



POLICY REVIEW
Paratransit Service White Paper
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Introduction

STAR operates as a supplemental service that supports MetroAccess, provided by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

The STAR service area includes the following:

- Arlington County, Virginia
- Washington, D.C.
- Fairfax County, Virginia
- Cities of Alexandria, Falls Church and Fairfax in Virginia
- Montgomery County, Maryland
- Prince George's County, Maryland

STAR riders are certified by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) MetroAccess, the regional para-transit service established in compliance with ADA U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulations, as being unable to use fixed route transit for some or all trips due to a disability.

STAR transports Arlington residents, seniors, persons with disabilities, including those with sensory impairments (blind or visually impaired, hearing loss) people with cognitive impairments and people with physical disabilities. Some of those with physical disabilities use canes, crutches, walkers, rollators, wheelchairs, and scooters.

Service Overview

STAR service is available between 5:30 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. STAR has no restrictions on trip purpose. All daily trip plans on STAR must begin or end in Arlington. Our customers may ride anywhere Metro Bus or Rail service is available -- all pickup and destination addresses must be within 3/4 mile of a transit route. However, STAR does

not provide service to or from Montgomery and Prince George's Counties on weekends and holidays. MetroAccess services are also available for destinations beyond Arlington County.

Federal Regulations and Guidelines on Paratransit Services

This section provides a summary on the federal regulations that apply to paratransit services such as STAR and Metro Access. Under Department of Transportation (DOT) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations at 49 C.F.R. Section 37.121(a), “each public entity operating a fixed route system shall provide paratransit or other special service to individuals with disabilities that is comparable to the level of service provided to individuals without disabilities who use the fixed route system.”

Paratransit service is by nature a shared-ride service. The standard of service is not intended to reflect that of a taxi service, which typically transports passengers directly to their destination. A paratransit trip should be comparable in length to an identical trip on the fixed route system, including the time necessary to travel to the bus stop, wait for the bus, actual riding time, transfers, and travel from the final stop to the person’s ultimate destination.

Summary of Industry Research

Background

To help provide context for STAR’s current policies and practices, the Arlington County Transit Bureau is studying the policies of similar paratransit agencies in the United States. The County has identified similar agencies using data from the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) National Transit Database (NTD). Agencies selected for comparison serve urbanized areas of similar size to the Washington region, operate similar numbers and types of vehicles during maximum service, and/or provide

supplemental service to their region's ADA-designated paratransit service provider.

Methodology

Based on these attributes, the following agencies were selected for comparison. All data is from NTD for Reporting Year 2019.

GoTriangle ACCESS provides regional paratransit service for eligible residents of Wake, Durham, and Orange counties in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill metropolitan area of North Carolina. GoTriangle ACCESS uses 18 demand response shared-ride vehicles directly operated by the agency. The region has a population of approximately 1.6 million people.

Gwinnett County Transit (GCT) serves Gwinnett County, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. It provides paratransit service to eligible persons with disabilities, to complement Gwinnett County's local fixed-route bus service. The service consists of 69 demand response shared-ride vehicles operated by purchased transportation providers. Gwinnett County Transit serves an urbanized area of approximately 4.5 million people.

SamTrans serves San Mateo County in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. Its paratransit services, Redi-Wheels and RediCoast, are for persons with disabilities who cannot independently use SamTrans fixed-route bus service. The services use 79 demand response shared-ride vehicles and 52 demand response taxi vehicles, all of which are operated by purchased transportation providers. SamTrans serves an urbanized area of approximately 3.3 million people.

Additionally, the County studied **WMATA's MetroAccess** program because it serves as both the Washington region's ADA-designated paratransit provider and a readily available alternative for STAR customers. MetroAccess uses 754 demand response shared-ride vehicles and 338 demand response taxi vehicles, all of which are operated by purchased

transportation providers. MetroAccess serves an urbanized area of approximately 4.6 million people.

Review of STAR Policies

This section will provide a review of seven policies currently employed as part of STAR service and how they compare to the peer agencies reviewed. In addition, information on federal guidance related to the policy being discussed.

Reasonable Accommodations

Current STAR policy:

If a reasonable accommodation is needed under provisions of the ADA, please have your physician detail in writing the needed accommodation, including how long the accommodation is needed. The physician's note should be mailed to the Transit Services Manager, Arlington County Dept. of Environmental Services, Transportation Division, 2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 900, Arlington, VA 22201. If you cannot wear a seat belt for medical reasons, we request that you have your physician note that accommodation in writing for STAR records.

GoTriangle follows ADA rules on reasonable accommodations and offers door-to-door assistance upon request. Customers may file complaints with the Title VI coordinator within 180 days of alleged violations.

Gwinnett County Transit requires that reasonable modifications not fundamentally alter service, affect health or safety of others, or be the only way customers can use the service.

SamTrans does not allow modifications for vehicle requests, non-shared rides, or other priority service.

MetroAccess has no specific policy on reasonable accommodations. PCAs may ride for free. Drivers are not allowed to perform PCA duties.

Will-Call Return Trips

Current STAR policy:

STAR understands that in some situations, you are not able to predict when you will be ready to return home from a medical appointment. In those situations, you may book a Will-Call trip with STAR.

Will-Call Trips are also allowed when you have a return trip from another city via another mode of travel connecting at the Greyhound or Amtrak Stations or National or Dulles Airports. STAR understands that intercity trips sometimes run late. In these limited circumstances, ask for a Will-Call Return trip.

When you are ready, call the STAR Call Center. If the Call Center is closed, call the STAR taxi provider. The taxi provider won't leave you stranded—the Will Call return trip will already be booked with them. Please note that your Will-Call request will be erased from the database at midnight.

GoTriangle has no stated policy on will-call return trips. Reservations must be made at least one day in advance before 5 pm of the desired date of the trip; customers are asked to provide the time of their return trip when making reservations.

Gwinnett County Transit customers can place certain return trips (medical, government office, late arrival by GCT) on same-day hold. Requests must be made 60+ minutes before scheduled pick-up time or will be considered no-show. Wait times may be longer than usual.

SamTrans does not allow same-day changes and asks customers to schedule adequate time between same-day trips. Under their no-strand policy, dispatchers will re-schedule missed return trips, but the wait times for these trips may be longer.

MetroAccess asks customers to schedule return trips at the same time as their outgoing trips. Under their no-strand policy, dispatchers will try to re-schedule customers who missed their return trips but wait times may be longer; dispatch will not schedule return trips for customers who did not book them in advance.

From a federal perspective, Under Department of Transportation (DOT) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations at 49 C.F.R. Section 37.131(b), paratransit service must be provided to eligible individuals on a next-day response time. While transit systems are permitted to use real-time scheduling, it is not required. Where same-day service is provided, it is often a premium service. Because paratransit is a shared ride, allowing riders to change their drop-off locations on the same day to make intermediate stops could lead to late pickups or drop-offs for other riders.

Passenger Trip Notification (Where Is My Ride?)

Current STAR policy:

Please call the STAR Call Center 5 minutes after your scheduled pick-up time if your ride has not arrived.

Only call the transportation provider for “Where’s my Ride” calls or to cancel today’s scheduled ride when the STAR office is closed:

- 1. Weekdays between 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.*
- 2. Saturdays before 8:30 a.m. or after 5:30 p.m. and*
- 3. Sundays or holidays any time.*

You cannot reschedule a ride directly with the transportation provider unless you have scheduled a “will call” return trip as described above.

GoTriangle has no stated policy on checking the status of trips.

Gwinnett County Transit customers can sign up for customizable text alerts and are advised to call dispatch if their ride is more than 30 minutes late.

SamTrans customers are advised to call dispatch if their ride is more than 20 minutes late.

MetroAccess will use automatic call-outs whenever possible but does not guarantee them.

(NOTE: None of the peer agencies have stated policies allowing customers to call transportation providers directly.)

Trip Service Times and Locations

Current STAR policy:

STAR rides are available between 5:30 a.m. and midnight, seven days a week. STAR has no restrictions on trip purpose. All daily trip plans on STAR must begin or end in Arlington. STAR has capacity for a limited number of weekday midday trips (approximately 10:00 AM – 2:30 PM) entirely outside Arlington County within Fare Zone 2 (see STAR Fares). Those rides must be booked at the same time as a trip beginning or ending in Arlington that day. Our customers may ride anywhere Metro Bus or Rail service is available – all pickup and destination addresses must be within 3/4 mile of a transit route. However, STAR does not provide service to or from Prince George’s County on weekends and holidays. If you need a ride that STAR cannot accommodate, please call MetroAccess at 301-562-5360.

GoTriangle trips must begin and end within 3/4 mile of all-day fixed route bus stops. All trips must be scheduled to be completed by end of service on day of travel. Service hours are Monday-Friday 5:45am-11:15pm, Saturday 6:40am-11:15pm, Sunday 6:40am-7:15pm.

Gwinnett County Transit trips must be within 3/4 mile of local bus stops currently or previously served by GCT. All destinations are within Gwinnett County except for the closest MARTA rail station. Service hours are the same as fixed-route bus.

SamTrans offers limited service outside normal operating hours. The service area covers all of San Mateo County and certain parts of San Francisco and Palo Alto (directly adjacent to San Mateo County). Service hours are 5:30am-12:00am daily for most of the County and 6:00am-9:00am daily for more remote, less populated areas.

MetroAccess operates within 3/4 mile of fixed-route services provided by WMATA and/or other regional transit providers. Service hours are the same as Metrobus and Metrorail; MetroAccess does not operate when Metrobus and/or Metrorail are not operating.

Passenger Assistance

Current STAR policy:

STAR provides curb-to-curb service. The driver will assist you into and out of the vehicle, but the driver cannot leave the vehicle unattended. If you need assistance beyond the vehicle, you should bring a PCA or a companion.

GoTriangle drivers will assist customers getting on or off vehicles, secure mobility devices, and fasten customers' seatbelts upon request. Drivers will not assist customers past the door of their destination. A maximum of three grocery-sized bags are allowed on board, but drivers will not carry them. Door-to-door assistance may be requested as a reasonable accommodation.

Gwinnett County Transit offers curb-to-curb service, with assistance beyond the curb upon prior request (at the time of reservation). Drivers will help customers board and alight; assist with lifts, ramps, and mobility devices; and push manual wheelchairs onto bus ramps or lifts. Drivers may provide limited assistance with packages but are not required to do so. Drivers cannot lift customers or enter buildings.

SamTrans generally offers curb-to-curb service, with door-to-door upon request at time of booking. Drivers must stay within 100 feet from the vehicle and cannot lose sight of the vehicle for more than a few moments. Door-to-door service may require an advance survey of the dropoff/pickup location. Some locations have marked and designated pickup/dropoff points. Customers must request assistance at time of reservation. Drivers

can help with boarding/alighting, securement, guiding sight-impaired customers, opening building doors, and carrying up to four grocery bags (with max weight limit). Drivers cannot enter buildings, lift wheelchairs, leave vehicle unattended for long periods, or maneuver or park vehicles unsafely.

MetroAccess drivers will knock on exterior doors or open vestibule doors to identify themselves but will not enter buildings or knock on interior doors. Drivers will offer an arm to ambulatory customers; guide customers with low vision upon request; accompany or assist customers between the vehicle and the exterior building door; maneuver wheelchairs upon request; carry packages up to 40 pounds to the exterior door in a single trip; and assist customers with vehicle boarding, lifts, and wheelchair securement. Drivers will not perform PCA duties, such as moving wheelchairs up or down stairs, manipulating mobility device controls, waiting with customers, or handling service animals.

Pick-Up Window – Drivers and Customers

Current STAR policy:

Pick-up sequence is as follows:

1. If you are not visible (outside, or at least opening your door to exit the building) when the vehicle arrives and parks, the driver will ask the Dispatcher for a call-out to you. Please check that you have cell phone reception where you are waiting.

If the pickup time is during STAR Call Center hours:

1. Five minutes after arriving, the driver will ask the Dispatcher to contact the Call Center and the Call Center will then try to reach you.

2. Ten minutes after vehicle arrival, or ten minutes after your scheduled pick-up time, whichever is later, the dispatcher will grant permission for the driver to leave. The dispatcher will notify the Call Center, which will then assign a No Show to the trip.

If the pickup time is outside Call Center Hours:

1. Five minutes after arriving, the driver will ask the dispatcher to try to reach you again.

2. Ten minutes after vehicle arrival, or ten minutes after your scheduled pick-up time, whichever is later, the driver will ask the Dispatcher for permission to leave. The Dispatcher will email the Call Center of the No Show. When the Call Center reopens, a No Show will be assigned to the trip.

For Drivers:

GoTriangle uses a 60-minute pickup window. Upon arrival, drivers will wait for five minutes before leaving for their next trip. Customers may be considered a no-show if they do not meet vehicle within that time.

Gwinnett County Transit uses a 30-minute pickup window. Vehicles may arrive up to 30 minutes past the scheduled pickup time. Drivers will wait up to five minutes past the scheduled pickup time. Late-arriving vehicles will wait up to five minutes after arrival and contact dispatch. Drivers will not wait at the destination while customers conduct business.

SamTrans uses a 20-minute pickup window. Pickups are considered on time if the driver arrives 0-20 minutes after the scheduled pickup time. Drivers will wait up to five minutes after arrival or the scheduled pickup time, whichever is later.

MetroAccess uses a 30-minute pickup window, from 15 minutes before to 15 minutes after the scheduled pickup time. Drivers are required to wait for five minutes upon arrival, or for the first five minutes of the scheduled pickup window if they arrive early.

For Customers:

GoTriangle customers must be ready at their pickup location from 30 minutes before to 30 minutes after their scheduled pickup time. Customers may be considered a no-showed if they do not meet the vehicle within five minutes of its arrival.

Gwinnett County Transit customers are expected to be ready at their scheduled pickup time and location.

SamTrans drivers will wait up to five minutes after arrival, so customers must meet the vehicle within that time.

MetroAccess customers should be ready at the beginning of the 30-minute pickup window and must present themselves within five minutes after the vehicle arrives. If it arrives early, they may choose to board but are not required to do so.

Cancellation Advance Notice

Current STAR policy:

You can cancel a trip at least one hour before your scheduled pick-up time without penalty by calling the STAR Call Center. If you are canceling a ride for today or early the next morning and the STAR Call Center is closed, we

request that you call the transportation provider at least one hour before your scheduled time.

If you do not call to cancel at least 45 minutes prior to your scheduled time and do not show up for your trip, you will be charged a No Show. All of your remaining trips FOR THAT DAY will be automatically cancelled unless you call and request that your remaining trips be provided.

STAR will not send a vehicle back to your home if you are not ready for your scheduled pickup.

GoTriangle customers must cancel at least 60 minutes in advance to avoid being considered no-show. Subsequent trips will not be canceled automatically if they no-show or late cancel their outbound trip; customers are responsible for canceling each trip separately. Warnings and suspensions are issued to customers who no-show or late-cancel 20% or more scheduled trips in consecutive months.

Gwinnett County Transit customers must cancel at least 60 minutes in advance to avoid being considered a no-show. Late cancellations and cancellations at the door are considered no-shows. Exceptions may be made for circumstances beyond the customer's control. Subsequent trips will not be canceled automatically if the initial trip is missed. Customers receive no-show violations for canceling five same-day trips within 30 calendar days, even if they cancel more than 60 minutes in advance. Customers may receive notification or warning letters, suspensions, and/or loss of subscription service based on number of prior no-shows within a rolling 30-day period.

SamTrans customers must cancel at least two hours in advance or as soon as they know they will be unable to ride to avoid being considered a no-show. Subsequent trips will not be canceled automatically if the initial trip is missed. No-shows will result in warning letters listing each infraction,

and suspensions are given for no-shows or late cancellations on three or more trips or 6% or more of scheduled trips within a rolling 30-day period.

MetroAccess customers must cancel at least two hours before the start of the pickup window and before the vehicle arrives. Customers who book at least 10 trips in a calendar month and no-show or late-cancel at least 10% of them accrue penalty points and are subject to warnings and suspensions.

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