PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF TRANSIT

TECHNICAL REPORT D: PARATRANSIT

King County

Presented to
the Metropolitan King County Council
Government Accountability & Oversight Committee
by the
County Auditor's Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access is Transit's paratransit program, required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The service is expensive; it costs nearly $40 a ride to provide, but recovers less than $1 per ride in fares. Although there has been an increase in productivity in 2009, for the most part, the program's costs have risen while productivity has declined. Transit has devoted significant staff resources to contain paratransit costs, creating unique programs and functions that appear to be cost effective, but may reduce paratransit productivity.

We recommend that Transit develop a strategic plan to improve paratransit productivity, continue its cost-containment efforts, and provide council with policy options to deliver more efficient service, including the option to scale back service to baseline levels required by the ADA.

1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides background on Transit's paratransit program, including the legal requirements it satisfies. It describes the objectives and methodology used in analyzing the program and concludes with a summary of the findings and recommendations and an accounting of the estimated savings that could result from implementation of these recommendations.

Background

Transit's Access program is responsible for responding to federal requirements established by the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and related regulations. Those regulations stipulate that any entity operating fixed route transit services must also provide a complementary paratransit program for persons with disabilities who are unable, due to their disability, to make independent use of the fixed route service. The paratransit program is intended to be comparable to services available to the general public in that it is required to operate within the same service area and operate the same hours as fixed routes.

Access Costs Have Risen While Productivity Has Generally Declined

Transit's Accessible Services Programs (Access) provides paratransit services for King County. The Access operating budget, including administrative and direct service costs, totaled $50,229,745 for 2008, which represents almost nine percent of Transit's total operating budget. The majority of Access's budget is spent on contracted services, including ADA eligibility assessments, customer service, reservations, scheduling and dispatch management, and service delivery.

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Objectives and Methodology

The entire Transit audit spanned multiple areas of work, including Transit's service design practices, financial and capital planning, technology and information management, vehicle maintenance, operator and transit police staffing, and paratransit. The objectives of this portion of the Transit audit were to assess Access's costs and productivity, determining recent trends and comparing Access's performance to peers where possible. We analyzed Access's current and potential cost containment strategies, including alternative delivery methods and reducing levels of service to legally required levels. We also evaluated Access's staffing efficiency and effectiveness, as well as its contracts for providing paratransit service.

To achieve this objective, the office and its consultants:

- Interviewed Transit leadership, management, and line staff
- Surveyed relevant industry literature and best practices
- Reviewed Transit documents and service contracts
- Conducted a peer review including: TriMet's LIFT program in Portland, Oregon; Metro Mobility in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and RTD's Access-a-Ride program in Denver, Colorado
- Analyzed data including five years of Accessible Services Year-End Performance Reports.

Summary of Findings

We found that Access sets goals and monitors reports related to productivity, but does not have a strategic plan for investigating factors for productivity declines or identifying solutions to reach goals. Access has developed several successful programs to contain costs. Access provides service and fare levels that are more generous than required by the ADA.

Access's contracted reservationist and scheduler staff appear to be effective, and are well-trained and experienced in comparison

to peer agencies. Access has many more agency staff than peers and does not currently conduct comprehensive staffing analysis. Transit has not enforced its contractual incentives to promote contractor productivity.

Summary of Recommendations

In order to improve Access's productivity and reduce costs, Transit should:

Chapter 2

- Adopt a comprehensive, fully documented strategic plan and approach to address how productivity goals are to be met and should regularly reassess its paratransit productivity goal, based on historical trends and the anticipated future service environment.
- Continue Access's cost containment efforts and monitor their effectiveness while expanding Community Access Transportation (CAT) and other alternative service programs proven to effectively offset the cost of the more expensive Access services.
- Submit a plan to council detailing the potential savings and impacts on customer service if Transit adjusts paratransit service and fares to levels allowed by the ADA.

Chapter 3

- Develop a thorough staffing model that incorporates workload factors and processes, efficiency benchmarks, impacts of workload changes on staffing needs, and the effects of staffing changes on Access performance.
- Monitor and enforce its contract incentives and penalties for a period of one year, and then re-evaluate their usefulness as a tool for improving productivity.

EXHIBIT A

Estimated Savings/Revenue from Recommendations

	One-Time Cost Savings	**Ongoing Cost Savings**	**Opportunities Ongoing Increased Revenue**
Meet Productivity Goal	$2.8 million		
CAT Expansion, 2009-2010	$2 million		
Contain Services to ADA		$1 million	
Increase Fares to ADA Levels			$0.8 - $2.8 million
TOTAL	**$4.8 million**	**$1 million**	**$0.8 - $2.8 million**

SOURCE: King County Auditor's Office

2 MANAGING PARATRANSIT COSTS

Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses Access's productivity and cost controls, including comparisons to peers and to historical performance. We found that Access sets goals and monitors reports related to productivity, but does not have a strategic plan for investigating factors for productivity declines or identifying solutions to reach goals. Access has developed several successful programs to contain costs, which we recommend be continued or expanded. Finally, Access provides service and fare levels that are more generous than required by the ADA. We recommend that Transit prepare a proposal for council detailing the cost savings and impacts of reducing service level and raising fares.

Productivity

Transit Agencies Often Develop Strategic Plans for Achieving Productivity Goals

It is a common practice among large transit agencies to develop strategic plans for achieving productivity goals and objectives that support the agency's mission. They are typically developed in conjunction with the budgeting process, to provide the resources for implementing the strategies; then, performance is monitored, and deviations from plan are explained and used to inform next year's targets. These strategic plans feature:

- An annual productivity goal.
- A strategy for achieving the goal, taking into account how time is being allocated in actual operation thus allowing the plan to provide maximum return for the effort invested.
- Measurement techniques to monitor progress on the strategic initiatives.
- Ongoing monitoring of progress.

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Access has implemented some features of a strategic plan. It sets productivity goals based on historical trends and with the intent to improve past performance. Access's contracts with its service providers state the productivity goals in terms of boardings per hour for the first five years of the contracts. These provisions hold that boardings per hour should increase by .01 per year, from 1.79 in 2008 to 1.83 in 2012.

Access further monitors performance against its target on a monthly basis. The Access program tracks boardings per hour and other performance indicators to monitor service efficiency and effectiveness. These indicators are reviewed by Access staff and summarized into a monthly report distributed to management staff.

Access Has Not Defined a Strategy for Achieving Its Productivity Goal

However, Access has not defined a strategy for achieving its boardings per hour performance goal. Strategies for improving boardings per hour could include assessing Access's performance using factors identified above that influence productivity in order to identify the root causes of not attaining optimal performance. It should be noted that some productivity factors are outside the control of Access while others are fully or partially within the agency's control.

Factors Affecting Productivity Outside Access's Control
- Traffic congestion (loss of operator time stuck in traffic)
- Density (affects length of client trips)
- Development patterns (affects length of client trips)
- Client residential patterns (clustered versus scattered)
- Configuration of popular trip origins and destinations (may increase loading and unloading time and time to reach customers)

Factors Affecting Productivity Within or Partially Within Access's Control

- Scheduling effectiveness (grouping trips, minimizing slack time, optimizing operator assignments)
- Dispatch effectiveness (use of slack time, utilizing nearest vehicle, time loss recovery techniques.)
- No show customers
- Lost operators
- Searching for addresses
- Operators not using most efficient routes between points
- Communications and paperwork
- Passenger escort
- Late cancellations

While there is no industry standard that defines an optimal goal for trips per hour, a Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) survey of the largest urban demand response systems (which included Access) revealed a range of productivity as measured in trips per hour of 1.3 to 2.3 trips per hour. At 1.68 boardings per hour, Access is at the lower end of that range. In the peer review, only Denver's service productivity (1.29) is lower than Access's.

Exhibit B shows recent trends in Access productivity in terms of boardings per hour.

EXHIBIT B

Boardings per Hour, 2004 – April 2009
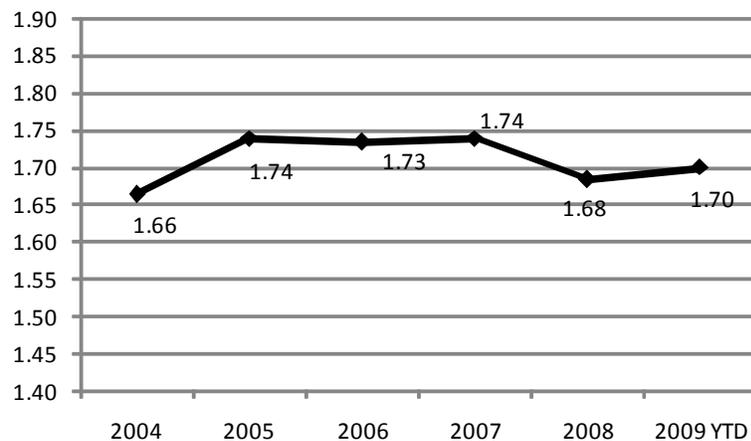
SOURCE: Nelson Nygaard

Every .04 Increase in Boardings per Hour Saves $1 Million per Year

As Exhibit B indicates, there was a 4.8-percent increase in Access's productivity as measured by boardings per hour in 2005. Productivity remained relatively constant between 2005 and 2007 and declined 3.4 percent in 2008. While these changes in productivity may seem inconsequential, very small changes in productivity equate to very large changes in expenditures. In 2008 each 0.01, or 0.6-percent change has a value equal to nearly $240,000 per year. For example, if productivity was 1.72, or 0.04 more than what is recorded for 2008, the service would have cost $950,000 less to provide. The cost impact of Access not attaining its productivity goal can be quantified by examining the reduction in hours that would be possible at the higher productivity rate of 1.8 boardings per hour. If the 2008 goal was met, Access would have saved $2,842,000.

Access staff offered the following observations on possible reasons for declining productivity over the past year:

- The addition of 145 square miles in the eastern portion of the service region funded by Transit Now may have contributed to this decline.

- Access negotiated new service contracts which took place as of August 1, 2008; two service providers continued, one was discontinued. As a result, significant staff turnover occurred, and some loss of productivity can be attributed to the transition.

- Productivity declined sharply in December 2008 which was likely due to severe weather conditions. On average for the first 11 months of the year, 95,502 trips were provided, compared to 71,242 trips, or a 25 percent reduction, in December.


RECOMMENDATION D1   Transit should adopt a comprehensive, fully documented strategic plan and approach to address how productivity goals are to be met and should regularly reassess its paratransit productivity goal, based on historical trends and the anticipated future service environment.

Access's growing costs and cost containment efforts

The trends show steadily growing costs for the program as measured by cost per hour, cost per mile, and cost per boarding. In addition, Exhibit C indicates the total program operating costs grew nearly 30 percent over the past five years, while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) grew by 15.4 percent.

EXHIBIT C
Growth in Total Operating Expenses
Compared to Growth in CPI 2004 - 2008
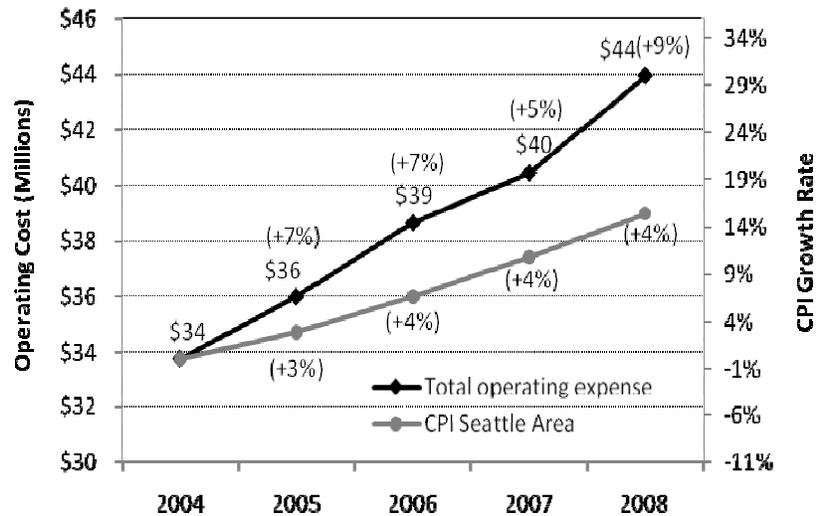
SOURCE: Nelson Nygaard

Despite Cost Containment Efforts, Access's Costs Are Growing

Access's costs exceed those of its peers. Its cost per hour and cost per mile are the highest of the peer group. Access's cost per boarding is exceeded only by Denver.

Access, along with its peers, seeks to control the growth of the ADA paratransit system and therefore overall costs of the program. A common approach is to move riders from paratransit to fixed-route or community services when appropriate. Access's travel training, conditional eligibility and path review programs have resulted in diverting some rides that might otherwise have been taken on Access.

Pathway Review and Travel Training Programs
By definition, persons who are conditionally eligible for ADA paratransit programs are able to take some of their trips by fixed route transit. Access administers a program to conduct a pathway review to assess whether such individuals are able to

get to a fixed route bus stop. If it is determined, following an assessment of the individual's path of travel to and from the bus stop, that he/she is able to use fixed route, that person is not considered eligible for paratransit for those trips.

Transit's Pathway Review Saved $0.5 Million in 2008

During 2008, four FTEs were assigned the task of pathway review; three are contracted staff, and one person is on Access's staff. Altogether, the salaries and fringe benefits associated with those staff totaled $223,220. This program diverted 17,901 trips in 2008 that might otherwise have been taken on paratransit. At a fully loaded cost of $39.17 per trip, this saved the program about $701,000 and cost $223,220 to administer, for a net savings of $477,800.

Contract staff are responsible to conduct travel training activities to train and encourage people to use fixed route transit services. Some people need to be trained multiple times, or retrained if there is a change in their circumstances, or there are significant changes in transit services the individual uses, or they need to be trained to take a different type of trip outside their regular routine.

During 2008, the expenses associated with this program totaled $434,400. An estimated 40,593 trips were taken on fixed route that otherwise would have been taken on paratransit. This estimate is based on the actual paratransit trip usage of those individuals prior to the training. At a fully loaded rate of $39.17 per trip, the net savings were $1,155,628.

Taxi (Overflow) Service

Currently, taxis provide "overflow" service to be used in cases when it is not possible or practical to employ an Access van. Use of taxis for this purpose allows for service to be adjusted for high volumes of trips without hiring new staff or increasing service hours for existing providers. Access staff has established a goal

of capping taxi services at five percent of the total service. This goal is based on review of historic trends, on professional judgment, and on the limited capacity of local taxi companies.

Each Trip on Access Costs $40

Depending on the circumstances, taxis may or may not be a more cost-effective method of providing service. In 2008, Access reported that a total of $2,800,883 was spent for overflow taxi service and that 68,540 trips were provided at an average cost of $40.86 per trip. This represented six percent of the total number of boardings provided in the system. The average operating cost in 2008 for an Access trip was $39.17, compared to $40.86 for the average cost of a taxi trip. Because the cost of an Access trip has increased on average five percent per year, it is likely that in 2009 the cost of an Access trip may exceed that of a taxi.

Increasing the use of taxis raises concerns about Access staff's ability to conduct additional program oversight and monitoring for service quality and for adherence to federal requirements (e.g., drug and alcohol testing). In addition, seeking an increase in taxi service is dependent upon the availability of services and capacity of existing companies to increase services.

Community Access Transportation Program
Access's Community Access Transportation (CAT) was established in 2003, with the purpose of providing used vehicles to community agencies in exchange for those agencies providing service to their own clients, as well as to certified ADA eligible persons who would otherwise have qualified for more expensive Access services. In 2008, the average cost for a CAT trip was $4.80, compared to an Access trip cost of $39.17. Access provides lift-equipped vans or 15-passenger vans (that are either retired from the Access fleet or new), maintenance, and driver training, while the agencies provide van drivers and scheduling, comprehensive and liability insurance, and transportation service

Transit's CAT Program Saved About $1.6 Million in 2008

for customers, including at least 50 one-way trips per month for Access eligible customers. For agencies that provide at least 100 one-way trips per month for Access eligible customers, Access may provide operating funds (which cannot be used for driver salaries). The average cost of a CAT trip is $4.80; in 2008, 155,456 trips were provided on CAT vehicles; 38 percent of these trips were trips that would have been eligible for regular ADA service. This resulted in potential cost savings of up to $1,567,712.

This program has steadily grown, as measured in trips provided, over the six years since its inception while the number of participating agencies has remained relatively constant. It is likely that there are inherent limitations as to the extent this program can grow unless additional participating agencies are included. Theoretically, the program would be limited only by the lack of demand from partner agencies. Access would benefit from developing an inventory of potential partner agencies, starting with those that may have expressed an interest in participating in the program, in order to project future demand for program involvement.

When the program first started, retired Access vehicles were provided to the agencies; however, it proved more reliable to provide those agencies with new vehicles which are paid for either through Transit Now or through a formula-based grant provided by the Washington State Department of Transportation. The latter source of funds is not entirely predictable since they are subject to legislative approval every two years.

Expanding CAT may have a negative impact on Access system productivity because agencies tend to provide more group trips to agency activities and programs which are more efficient to provide, but on the whole could be more cost effective. Also, the

more agencies that participate, the greater the need to focus on program coordination to ensure service expectations are met in a consistent manner.

Expanding the CAT Program Could Yield $2 Million

While it may not prove feasible to double the program without careful planning (and depending on the approach to implementation), expanding the program could result in additional staffing responsibilities, Access should accelerate efforts to include additional agencies, identify resources needed to support their participation and seek this funding through WSDOT or other sources, or consider shifting funds from contracted service to this program. Access estimates that CAT could grow by 25 percent over the next two years, which would yield an additional $2 million in savings.

RECOMMENDATION D2

Transit should continue Access's cost containment efforts and monitor their effectiveness while expanding CAT and other alternative service programs proven to effectively offset the cost of the more expensive Access services.

Federal ADA Requirements

Access exceeds minimum ADA requirements, which also drives up costs. The following lists areas where Access exceeds legal requirements:

- *Service Area*: ADA requires complementary paratransit service to be provided within ¾-mile corridors from fixed routes and the core service area. Access exceeds this standard by providing service in some parts of King County where fixed route transit does not operate. In 2008, it cost $554,000 to provide Transit Now trips, but Access was only reimbursed $387,714 in Transit Now funding.

Transit Exceeds ADA Service Requirements for Area, Hours, and Level

- *Service Hours*: ADA requires complementary paratransit service to be available during the same hours and days as fixed route service. Access exceeds this standard by providing 26,500 trips during hours that fixed route does not operate. Access is the only agency we identified that exceeds the ADA by providing more hours of service than what is required.

- *Service Level*: ADA requires complementary paratransit to provide curb-to-curb, origin to destination service. Access provides a higher level of service (door-to-door or hand-to-hand for persons who are certified as needing this level of service).[1] All peers go beyond requirements by providing door-to-door service when necessary. Although it is unclear how many riders would not take Access trips if the higher level of service was not provided, the cost of this service level is high.

- *Fares*: ADA requires that fares may be no more than twice the fixed route fare. Currently, the Access paratransit fare is $1.00, compared to $1.75-$2.50 for fixed route fares. One of the three peer agencies is charging the maximum fare allowed under the ADA and one is close to the maximum allowed. Estimated additional fare revenue is based on charging $1.75 (the Access base fare) for all paratransit trips. Although this estimate assumes an additional $0.75 per trip, it cannot be assumed that all riders would be willing or able to pay a higher fare. In addition, paratransit customers, as those who use fixed route, are able to purchase monthly passes, which means revenues may not exactly correlate to the number of trips taken. The ADA allows paratransit fares to be established at up to twice the regular fixed route fare; for

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[1] Transit believes that there may be legal issues that would arise from reducing this level of service. The auditors did not evaluate related risk or legal issues.

Access, this would be $3.50.[2] It cannot be assumed that all riders would actually pay the additional fare.

The potential cost savings and net revenue increases are estimated to be between $1.9 and $3.8 million, as illustrated in Exhibit D.

EXHIBIT D

Cost of Exceeding ADA Standards and Potential Revenue from Meeting ADA-Allowed Fare Levels

Service category exceeding ADA standards	Boardings in 2008	2008 net costs
Service hours	26,533	$858,149
Service area	14,133	$166,286
Level of service	595,641	Unquantified. High cost.
Total costs		**$1 Million**

Fare Options	Boardings in 2008	Potential additional revenue
Fares at $1.75	1,121,776	$841,000
Fares at $3.50	1,121,776	$2,804,000
Total potential revenue		**$0.8 - $2.8 Million**

SOURCE: Nelson Nygaard

These changes would impact the level of service for Access customers. This audit did not attempt to quantify the magnitude of this service and fare impacts. Decisions about level of service and fare amounts will be dependent on policy goals.

RECOMMENDATION D3   Transit should submit a plan to council detailing the potential savings and impacts on customer service if Transit adjusts paratransit service and fares to levels allowed by the ADA.

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[2] Transit believes that Washington state law would preclude this fare level. The issue has not been tested in court. The auditors did not evaluate related legal issues.

3 PARATRANSIT STAFFING

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews Access staffing, including effectiveness, training and experience, and efficiency of staff. Access's contracted reservationist and scheduler staff appear to be effective, and are well-trained and experienced in comparison to peer agencies. Access has more agency staff than its peers and has not conducted comprehensive staffing analysis to explain the need for those staff. In addition, Transit has not enforced its incentives to promote contractor productivity. We recommend that Transit monitor and enforce its contractual incentives to determine the impact this has on contractor productivity.

Background

Access's call center primarily employs three employee classifications: reservationists, schedulers, and dispatchers.

Reservationists perform the primary call-taking function in response to customer calls requesting a trip. Reservationists also initiate the scheduling process, placing trip requests onto available routes. Reservation staff must be able to work with the call center's mapping and scheduling tools to quickly verify the rider's trip origin and destination, and process the trip request.

Schedulers refine vehicle/route assignments. A scheduling process should work to maximize productivity by minimizing overall trip lengths, maximizing the number of shared rides, and matching the number of vehicles and drivers to customer demand.

Dispatchers manage scheduling on the day of the trip, addressing late cancellations, no-shows, and all day of trip requests (where allowed). Dispatchers typically respond to vehicle arrival questions as well as to day-of-service trip changes as they maintain communications with drivers and monitor vehicle status/location via the automated scheduling and dispatch tools.

Large systems like Access use automated scheduling and dispatch software to manage the reservation process. These computer systems maintain a customer database that stores each rider's home location, eligibility status, mobility limitations and other parameters used when processing a trip request. The use of other technology, such as Transit's automated telephone systems, can allow customers to make some transactions (e.g., existing trip cancellations or confirmations) without the assistance of reservation/dispatch staff – further increasing the efficiency of the reservation process.

Effectiveness of reservation and scheduling staff
The effectiveness of the reservation process is gauged by examining customer performance measures relative to the level of staffing dedicated to processing trip reservations. A call center can reduce staff and maximize the use of its personnel, but may sacrifice customer service (typically reflected in the amount of time a customer is put on hold before they reach a reservationist and/or the number of abandoned or incomplete calls). Conversely, an organization can be overstaffed resulting in minimal hold times but increased slack time for reservationists.

Reservationist effectiveness is measured by looking at several key indicators, including:

- Average time on hold,

- Percent of reservation calls answered within three minutes, and

- Average time to process trip requests.

Access Has Lower Hold Times Than Some Peers

These measures show Access reservationist staff to be effective when compared to its peers and draft industry standards. Access's call center responds to more calls per staff person (reservationist, schedulers and dispatchers) than peers. Access had an average hold time of 51 seconds and 94 percent of the calls were answered within 3 minutes in 2008. Access took an average of 3 minutes and 4 seconds to process a trip request in 2008. Among peer systems, trip processing times ranged from 1 minute and 27 seconds in Minneapolis to 3 minutes in Portland and 3 minutes and 35 seconds in Denver. Peer systems had average hold time ranging from 34 seconds to two minutes and 55 seconds. Under proposed industry standards, 91 percent of calls should be answered within 3 minutes.

The effectiveness of the scheduling process is gauged by examining system productivity in terms of trips provided per service hour. There is often a trade-off between productivity and on-time performance, a key customer service index. By maximizing the number of trips completed per run, there may not be adequate slack time to account for traffic and delays in passenger boarding that may result in trips running late.

Scheduling effectiveness is typically measured by number of trips actually provided per service hour and number of scheduled trips per call center staff. Access is in line with the peers with respect to the number of boardings processed by key call center staff. In 2008, Access had over 1.1 million boardings or 15,580 per primary staff (reservationists, schedulers and dispatchers). Due to variations in definition of peer call center organization and staff roles, this measure looks at the number of staff potentially

involved in the processing of customer calls focusing on reservationists, schedulers and dispatchers. As a comparison, peer systems processed between 11,600 and 25,500 boardings per dispatch/reservationist/scheduler position.

Training and experience of reservationist and scheduling staff

Training and experience is measured by looking at several key indicators, including:

- Initial and ongoing training provided,
- Average length of experience, and
- Turnover rate.

Access Call Center Staff Has the Longest Tenure Compared to Peers

Access reservationists obtain 80 hours of initial training on applicable procedures and tools, and they receive two hours a month of additional training, focused on any new processes/procedures and/or employee deficiencies. This amount of training is considerably higher than two peers, but lower than one other. A 2004 survey at 10 large transit agencies found that reservationists averaged 21 hours of training.

Access reservationists have an average tenure of four years on the job. This classification has a turnover rate of 31 percent (per year). Of the peer systems monitoring experience and turnover, Denver's call center staff has the least experienced staff averaging one year of experience and a turnover rate of 60 percent. Portland's call center staff has an average length of experience of three years and a turnover rate of 26 percent. In conclusion, Access reservationists have more experience (in terms of time at current job) than the peer group.

Access schedulers are also more experienced in terms of time at current job than the peer group. They have an average tenure of 5.7 years on the job. The scheduling department has a turnover

rate of 19 percent. Among the peers, Portland's current scheduling staff has been in place for four years and has not seen any turnover in that time while Denver's overall call center staff averages one year of experience and has a turnover rate of 60 percent.

Access scheduling staff receive 80 hours of initial training on applicable procedures and tools, and two hours a month of additional training, focused on any new processes/procedures and/or employee deficiencies. Peers in Denver and Portland provide more training, but a 2004 survey indicated that schedulers average 31 hours of training at 10 surveyed large transit agencies.

Staffing efficiency

Access and the peer cities all contract their paratransit service provision to outside providers. As noted in the previous chapter, Access staff also oversees other services, such as the CAT program, that have no parallel activities in peer programs. The following highlights how Access compares to its peers with respect to staffing.

Access Has More In-House Staff Than Peers

A total of 24 non-contracted staff work in Access, which exceeds the number of agency staff at any of the peers contacted. Access provided a listing of staff that they believe provide services that are not provided by peer agencies, as shown in Exhibit E. When this staff is subtracted, Access still has four more agency staff than its next closest peer.

EXHIBIT E

Comparison of King County Access Agency Staff to Peer Agency Staff

	King County Access Staff	Denver Staff	Minneapolis Staff	Portland Staff
Total agency staff	24	6	9	10
King County Access staff who provide services that peers do not				
Service Quality	1			
CAT Program	2			
Grant Funded Programs	1			
Trip by Trip Eligibility	2			
Recertification	4			
Total agency staff minus KC staff who provide services that peers do not	**14**	**6**	**9**	**10**

SOURCE: King County Auditor's Office, Nelson Nygaard

Transit Does Not Have Objective Method to Determine Actual Staffing Needs

Access has not developed a comprehensive staffing model. Using a staffing model to analyze Access's workload and productivity could provide objective guidance for establishing the most efficient staffing level. Such models analyze current staffing needs and identify the costs and benefits of alternative staffing arrangements. The benefits of employing a staffing model include:

- Distinguishing key workload factors and processes
- Setting benchmarks for efficiency
- Estimating the impact of workload changes on staffing needs
- Identifying the effect that changes to staffing and processes have on performance

Access's three service providers have a total of 495.5 employees: 403 drivers, 36.5 mechanics, 6 training and safety staff, 17 administrative staff, 11 schedulers/dispatchers, 21 operations staff, and 1 IT staff. The call center contractor

employs 91.5 people: 10 training and safety staff, 4 administrative staff, 37 schedulers/dispatchers, 7 IT staff, 10 passenger service staff, and 23.5 reservationists.

If extended to contractor responsibilities, the staffing model could assist Access in determining appropriate staffing and compensation levels during the contracting process.

RECOMMENDATION D4   Transit should develop a thorough staffing model that incorporates workload factors and processes, efficiency benchmarks, impacts of workload changes on staffing needs, and effects of staffing changes on Access performance.

Contracting Out

Many transit agencies elect to contract some or all aspects of their ADA paratransit services. Generally these contracts are intended to reduce the costs of providing the service in-house and/or to leverage the availability of specific skills that are available in the private sector or from non-profit organizations. Keys to effective contracts in this area are:

- Clear performance and service expectations and goals,
- Incentives and/or penalties to motivate contractors to meet or exceed performance and/or service quality standards,
- These incentives and penalties should be implemented and their effectiveness in improving performance evaluated, and
- Effective use of taxis and community-based service to supplement ADA paratransit services.

Access contracts out functional assessments for the eligibility determination process and the transportation control center (including the call center, dispatch, scheduling, customer service, and scheduling and certification software project management). Access also contracts with service providers for ADA paratransit

service to accommodate cases when it is not possible or practical to employ an Access van, two programs that attract community agencies to provide ADA paratransit service, and a program that provides trips to ADA eligible persons going to senior services activities.

New contracts between Access and its providers took effect in August 2008, and they include incentives and penalties related to exceeding or not meeting established productivity or service quality standards. Incentives are established to reward improved productivity as measured in trips per hour, number of road calls, preventable accidents, no missed trips, or meeting all scheduled pull outs. Penalties relate to missed trips, or dropped routes.

Productivity Goals Have Not Been Met by Contractors

The productivity goal established in the contracts has not been met, so there has been no opportunity to implement incentive payments for that purpose. Although the county has the option to impose penalties for failure to meet productivity and other standards, management has elected not to impose them in this contract period. Because they are not enforced, there is no incentive for providers to mitigate or minimize conditions specific to the service penalties included in the contracts. Access's current practice of not enforcing expectations and consequences sends a mixed message to contractors, and is not likely to result in changing performance. Furthermore, it is possible that prospective service contractors, in anticipation of incurring fines or penalties, may include these costs in their estimates when bidding on the service. However, at present it is not possible to fully understand the consequences or impact the inclusion of incentives and penalties may have on performance.

RECOMMENDATION D5   Transit/Access should monitor and enforce its contract incentives and penalties for a period of one year, and then re-evaluate their usefulness as a tool for improving productivity and performance.