



Transportation Department

TRANSIT DIVISION-Administration

1 N. University Drive, Suite 3100A • Plantation, Florida 33324 • 954-357-8300 • FAX 954-357-8305

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 17, 2020
TO: Broward County Board of County Commissioners
FROM: Chris Walton, Director
Transportation Department
RE: Paratransit Service Transition Issues

Please allow this memorandum to provide you with an update on the status of Paratransit Services.

As you are aware, we have been receiving complaints regarding the timeliness of Paratransit services due to a capacity reduction stemming from the decision by First Transit, Inc. to not renew its contract with the County, which ended on 12/31/2019. First Transit agreed to a transition plan which allowed the remaining vendor, Transportation America, to absorb its workforce to perform the services until a new vendor can be procured; yet many of the workers began leaving without notice. It is worth noting that only 127 of the 185 employees transferred to Transportation America.

The following steps have been or are in progress to address the issue:

A class to hire 45 new drivers began on January 10, 2020. These drivers are expected to begin service on January 20, 2020. A second class is scheduled for January 27, 2020, with an additional 30 driving candidates expected to begin on February 5, 2020.

For two of our larger sites, senior-level (more experienced) drivers have been assigned to the routes serving those facilities. Additionally, an onsite supervisor with a spare vehicle has been assigned to each site to respond to any service issues that arise during the day.

BCT has 102 new wheelchair lift paratransit vehicles on order, with the first 10 arriving onsite January 17th and will be placed into service on Monday, January 20th. The final vehicle delivery, with the remaining 92 vehicles, is expected on February 23rd and will be in service shortly thereafter.

BCT is working to expand the agency coordinated transportation program (ACT). The ACT program was designed in 2014 to allow agencies with adult day care and nutrition service

facilities to provide transportation for their clients. By participating in this program, the Agencies have greater control of the arrival and departure times of their customers and the staff responsible for them. The first to join the current six ACT agencies is the Lighthouse for the Blind. The ACT program reimburses the agency for costs associated with providing this transportation and will also work with them to obtain vehicles through state and federal grants, specifically designed for agencies like those in the ACT program. This past year, the state issued vehicle grants to 41 agencies in Broward & Palm Beach Counties in the amount of \$3,204,026, which the County pursued and received \$1,218,851.

Finally, we have investigated the feasibility of using taxis and TNCs to provide relief during the transition and, for some of the reasons outlined, do not believe that to be a viable solution at this time. Timing being the major concern with introducing the use of taxicabs or TNCs to the existing paratransit program on an emergency basis outside of the Riders Choice Program due to federal and state requirements related to training and drug testing. As a reminder, these companies are not considered part of our system. It is a "rider's choice" that is offered as an option and we are still grappling with some of the issues arising from its introduction. Today, only a small number of TOPS customers are actively using the Riders Choice Pilot Program. Over 2,500 TOPS customers were invited to join the Pilot Program. To date, only 538 customers have signed up; 167 customers tried it and returned to TOPS; and 181 customers have never taken a taxi trip. We have complaints, some of which include drivers are confrontational to customers who may not be able to tip; improper handling of individuals with cognitive disabilities; denying persons in some instances with service animals; denying the use of the payment card and, in one case, a driver drove the customer to an ATM to get cash; and customers in the western part of the county told they will not be served.

In closing, we are closely monitoring the situation. It is expected that service will improve as the provider reaches full staffing capacity and the additional new vehicles are introduced into the system.

cc: Bertha Henry, County Administrator
Monica Cepero, Deputy County Administrator