

Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority

of Nashville & Davidson County, Tennessee

Information Item Committee Discussion Item Committee Action Item Board Discussion Item

Item Number:	M-I-23-000	Meeting Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Item Title:	Title Goes Here		

BACKGROUND:

In May of 2021, the MTA Board of Directors approved award for the Access Improvement Study to KFH Group, Inc. This study is a comprehensive review of the WeGo Access Paratransit program, with a focus on improving both service reliability and operational efficiency. The project also includes a review of opportunities for greater coordination with fixed route services, including strategies to encourage fixed route use among current paratransit customers. Below is a summary of the core goals established at the outset of the project as well as remaining project tasks and milestones:

FOCUS AREA	PROJECT GOALS
Service Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve on-time performance• Enhance ability to quickly mitigate effects of service disruption• Accommodate 'spikes' in demand and travel times
Customer Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide intuitive self-service options for customers• Publish accurate vehicle arrival time estimates• Expand user choice/premium/same-day service options• Improve call center performance
Service Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase vehicle productivity• Improve 'Smart' allocation of trips to 3rd party providers, TNCs• Lower per-trip costs• Encourage use of fixed route by paratransit customers (where reasonable and appropriate)
Service Design & Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement nMotion objectives surrounding paratransit and on-demand services• Benchmark service model and performance against comparable peers• Establish resilient and efficient service models and 3rd party contracting mechanisms• Examine opportunities to integrate Access into broader first/last mile connections
Business Process Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streamline reservations/scheduling/dispatch process flow• Increase automation of recurring tasks• Identify skills gaps and training needs
Regulatory Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review existing and proposed policies and practices and ensure their conformance to the Americans with Disabilities Act and other applicable Federal, State, and local regulations

PROJECT TASKS & TIMELINE:

UPCOMING MILESTONES	ANTICIPATED COMPLETION
MTA Board Review	April 27 (Today)
Public Outreach and Engagement, Round 2	May 1 to May 31
APAC Draft Recommendations Review	May 24
Internal Review of Public Outreach Feedback	June 2
Draft Final Recommendations/Report	June 16
MTA Board Interim Update (if needed)	June 22
Draft Implementation Plan	June 30
MTA Board Adoption of Recommendations	July 27
Final Recommendations/Report and Implementation Plan	August 31

The study is now at a point where there can be a holistic discussion of key observations and potential changes, including potentially significant policy considerations. A summary of significant observations, actions in progress, and potential changes for both the Access paratransit program as well as the Access on Demand customer choice program are included on the following three pages.

Following today’s Committee discussion and incorporation of Board feedback, MTA Staff as well as members of the KFH project team will conduct an additional round of customer and stakeholder engagement to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to comment on potential changes to policy, with a focus on reaching out to current riders. These comments will be used to develop a final set of recommendations and associated Implementation Plan.

CURRENT STATUS:

Dan Freudberg, Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Ken Hosen, Project Principal for KFH Group, will provide a project update and facilitate a discussion of potential Access and Access on Demand policy changes.

APPROVED:



Deputy Chief Operating Officer – Op Systems

Click or tap to enter a date.

Date

Access Improvement Study – Significant Findings and Potential Changes

Significant Findings:

1. BENCHMARKING

- High productivity (relative to peers)
- Low on-time performance
- Very high late cancel/no-show rate
- Comparable performance in other areas (including per-trip costs)

2. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Timeliness/reliability is an issue
- Need better notifications, rider app
- WeGo Central is intimidating

3. ORGANIZATIONAL/ADMINISTRATIVE

- Core functions are spread across multiple departments
- Dispatch resources are insufficient
- All operators require a CDL even though some vehicles do not
- Access and Fixed Route compete for drivers, vehicles (Access generally loses)

4. POLICY (ACCESS PARATRANSIT)

- No significant FTA compliance issues
- No-show policy is good but unenforced
- 50% cap on subscriptions is not required and counterproductive
- Trip negotiation is on the books as a policy but not currently used
- Flat 90-minute maximum on-board time rather than being tied to fixed route

5. POLICY (ACCESS ON DEMAND)

- Current provider requirements (same as Access) increase costs and limit provider participation
- Most trips are pre-booked, limiting same-day, spontaneous trip availability
- Subsidy is not tied to provider cost, even though the customer chooses the provider
- ‘Favorite Driver’ component of program is an invitation for collusion and fraud

6. FIXED ROUTE INTEGRATION/ADOPTION

- WeGo Central is a barrier (intimidating)
- Accessible stops paths of travel are barriers
- First/Last mile and para feeder service could encourage a few, but first address above barriers
- Conditional eligibility enforcement has limited utility given current barriers – could focus on very frequent riders only

7. TECHNOLOGY

- Complex and not user-friendly
- 3rd party integrations are complex, slow, expensive, and issue-prone
- New, viable alternatives are available

Current Actions:

Action	Status
Move Access supervisors within same group as Scheduling	Complete
Remove 50% subscription limit	Complete
Resume in-person eligibility interviews	Planned in next 3-6 months
Diversify fleet to address vehicle shortages	Ongoing
Improve on-time performance through less aggressive scheduling	Ongoing
Implement Access dispatch performance monitoring, KPIs	In Development

Potential Changes – Core Access ADA Paratransit Program

Change	Pros	Cons	Budget Impact	Comments/Details
Provider Option Program (POP)*	Reliability, Efficiency	Fare collection complications	\$\$\$	*See discussion on last page
Enforce No-Show Policy	Efficiency	Customer suspensions	\$\$\$	Enforce existing policy and/or require trip confirmation calls from customers with excessive late cancels
Premium fare for non-ADA trips	Efficiency	Higher customer fares for some	\$\$\$	Higher fare for trips beyond ¾ mile of fixed route service (~2x base fare)
Free Bus and WeGo Link Fares	Fixed route adoption	Eligibility volumes	\$\$	Implement free (or significantly reduced) fares on fixed route and/or WeGo Link
Non-CDL Drivers	Staffing, Efficiency	Union relations, liability	\$\$	FT and/or PT, operating either sedans or smaller vans. Would also necessitate use of tablets and a smaller farebox/cashbox
Tie on-board time to fixed route	Efficiency, Context-sensitive travel times	Increased on-board times for some	\$	Fixed route travel time + 20 mins (FTA guidance) rather than current flat 90-minute limit
Trip Negotiation	Reliability, Efficiency	Customer flexibility	\$	Offer customers pickups +/- 1 hour of requested rather than automatically granting exact time
Paratransit IDs	Lower risk of fraud	Logistics issuing cards	\$	Issue personalized QuickTicket cards as paratransit IDs
Add Staff	Reliability, Efficiency	Eligibility volume, Revenue loss	\$\$\$	-2 Schedulers, +3 dispatchers +2 supervisors, +1 reservationist, +1 Director (Net +5 FTEs, 2 included in BB)
Procure new Para Software	Reliability, Efficiency, Rider Experience	Implementation issues, upfront costs	\$\$\$	Replace current reservations, scheduling, and dispatch software. Initial significant cost, long-term cost savings

\$ = net cost, \$ = net savings, --- = neutral

Potential Changes – Access on Demand Program

Change	Benefit(s)	Downside(s)	Budget Impact	Details
Remove D&A Testing Requirements	Increase provider pool	Service Consistency	\$\$	OK under taxi voucher exemption. TNCs will not meet current requirements
Remove Door-to-Door Service Requirement	Increase provider pool	Service Consistency	\$\$	TNCs will not meet current requirements
Reduce Insurance Requirements	Increase provider pool	Perceived or Real Liability Risk	\$\$	Barrier to entry for some providers
Implement provider-side subsidy fares	Reduce costs	Increase in fares for some	\$	Current: \$7.00 base fare + \$1/mi after 14 miles. Future: Base fare + overage beyond subsidy cap (same general model as WeGo Link). Total trip costs set by provider (public rates)
Replace daily trip caps with monthly caps	Limit induced demand	Lower customer trip limits	\$	Current: 4 trips/day Future: 40 trips/month
One provider per customer per month	Reduce risk of fraud	Decreased rider flexibility	\$	Customer selects preferred provider once rather than for each individual trip
Eliminate Trip Grouping Requirement	Increase provider pool, quicker trips	Not reportable to NTD	\$	TNCs and taxis may not meet this requirement

\$ = net cost, \$ = net savings, --- = neutral

***A Note on the Provider Option Program (POP):**

A Provider Option Program, or POP, is a program in which riders that utilize a rider choice program (such as Access on Demand) may also have trips that were originally scheduled with the agency as regular paratransit trips 'converted' to one of the providers in the rider choice program. For these trips, the rider either has the fare waived (rides free) or receives the trip for the original standard paratransit fare (requires account-based fare collection). Customers reserve the option to 'opt out' of these 'conversions' on a trip-by-trip basis at the time of booking. For example, a rider scheduling a trip where they require door-to-door assistance would let the booking agent know to mark this trip as ineligible for conversion. POP programs have been introduced at a number of agencies in recent years, including MBTA in Boston ([MBTA The Ride Flex](#)) and WMATA ([WMATA Abilities-Ride](#)) in Washington, DC. Enrollment in the program at MBTA is an automatic requirement of participating in their customer-choice program with Uber and Lyft. However, WMATA Abilities-Ride has its own opt-in process. Both agencies report significant cost savings from the programs even though the service is not reportable to the NTD due to being direct ride services (no trip grouping).