

Highlights from the
2016 ANNUAL PUBLIC TRANSIT FORUM

June 29, 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

TPB Private Providers Task Force (PPTF): Robert Werth and Tim Collins (Co-Chairs)

ATTENDEES:

Cynthia Alarico, Fairfax County
Deanne Archey, Montgomery County
Jeff Barnett, Charles County
Samuel Bland, Regency Taxi
Rake Choudhury, District of Columbia DOT
James Davenport, Prince William County DOT
Dan Goldfarb, NVTC
Pierre Holloman, City of Alexandria
Charlie King, Red Top Cab
Jeffrey Lehmann, WMATC
Veronica Lowe, Frederick County
Eric Marx, PRTC
Hal Morgan, Taxicab, Limousine, and Paratransit Association (TLPA)
Karl Muhammed, District of Columbia (tel)
Jeanne Nuhuro, Fairfax County
Kyle Nembhard, Maryland Transit Administration

Nancy Norris, Frederick County
Perrin Palistrant, PRTC
Von Pelot, Red Top Cab
Nicky Pires, TriCounty Council for Southern Maryland
Sharla Quintanilla (tel)
KJ Reynolds, Fleetpro
Carolyn Robinson, DC Professional Taxicab Drivers Association
Jeff Schaeffer, Libery Transportation
Kari Snyder, Maryland DOT
Sophie Spriggs, NVTC
Steve Strauss, District of Columbia DOT
Kyle Summers, Alexandria Yellow Cab
Neville Waters, DC Department of For Hire Vehicles
Malcolm Watson, Fairfax County (tel)
Andy Wexler, Arlington County
John Zarbo, Fairfax Department of Neighborhood and Community Services

TPB STAFF:

Bryan Hayes
Wendy Klancher
Lynn Winchell-Mendy

Ben Hampton
Eric Randall
Rich Roisman

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Werth and Mr. Collins welcomed the participants and asked them to introduce themselves. Housekeeping matters were also mentioned.

2. TCRP SYNTHESIS 119 - USE OF TAXIS IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OLDER ADULTS

Ms. Elizabeth Ellis, KFH Group, gave a presentation on the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) synthesis for which she was a lead consultant. The report examined the use of taxis by public transit agencies, including for ADA paratransit, and the emerging challenge of "Transportation Network Companies" (TNC's) competing with the taxi industry for drivers. Five reasons were identified for transit agencies using taxi companies to provide paratransit trips: for cost-efficiency, to serve both pre-scheduled and real-time trip requests that the contract carriers are not able to serve, to expand service without having to purchase vehicles, and to avoid trip denials. The report outlines lessons learned from public transit agencies in working successfully with taxi companies. Issues such as oversight monitoring and FTA reporting requirements make taxi use challenging in some

situations. Ms. Ellis spoke to several specific case studies, including San Francisco, where implementation of a new technology to dispatch trips was challenging to complete but has been cost-effective. However, TNCs in San Francisco took trips from taxis which caused the loss of taxis and drivers, in turn reducing taxi companies' ability to provide paratransit service. She also mentioned three recent studies with data on the impact of TNCs on taxis, including a survey by WBA Research of transportation use in the DC region, a study by the including a WB&A study of TNCs in the DC area, a Shared Use Mobility Center study of TNCs complementing transit use, and a study by Frederick Polls on millennial use of transportation options.

Presentation: <https://www.mwcog.org/file.aspx?&A=YyRk2aphSGQYlq9xNI5eidc7z%2byXN%2bqGFMPPE17nlBcQ%3d>

Questions and discussion included:

- Did any cities or agencies contract with TNCs like Uber and Lyft to provide paratransit supplementary service? It was noted this is being tried in Boston, but there are payment technology issues. There are federal requirements to meet when federal funds are used for ADA paratransit service. It was also noted that the DC region is different, as Metrorail is fully accessible, which impacts the need for trips.
- Is taxi use for ADA service Increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable? The response was that it appears to be slightly increasing, in part due to technology making it easier to plan and schedule such trips. In addition, transit agencies with limited budgets are under increased direction to provide more cost-effective service.
- How does San Francisco determine a user's need for paratransit service and the ability to use a taxi instead? The responses was that eligibility is determined based on the person's disability, such as the need for dialysis, and for premium same-day service, income can be a consideration.
- Do the same standards or rules apply to same-day service as they do to traditional paratransit (with its day in advance scheduling requirement)? Same-day service is considered premium service and the same ADA service criteria do not apply. But same day service must still meet ADA equivalency requirements. Equivalency includes accessible vehicles, same price fares, and same service for a wheelchair customer as for an ambulatory user.
- While there are 90,000 accessible vehicles registered in Virginia, it can take just 5 minutes to catch a taxi, but 30 minutes to schedule an accessible taxi. Does this affect equivalency standards? The response was that the service provided should be equivalent, but this is difficult with relatively few accessible vehicles. TNCs generally cannot provide accessible services.
- It was noted that the report showed the costs in San Francisco of \$13 for a TNC trip but \$34 for a paratransit trip. Does geography or jurisdictional boundaries play a factor in costs? The costs are different for the two service providers, including overhead, dispatch, dedicated but limited number of vehicles, staff compensation, and others.
- A recent magazine article noted that Pinellas County, NC (Charlotte region) was contracting with TNCs to provide paratransit trips. WMATA is also doing something similar with the Maryland Abilities Ride project, which recently completed an RFI and will shortly result in the issuance of an RFP. However, there will still be the need for a back-up call center and other support.
- It was noted that paratransit providers receiving federal funds need to meet Federal certifications and assurances, ADA rules, EEO, Title VI, operator drug & alcohol checks, employee background checks, and other requirements.
- It was noted there are other studies on TNCs providing paratransit, including one completed by WMATA last year.

The session closed with Mr. Werth noting that it would take two hours to do justice to this discussion.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF SPLIT AND THEIR OPERATIONS IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Mr. Ario Keshani, CEO, Split Technology, spoke to his firm's dynamically routed shared ride service (www.split.us). He opened with an overview of transportation options in the US, primarily car use but also public transit, taxis, and TNCs. However, auto use is increasing less appealingly as the cost of car ownership rises and urban congestion and the time of travel increases, while other options are expensive. Split is positioning itself in the market niche in-between these options, offering a relatively inexpensive shared-ride trip, but adding a potential walk trip at either end. Customers can use apps on Android or iPhones and will receive an offer of: time, pick-up point, and price. Split uses an algorithm to optimize service vs demand. Uber and Lyft are more direct, but also more costly, while fixed route transit service is cheaper but also slower.

Mr. Keshani explained how Split takes the middle ground, identifying routes and trips for users to share with an always working algorithm. Drivers are given turn-by turn direction, and users are asked to proceed to specific points and sides of the street to minimize driver delay in turns. The point network is very precise in both location and time. Users who miss a trip still pay; they must be at the pick-up point to make their trip. This enables improved efficiency and higher numbers of riders per driver-hour. As the service grows in users and in served area, the network effect provides a virtuous circle of increased demand and decreasing unit costs. Service in a non-grid city like DC is more challenging for the algorithm than some place like New York City. Mr. Keshani noted that usage information is proprietary, but he could state that Split provides more than 1000 trips per day, with users increasing by 10% a week.

Presentation: <https://www.mwco.org/file.aspx?&A=KACSNNE4IEoDx3DHdYoLai3cl1DgXfZ%2fSC7u5DvcUAW%3d>

Questions and discussion included:

- How does Split vet its drivers? Driver quality is very important, and Split has relatively fewer drivers than other Uber or Lyft. A more focused driver group is better. Split recruits its drivers through a specific process. Potential recruits are often too impatient for work to wait for detailed background checks to be completed, but Split does conduct interviews, provide direct training, and otherwise vet their drivers.
- Does Split offer service during snow or rain, or throughout the day, or to all of the city? Split does offer 24/7 service, but there is a capacity constraint. Split uses data to predict demand and thus schedule service. Currently Split serves about half of DC, and this area will expand based on future customer demand. Drivers do not know their destination, so they are location agnostic.
- Does Split offer ADA-accessible service? No, Split is too small to afford offering this type of service.
- How does this service impact the driver? Are they constantly being given new directions? No, drivers don't know their trip in advance; instead they are given turn-by-turn instructions through a tablet.
- What if a customer wants to be dropped off outside Split's service area? No, this service is not provided; the service area is geo-coded and requests will not be processed outside this area.
- What vehicle requirements are there: inspection, insurance, pre-trip checks, etc.? Split follows DCTC rules. Vehicles are required to be less than 10 years, and less than five years is preferred. Vehicles must be inspected, drivers must complete initial training, and operations team members review these items.

- How does Split track the number of seats available per vehicle? The number of seats for each vehicle is parameter in the algorithm for the service. The algorithm is really moving seats around the city, not vehicles.
- Are the drivers employees or independent contractors? They are independent contractors?
- How does a user pay for a Split trip? Normally by credit card, but for several months Split has been trailing PayPal and ApplePay. There's also a ride wallet, where a user subscribes for a fixed amount of service in advance.
- What led Split to set-up in DC? Regulations or driver availability? Split chose DC as a forward-looking city, with an active regulator interested in enabling these new types of services.

4. TPB UPDATES: HUMAN SERVICE TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION AND ACCESS FOR ALL COMMITTEE RESTRUCTURING

Ms. Wendy Klancher, TPB Transportation Planner, briefed the attendees on two opportunities for private transportation providers to be involved in TPB activities related to human service transportation coordination. The first is the restructured Access for All (AFA) Committee which combined the Human Service Transportation Coordination Task Force with the Access for All Advisory Committee. A call for applications was conducted in the Spring, and private providers were invited to apply as ex-officio members. The restructured AFA advises the TPB on issues and services important to low-income communities, minority communities, persons with disabilities, those with limited English skills and older adults. The AFA will be responsible for reviewing the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan for any updates and confirming priority projects for grant application solicitations for the Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility Program, which is the second opportunity for private providers. Ms. Klancher stated that the COG/TPB does allow private providers, such as taxicab companies, to apply directly for Enhanced Mobility grant funding, unlike other FTA designated recipients. The Enhanced Mobility grants that were approved by the TPB in January are now in the process of receiving FTA approval. The next solicitation for Enhanced Mobility grant applications will occur in 2017, as COG/TPB will conduct solicitations every other year.

5. NEW METROPOLITAN PLANNING AND TRANSIT RULES

Mr. Eric Randall, TPB Transportation Engineer, briefed the attendees on the changes to public transportation involvement at the TPB in response to a new metropolitan planning rule issued on May 27, 2016, by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The planning rule updates federal surface transportation regulations with changes adopted in the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) and the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, including a requirement for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to include intercity bus and commuter vanpool providers in the planning process. In addition, he also spoke about the new performance-based planning rules including for transit asset management. This new rule will add additional reporting requirements for any recipient or sub-recipient of federal transit funds, such as Section 5310 sub-recipients.

6. ROUNDTABLE ON TRANSIT PLANS AND PROSPECTS

City of Alexandria

Mr. Holloman reported that the City has awarded a contract to replace bus shelters throughout the city. The City is working on a project for a new bulb-out design which will lead to bids for construction. Transit signal priority is being implemented on the Van Dorn-Beauregard corridor and is planned for the Duke Street corridor (funded by an NVTA grant). Diamond and White Top are doing a great job operating the DOT paratransit service, which has realized cost savings. The King Street Trolley is now operated by DASH, is running on a 10 minute headway during the summer months.

Arlington County

Mr. Wexler reported that the County Council was anticipated to approve a ten-year Transit Development Plan in July. The plan includes more ART service, replacing some Metrobus routes. The County just renewed for one year the contract with national Express for the ART service, and there is one more option year remaining. The STAR contract has been extended to April 2017, and there will be a new procurement this fall for the service. The County is examining having one vendor operate START and provide demand-response service throughout the county. Taxi contracts are still in place.

Charles County

Mr. Barnett reported that the County has reorganized its transportation functions. A recent Transportation-Land Use Connections (TLC) study looked at access for a new campus of the College of Southern Maryland in Hughesville. This will be a transfer point for three transit services, for the first students expected next year. Charles will be conducting a bus procurement, and will be re-bidding a medium-duty vehicle procurement. Charles recently launched a new smartphone app, Double Map, which is currently in test mode but will provide customers in the county real-time transit information.

District of Columbia

Mr. Waters announced the re-organization of the DC Taxicab Commission as the District Department of For Hire Vehicles (DDFHV), effective June 28. DDFHV does not own or operate services, nor is it a lobby or advocacy organization. The previous commission board has been abolished and is being replaced with an advisory committee which will hold periodic meetings. There are 11 seats on the committee, 2 officio and 9 appointed by the Mayor. The mission is to provide customers a safe, efficient ride. Three appointees will be regular users of taxi cabs. The DDFHV will be a regulatory agency, but the advisory council will only recommend rulemakings, not approve them. The DC taxicab app will be transitioned to industry as a cooperative venture.

Mr. Strauss reported that TransportDC, the supplementary paratransit option, is now carrying about ten thousand trips a month, more than was anticipated. Otherwise, DDOT is focused on planning the Streetcar extensions to Georgetown and to Benning Road metro station. An RFP will be issued for 35 new DC Circulator buses to replace current vehicles. DDOT is working to mitigate the WMATA SafeTrack surges. Other bus plans include improved service on 16th street, with rush hour bus lanes and transit signal priority implementation.

Fairfax County

Mr. Zarbo reported that Fairfax County is implementing the AT&T Push To Talk radio system for dispatching and GPS location of all county public service vehicles, which will also provide communications. Cameras are also being installed inside all Human Services Transportation vehicles. Next year, Human Services Transportation will be implementing Mobile Data Terminals that will work with their current Trapeze software, which should improve customer service. Also, Human Services Transportation is planning on switching over our paper taxi cab voucher program to a debit card taxi cab voucher program.

Frederick County

Ms. Norris noted the new mobile ticketing app: Transit ezFARE. Frederick also did a TLC grant on route 40. Frederick is putting into operation five all-electric buses, which will be refurbished chassis of older vehicles. These will be used in peak hour service, while more charging stations are being installed, all funded by grants from FTA., MTA, and the Maryland Energy Commission. In other news, a ride-matching service has been implemented. All vehicles now have "Route Shout", which provides real time information to customers, and on which they can set alerts and other features. Frederick is looking at expanding service in the eastern portion of the county with shuttles. Frederick also hired

two paratransit staff to manage the exploding demands for this type of service. In future Frederick hopes to replace Trapeze with a new system for which an RFP will be issued. Another RFP will be issued for two replacement vehicles; currently in review by MTA.

Montgomery County

Ms. Archey reported on two pilot programs with contracted fixed route service: Rock Spring to Grosvenor and Potomac to Rockville metro stations. Previous on-demand service in this area funded by a JARC grant did not work out that well. In fall 2017, RideOn Plus will be implemented with corridor express service on MD 355, between Lakeforest and Medical Center; the ultimate goal is to make this a BRT service. Otherwise the county is preparing for WMATA SafeTrack surges 6, 7, and 10, for which the county will use 17 dedicated buses.

Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)

Mr. Nembhard reported on the complete re-design of the bus system in Baltimore - the Baltimore Link - of which the second version will be released on July 5. Part of the project, the Express Link suburb-to-suburb service has already started. Other MTA work includes the BRT studies in Montgomery County on MD 586 and MD 355 and US 29. The US 29 corridor is on an accelerated schedule with final design by 2018 and service operating by 2020. MTA is also coordinating with Howard County on their BRT efforts. MTA is continuing to look at Bus On Shoulder throughout the state and is currently in the middle of a Bus On Shoulder Study along MD 5 between US 301 and the Branch Avenue Metrorail station. MTA is involved in ongoing coordination with the State Highway Administration and Maryland State police.

Northern Virginia Transit Commission (NVTC)

Mr. Goldfarb spoke to the major activities at NVTC include the completion of the Envision 7 transit alternatives analysis, which has identified BRT between Tysons and the Mark Center as the preferred option. The I-66 outside the Beltway project made \$10 million available for mitigating projects, and the recommended proposals are now in front of the Commonwealth Transportation Board for approval, including three commuter bus routes and two local bus routes as well as a TDM project and bus stop consolidation along US 29 in Arlington County.

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission

Mr. Marx reported the year has been a challenging one for PRTC, as the commission faces a seven million dollar deficit on a thirty-five million budget. This required service cuts and fare increases. On July 5 there will be another revised schedule. Strategically, PRTC is consulting a customer analysis looking at needs and options for the near-term. In the longer-term, PRTC is working on a 15-year strategic plan outlining future needs and how to meet them. In other news, he reported that PRTC accepted its new CAD/AVL system on June 24, and they are developing new analytic tools to use the data and optimize service. PRTC previously had a three year taxi voucher program for qualified users, funded by the Potomac Health Foundation. This ended once no longer funded, but now Prince William County and Kaiser will be funding a restarted program. Finally, he mentioned there will be new bus service from Gainesville to the Pentagon.

Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Commission (WMATC)

Mr. Lehmann noted that WMATC oversees approximately 650 firms, which operate around 5,400 vehicles. As background, WMATC licenses private passenger carriers including contractors, and exercises some oversight over taxicabs on interstate trips. School buses, WMATA, and state and locally-operated transit services are exempt. Regarding transportation networking companies (TNCs), the Commission adopted a rulemaking on June 9 to clarify WMATC jurisdiction over TNCs. The decision was that duly authorized transportation services provided by a TNC fall within a licensing exemption for bona fide taxicab service. This new rule takes effect July 25. To elaborate, the exemption for bona fide taxicab service is for a service that carries nine or fewer passengers, where

the passengers select the destination and direct the route the vehicle takes. He added that DC, Maryland, and Virginia have recognized TNCs as a new form of transportation, and have instituted new regulatory structures to oversee them.

7. Open Discussion / Other Business / Adjourn

No further discussion took place, and Co-Chair Collins adjourned the meeting.

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All documents for the meeting are available on the MWCOG website, available at:
<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2016/6/29/annual-private-providers-forum-on-public-transit/>

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