



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

May 25, 2018

Follow-up on Access Paratransit Audit

TO:

Metropolitan
King County
Councilmembers

FROM:

Kymber Waltmunson,
County Auditor

Transit has made progress on five recommendations to improve the quality and accessibility of Access paratransit, but contract delays and resource constraints are slowing their implementation. For example, Transit recently established a performance standard for how long riders spend on paratransit vehicles and estimated the cost of dropping riders off closer to their appointment times. Transit now aims to have 97 percent of Access monthly trips take no more than 15 minutes longer than fixed-route trips, and starting in its next contract, intends to charge contractors for providing excessively long trips. Transit plans to issue its amended request for proposals by June 2018. Its next contract is slated to go into effect in August 2019.

Transit estimates that ensuring paratransit riders are dropped off within 30 minutes of their appointments could cost up to \$1.5 million per year. Transit said that it may not have the resources to fully implement this recommendation.

In addition to the two recommendations on service quality discussed above, Transit made progress on recommendations related to accessibility. Transit has taken steps to make paratransit more accessible to limited-English-speaking communities through community outreach, technical solutions, and the initiation of an Equity Impact Review. Transit noted that future decisions about how to reduce barriers for limited-English-speaking riders will depend on resource availability.

We made 17 recommendations in our 2017 audit, "Access Paratransit: Action Needed to Address Cost, Quality, and Equity." In this first follow-up report, we cover five of the 17 recommendations scheduled for implementation in the first quarter of 2018. We plan to follow up on the 12 remaining recommendations in October 2018 (five recommendations), October 2019 (six recommendations), and April 2020 (one recommendation).

Of the five audit recommendations scheduled for follow-up:



1
DONE

Fully implemented

Auditor will no longer monitor.



4
PROGRESS

Partially implemented

Auditor will continue to monitor.



0
OPEN

Remain unresolved

Auditor will continue to monitor.



King County

Please see below for details on the implementation status of these recommendations.

Recommendation 5

PROGRESS 

Transit should define excessively long trips in reference to fixed-route standards, regularly sample longer trips to count how many are excessively long, and take steps to make sure there is not a pattern of significant numbers of excessively long trips.

STATUS UPDATE: In January 2018, Transit defined excessively long paratransit trips as those where onboard time is more than 15 minutes longer than that of comparable fixed-route trips. Since then, Transit established a monthly performance standard for 97 percent of monthly trips to take no more than 15 minutes longer than comparable fixed-route trips. (For this standard, the total number of trips excludes intercounty or adult day health trips, which accounted for eight percent of total trips in 2017.) When enforced, this standard will help ensure that paratransit riders experience trip lengths similar to those of fixed-route passengers.

To complete this recommendation, Transit needs to regularly monitor the number of excessively long trips and enforce the monthly performance standard. Transit said that it aims to implement monitoring guidelines by July 2018 and will include financial disincentives for contractors who fail to meet the monthly standard in its next paratransit contract, slated to go into effect in August 2019.

Recommendation 6

PROGRESS 

Transit should put in place monitoring and enforcement procedures to make sure paratransit riders are not dropped off more than 30 minutes before their appointments.

STATUS UPDATE: Transit and its software contractor modeled the impacts of implementing a new software setting to prohibit trips that schedule appointment drop-offs earlier than 30 minutes before appointment times. They found that implementing the new standard, as encouraged by the Federal Transit Administration, would cost up to \$1.5 million annually in additional vehicle service hours. Transit aims to implement this standard in the fourth quarter of 2018 if it has sufficient resources to do so.

Implementing this new standard will improve service quality by allowing riders to be picked up later and wait less time at their appointment destination. To complete this recommendation, Transit needs to implement monitoring and enforcement procedures to reduce untimely drop-offs.

Recommendation 8

PROGRESS 

Transit should work directly with King County communities to develop activities that will address barriers to the Access paratransit program for people with limited English proficiency.

STATUS UPDATE: Transit held focus groups with limited-English-speaking Cambodian, Chinese, Latino, and Somali communities to learn about the barriers they face in riding Access paratransit. Using this information to shape Access policies and procedures will make the service more inclusive and reflect the needs of the diversity of residents who rely on fixed-route alternatives.

To complete this recommendation, Transit needs to develop and implement activities that address barriers faced by limited-English-speaking communities. Depending on available resources, Transit said activities might include training customer-facing staff on providing interpretation assistance and translating Access materials.

Recommendation 9

DONE



Transit should use language data collected during eligibility determination to provide linguistically appropriate customer service to paratransit riders and routinely collect and update information on language preference.

STATUS UPDATE: At the beginning of 2018, the paratransit call center began using software to retrieve Access customers' preferred language before answering the call. By implementing this change, Transit enabled paratransit riders to better connect with linguistically appropriate customer service. Transit plans to quantify the impact of this recommendation by enhancing data collection and analyzing whether use of interpretation assistance is increasing.

Recommendation 10

PROGRESS



Transit should immediately take steps to implement an Equity Impact Review of the Access paratransit program.

STATUS UPDATE: Transit hired a special duty position to lead the Equity Impact Review and is consulting with the Office of Equity and Social Justice on the review. Transit is currently developing the scope of work and aims to complete the entire review by the end of 2018. This review will allow Transit to find gaps in service and ways to address them.

To complete this recommendation, Transit needs to finish scoping and implement the review process in consultation with the Office of Equity and Social Justice.

Megan Ko, Management Auditor, conducted this review. Please contact Megan at 206-477-7890 if you have any questions about the issues discussed in this letter.

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