

2017 Beyond ADA PCC Regional Conference

February 21, 2017

Meeting Summary

OVERVIEW

On Tuesday, February 21, 2017, the San Mateo County Paratransit Coordinating Council hosted a Regional Conference, “Beyond ADA.” The conference was held at the SamTrans Headquarters building in San Carlos, CA. In attendance at the conference were Paratransit Coordinating Council (PCC) representatives, paratransit providers, paratransit customers, transit agency representatives, transit planners, and transit consultants from five of the nine Bay Area Counties. Representatives from the SamTrans Board of Directors and San Mateo County Field Representatives for California State Legislature offices were also in attendance.

The last PCC regional conference was hosted by the San Mateo County PCC in 2007. The primary purpose of the 2017 conference was to bring together stakeholders in paratransit from every county in the San Francisco Bay Area to explore current issues in paratransit. After a brief introduction by each stakeholder group in attendance, a presentation about Mobility Management Programs in the Bay Area was given by Richard Weiner, from Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates. After Richard’s presentation and a Q & A session, several topics exploring paratransit services beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) were discussed in breakout group sessions.

BREAKOUT GROUPS

Conference attendees gathered into four breakout groups, shared their experiences and opinions on the following topics: Other Same-Day Service Options (not taxis or TNCs), Use of Taxis and TNCs in Service to People with Disabilities, Effectiveness of PCCs & Protocols Used for Inter-County Transfers, and other Best Practices in Paratransit Services. The following summarizes their comments:

GROUP 1: Other Same-Day Service Options (not taxis or TNCs)

Facilitated by: Vincent Merola

Participants: Erin McAuliff, Ben Cohn, Susan Capeloto, Stan Gow, Craig McCullough, Margo Ross, Dave Daley, and Maria Kozak.

Defined “Other Same-Day Service Options” as: volunteer driver programs, ride matching programs, Riverside reimbursement model, fixed route, deviated fixed route, dial a ride, and transfers to paratransit.

- Other Shuttle Services, SamTrans contracts with private companies (administers the monies).
- AC Transit Flex Service serves lower-density communities with demand-response service.
- Self-Driving Cars, Car Share, Bike Share
- ZipCar / Car2Go / City CarShare
- Volunteer driver programs in each county, Santa Clara’s premium same-day service, Greyhound service (national).

Local agencies providing Same-Day Service (not TNCs):

- Sonoma County has several volunteer driver programs (Sebastopol has one that is well-known).
- Marin has the CARSS program, a Call-A-Ride to the Sausalito Ferry.
- San Mateo has the Shuttles Program.
- Santa Clara has a premium paratransit same-day service program through VTA, but it is considerably more expensive than a traditional paratransit fare. The premium program has accessible vehicles.

Restrictions/Constraints Include:

- Difficult market to serve and match demand/supply.
- Difficult to communicate these services to the public.
- Difficulties in communicating to dispatchers.
- Lack of accessible vehicles with volunteer programs.
- Taxis operate under difference license in each city, not all have accessible vehicles. As an example, San Mateo County only has one taxi company with accessible vehicles.
- Need to add same-day paratransit to brokerage of Medi-Cal trips.
- Shuttles need to coordinate schedules from local transit to Caltrain/SamTrans. The San Carlos FLEX Service pilot was cancelled because it was underperforming.
- Transit feeder service needed that is also accessible/expandable to paratransit (like Denver Call n’ Ride).

Opportunities Include:

- Private paratransit companies like American Logistics Company who contract with owner/operators. ALC has a contract with San Mateo for Medicare transportation.
- Ride brokerage services, like Ride Connection in Portland. Passengers can opt-in for non-ADA service, which can accommodate rides based on availability. Various kinds of transportation are housed in one place.
- In Los Angeles, the cities make their own rules (not a county-wide service). Passengers can opt-in to the city system or use the county-wide paratransit program. Most cities have Dial-a-Ride. A county-wide proposition has local return dollars (from a sales tax) and each city gets to decide how they spend their money on transportation.
- In the Bay Area, there is a greater focus on getting people to use BART, Caltrain, etc... In the North Bay, there is an opportunity to coordinate the SMART train with other transit.
- Regional train service is easy to ride but hard to get to vs. same-day shuttle service that picks people up at their house.

GROUP 2: Use of Taxis and TNCs in Service to People with Disabilities

Groups Facilitated By: Richard Weiner and Mark Weinstein

Participants: Annette Williams, Josh Powell, Cheryl Damico, Rowland Wong, Shawn Fong, Pete Ratto, Barbara Kalt, Charles Stone, Jeffrey Lew, Victoria Williams, Ronny Kraft, Jim Lange, Hakeim McGee, and Tighe Boyle.

Restrictions/Constraints Include:

- TNCs are less expensive, but are also less accessible. Consideration needed for existing taxi companies.
- Customer choice is important to maintain.
- Wheelchair users are having difficulty finding accessible vehicles from TNCs and taxis.
- Curb to curb service needed for individuals with disabilities, but it is not provided by TNCs.
- Smartphone and app accessibility is a need for some customers. Hosting a concierge services require a call center and would have to be cost effective.
- At the present time, some agencies are relying on taxi vouchers.
- Questions arose about the use of TNCs and their financial viability/affordability in the long-term, since it is an emerging mode of transportation.
- Customer service for individuals with disabilities important with implementing the use of TNCs.
- Pushback to customers using service animals.
- Shortage of RAV taxis in SF.
- TNCs do not have agreements with cities, like the taxis are required to have.

- There is a lot of interest in TNCs, but not a high number of applications yet. Liability is an issue, along with it being non-ADA paratransit.
- Taxis have gate fees and other costs, while TNC drivers have vehicle maintenance, insurance and other costs. Deadhead trips and liability are an additional expense.
- Surcharge proposed on Uber and Lyft rides to create an accessibility fund. Or, contribute to funding accessible services.
- CPUC regulate TNCs and cities/counties regulate taxis.
- First Mile/Last Mile service must include accessible vehicles.
- Weigh costs vs. benefits of using TNCs.
- On-demand accessible taxi service in SF is difficult to obtain for customers.
- Cost of living for consumers is an issue.
- Fremont could not sole-source with a local TNC. The City is now using a paper voucher program with a taxi company.
- Driver Training is a critical area for accountability and clarification.
- Lack of control/oversight of drivers in TNCs. Taxi companies are under contract with a private company or transit company to maintain accountability.
- TNC driver time limited by lock-outs for hours on the road. Drivers have been reported to switch companies to get more hours. Drivers have also been observed sleeping in their cars in parking lots so that they can start the day early in areas with high demand for TNC rides. Taxi drivers check in before they begin driving each day.

Opportunities Include:

- Livermore is piloting a program with Lyft, giving the customers an option of a TNC ride or accessible taxi.
- Whistlestop Wheels in Marin County provides transportation to the Institute on Aging in SF. The contract is made through Lyft. A volunteer driver program also in place.
- A high level of interest from Lyft is being considered in collaborating on non-ADA paratransit.
- SF is working on creating guidelines for TNCs around accessibility, data transparency, equity, traffic congestion management, and labor. Impacts on the existing taxi industry are also a consideration.
- Facebook posts for rides.
- Lyft is getting contracts for healthcare service transportation.

GROUP 3: Effectiveness of PCCs & Protocols Used for Inter-County Transfers

Facilitated By: Sammi Riley

Participants: Jean Marie Greene, Dana Turrey, Terry Scussel, Oliver San Andres, Jon Gaffney, Sandra Lang, Yuri Kolsen, and Mike Levinson.

Inter-County Transfers Restrictions/Constraints Include:

- Trips are a day-long process and transfers are not guaranteed. Planning requires padding the departure and arrival times.
- Last mile issues with early connections. Arrangements may also be needed to go beyond the service area.
- Trips should be managed by the scheduling agency.
- Drop off should be a hand off, to avoid stranding riders.
- Agency communication and dispatch coordination is essential.
- A Bay-Area wide regional paratransit map would be helpful.

Effectiveness of PCCs Restrictions/Challenges Include:

- Increasing participation needed, more members needed. Invite individuals submitting complaints to attend a PCC meeting.
- Not all PCCs have an Education Committee (outreach). Use of direct mail needed.
- Counties need to be educated about PCC activities.
- PCCs need a better understanding of underlying transit issues, like congestion management and the effect of no-shows.

Effectiveness of PCCs Opportunities Include:

- Opportunities to participate include vehicle review committees and secret shopper programs.
- Mobility Management (gap services) to train individuals who aren't familiar with the service.
- PCCs are gathering data to analyze service to customers.
- PCC Legislative Committees work to educate municipalities and the community about paratransit needs and advocate for increased funding sources.
- Working to understand the total needs of customers – paratransit and beyond.

GROUP 4: Other Best Practices in Paratransit Services

Facilitated By: Tina Dubost and Dinae Cruise

Group Participants: Aki Eejima, Karyl Matsumoto, David Lee, Cynthia Bullock, John Sanderson, Jane Redmond, Sylvia Stadmire, Sandra Johnson, and Jonathan Cheng.

Travel Training Restrictions/Challenges Include:

- Fares and low income options are a growing need. San Mateo County has a one-fare system for eligible individuals, other counties have a scholarship program. SF has a helping wheels fund which comes from private donations. Different agencies have different fares.
- Paratransit eligibility needs to be as easy as possible. Paper applications, instead of in-person screening would be helpful to reduce the travel needed for individuals completing the eligibility process.
- Sensitivity training needed for bus operators. Experienced operators who have a background with serving people with disabilities are needed.

Travel Training Opportunities Include:

- Agency Partnerships for Training/Coordination with non-profits, Community and Group Orientation, Group Training. Travel training enables individuals to make grocery shopping trips and continue to travel independently.
- Importance of having individuals who transitioned from driving to using paratransit work as ambassadors.
- Care Evaluators is completing travel training and the eligibility screening process in San Mateo.
- East Bay Paratransit provides customers a booklet with emergency instructions.
- A proposal has been sent to senior legislators seeking to integrate transit across California by streamlining transfers.
- Low-income seniors ride free on Muni.
- Low cost fares for seniors on fixed route buses in San Mateo. Individuals who qualify for Redi-Wheels paratransit can ride for free on SamTrans fixed route vehicles.
- VTA uses pre-paid accounts to pay fares.

Next Steps

When the breakout groups concluded, Mike Levinson and Richard Weiner of the San Mateo County PCC thanked all of the attendees for participating in the conference. They noted that the San Mateo County PCC will be working to establish a partnership with other PCCs and agencies to host regional PCC conferences every few years. Richard and Mike also asked the group if they could provide any feedback about their impressions of the 2017 conference.