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A SURVEY ON THE USE OF TAXIS IN PARATRANSIT PROGRAMS Executive Summary

Easter Seals
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Team and Advisory Committee

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- Raymond Nelson, vice president of Veolia-Yellow Transportation of Baltimore, Md.

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Paratransit Services Provided By Taxis: Strategies For Success

Executive Summary

Transit authorities have contracted with taxi operators to provide paratransit services since the 1970s when transit authorities first started offering paratransit services to members of the general public. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the first Federal legislation to “prohibit discrimination on the basis of handicap in any program receiving Federal assistance,”¹ was largely responsible for the initiation of many of these paratransit services. The Section 504 provisions have now, of course, been augmented and expanded by the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations implementing the ADA include a requirement that “public entities operating fixed-route transportation service available for the general public also provide complementary paratransit services to persons unable to use the fixed-route system.”² Under the ADA, paratransit is not a substitute for fixed-route service but a supplement for persons who are unable to use the fixed-route system. These “complementary paratransit services” may be provided in a number of ways, and taxi operators have, in many communities, provided paratransit services that meet or exceed ADA requirements.

This report describes the variety of ways in which taxi operators can assist transit authorities by providing paratransit services for people with disabilities. Based on expert interviews, case studies, surveys, and other methods, this report reviews the extent to which taxis support paratransit programs in various communities and describes the features that characterize the most successful taxi-aided ADA paratransit programs.

Strategies For Reducing Or Controlling Paratransit Costs

Transit agencies offer ADA complementary paratransit services through a variety of service models. These service models range from the transit agency providing all of its own complementary paratransit services using its own drivers and vehicles to the other extreme—contracting with other providers for the full range of management and operational services of their ADA complementary paratransit services.

Nationally, the costs for ADA paratransit services are becoming a larger and larger percentage of overall transit authority costs. While the ADA paratransit percentage of overall transit authority costs is often about 15% of transit authority budgets, in some communities, these paratransit costs now constitute 25% or more of the transit authority’s budget. Paratransit costs are increasing at a significantly higher percentage than fixed route transit services. In the face of these escalating costs, transit authorities are pursuing a variety of actions in an effort to minimize these costs. The six most common strategies can be summarized as follows.

¹ The U.S. Department of Transportation issued its final rule on “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Handicap in Federally-Assisted Programs and Activities Receiving or Benefitting from Federal Financial Assistance” on May 31, 1979. See Federal Register 44:106, page 31442-31460.

² See “Transportation Services for Individuals with Disabilities,” Federal Register 56:173, September 6, 1991, p. 45621-45641.

One of the first strategies to be implemented was the effort to improve driver training for “main line” transit drivers. Activities in this area include training on passenger sensitivity and disability awareness, assisting passengers, deploying bus kneeling features, and calling out bus stops, as well as including passenger assistance procedures in driver “work rules.”

A second strategy is to provide mobility training for both existing and newly certified eligible riders. This strategy has been used for more than a decade by numerous transit authorities. We see a renewed effort in mobility training because of the costs and benefits of diverting passengers from the paratransit services to main line services. This recognition has given rise to more extensive mobility training, including having travel trainers going to the homes of individuals eligible for ADA complementary paratransit and providing trip training for their most common destinations.

A third strategy is to determine eligibility for services on a trip by trip basis. This is often undertaken in conjunction with mobility training. This process takes place during the trip-booking request process. Once an ADA-eligible individual designates their trip origin and destination, the TA software looks at an overlay of the mainline bus and rail services. If the trip can be accommodated using these modes; the caller is then given the trip information for the mainline system, including stop locations and times. Some transit authorities have software systems in place that are capable of diverting a significant percentage of trips from more costly ADA service.

A fourth strategy that is emerging is to allow ADA-eligible individuals to ride the mainline services at no cost. The logic is quite straight forward. The transit authority foregoes perhaps a dollar or two of fare box revenue and may save an average

of \$20 in cost per paratransit trip. The actual savings will of course be the difference between the fare box and the average one way trip cost on paratransit.

The fifth strategy is to use taxi services to reduce the cost of typical ADA paratransit costs. In many communities, ADA paratransit services offered by taxi operators are less expensive than those provided by transit authorities. In such cases, and with all other factors being equal, it makes sense for the transit authority to execute contracts with one or more taxi providers to provide ADA paratransit services. At this time, the percentage of ADA paratransit services provided by taxi operators varies greatly across the U.S.

The sixth strategy is to provide non-ADA paratransit services with taxis to reduce the cost of typical ADA paratransit costs. Typical ADA service criteria requirements include (among other requirements) prior day reservations (usually 5 p.m. or earlier) and a fare not to exceed two times the standard mainline bus or rail service. Many transit authorities have successfully implemented non-ADA taxi services that are “above and beyond” typical ADA service standards. Implemented under contracts between the transit authorities and the taxi vendors, these agreements typically allow an ADA-eligible individual to contact the taxi vendor on a same-day basis. The passenger pays the standard ADA paratransit fare, but the transit authority underwrites the amount after the typical one-way ADA fare up to a set limit.

For example, a taxi- metered trip of \$20 might require the passenger to pay the standard ADA fare of \$2; the transit authority would then pay for the next \$13 (this amount varies depending on the transit authority) and then the rider would have to pay any amount in excess of \$15 (in this

case, the rider would pay an additional \$5 total out of pocket cost, before tip). For shorter trips, riders pay no more than they might pay on a typical ADA paratransit van. For longer trips, the passenger's share of the total payment is considerably higher. This tradeoff of having "on demand" service, which is often provided on an exclusive-ride basis, is a trade-off that many passengers are willing to make. The savings to the transit authority would be the difference between the amount of the fare that they subsidize (in this example, \$13) and their one-way cost of typical ADA service (in this example, \$20). This calculation shows a savings of over 30%. (For the analysis to be completely accurate, we would have to factor in an increase in trip demands generated by being able to make same day reservations. Unfortunately, there are no empirical data to assign a precise number to this increase in demand. Despite the lack of definitive data, it appears that this strategy will provide the transit authority with significant savings.)

Current ADA Travel Characteristics

Annual Volume of ADA Paratransit Trips

The size of ADA paratransit operations varies across the cities studied in this project. In Des Moines, less than 20,000 trips were provided annually. In the Chicago area, 2,737,500 annual ADA trips were reported. Table 1 describes the reported annual ADA trip volumes among the study cities.

Proportion of Taxi-Provided ADA Trips

In one-third of the cities studied (10), less than 5% of the ADA trips were done by taxis. An additional seven communities reported 5-20% of taxi ADA services. In four cities, taxi use accounted for more than 20% of all ADA paratransit trips. In

Madison, Houston, San Francisco, and Kansas City, taxi involvement was substantial, with 25%, 55%, 56% and 100% of taxi use in ADA paratransit services, respectively. As discussed earlier, 8 of 29 cities did not use taxis at all as part of their ADA paratransit programs.

ADA Paratransit Costs per Trip

Determining accurate paratransit costs is a challenge: because some operators typically exclude overhead and administrative fees from their cost accounting, costs reported at one site may not be strictly comparable to costs reported at another site. Some of the costs reported are as follows: for ADA paratransit trips provided by the transit authority or its contractors, \$13.90 in San Francisco, \$44 in Denver, and an average cost for an ADA paratransit trip was \$26.46. The taxi-provided ADA paratransit trips are often less expensive. For example, cities reported dollar amounts ranging from \$11.22 (San Francisco) to \$39.78 (King County, Washington). Most of the taxi-provided ADA paratransit trips cost less than \$20; the average cost was \$17.60. More detailed information was provided by respondents at the four case study sites.

Table 1: Annual ADA Paratransit Trips

Annual Volume of ADA trips	Cities	# of cities
< 500,000 trips	Des Moines, Pomona Valley, El Paso, Cincinnati, Madison, Daytona Beach, Kansas City, Bremerton, Louisville, Pee Dee Region, Salt Lake City	11
500,000 ~ 1,000,000 trips	Cleveland, Dallas, San Jose, Palm Beach, Baltimore, Honolulu, Denver	7
1,000,000 or more trips	Houston, King County, Portland, Miami, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington DC, Boston, Pittsburgh,	10
[No response]	Philadelphia	1
Total		29

The Pros and Cons Of Taxi-Provided Paratransit Programs

Taxi-provided paratransit programs have played a critical role in many communities across the nation. While the use of taxis in paratransit service may offer numerous benefits to transit authorities, taxi operators, taxi drivers, and customers, some communities have found disadvantages of using such services. The mixed results of taxi use in paratransit programs raise questions for many transportation professionals. In particular, factors associated with successful taxi paratransit operations are of interest to many community transportation officials who wish to replicate success of other programs. This report illustrates key success factors related to taxi paratransit programs and how such programs can benefit all parties involved.

Benefits of Using Taxis

Our study demonstrates that taxi paratransit services offer a variety of benefits to the transportation industry. Transit agencies or brokerages reported flexibility as the number one benefit of using taxis. Twenty out of 29 cities reported flexibility as a major benefit. The second frequently reported benefit was that taxis were good at difficult times. Seventeen out of 19 cities reported taxis can be used for off peak hours, peak hours, and weekend trips or hard to reach areas. Almost 50% of the respondents mentioned that taxis saved money for them. In many cities, transit agencies were able to save money by employing taxis for paratransit ride requests. Other frequently mentioned benefits were quick response, increase service quality, and wide area coverage. Table 2 shows the complete list of benefits of using taxis transit agencies or brokerages reported.

Table 2: Reported Benefits of Using Taxis for ADA Paratransit Services

Benefits	Details
Operational benefits	<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There when you need it Same day service is possible 24/ 7/ 365 service <p>Convenience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow after hour service Quick response Demand responsive trips <p>Good at difficult times</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fills in for emergencies & breakdowns Peak periods, nights, weekends Trips that do not fit into regular routes Serve add-on or will-call trips Serve as safety net for service peaks <p>Wide area coverage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cover large geographic area Can cover non-urban sections Cover hard to reach area Fill gaps in coverage
Service quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Riders like the direct, exclusive ride Customers appreciate having alternative option Taxicabs are appreciated by the riders Having taxis allows TA to have a good customer service Increased customer satisfaction Provide reliable/ high quality service Eliminates trip denials
Drivers' steady income	Steady year-round income for drivers
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier and safer to serve mobility device users Use of accessible minivan - remove physical barriers and cover hard to serve area

Problems Using Taxis

When asked about the concerns or problems of using taxis for paratransit program, many agencies expressed their concerns over service quality issues. Seventeen out of 29 reported

service-quality problems primarily related to taxi drivers. Other concerns were fraud, difficulties in monitoring service, and lack of driver training, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Reported Problems in Using Taxis for ADA Paratransit Services

Problems	Details
Service quality- Driver quality	Accessible vehicles are not cost-effective: shorter life; higher capital cost Transit authority does not want to supply vehicles to the contractors Drivers don't make enough income Liability issues, including insurance costs By drivers Riders selling scrip to non-ADA-certified riders
Operational issues	Taxi fares are "too high" No control over training
Fraud	Hard to maintain proper oversight Lack of control
Cost	Jurisdictional conflicts regarding taxis involving airport, cities, etc. Conflicts between taxi drivers Need for larger dispatch facilities
Lack of training	Insurance and drug testing requirements Not the easiest group of riders to serve High taxi driver turnover
Difficult to monitor	Contracting agency wants employee drivers not independent contractors
Other problems	Relationships with brokers: payment and administrative issues Lower productivity of the rest of the system Lack of ownership from the taxi vendor in high quality services Difficulty of using taxis by riders with cognitive impairments

Interviews with Taxi Companies

Nine taxi companies were interviewed for this study. In Arlington County, Virginia, the taxi company interviewee reported that ADA paratransit services represented 3% of their annual business. In San Francisco, 34% of the annual business of the taxi company was generated by paratransit services. In a majority of cases, compensation is paid by meter rate. Some exceptions were hourly rate (Houston), mileage base (El Paso), or flat fee (Madison). The paratransit history in each city shows that all of the nine cities have always had a taxi role in their paratransit services. When asked about benefits of using taxis in paratransit services, cost savings, flexibility, and good at difficult times were the most frequently reported advantages. Problems reported by taxi companies were fraud and liability issues.

Keys to Successful Taxi Paratransit Programs

There are significant commonalities among cities that have successful taxi paratransit programs, and also among cities that did not report successful use of taxi paratransit. This section briefly discusses key factors affecting the success of the utilization of taxis in paratransit programs.

A Shared Vision and Commitment to Quality Services from Taxi Companies

- A commitment of the owner/manager to provide high quality services to ADA paratransit customers
- An appreciation by the taxi owner/manager that ADA services can be a financial beneficial portion of their business
- A sense that this ADA service will be of benefit to the rider, the community at large, and to the company
- Develop and implement extensive and meaningful driver training

- Structure driver compensation at levels sufficient to effectuate quality outcomes
- Process driver compensation in a timely fashion
- Create high standards for service
- Monitor service outcomes
- Follow up on complaints
- Remove drivers from service that do not meet quality standards
- Build positive relationships with their customers, the transit authorities and the public at large

A Good Working Relationship among All Parties Involved

- Good working relationship between transit authorities and taxi companies
- Good working relationship between taxi companies and their drivers
- Good working relationship between taxi companies and their customers and communities
- Mutually benefit all stakeholders

Transit Authorities Facilitate Competition

- Work with multiple taxi providers
- Have riders choose their provider

Driver Training and Regulation Issues

- Additional training for taxi drivers
- Make sure taxi drivers are in compliance with regulations

Lessons From Case Study Sites

Madison, Wisconsin

Madison is the Capital of Wisconsin and the home of the University of Wisconsin. The operations of state government and the university system have a significant impact on how the area functions. The City of Madison is responsible for control and management of Madison Metro Transit operations. Its 64 square miles of service area and total trip volume of less than 66,000 annual trips make it a relatively small operation.

Madison Metro provides some of the ADA paratransit trips using its own vehicles and drivers. Over the last decade, it has continually increased the percentage of services contracted out to outside vendors. This change has proven to be cost effective and allows the system maximum flexibility. Besides the services it provides, it currently contracts with three to four outside vendors. One of these vendors, Badger Cab, provides over a quarter of the outside contracted work. Metro operates the eligibility, call center and scheduling functions. The other vendors are contracted on an hourly basis; Badger Cab is paid on a flat rate regardless of trip length. Badger in turn pays its drivers on a metered basis, which is the drivers' preference.

Focus group participants had a distinct preference for Badger Cab over any other vendor. Interviews with management and drivers indicated that Badger staff had a commitment to quality services for Metro's passengers with disabilities. Note that this service is operated on a shared ride basis: Metro's ADA passengers often ride at the same time with other Badger customers. This operational characteristic allows for a significantly lower cost for Metro than if ADA services were provided on an exclusive ride basis.

A key message from Madison: Metro implements its paratransit strategy with a strong customer service emphasis and a healthy dose of competition. This strategy helps them reduce costs and at the same time reduce the chances for service deficits. Their taxi vendor provides a significant level of service on a daily basis. Metro also uses the cab company to respond to last minute trip requests. With a flat rate payment, the taxi contractor is certain of their payment for each trip and the transit authority avoids the administrative burden of calculating per trip reimbursement amounts. Madison Metro management clearly understands that good service can only be accomplished by having very good relationships with its vendors.

Daytona Beach, Florida

Volusia County in northeast Florida has a population just under ½ million people. The county has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, adding more than 20% of its current population this decade. Twenty percent of its population is classified as disabled, and twenty-two percent as elderly. The county covers an area of 1,432 square miles and is roughly the size of the state of Rhode Island. The county has a very unusual settlement pattern: all of its population centers are along the outer boundaries of the county with very little population in the center. The population centers are either on the extreme eastern end of the county where the Atlantic Ocean is, or on the extreme western boundary near the St. Johns River, with no population centers in between. This unusual pattern means that many people have to travel across the county to receive services, and that public transit finds it difficult to serve other people, particularly those living in the western part of the county, in the evening hours and on weekends.

Volusia County's transit system, headquartered in Daytona Beach, is called VOTRAN. VOTRAN provides transportation to all urban areas of the county with a fleet of fixed-route buses, four trackless trolleys, and 44 paratransit vehicles. Additional service is provided through contracts. VOTRAN's key functions are creating policy and monitoring the operations of its transit services, all of which are contracted to the McDonald Transit Associates management company.

The county's paratransit service is called VOTRAN Gold Service. VOTRAN, via the management company, runs its own fleet of county-owned vehicles, and provides much of the paratransit service on its own. It also sub-contracts with local lift-equipped van and taxi companies to provide additional paratransit services. VOTRAN Gold Service is pre-scheduled, shared-ride, door-to-door, ADA transportation in which riders are picked up in either lift-equipped vans or taxicabs. Reservations are booked from one to seven days before the day of the trip, and service is provided within one hour of the requested pick-up time. VOTRAN Gold conducts about 22,000 trips on a monthly basis and about 264,000 trips on an annual basis.

VOTRAN pays its taxi subcontractors the metered rate, and currently transports about 3,000 trips per year with taxicabs. The Gold Service utilizes two taxicab companies as part of the Gold Service, Yellow Cab and Southern Komfort Cab. Southern Komfort is currently transporting over 80% of all taxicab paratransit trips. Unlike Madison, Houston, or San Francisco, in Daytona Beach a taxicab cannot be specifically requested, but knowledgeable riders know how to schedule in a manner that will produce a taxicab: they know that trip requests on nights, weekends, or from more remote locations are more likely to receive taxicabs. In fact, most riders knew how

to set up a request that would result in a taxicab being sent.

As Volusia County grows and becomes more developed, VOTRAN foresees taxicabs playing a larger role than they currently do. Low ridership in rural areas can often be served best and most cost-effectively by taxicab service. To this end, VOTRAN is actively recruiting more taxicab companies to service these remote areas.

A key message from Daytona Beach: A well-run paratransit system that concentrates on executing the fundamentals, with an eye toward on-time performance, staff training, and continuous improvement, can often deliver a more satisfying product to the public than another service with all the new bells and whistles. The secret to success in transportation is the fulfillment of expectation levels: a high level of rider satisfaction is a clear demonstration of well-run services.

San Francisco, California

Many people who live and work in San Francisco are dedicated public transit users. The San Francisco Metropolitan Transit Authority (SFMTA) has provided paratransit services for more than 25 years. Besides creating policy and monitoring its subcontractors, SFMTA directly provides administrative services, such as user certification, trip eligibility, and participation in such oversight processes as quality assurance, customer service, and user feedback. SFMTA currently contracts with a paratransit broker, Veolia Transportation, to manage the transportation portion of the program. Veolia contracts with van and taxi companies to provide the actual rides. ADA Access (for people who are ambulatory) and Lift-Van (for people who use wheelchairs), are pre-scheduled, ADA-compliant van services providing door-to-door transportation. ADA Access and Lift-

Van are both shared-ride services. Reservations are booked from one to seven days before the day of the trip, and service is provided by a company called Mobility Plus within one hour of the requested pick-up time.

SFMTA uses taxicabs on their paratransit service for ADA services and services beyond ADA requirements. On the ADA paratransit component, Mobility Plus uses a large measure of taxicab backup for its lift van service. The number of trips varies daily, but can total well over 500 trips per week. SFMTA also offers a direct-to-the-public paratransit taxi, offered as a demand response curbside service. This is not an ADA service, but many riders find that it better meets their transportation needs. Riders on this program are pre-certified and provided with a monthly, budgeted allocation of taxi scrip, which can total as high as \$330.00 per month. The eligible users may call any taxicab company they choose, but two large companies (Yellow Cab and Luxor Cab) transport more than 80% of the taxicab paratransit trips.

SFMTA prohibits all taxicab companies and all taxicab drivers from refusing request from disabled riders. To that end, many companies deploy a certain percentage of their fleet as wheelchair accessible taxicabs. More than 100 accessible taxicabs are currently operating in San Francisco.

Due to San Francisco's relatively small size and hilly geography, taxicab transportation plays a much greater role in the daily lives of city residents than in many other cities. That dynamic is also reflected in the paratransit taxicab program. Many ADA-eligible paratransit riders consider taxi rides more desirable than traditional services. In fact, one taxi vendor (Luxor Cab) is actually transporting more paratransit trips daily

than the lift-equipped van paratransit vendor, Mobility Plus. Luxor takes from 800 to 1,000 paratransit trips daily while Mobility Plus averages about 750 trips per day. This viewpoint benefits the transit authority, since the fully allocated cost of a trip on the traditional paratransit system is approximately \$40.00 while the same trip in a taxicab costs \$15 to \$18.00.

Many of the taxi drivers in San Francisco are enthusiastic about their paratransit clients. Many drivers are contacted directly by users ordering trips, and some drivers reported they carry so many paratransit users that they sometimes go all day without being dispatched to a conventional taxi call.

Another unique aspect of SFMTA's paratransit program is the fact that all contractors work closely with a consumer advisory group called the 38-member Paratransit Coordinating Council (PCC) in planning and monitoring door-to-door van and taxi services. The PCC is comprised of van and taxi customers, representatives of agencies serving seniors and individuals with disabilities, transportation providers, and government entity representatives.

A key message from San Francisco: In San Francisco, independent contractor taxi drivers understand the value that paratransit trips can add to their overall portfolio of business, and the transit agency operates a program that allows those drivers to achieve real benefits from paratransit services. These are two key building blocks of a successful paratransit taxi program.

Houston, Texas

Houston is the third largest city in the United States. With a service area of 750 square miles, an annual METROLift ridership of about 1.3 million

ADA passengers and 19,000 eligible riders, Houston's METROLift paratransit program is the largest program examined in this study. In Houston, every form of public transportation in the city is wheelchair accessible.

Houston's METROLift is the only program examined that manages both a typical ADA paratransit contractor and a typical ADA taxi vendor under the same contract, providing a unique opportunity to evaluate services and costs under the same contractual operating specifications. In addition, Houston METRO manages the eligibility, call center and dispatch functions. They also require a staff member of each contractor to be present in the Houston METRO dispatch center. The operating characteristics and service outcomes are identical between the two provider types. The paratransit subcontractor operates lift-equipped vans supplied by METRO and the taxi company supplies accessible taxicab minivans with rear loading ramps. Yellow Cab's fleet of 160 accessible taxicabs used on this project are believed to be the largest such taxi fleet in the United States.

This situation, with essentially identical services and operating procedures, provides a very strong basis for considering cost differences. The fully allocated cost per hour for the paratransit van service is \$42.65 and the fully allocated cost per hour for the ADA taxi service is \$32.10. This indicates a nearly 33% higher cost per hour for the paratransit vans. If this figure is adjusted by the differential in productivity per hour of 1.74 passengers per hour for paratransit vans versus the passengers per hour figure of 1.61 for taxis in ADA service, the 7% differential in productivity would still result in a 26% savings for taxi provided paratransit services for this program. Based on the differential in bonus payments to the paratransit vendor, this productivity

differential is largely already accounted for in the higher bonuses paid to the paratransit vendor. Considering the productivity differences and the bonuses, the differential in costs remains nearly a 30% savings. The overall result is that the ADA paratransit service provided by the accessible taxis in Houston are both more cost effective and also more satisfactory to the riders in terms of customer service and sensitivity.

Houston METROLift also manages a service above and beyond ADA required service. Operated by several taxi cab companies, this service, called the METROLift Service Plus or MSP, allows the rider to call the taxi vendor directly for service. MSP is a direct-to-the-public paratransit taxi, offered as a demand response curb-to-curb service. This is not an ADA service, but many riders find that it better meets their transportation needs. Riders on this program are pre-certified and have the ability to call any one of five different taxicab companies that participate in the MSP program. With distance-based fares, these trips may well cost the rider significantly more than METROLift service but offers greater flexibility to the rider. The user who wants to ride in the MSP (beyond-ADA) program has a choice of which company they ride with. METRO feels that this promotes competition and lets the rider go with whoever is supplying the best service. Plus, MSP saves money for METRO as opposed to a standard paratransit trip. On the MSP service, the customers pay the first \$1.00, METROLift then pays up to \$8.00 of the fare, and the customer pays any amount over a \$9.00 meter fare. METRO's fully allocated operating cost per paratransit trip is \$20.86, but METRO's average MSP trip subsidy is \$5.08.

Riders preferred, by a wide margin, the METROLift taxicab service over all the other options. They liked the pre-arranged taxi more than the service provided by the demand response taxi (MSP) or

the paratransit vans.

A key message from Houston: The transit agency views the delivery of paratransit services as one of providing a high level of service to their customers, and local taxicab companies have adapted their delivery model to meet evolving community needs. Focus Group comments indicate that the ADA taxi service is well received by its riders, and our cost analysis indicates that the taxi service is less costly than identical services provided by a paratransit operator.

Benefits of Using Taxis: The User's Perspective

A Typical Focus Group Perspective

In San Francisco, focus groups of riders gave the following rankings to the key benefits of using taxis for ADA paratransit services:

1. Independence due to the existence of such a service
2. Convenience of access, especially in the demand/response aspect
3. Flexibility of taxicab service, also especially in the demand/response aspect
4. Ability to contact a specific company, even a specific driver
5. Privacy of travel, which includes receiving personal service from driver
6. Simplification of travel—the rider is usually taken directly to his or her destination without stops for other riders or having to transfer, as in trips by bus or train.

Some Personal Stories

In San Francisco, a blind paratransit rider—an independent lady who is very active both civically and socially, attending many local functions and events—enjoys using Metro's lift van paratransit service and feels comfortable with this service for trips to familiar places. She uses the paratransit taxicab service for places new to her, as she needs to check out the lay of the land, the entrances, exits, curbs, doors, ramps, railings, walls, and any other aspects of the venue she must navigate. Were she to use the lift van for unfamiliar destinations, she would face two problems:

- The size of the van often prevents it from getting close to the building entrance.
- The multi-loaded nature of the lift-van often precludes the driver from providing her with much individual attention at the drop off point.

Therefore, when she travels somewhere for the first time, she uses the taxi paratransit service. In this manner, she gets as close as possible to the main entrance. She also uses the driver as an information source. He can describe the obstacles she may encounter on her journey into the building. For this user, the service provided by the taxicab is much more than just transportation.

In Daytona Beach, a rider who is a retired veteran enjoys his regular Thursday night trip to the VFW. Thursday is Spaghetti Night, and this gentleman enjoys his plate of pasta while visiting with his friends, listening to music, and trading stories. At first, he utilized the VOTRAN ADA paratransit lift van service, but he found that the vehicle for his trip home never showed up at the same time because the driver's route had several pickups. Sometimes the van would arrive before the gentleman was ready to leave, which left

him feeling that he had not enjoyed his most important social occasion of his week. After explaining his situation to the taxi company and the drivers, he found that they could more easily accommodate his request for a specific return time. By switching to the taxicab service, he now was able to enjoy his evening and bid a proper farewell to his friends. The change has improved this gentleman's quality of life.

Future Expectations

When asked about future taxi use for paratransit services, 12 out of 29 cities predicted they were likely to increase the taxi use or to have strong continued taxi involvement. Another 14 cities indicated they would have just about the same amount of taxi services. A few mentioned taxi use would decline in the future. Of those who mentioned decline, they pointed improved dispatching technology will advance the efficiency of the traditional paratransit program, thus requiring less reliance on taxi paratransit services. Others who predicted same level of taxi involvement stated that paratransit drivers' union would not allow the transit authority to increase contractual work with outside vendors such as taxicab companies. In sum, many transit authority officials forecast an increase in taxi paratransit work. Even those who predicted less or same amount of work in the future, they did so based on rationales other than dissatisfaction with service quality of the taxi paratransit services.