County Connection

INTER OFFICE MEMO

To: Operations and Scheduling **Date:** 11/28/2019

From: Rashida Kamara, Manager of Accessible Services **Reviewed by:** WC.

SUBJECT: Transdev Transition Update Part 2

Background:

Transdev assumed County Connection's paratransit contract from First Transit in July 2019. In its request for proposal, County Connection, asked for the in-coming contractor to address long standing performance issues, bring about user friendly technologies for passengers, and develop transit partnerships to increase service efficiencies.

After winning the bid Transdev spent 60 days prior to the contract's commencement, on-boarding drivers, reviewing service parameters, training staff and becoming familiar with LINK service rules. As with any transition we have faced both successes and challenges.

Challenges:

There have been a number of challenges that Transdev have had to overcome in order to effectively manage and operate the LINK service

- Lack of sufficient training for employees prior to the transition
- Lack of correctly designed Processes and Reports
- Insufficient Fare collection procedures
- Implementing a brand new service model and achieving full employee buy in.

Cost

Driver living wages were increased from $13hr to $19hr. Call center staff and dispatchers also received living wage increases from $12hr to $16HR and $13hr to $23hr based on tenure.

Productivity in the past 5 months has yet to reach the goal of 2.0. We ended the FY18/19 with a 2.02. This was mostly due to extreme driver shortage. So, although productivity was high, service quality was still very poor with complaints at an all-time high. Productivity comparisons are not necessarily accurate as a result. Productivity in July was 1.80 and has remained at 1.90.

Service improvements:

Since Transdev's assuming the contract, service quality from the rider's perspective noticeably continues to improve (see letters attached). We ended the FY18/19 fiscal year at 81% on-time. We started in July at 90% with a slight dip to 88% in September due to pulling drivers off the road to train, October was 92.5% and November is 93.3% to date.

Technology:

- On July 1, 2019, we transitioned to using tablets with a small percentage of the fleet. We continued to train drivers and added tablets each day until we were fully automated by July 11, 2019. By the end of the month we had gone paperless.
- On November 1, 2019, we launched My Transit App, a smartphone app that allows users to monitor the status of their trips in real time. It also provides the ability to see where the bus is on the map (This is especially helpful for "where are my ride" calls and has minimized those calls from the call center). It also provides notifications by way of email, text and voice alerts of when the driver arrives. It can also be configured to inform family members of the same trip status, which has minimized calls to the call center. More excitingly is the ability for the rider to rate their experience in real time and that feedback is instantly relayed back to LINK and County Connection Staff. Riders can rate their experience from 1-5 with one being the lowest or least satisfactory to 5 where their experience was exceptional. Our current rating 4.50.

A brief demonstration on the My Transit App will be presented at the O&S meeting.

Financial Implications:

Staff will continue to monitor closely the rising cost of Paratransit by paying attention to the cost of fuel and working to meet productivity standards of 2.0.

Attachments:

- Letter from Choice in Aging
- Letter from Paratransit User

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Debbie Toth
Chief Executive Officer

Rashida Kamara
Manager of Accessible Services
County Connection
2477 Arnold Industrial Way
Concord, CA 94520

October 25, 2019

Re: New paratransit provider, Transdev

Dear Rashida:

The purpose of this letter is to provide feedback regarding County Connection's new paratransit contractor, Transdev. As you know, we had a myriad of problems through the years with First Transit, many of which were never resolved. These included extremely long wait times when calling reservations or trying to reach dispatch, issues with the manifests, mix-ups in our participants with participants from RES next door, long travel times, etc.

From our perspective, Transdev's service has been much better since July. For example, Christian Sanchez in scheduling has been excellent. He provided all of the Passenger ID numbers for us so that we could reference them when calling about a Mt. Diablo Center participant. Additionally, he communicates with me and our receptionist, Kitty Cryderman, whenever there is a question or an issue regarding a Mt. Diablo Center participant.

For the most part, the drivers have been attentive and helpful. We have had only a few complaints since July. Whereas, in the past, I was getting complaints in writing or verbally from our staff on a daily basis. It was taking an inordinate amount of time from Mt. Diablo Center staff to get to resolution.

April Lewis has helped us with problems reported by a participant and we have gotten information in a timely manner. Just last week a participant reported a fall, which in fact was not. It is important to get these reports validated as quickly as possible.

Finally, we appreciate the invoice format and resolution to an issue we had regarding the first Transdev invoice.

If you need any further information, please feel free to call or email.

Best Regards,

Lisa Hammon

Lisa Hammon, Director of Special Projects

November 18, 2019

Via email

Rashida Kamara
Manager of Accessible Services
County Connection
2477 Arnold
Concord, CA 94520

Dear Rashida:

BRAVO!

Everyone involved in the Transdev transition deserves to hear that, from the drivers to the many working behind the scenes.

Transdev's new technology has substantially improved the paratransit rider's experience. Equally as laudable has been the effective implementation of the transition. To achieve so much change in so little time is a testament to the strong leadership and organizational management you and your team have brought to the table.

Timing is everything! I've observed the transition seated in my wheelchair in the back of Link's vehicles and have seen the progress firsthand. As I'll describe below, my first round of rides were examples of the old Link service model's worst and best. Since then, I've experienced the positive contrast brought by Transdev.

The accumulative changes the transition team and drivers have been able to achieve over the past five months makes quite a difference! Allow me to compare the old and the new systems, using my rider experiences to demonstrate the great inroads you all have achieved.

- Before the Transdev transition
  Last Spring, I received conditional paratransit privileges just as the Transdev's transition started, yet my first trip wasn't until June. I needed to get to a doctor's office in Blackhawk Plaza which was neither accessible nor near a fixed route. This first trip was as hair-raising as *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride*; however, the experience helped me understand why paratransit had such a bad rap within the disabled community.

  The driver arrived to where I was waiting 30 minutes past the pickup window. He couldn't find the paratransit bay at Walnut Creek BART. After loading me, he drove north to Contra Costa Center because his manifest was out of order. The driver announced that the next passenger would be dropped off in Clayton before we would leave for Danville. With my appointment starting in only 15 more minutes, I knew I would be very late. I called my doctor to apologize and beg that my appointment not be cancelled as a no-show.

About 20 minutes later, we arrived at the next passenger's home. The driver went to help him out the door, only to find the rider had decided to cancel. I groaned, but then had some hope that I'd be less tardy. Before continuing, the driver pulled out a paper map to augment his personal GPS as he planned his route to Blackhawk.

As the driver raced down the I680, he kept checking his map because the GPS was taking us on the longest route. Since he wasn't familiar with the design of the lanes and off-ramps, he nearly missed the exit and unsafely swerved. The breakneck speed and sudden maneuvers were hair-raising.

Finally, he asked if I could help him with directions. Luckily, I knew the route, so I suggested an easier and more direct way. Whew…we finally made it to the appointment 45 minutes late. I laughed off the anxiety with the doctor and hoped that the trip home would be better.

Afterwards, my pickup was again late. While waiting at the curb and assuring passersby that my ride really was en route, I started to doubt the reliability of using paratransit. I started analyzing what wasn't working: I asked myself, "Why isn't the system using technology to help with the scheduling and routing like Uber and Lyft do?"; "Why does the driver have to provide their own GPS?"; And, "Why can't the passenger have an Uber-like app to help see their rides?"

After more waiting, the dispatcher finally called me to say the driver was lost and could I give directions. That helped…within minutes he arrived. Immediately, I sensed his calm demeanor, sincerity, and best of all his competence. That was a positive contrast from my earlier harried ride.

My blood pressure dropped as the driver and I chatted while he drove one other passenger home before heading north towards Walnut Creek. I shared about the stress of my earlier experience and he listened with empathy. He explained Link's workings. He shared about the operations from his viewpoint. His insights into the upcoming changes with Transdev helped me further see inside the program's processes. Despite the heavy commute traffic, he safely drove me home.

- <u>After the Transdev transition</u>
  A few weeks passed before I scheduled my next set of rides. Thankfully, I had the benefit of hearing directly from you about the Transdev transition plan—and I now had a basis for comparison. The initial process improvements were immediately apparent.

  Chatting with my drivers, I learned how they experienced the changes and how it was working for other passengers. Those drivers who were tech savvy and resilient were excited by the possibilities brought by Transdev's new practices and technology. Others were wary but open to the changes, and only a few seemed to be struggling. In real time, I saw the dispatchers and drivers collaborating to learn the new systems and make them even better.

During the weeks that followed, I saw continued improvements as the drivers' leaned into the new ways. You could see the benefits as they built their trust in the new processes, procedures, and most importantly the routing technology. Their job stress levels seemed to drop so rides were increasingly more relaxed. A few of my trips were in the Big Star vans which exposed me to that part of the service model. In every case, it was clear the drivers were first concerned about my safety and had been trained in how to assure it.

By showing an interest in each driver, I learned about their typical workday, job designs, and Transdev's approach. Often, drivers shared why they were motivated to work for Link/Transdev. This was touching because it wasn't just for the money; their compassion for helping their passengers be out in society was equal. All these insights could be the makings of a sociology/ operations case study.

By August, I could see that the continuous improvements were helping make my itineraries more predictable. There seemed to be fewer and fewer bugs in the technology used for creating the manifest, routing, and scheduling. That changed the game by increasing Link's reliability for me. The drivers were generally on time. They stayed focused and knew their way.

Mis-ordered trips no longer have seemed to be a problem. When drivers have problems, the dispatchers usually communicate with me, explaining status or helping the driver find me at the venue. Those extra steps prevent frustration and keep us on-time. (Even when other riders throw curve balls, the drivers handle the situation with equanimity and grace. That reflects well on the hiring process, labor management, and training.)

Another improvement is that my rides generally arrive within the promised 30-minute pickup windows. I have made it a point to get to the curb by the start point, but to do so though means I have had to "hurry up and wait." With the old program, waiting at the curb was unpredictable. With the new system, the driver usually arrives at the beginning of the pickup window. These improvements have meant that I'm not sitting late at night in unsafe places until my ride arrives.

Since I have retired from driving, I've spent a lot of valuable time waiting for fixed- and paratransit. Appointments that used to be a 10-minute car trip from home, now take me several hours. What an opportunity cost!

While waiting for paratransit, I use to wonder: "Where is my ride? Will it be on time? If not, do I need to call ahead to let my appointment know so I'm not charged a cancellation fee or then have to wait months for another appointment? How far off schedule will we be?"

Regardless, I would ask: "What else could I be doing with my time--if I wasn't sitting at the curb?" The long hours traveling around the county have absorbed much of my time and have been physically exhausting. The lost productivity felt like my human potential no longer mattered to society just because I couldn't drive myself anymore. It also felt like the loss of a basic right: getting door-to-door.

I have replaced my frustration by being grateful about the blessing of having paratransit services at all. It would be even worse if the ADA hadn't provided for paratransit. Instead, I also shift to thinking about how I'd solve the problem: "What if I could tell how far off the driver was? Then, I could plan, manage my time, do one more thing, and then regain the ability to actually seize the day."

So, imagine my excitement when the Transdev phone app was rolled out. What a game changer! The app's real-time status has eliminated my forgone time. As a passenger having info means I once again can live more of my life.

My new ability to see what's happening makes all the difference. I can verify from the time of booking that my trip is correctly set-up and stay updated throughout each ride's life cycle. With the reminders and count-down alerts in real-time, I won't miss a ride.

Added features on the app like watching the driver's progress on the app's map helps me gauge the driver's arrival timing. Predictability is a good thing! No more pestering the dispatcher to verify I was still on the manifest, and fewer calls to ask, "Where's my ride?" That reduces stress! The extra time was a true gift, what a difference it makes to do one more thing or make one more call before the bus arrives. Best of all: no more sitting idly at the curb.

Rashida, all these improvements have given me back my life! Link's new collaboration with Transdev sends a powerful message to stakeholders that our time indeed is respected. Paratransit is there to help us live fuller lives. The new model also conveys that our lives are as valued as much as a more able person. I am grateful for the sincere care that everyone has put into making this a success from the passenger's perspective.

Thank you for asking for my perspective, being curious, and letting me share my experiences with you. Most importantly, please share this with your team and the drivers. I hope they are all encouraged to see that their hard work, patience, and commitment to continuously improve has increased the quality of their passengers' lives.

Respectfully yours,
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