

To: Marketing, Planning & Legislative Committee

Date: 08/31/2023

From: Rashida Kamara, Director of ADA & Special Services

Reviewed by:



SUBJECT: Paratransit Service Area Analysis Update #1

Background:

County Connection was formed in 1980 and provided transportation services in the 10 cities and unincorporated areas of Central Contra Costa County. This included fixed-route services and other transit options for seniors. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), adopted in 1990, requires transit agencies to provide paratransit services within a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile radius of all fixed route services. County Connection's Board of Directors adopted a more expansive paratransit service policy that increased the service area radius to 1.5 miles for the LINK Paratransit program.

Over the past three decades, County Connection has modified fixed route services to meet changing ridership demands and adapt to revenue constraints posed by shrinking funding sources. As a result of these changes, many ADA paratransit passengers fell outside of the 1.5-mile distance from fixed route service. When this occurred, County Connection permitted existing paratransit users who were impacted to retain access to complementary paratransit service. During the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all socially accessible transportation services collapsed throughout the County, leaving the vulnerable paratransit-eligible population without access to food or medical services. To help bridge this gap, County Connection provided paratransit services for disabled passengers living outside the 1.5-mile radius of fixed-route services.

The growing population of paratransit customers living outside of the defined County Connection paratransit service area has the potential to degrade services for customers living within the core service area. As a recipient of federal funds, County Connection must provide paratransit services to our core service area customers without excessive ride times, poor on-time performance, or inconsistent access to services.

Staff conducted an analysis of out-of-service area passenger trips to help determine the impact on core service customers.

Out-of-Service Area Analysis:

The analysis considered various factors, in addition to financial costs, and demonstrates the necessity of limiting the paratransit service area as close to the 1.5-mile radius from fixed routes as possible. These factors include:

1. **Trips Outside Service Area:** Determination of the total number of trips exceeding the 1.5-mile radius service area boundary.

2. **Financial Cost:** Evaluation of the aggregate financial impact associated with providing trips beyond the 1.5-mile radius.
3. **On-time Performance Impact:** Examination of how out-of-area trips affect the punctuality of trips within the 1.5-mile radius.
4. **Resource Utilization:**
 - Assessment of the allocation of resources such as vehicles and drivers required for pick-ups beyond the 1.5-mile radius.
 - Consideration of how this allocation may compromise service quality within the core service area.
5. **Federal Compliance:** Analysis of whether providing trips beyond the 1.5-mile radius affects County Connection's ability to provide service consistent with federal standards. Providing service that does not meet federal standards could ultimately affect County Connection's receipt of federal funds, which are crucial to the overall health of the entire transit service system.

Initial findings: Below is a chart of some initial findings:

Month	Trips Outside the 1.5-mile radius during Fiscal Year (FY) 2023	Trips Inside the 1.5-mile radius during FY 2023	Percentage of Trips Outside the 1.5-mile radius during FY 2023	<u>Cost of Trips Outside the 1.5-mile radius (based on cost of \$75.18 per passenger)</u>
Jul-22	15	5,879	0.26	\$1,202.88
Aug-22	18	6,959	0.26	\$1,804.32
Sep-22	21	6,743	0.31	\$1,653.96
Oct-22	30	7,705	0.39	\$1,503.60
Nov-22	23	6,450	0.36	\$2,330.58
Dec-22	43	6,386	0.67	\$3,608.64
Jan-23	23	6,414	0.36	\$2,105.04
Feb-23	24	6,973	0.34	\$2,480.94
Mar-23	36	8,388	0.43	\$2,932.02
Apr-23	25	7,631	0.33	\$2,255.40
May-23	27	8,524	0.32	\$3,157.56
Jun-23	14	4,394	0.32	\$3,007.20
Total	299	82,446	0.36	\$ 28,042.14

In a small sampling of trips, staff discovered the following:

- Routes that accommodated trips outside of the 1.5-mile radius spent less time picking up passengers within the 1.5-mile radius, which ultimately resulted in picking up fewer passengers overall.
- Expenses were higher for routes that accommodated trips outside of the 1.5-mile radius.
- Few routes were available to serve both the core paratransit customers inside the 1.5-mile radius and out-of-service area ADA eligible trips.
- Ride times for passengers outside the service area tended to be longer.

Although trips serving origins and/or destinations more than 1.5 miles from a fixed route currently represent less than 1% of trips performed, ridership continues to increase, and staff expects the number of out-of-service-area trips to increase without a policy change. Federal rules and regulations do not prohibit a transit agency from providing paratransit service beyond a ¾ mile radius from fixed route service. (See 49 CFR 37.131(g)). However, a transit agency may not limit the availability of

complementary paratransit service to paratransit-eligible individuals by engaging in any operational pattern or practice that significantly limits the availability of service, such as by having a substantial number of significantly untimely pickups, trip denials or missed trips, or by operating trips with excessive trip lengths. (See 49 CFR 37.131(f)).

It's important to understand that, under the ADA, paratransit services function as a "safety net" for persons whose disabilities prevent them from independently using the fixed route system. It is not intended as a comprehensive system of transportation that meets all the travel needs of all persons with all disabilities at all times. The paratransit service criteria required by statute are designed to provide a level of mobility to eligible riders that is comparable to that available to riders of the fixed route system. If a transit agency wishes to provide a more comprehensive level of paratransit services, it must ensure that eligible riders traveling within the established service area do not experience the capacity constraints described in 49 CFR 37.131(f).

Financial Implications:

The total cost per passenger per trip outside the 1.5-mile radius from a fixed route was relatively low for FY23 at \$28,042. However, if providing trips outside the 1.5-mile radius limits the quality and availability of paratransit services to customers within the 1.5-mile radius, this may affect County Connection's eligibility for federal funding.

Recommendation:

Providing paratransit services to passengers outside the service area has a profound and life changing positive impact for those individuals as well as the communities we serve. However, it's imperative to recognize the potential risk it poses to our core passengers. Staff seeks the opportunity to engage the committee in a discussion for the potential modification of paratransit service policies that meets the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) required service quality guarantees for passengers within the service area and a less stringent standard for individuals outside the service area.

As long as the Authority is providing a service to customers outside the service area, staff believes that any service provided should be of the highest quality in terms of safety, on-time performance and reliability. Toward that end, staff will seek creative alternative service models, partnerships, and funding opportunities to maintain the existing high quality service standards for those individuals outside the service area.

Action Requested:

None: For information only

Attachments:

None.