provide more direct trips and efficient schedules.

IV. Paratransit Topic – Eligibility
Vice President LoPiano reviewed the Paratransit organizational chart and explained that he would introduce a unit head at each meeting that will describe what their unit does. For this meeting Vice President LoPiano introduced Diane McFarlane, Eligibility & Planning Officer. Diane proceeded to explain the eligibility unit and process.

An applicant must call the Eligibility Information Center and give the agent his/her name, address and telephone number and agree on a mutually acceptable date and time for an appointment at an assessment center in his/her borough. Then a letter is sent to the applicant with a brochure "How to Apply or Recertify for Access A-Ride Paratransit Service" and an Access-A-Ride Application is to be completed and taken to their assessment. Currently, 100% of applicants are required to appear for an in-person assessment.

As a result of the Jorge v. NYCT Class Action Lawsuit, no one will be denied access to apply for AAR based on language because we now have use of a Language Line. We have English and a few Spanish speaking staff members but Language Line handles 200 languages and will help to identify the language spoken and translate. Written applications are available in five languages.

Presumptive eligibility is given to an applicant or recertifying customer for two days before and one day after an appointment so the customer can be transported to and from the assessment center. At the assessment center the customer states his/her preferred language and then we will use the Language Line. Eligibility has 21 days within which to make a determination of the customer's eligibility. If Eligibility is unable to make a timely eligibility determination then a customer is given presumptive eligibility until the eligibility determination is made.

Caldwell v. NYC Transit kicks in now. If, for example, you had full service and you were recertified and as a result of the recertification, you were given a determination other than full service and you appeal, you will keep full service while you appeal. Once you receive your determination letter and you are not satisfied with the decision, you have a right to appeal the new eligibility determination. The new eligibility determination will not take effect until 60 days after the recertification date. Within the 60 days you have 30 days from the date of the eligibility determination

to request a copy of your records. Caldwell only applies to customers that are recertifying. You must initiate your request within a reasonable period of time. Eligibility must send your file to you within 30 days and may have to fax or email it to you so that you receive it within 30 days from your request.

Appeal – You can only appeal the determination made on your current AAR application. Eligibility has 30 days within which to make a decision on your appeal. A new condition cannot be raised during the appeal. If you have a new condition you must reapply. If you lose your appeal of the determination of your current application which granted you conditional eligibility (when formerly you had full eligibility), you will now have conditional eligibility such as Distance: 1-2 city blocks.

Within Eligibility, misconduct appeals are handled. Misconduct decisions are usually made whether to suspend or terminate. With certain misconduct, under the law if it's illegal or violent we are able to suspend or terminate immediately. Otherwise, a suspension or termination does not occur until due process.

Under No-Shows/Late Cancellations, a no-show occurs when the AAR vehicle arrives within the 30-minute pick-up window (waiting period) and the customer does not board within five minutes. There is a 30-minute window for the vehicle to arrive which begins at a customer's pick-up time. For example, if a customer has an 11 a.m. pick up and the vehicle arrives at 11:30 a.m., the vehicle is on time. If the customer shows up at 11:38 a.m. and the vehicle has already left the pick-up location, it is considered a no-show. A Late Cancellation occurs when a customer cancels a trip less than two hours before the scheduled trip. If you are suspended under the No-Show/Late Cancellation policy, your subscription service is immediately suspended and you have to wait 30 days before you can apply again.

There is a difference between a right to Due Process and a Privilege. Subscription service is a privilege and may be cancelled any time.

V.   Election of the Vice Chairperson– Chair David H. DePorte
Prior to discussing Eligibility, David DePorte reminded the committee that there was business that had to be attended to and moved to vote on the selection of a Vice Chair.

Ken Stewart nominated Ellen Rubin for Vice Chair
Luda Demikhovskaya seconded

Tucker Salovaara nominated Edward Friedman for Vice Chair
RueZalia Watkins seconded

A vote was taken with 8 votes casted for Ellen Rubin and 4 votes casted for Edward Friedman. Ellen Rubin was elected Vice Chair.

Discussion/Member Feedback:
Suspensions
Mr. Friedman asked if we send out warning letters. Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded, "Warning letters are initially sent and if behavior does not improve after the warning letter then you will be subjected to a suspension."

Jean Ryan asked if a customer would be suspended after receiving seven violations in one month. Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded, "Not in one month."

Equipment Changes

Ms. Demikhovskaya asked, "If you have an equipment change do you have to reapply?" Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded, "Yes, you must."

Recertification

An inquiry was made if a customer is approaching his/her expiration date will he/she receive a call or a letter. Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded, "Recertification packets are sent out approximately two months prior to a customer's expiration date."

Language Lines

Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded to a question about accommodating individuals who speak other languages. "If we receive a request for another language, we can accommodate 200 languages via NYC Transit's Language Line." Printed material is also readily available in five languages. An applicant's rights will not be effected due to a preference for an alternate language.

Mr. Friedman asked if the language line is available throughout New York City Transit and Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded, "The Language Line is available throughout our system."

Ms. Veerubhotla asked if Eligibility can email records and Eligibility & Planning Officer Diane McFarlane responded, "If you give us your email."

Non-Dedicated Service

Ms. Rubin asked as the number of yellow and green taxis increase will customers be offered more use of taxis. Vice President Steve LoPiano responded that the taxi reimbursement program requires

customers to pay the cab fare up front and seek reimbursement from NYCT. This is not customer friendly, creates a back office function and care has to be taken to avoid fraud. In order to take advantage of the increased taxis and Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV), we are working with TLC to use Transit Network Connectivity (TNC) and E-Hail to dispatch and pay for the fare. We expect a pilot program to be launched in early 2017. Ms. Rubin said when credit card machines became available, VeriFone wouldn't train individuals who are blind.

General
Carlos Duque reminded everyone that the Elections are approaching and MOPD wants everyone available to vote. There are flyers on their website and twitter.

Closing
Mr. DePorte commented that there were three excellent presentations given at the meeting. He asked PAC members to email or call him with suggested topics for the November 15 meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 7 p.m.