

Our File/N/Réf.
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DATE: 10 June 1999

TO/DEST: Co-ordinator, Transit Services Committee

FROM/EXP: General Manager

SUBJECT/OBJET: **PARATRANSPO CUSTOMER RESERVATIONS**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Transit Services Committee receive this report for information.

INTRODUCTION

At the Transit Services Committee of 28 April 1999, Commissioner L. Davis expressed concern with the level of frustration some persons are experiencing trying to reserve Para Transpo service. The General Manager, M. Sheflin indicated that staff would prepare a briefing on this matter for submission to the Transit Services Committee in June 1999.

This report provides a general overview of Para Transpo operations, a more detailed description of the Para Transpo reservation process and a discussion on how the reservation system might be improved.

BACKGROUND

Para Transpo is a door-to-door transportation service for persons with a disability who are physically unable to use OC Transpo's regular transit system. There are approximately 9,000 permanently registered (3 years or more) Para Transpo customers and an additional 1,000 temporary users of the service. Each month Para Transpo processes up to 400 new registrations. Sixty percent (60%) of these are registered for 3 years or more while the remaining forty percent (40%) are temporary registrations usually for one year or less. The service operates 7 days a week, 365 days a year, with the bulk of service operated from 06:30 to 24:30. The geographic area served is similar to OC Transpo's regular transit service and the Para Transpo fare structure uses cash, tickets and passes.

The demand for service has increased over the years and in 1998 a fleet of 144 vehicles (57 cars / 86 wheelchair accessible vehicles and one 30 ft. bus) operated over 330,000 revenue hours of service, traveled over 6.5 million revenue kilometers and provided transportation to more than 734,000 passengers. Actual ridership, after "no shows" and cancellations, on weekdays will

average 2,500 trips while on Saturdays and Sundays ridership will average 1,200 trips. In 1998 the no show rate was 4.3%, the trip refusal rate was 5.1% and the customer cancellation rate was 14.6%.

The on-street service is provided by a private contractor (currently Laidlaw Transit Ltd.). Through two separate contracts (sedan contract and wheelchair accessible vehicle contract), Laidlaw supplies over 200 drivers and the majority of the vehicles necessary to operate the service. The contractor is totally responsible for their employees and all fleet maintenance.

The Para Transpo contracts are managed by 22 OC Transpo full time and 7 part time employees who are responsible for customer registrations, trip reservations, and the overall scheduling and assignment of trips.

CUSTOMER RESERVATIONS

A registered customer can reserve transportation using three different booking methods: Advance Bookings, Regular Bookings and Daily Bookings.

All reservations are booked on the hour and half hour and as of June 1, 1999 reservations have been processed using Para Transpo's new automated reservation and scheduling system.

The total number of telephone calls processed by the reservation section in a month is approximately 28,000. There are currently 14 telephone lines on a sequential phone system and in peak periods up to 10 reservationists process reservations, seven days a week from 07:00 to 17:00.

Most calls taken by the reservationists are for advance bookings, however, some regular bookings and same day booking requests, as well as some trip cancellations are also taken by the reservationists. There are also two additional phone lines with a special phone number that customers can call to cancel their trips on the day of service. This phone line is also used by customers who have missed their bus and want another bus sent or want an estimated arrival time of their vehicle. These calls are also taken by the reservationists.

REGULAR BOOKINGS

Regular bookings account for 50% of the total service provided by Para Transpo. They are trip reservations arranged for customers who require transportation to a specific destination on a regular basis each week. These trips must be from the same origin to the same destination on the same day and at the same time each week. A customer may have a regular booking once a week or as often as seven days a week. Although trip purpose is not considered when arranging regular bookings, trip purpose is usually work, post secondary education or physical therapy. However a number of shopping and recreational trips are also booked through the regular booking process.

Regular bookings must occur for a minimum of four consecutive weeks to be considered regular bookings and the trip must be made as booked at least 75 percent of the time or the booking is subject to cancellation. A customer only needs to phone Para Transpo once to set up this type of booking and need not call again unless they wish to cancel.

ADVANCE BOOKINGS

Advance bookings account for 45% of the total service provided by Para Transpo. They are trip reservations arranged for customers one day before the service is required. Customers who require a fully accessible vehicle can phone the reservation line at 07:00 while ambulatory customers who do not need a fully accessible vehicle must wait until 09:00 before they can call the reservations line. Within these time frames, transportation requests are confirmed on a first call first served basis by the reservationists until resources are no longer available. Since the demand for service currently exceeds resources, the phone lines are generally very busy in the mornings up to 10:30. After 10:30 the phone lines are less busy but transportation is often no longer available. The average telephone call for a round trip reservation (2 one way trips) is usually less than 3 minutes.

DAILY BOOKINGS

Daily bookings account for only 5% of the total service provided by Para Transpo. They are trip reservations arranged for customers on the same day they require the transportation. The availability of these bookings is generally very limited. However as Para Transpo staff gain experience with the new automated reservation and scheduling system, the number of same day bookings should increase. Daily bookings include same day fit ins as well as trips for which a second vehicle is sent to pick up a customer because the first driver could not locate the client. Trips for which a vehicle is sent to pick up a customer at an earlier time than originally reserved would also be classified as daily bookings.

DISCUSSION

Para Transpo service levels have not increased substantially since 1993 while the demand for transportation has continued to increase. This has resulted in a number of customer trip requests being refused each year.

In 1993, Para Transpo was able to accommodate all but 5,000 customer trip requests while in 1998, 40,000 one way trips could not be accommodated due to the limit that has been placed on resources.

Prior to 1996 all trip requests other than regular bookings were accepted on a first call first serve basis, one day in advance beginning at 09:00. Phone lines were often busy from 09:00 until 13:00 and those customers who were the last to reach Para Transpo could not be accommodated because resources were no longer available.

Para Transpo improved access to their reservation lines in May 1996, by opening up its reservation lines at 07:00 for customers who needed a wheelchair accessible vehicle. Ambulatory customers continued to call beginning at 09:00. Tailoring call-in times to the type of vehicle our customers needed, helped all Para Transpo customers to get through on the reservation lines more easily.

Presently, all customers with regular bookings and practically all customers in wheelchairs or scooters who call Para Transpo between 07:00 and 09:00 one day in advance of when they want service are being accommodated.

However, by 09:00 each morning when ambulatory customers begin phoning in to reserve casual trips for the following day, 70% of Para Transpo's resources have already been depleted. Realizing that service may not be available when they finally reach Para Transpo, between 100 and 200 ambulatory customers begin dialing Para Transpo around 09:00 each morning. With 14 phone lines and 10 reservationists, some of these customers do not reach Para Transpo until after 10:00. By 10:30 Para Transpo phone lines are generally free however by then, 95% of the service has already been taken.

Although Para Transpo can accommodate 95% of its customers' trip requests, the 5% of customers that are refused are usually the ambulatory customers that call each day after 09:00 looking for casual trips. This means that for these customers their refusal rate is actually much higher.

Para Transpo does not use trip purpose as a means of giving priority to specific trip requests, however, we do know that most work and school related trips and a large number of medical trips are booked as regular bookings and therefore do have a form of priority over casual trips booked one day in advance. We also know that virtually all casual trip requests from customers using a wheelchair or scooter are accommodated each day.

The trip requests that cannot be accommodated each day are trips that are of an irregular nature requested by ambulatory customers. These would include mostly recreational trips, shopping trips and medical trips.

Trip purpose was used by Para Transpo prior to 1986 as a means of giving priority to specific trips, however, it was a difficult system to administer since the only information that Para Transpo really had was trip address not purpose. Also many Para Transpo clients felt that the purpose of their trip should not be considered since a non disabled person did not have to advise OC Transpo of the reason of their trip when they boarded a regular transit bus. Para Transpo stopped using a trip purpose priority system in 1986. Most other Ontario municipalities stopped this practice around the same time.

The OC Transpo comprehensive review that was developed by KPMG/IBI recommended that Para Transpo not use a trip purpose priority system.

Presently, the vast majority of medical trips are being accommodated by Para Transpo and throughout the summer because demand for service decreases, we believe that we can continue to accommodate almost all medical trip requests.

However, should the Transit Services Committee indicate that medical trips must take priority over other casual trips provided by Para Transpo, the new Para Transpo automated reservation and scheduling system which has just been implemented, can be adapted to handle this type of change. If we were to accept reservations for medical trips before other casual trips, all requests for medical trips could be accommodated and by accepting calls for medical trips at different times, all Para Transpo customers would get through on the reservation lines more easily.

Our goal was to implement this new automated system with as little inconvenience to our customers as possible and our first objective has been to improve Para Transpo's service reliability. Para Transpo staff, Laidlaw drivers and our customers will first have to gain experience with the new computer system before any major changes can be made in the reservation process.

However, after we have gained experience with the new system we will be looking at ways of improving some of the other services we offer to our customers. Changes in the reservation procedures will then be possible.

Before this type of change can be made, however, the term "medical trip" would have to be defined, a trip purpose priority list would have to be agreed upon, a system would have to be put in place which would cause as little inconvenience to our customers as possible and ideally the system would be easy to administer. Detailed discussions with the Accessible Transit Advisory Committee would be required.

*Approved by
M.J.E Sheflin, P.Eng.*