

FutureStructure

AUTOMATION (/fs/automation) DATA (/fs/data/) INFRASTRUCTURE (/fs/infrastructure/)
INTERNET (/fs/internet/) TRANSPORTATION (/fs/transportation/) PERSPECTIVES (/fs/perspectives/)
INSIGHTS (/fs/insights/) GOVTECH.COM (/)



**PROTECTING THE PUBLIC
SECTOR FROM RANSOMWARE**

Are you prepared?

[Learn More](#)



TRANSPORTATION

(/fs/transportation)

Boston's Paratransit, Ride Hailing Experience Could Work Well in Philadelphia

Transit officials there are nearing the end of a one-year pilot program that could reinvent paratransit services.

BY JASON LAUGHLIN, PHILLY.COM / AUGUST 14, 2017



SHUTTERSTOCK



(TNS) -- When it's working at its best, SEPTA's service for riders with disabilities requires a reservation no less than a day before the trip.

The riders might have to accept a pickup time within two hours of when they would actually like to depart, and then may need to be OK with the vehicle showing up 10 minutes early — or 20 minutes late.

When the parts aren't moving in sync, riders have waited hours for the Customized Community Transportation vehicle to show.

“For a long time I did use paratransit,” said Theresa Yates, 49, whose cerebral palsy requires her to use a wheelchair. “I got tired of waiting.”

In coming weeks, SEPTA expects to release the results of a study

RELATED

Boston Open Data Challenge Will Highlight City's New Data Portal
(<http://www.govtech.com/civic/Boston-Open-Data-Challenge-Will-Highlight-City's-New-Data-Portal.html>)

Incentivizing Excellence in Boston Through Results-Driven Contracting
(<http://www.govtech.com/data/Incentivizing-Excellence-in-Boston-Through-Results-Driven-Contracting.html>)

Boston Enters Partnership to Ensure New Developments are Broadband-Ready
(<http://www.govtech.com/dc/articles/Boston-Enters-Partnership-to-Ensure-New-Developments-are-Broadband-Ready.html>)

(<http://www.philly.com/philly/business/transportation/Consultant-to-review-SEPTA-paratransit-services.html>) on how to improve CCT service.

It could look to Boston. Transit officials there are nearing the end of a one-year pilot program that could reinvent paratransit services. Since fall 2016, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority has subsidized rides on Uber and Lyft.

It is a work in progress, and there are concerns about providing equal service for everyone who needs it, but ride-booking services could create unprecedented mobility and freedom for people now forced to live by the limits of paratransit services, said advocates for the elderly and disabled around Boston.

“I really think this has a lot of promise,” said Elizabeth Dean-Clower, a clinical instructor at Tufts University School of Medicine who herself uses a wheelchair due to muscular dystrophy. “Right now there’s still this inequity for people who require WAV [wheelchair accessible vehicles] to fully participate.”

Public transportation for people with disabilities — more like cab service than mass transit — is difficult and expensive, whether it’s here in Philadelphia or in Boston, where user complaints are similar. The services require well-trained drivers and smart dispatch, accounting for multiple stops and a wide range of physical limitations.

Users describe

(http://www.philly.com/philly/columnists/helen_ubinas/412932353.html) long waits, disrespectful drivers, and meandering routes to travel just a few miles. The result can be late arrivals, missed appointments, and an uncertainty about how long it will take to get from here to there.

In Philadelphia, these complaints prompted the \$150,000 consultants' review. SEPTA's paratransit service provides about 8,000 trips a day with 465 vehicles.

Dire finances led to Boston's ride-hail pilot. The MBTA, which provides up to 7,000 paratransit trips a day in Boston and 60 surrounding municipalities, had seen paratransit service expenses double, from \$50 million to \$100 million, in 10 years, said Ben Schutzman, the MBTA's director of transportation innovations.

The MBTA trial was offered to 1,200 riders. Instead of \$35 per ride, on average, the sharing service cost the MBTA \$9.

"It became a no-brainer," Schutzman said.

By the end of the year, the MBTA expects to take steps to permanently add ride hailing as an option for disabled riders. Doing so, Schutzman said, would bring the authority's paratransit budget from about \$109 million down to \$93.2 million. Both Uber and Lyft reported interest in extending their participation.

A traditional paratransit ride in the Boston region runs a minimum of \$3.15, with the fee increasing based on distance. Under the MBTA pilot program, passengers pay for the first \$2 of the ride on an Uber or Lyft, and up to \$13 is covered by the MBTA, with the passenger paying anything beyond that. SEPTA's base fare is \$4.

Boston paratransit users reported that the on-demand, subsidized rides got them where they wanted to go in minutes, without a day's advance planning. Their main complaint has been there aren't always enough accessible Lyft or Uber vehicles available.

"My biggest fear is to be somewhere and not have the kind of vehicle needed to get back," Dean-Clower said.

Uber has added to its fleet of accessible vehicles since the pilot program began, a company spokeswoman said. The program also has expanded the search radius for available vehicles. Waits may be longer, but it's more likely that a vehicle will be available.

In Philadelphia, Uber met

(<http://www.philly.com/philly/business/transportation/ubers-wheelchair-accessibility-grows-with-room-for-improvement-20170706.html>) a state requirement of 70 modified vehicles, though users have complained that they aren't always sufficiently accessible for people in wheelchairs. Access to ride-booking services for people with disabilities, even those paying full price, has been a concern of the disabled community in both cities.

A contract between the MBTA and ride-hailing companies "allows us to exert pressure on Uber and Lyft to have more accessible vehicles," said Bill Henning, director of the Boston Center for Independent Living.

Because Uber and Lyft are reluctant to share data they consider proprietary, the MBTA can't track how often riders can't find a cab adapted for wheelchairs. It is evaluating the success of the program by tracking how many trips are taken through ride-hailing compared to traditional paratransit and how quickly requests for rides are filled. User surveys give the ride-hailing service significantly higher marks than traditional paratransit.

Philadelphia government personnel and SEPTA staff have been watching the MBTA program to determine whether it could be emulated here.

"I think the whole industry is watching what Boston's experience is," said Ron Hopkins, assistant general manager of operations for SEPTA.

In hearings before City Council in February, SEPTA officials said they were reluctant to turn to ride-hailing companies. Critics questioned whether unequal access to smart phones and a dearth of wheelchair-accessible vehicles might prevent ride hailing from being a viable alternative to paratransit. Federal transportation officials also raised the issue of ensuring training for drivers who, unlike contracted paratransit drivers, are not full-time employees.

Advocates in the Boston area worried the convenience of ride hailing might draw disabled riders who are physically capable of using buses and subways, thereby overloading the paratransit system.

The MBTA addressed some of the technological hurdles by setting up ways to hail rides by personal computer or telephone, not just by app. Just 20 percent of all paratransit users require wheelchair accessible vehicles. It's optimistic that there will be enough vehicles in the Boston area to serve those riders.

In the near term, SEPTA expects to use the consultants' report to improve CCT, Hopkins said.

Hopkins expects to have locators on CCT vehicles soon, allowing riders to track progress in real time. SEPTA uses six contractors to provide paratransit service in Philadelphia and the four neighboring counties. In the city, at least, a boost to the minimum-wage drivers, along with penalizing riders who were no shows for CCT trips, improved on-time rates from around 70 percent to 85 percent. The authority expects to also improve the dispatch and reservation process.

Ideally, Hopkins said, SEPTA's mass transit will be fully accessible to people with physical limitations, reducing the number of people who need a specialized service.

"There's a lot of effort in our capital program to make our fixed route accessible," he said. "If you make it more accessible, people will migrate to the subways or the buses."

But updates could take years. While all the authority's buses are accessible, most trolleys are not. On Regional Rail, the Norristown High Speed Line and the two subway lines, about half of 228 stops are wheelchair accessible.

Theresa Yates often is able to use SEPTA's buses and subways, but has been willing to pay the full rate for an occasional Uber for the convenience. About 20 percent of the time she has not been able to find a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, she said. Nevertheless, she is warming to ride hailing.

"I still prefer Uber over paratransit," she said. "They come when they say they are going to come."

©2017 Philly.com Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

DISCUSS

MORE FROM TRANSPORTATION ([HTTP://WWW.GOVTECH.COM/FS/TRANSPORTATION](http://www.govtech.com/fs/transportation))

ADVERTISEMENT



FEATURED RESOURCES

PRESENTED BY

Smart Cities Require Smarter Cybersecurity

(http://www.govtech.com/library/papers/Smart-Cities-Require-Smarter-Cybersecurity-80678.html?promo=gt_paper_web_channelmodule)

Forrester Report: How to Secure Your IoT and OT Environment

(http://www.govtech.com/library/papers/Forrester-Report-How-to-Secure-Your-IoT-and-OT-Environment-93957.html?promo=gt_paper_web_channelmodule)

The Fast Track to SANS Security: Implementing Critical Security Controls with ForeScout

(https://www.forescout.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Fast-Track-to-SANS-Security-CSC-ForeScout-White-Paper.pdf?utm_source=erepublic&utm_campaign=futurestructure&utm_medium=content&utm_term=fs_csc_wp)

Smart Transportation: It's Time For a Smart Transportation Transformation

(https://www.forescout.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Smart-Transportation-ForeScout-Solution-Brief.pdf?utm_source=erepublic&utm_campaign=futurestructure&utm_medium=content&utm_term=fs_smart_tr)

Securing Smart Transportation to Protect Your Community

(https://www.brighttalk.com/webcast/13809/241109?utm_source=futurestructure?utm_source=erepublic&utm_campaign=futurestructure&utm_medium=webinar&utm_term=smart_cities)

Tweets by @ForeScout

ForeScout Retweeted



Sayers

@sayers_inc

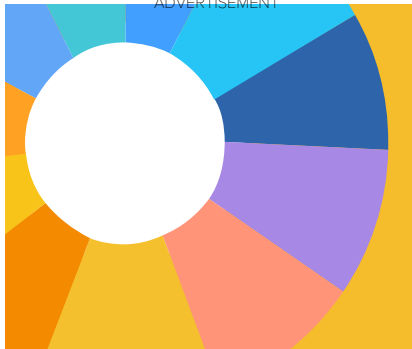
Experience the Difference of Agentless Visibility & Control with @ForeScout - Join Our Ultimate Test Drive on February 28th: hubs.ly/H09Z84S0



[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



NEWSLETTER

Scan the day's headlines, as well as original and breaking technology news for state and local government readers.

Email Address

PAPER

Case study: State of Louisiana Saves \$70 Million in IT Consolidation

Download
(http://www.govtech.com/library/papers/case-study-State-of-Louisiana-Saves-70-Million-in-IT-Consolidation-97007.html?promo_code=gt_paper_web_article)



ADVERTISEMENT

© 2018 All rights reserved. e.Republic
(<http://www.erepublic.com>)

[ABOUT](#) / [PRIVACY](#) / [CONTACT](#) / [ADVERTISE](#)

OUR NETWORK

CENTER FOR DIGITAL EDUCATION

(<http://www.centerdigitaled.com>)

CENTER FOR DIGITAL GOVERNMENT (/cdg)

DIGITAL COMMUNITIES (/dc)



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (/em)
FUTURESTRUCTURE (/fs)
INNOVATION NATION (/innovationnation)

(<https://twitter.com/FutureStruck>)