



MEMORANDUM

To: Catie Cullison
From: Nelson\Nygaard Project Team
Date: December 6, 2021
Subject: Recommended Strategies to Address Mobility Needs

TRANSIT AND FLEXIBLE TRANSIT STRATEGIES

1) Coordinate Improvements to Accessible Paths of Travel to Transit Stops

- Access to public transit is sometimes limited by lack of sidewalks, poor sidewalk condition, lack of curb cuts, and obstructions on sidewalks. Typically, cities rather than transit agencies are responsible for sidewalks. By targeting sidewalk improvements in locations near transit stops that serve key facilities and residential locations, accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities may be significantly improved. In addition, expanding existing bus shelter installation programs at transit agencies could serve the needs of those who wish to use fixed route but are prevented from doing so due to the lack of shelters. Consumers should be provided a single phone hotline and mobile app option to report barriers and request stop improvements. Other existing entities which may already receive complaints or bus stop improvement requests (e.g., the Mayor's Office, City Council Members, Honolulu's Customer Service Department) should modify policies, as needed, to consistently inform DTS of all requests and mark all access barriers as requiring prioritized attention.
- Building off multiple policy precedents that seek compliance beyond ADA (including but not limited to the Hawaii Pedestrian Toolbox, the citation of no detectable paths of travel as a cause for conditional paratransit eligibility, etc.), DTS is already working to address a list of bus stop priorities through the ongoing Bus Stop ADA Access and Site Improvements project and this work should continue to fill gaps in the accessible paths of travel network to and from existing and future transit stops.

2) Improve Safety and Cleanliness at Transit Stops and On Board Vehicles

- DTS has invested heavily in improving lighting and surveillance at transit centers and stops. Supplementing these measures with additional specialized staff (including those trained in social counseling and custodial services) can further improve safety and comfort at transit stops.

- Police intervention at bus stops and shelters is not always necessary and can potentially also discourage people from riding transit. An expanded policy focus on the benefits of having social work-trained civilians responding to complaints applicable to the health and welfare of transit riders at the bus stops and on board vehicles can help people of all ages, races, and abilities feel comfortable using the system. Even if other City and State agencies may need to be involved in hiring and training such staff, the procedure for dispatching non-police intervention should be consistently used and communicated across all DTS facilities and vehicles.

3) Establish Senior Shuttle Services

- Senior shuttle services have multiple benefits, including offering independence to older adults, creating social opportunities for riders, and providing help lowering paratransit costs for transit providers.
- Transit agencies can determine percentage of older adults in a given neighborhood or region, combined with the current number of paratransit pickups in the area. Senior shuttles are designed to target senior housing developments.

4) Establish Late Night Service

- Many transit agencies offer service during what are generally considered “traditional” time periods; however, second and third shift workers are sometimes left out of the service equation because of the cost of providing service during limited ridership hours. For example, as with most transit agencies, a majority of TheBus routes running local service either experience an increase in headway during the evening or do not run at all. As such, shift workers often have limited (or no) flexibility in using transit to access employment opportunities during non-traditional work times.
- DTS could offer a limited number of monthly subsidized trips on taxis or TNCs in order to meet the needs of shift workers who do not have access to an automobile, and work in an area not served by transit during shift hours.

5) Establish Connector Services to Park-and-Rides

- First-mile last-mile connections often present challenges for users of transit services and transit providers alike. Providing connector services can help individuals access the larger transit system, while also providing access to destinations in the community, including shopping, medical, and educational opportunities. Connector service could be offered in the form of a flex route or through a contract with a TNC.

6) Establish Feeder Services

- Feeder service and first-mile last-mile strategies do share in common modes of connecting riders to the fixed route service. However, as used in this memo,

feeder service is limited to paratransit service, whereas there are multiple approaches that can be used for first-mile last-mile connectors.

- Due to geographic constraints and traffic conditions, paratransit trips from remote parts of O‘ahu can be very lengthy and costly to the operator. One way of addressing this issue is to implement a feeder service strategy. Rather than taking a single paratransit ride all the way from origin to final destination, feeder services can provide riders with a short connection to transfer to a fixed-route service. Thus the longest segment of the trip is the least costly to the operator.
- Feeder services are intended for a subset of eligible TheHandi-Van riders for whom the largest barrier is getting to the nearest TheBus stop or rail station, usually due to terrain, but also due to challenges in path of travel or distance.
- The effectiveness of this strategy will depend on the frequency of the fixed-route bus service, as bus routes in which riders would need to wait more than 15 minutes could prove too inconvenient or impossible to use because of their disability. Protocols will need to be in place for transfer location amenities and whether the paratransit vehicle will wait with the rider until the connecting fixed-route bus arrives. Rail transfers would occur at rail stations with existing passenger amenities and rail headways are anticipated to be relatively short.
- Feeder service is very helpful in some systems and not useful in others. Rider acceptability also varies considerably depending on local conditions. In order to evaluate the feasibility of this strategy, a detailed analysis of various factors such as availability of frequent fixed route service in key locations, existence of suitable transfer locations etc. will be required.

PARATRANSIT AND DEMAND-RESPONSE STRATEGIES

7) Review Scheduling Software Parameters to Reduce Very Early TheHandi-Van Drop-offs

- If on-time performance analysis indicates that TheHandi-Van has a pattern of very early drop-offs, steps will need to be taken to address this pattern. This is not only a compliance issue, but also significantly impacts riders who are required to wait for programs to open, sometimes outside of the facility in inclement weather. The FTA has ruled that a pattern of drop-offs more than a half hour prior to the appointment time is non-compliant. Scheduling parameters need to be examined in light of this finding, and steps taken to either change the scheduling parameters used in the Trapeze computerized scheduling system or determine whether expanded fleet capacity is needed.
- The recommendation that DTS direct OTS to “[Improve] the use of the Trapeze computer system by putting more of its paratransit operations on real-time and

eliminating the reliance on manually amending trip runs” was a recommendation for follow-up from the City Auditor¹.

- OTS began the process of reviewing and iterating their scheduling software parameters earlier this year. DTS has noted that very early drop-offs are decreasing and will continue to monitor OTS’ progress.

8) Adjust TheHandi-Van Fleet to Include Smaller Accessible Vehicles

- Using accessible vehicles which are smaller than cutaway vehicles may help provide benefits that ultimately improve service reliability and cost-savings:
 - Standards for hiring drivers of smaller vehicles might not need to include the requirement of a Commercial Drivers License (assuming the vehicle is fewer than 26,000 pounds and designed to transport fewer than 16 passengers)², thus, potentially expanding the pool of potential drivers during a prolonged labor shortage;
 - Smaller accessible vehicles could help to improve access to locations that would otherwise be difficult to reach with the larger cutaway vehicles;
 - In response to continued limitations on vehicle occupancy for social distancing (either by mandate or expectations among riders and/or drivers), transporting the same amount of riders can be executed using a less space- and resource-intensive vehicle, and;
- If cost-savings benefits are possible, vehicles may be pooled as part of other partnerships with other providers outside of TheHandi-Van.

9) Introduce Voluntary Option for TheHandi-Van Riders to Accept Early Drop-Offs

- If a rider is flexible with their arrival time, TheHandi-Van could use that flexibility to provide more reliable service for all riders.
- Riders could voluntarily agree to the possibility of arrivals scheduled over 30 minutes early when getting certified, reserving an individual ride, or requesting a subscription trip. Incentives for participation may include the possibility their ride will be direct and/or unshared (i.e. not stopping to pick-up or drop-off another rider along the way).
- This program can also be supplemented by expanded demand-response service provided by taxis in partnership with TheHandi-Van.

¹ https://www.honolulu.gov/rep/site/oca/oca_docs/Paratransit_Followup_Final_Report.pdf

² https://dhrd.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/201904_0200005Attc.pdf

- Additional performance metrics and provisions that don't penalize drivers for dropping off registered program participants over 30 minutes early could be established.

10) Continue Funding for Agency Provided Trips Program

- For over ten years, the Agency Provided Trips Program has helped address demand for door-to-door demand-response transit service on O'ahu which may exceed the existing capacity of TheHandi-Van's facilities, staffing, and vehicles.
- The program provides assistance to human service agencies that operate day programs for individuals with disabilities to provide transportation services for their own clients, who would otherwise need to use TheHandi-Van. This additional trip capacity thus opens up capacity on TheHandi-Van for other riders, which helps to ensure ADA compliance.
- As a part of this ongoing program, DTS should continue to regularly monitor any posted calls for funding, deadlines, and reporting by recipients. DTS should also continue to monitor agencies in terms of costs per trip as a condition of receiving assistance. Agencies -- including those participating and not -- should also be regularly prompted by DTS to continue identifying any barriers to program participation, awareness, and usage.
- DTS may help agencies overcome barriers to participating by facilitating information sessions during open calls for funding, providing resources/trainings, and identifying and facilitating coordination opportunities between agencies on staffing, vehicles, and facilities.

11) Expand Fixed-Route and Paratransit Driver Pool

- One major cause of deficient paratransit and fixed-route schedule adherence nationally is due to a prolonged shortage of available drivers. The turnover in the industry has a variety of causes, including individual experiences dealing with misbehaving passengers, challenges accessing garages to and from home, burnout tied to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and competition in the job market from delivery companies. Unfortunately, this transit driver shortage can potentially delay the implementation timelines of certain strategies in this study, so a concerted effort to both hire and retain drivers plays a critical role.
- OTS can convene with other agencies and unions in the County and State to review existing pay, benefits, and licensing requirements to identify opportunities for improvement. Agencies and unions should also collaborate to find opportunities to add incentive pay not just for newly hired drivers, but for drivers willing and able to take on relatively more challenging assignments and routes.
- Lastly, it is important to continue recognition of drivers for improving the sense of community ownership and morale on board the transit system. All transportation providers—public, private, and non-profit—in O'ahu can incorporate driver

recognition as part of marketing and public-facing materials through calling attention to individual drivers' stories and establishing an email address or hotline requesting individual commendations from riders.

12) Expand Demand-Response Service

- A variation on service beyond ADA service areas could be directed to specific trip types (like dialysis) that commonly require travel early in the morning or late into the evening. Programs that are designed for these services generally employ taxis, non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) operators, or TNCs. Services that exceed the ADA minimum requirements that serve specific, privately operated destinations, such as dialysis clinics, could be candidates for cost-sharing arrangements with those entities, similar to paratransit trips that exceed ADA minimums. These sorts of arrangements may help target future solicitations for participation in the Agency Provided Trips Program, which could potentially be expanded to encompass other types of agencies or organizations.

13) On-Demand Paratransit

- On-demand paratransit offers users of traditional paratransit services the opportunity to have trip and booking flexibility. On-demand services offer a sense of autonomy and independence for customers but can also aid in lowering trip costs for the transit provider.
- Prior to the pandemic, several transit agencies initiated pilot programs that provide same-day door to door transportation service to ADA-eligible riders, using both TNCs and taxis (in areas where accessible taxis are available). While the transit agencies have not realized any substantive cost savings, their riders have been provided a much greater array of mobility options, including same-day service.
- There are some caveats to this strategy implementation:
 - Depending on the area (particularly in more rural areas), the availability of taxis and fully accessible vehicles (via taxi or TNC) may be more limited in general.
 - In periods of high demand, when TheHandi-Van may be otherwise unavailable, taxis may opt to decline supplemental trips in favor of general public trips when fares are more advantageous to the driver.
 - When agencies seek to implement this strategy, providers must be mindful of service equivalencies for passengers with disabilities.

14) Pilot Microtransit Program

- An on-demand microtransit system has potential to provide direct transportation service from multiple home or other front door locations within a given zone to key nodes, such as high-capacity transit transfer stations or large workplaces

- that may include locations and main entrances difficult to access with current transit options.
- “Microtransit” is a term that is defined in different ways within the transportation industry, in some cases being applied to any shared ride service in vehicles larger than a sedan but smaller than a bus. The model of microtransit is currently not proven to be more cost-efficient than providing fixed-route transit service in every context. Therefore, the key principle is ensuring that people living in areas unserved by fixed-route transit can still access the network without depending on driving an automobile.
 - Following are some of the key differences between microtransit and regular fixed-route transit.
 - Microtransit does not have fixed routes or timetables, whereas regular transit does.
 - Microtransit does a better job of serving multiple origin/demand nodes in a low-density area, whereas regular transit is better for linear/corridor demand.
 - Microtransit provides door-to-door service, whereas regular transit suffers from a first-mile/last-mile issue.
 - Microtransit can bridge the gap for seniors and children (especially for school trips) and can be better positioned/programmed to take advantage of pulses of demand at fixed intervals and locations.
 - The use of community transit or contract service operators to operate smaller, right-sized services may be a means to free up operating funding to provide additional services in low density and/or rural areas of the county. This is particularly relevant in areas with demand for transit service but insufficient demand to justify traditional bus transit.

15) Subsidize TNC Service in Underserved Transit Areas

- Service gaps could be addressed through contracts with TNCs, such as Uber and Lyft, which broker flexible, direct, and spontaneous service for people seeking transportation. If such trips are subsidized by a sponsor agency to lower the fares for customers, the subsidy per trip is likely to be lower than the current levels of per-trip subsidies for public fixed-route bus and paratransit services.
- Contracts with TNCs could be used to provide:
 - First/last mile service to bus stops and future rail stations
 - Trips for individuals who live outside the fixed-route/ADA paratransit service area
 - Alternative service for ADA paratransit customers, to add a flexible, spontaneous option for customers and reduce the overall cost of providing ADA service
 - Late night service for work trips

- Service for particular user groups, such as older adults or people with disabilities, who may have limited options
- Transit agencies have experimented with partnerships with Uber and Lyft to offer such services as pilot programs, with the transit agency subsidizing trips for customers. In most cases wheelchair accessible vehicles are not available through these TNCs and the transit agencies have contracted with taxi companies to provide accessible service.
- When implementing this strategy, agencies and partnering providers must be mindful of service equivalencies for passengers with disabilities.

OTHER STRATEGIES

16) Establish Volunteer Driver Programs

- Volunteer driver programs connect riders to a network of volunteers that provide one-way, round-trip, and multi-stop rides. Cost of participation in these programs can be provided free of charge, on a donation basis, through membership dues, or at a minimal cost, and typically have an eligibility process and advance reservation requirements.
- Programs are sponsored by non-profit organizations, transit agencies, or cities and counties. Some volunteer driver programs may also have an escort component where volunteers accompany riders with mobility devices on paratransit services, when they are unable to travel in a private vehicle. Some programs may use staff to provide initial rides or to fill gaps when volunteers are unavailable. Existing non-profit organizations with a trained volunteer base and experience providing transportation assistance, such as Project Dana, should be considered as potential partners for scaling up a volunteer driver program.
- Volunteer driver programs are generally designed for older adults and can fill key needs that are not met by other transportation services such as ADA-mandated paratransit. A key gap these programs usually address is offering door-through-door service. These services are therefore ideal for more frail individuals who cannot wait outside, may need a stabilizing arm, help with a jacket or carrying groceries, etc. These programs are also well-suited for certain medical trips, for example when someone needs to stop and pick up a new prescription before going home.
- Volunteer driver programs usually have to closely monitor their capacity and face ongoing challenges with funding and finding quality volunteers. Administrative costs often exceed policy-makers' expectations, so different models can be adopted to address this challenge.
 - For example, the Riverside County program in California pioneered use of a mileage-reimbursement model for the drivers. Agencies will assess the capabilities and needs of the applicant riders and reimburse drivers, but the

actual act of finding drivers and scheduling trips is done between the driver and the rider.

17) Expand/Improve Mobility Management Program

- Mobility Management programs serve as a “one-stop shop” to connect members of the target population groups with the most appropriate mode to meet their needs, given their abilities and other factors.
- Three key goals for a mobility manager include:
 - Creating partnerships between a diverse range of community organizations (public, private, non-profit, for-profit, etc.) to ensure that transportation resources are coordinated effectively.
 - Using these partnerships to develop and enhance travel options for customers in the community or region.
 - Developing ways to effectively communicate those options to the public to inform customers’ decision-making, focusing on enhancing customer service.
- Past mobility management programs on the island have experienced limited success and usage for a variety of reasons. Thus, upon hiring or contracting a full-time or part-time staff member responsible for implementation and management of programs, it is imperative to set clear stipulations and expectations for responsibilities and outcomes, such as:
 - Updating government and public service listings on an annual or bi-annual basis.
 - Answering all calls on a countywide hotline for transportation information.
 - Facilitating travel training and “train-the-trainer” sessions alongside committee meetings which are already happening and attended by invested individuals.
 - Incorporating questions on user awareness of existing resources into existing rider and program surveys.
 - Helping current and prospective participating organizations in the Agency Provided Trips program, such as facilitating information sessions during open calls for funding, providing resources/trainings on transportation service and operations, and identifying and facilitating coordination opportunities between agencies on staffing, vehicles, and facilities.
 - Serving as “mystery guests” to regularly check up on the quality of existing transit services and the accuracy of posted timetables and real-time bus arrivals.
- Mobility management programs could also help scale up existing transportation information hotlines (such as TheBus Customer Service, workfare/employment training programs, Aloha United Way 211, Honolulu 311) and other programs through direct marketing of these options to the general public.

18) Create Travel Buddy Program

- Even though traditional travel training programs based largely on one-on-one training have not met DTS' expectations in the past, the City and County may wish to consider a subset of travel training that can be conducted using volunteers – a travel buddy program.
- Travel buddies are an effective way to encourage individuals to try public transportation who are new to the local system, or public transit in general. Typically, travel buddies are volunteers who are familiar with the region and have been trained by the local transit agency on how to use the system, purchase passes, and navigate existing resources like maps and schedules. Travel buddies serve multiple purposes, including building rapport between seasoned and new riders, supporting public transit use, bringing new riders to public transit, debunking stigmas about public transit, and, over time, developing new friendships.
- Travel buddy programs may be established in a variety of formats. In addition to targeting older adults, agencies may establish programs for the general population, youth, individuals with disabilities, or new community members.

19) Support Pooling of Wheelchair-accessible Vehicles among Smaller Providers

- Vehicle pooling is designed to reduce unnecessary vehicle expenses, resulting in a smaller regional fleet. This strategy allows providers with complementary vehicle requirements to share vehicles. Under such an arrangement, multiple entities would jointly purchase vehicles that would be shared between them with terms and conditions set for cost allocation, sharing use, responsibilities for vehicle storage, maintenance, and insurance.
- Vehicle requirements do vary depending on the providers and/or location. An example of vehicle sharing takes place in Kern County, California, where several cities work with Kern County Transit to utilize both County and city-purchased vehicles for service delivery. While the vehicles may be different, all are branded similarly, and all are accessible.

20) Guaranteed Ride Home Programs for People with Disabilities

- A guaranteed ride home program usually is intended to encourage use of transit and carpooling by providing an alternative means to get home if the participant needs to work late or return home early due to an emergency. Usually, taxi or TNC rides are provided. A program geared to people with disabilities would provide wheelchair-accessible options and not be limited by trip purpose.
- To meet the needs of disabled riders, the program would need to incorporate design features such as a rider's existing account with a TNC, HOLO, and/or a

ridehailing concierge service for people without the ability to access the internet or a smartphone (GoGoGrandparent is an example of such a service) and a mechanism for charging agencies for the trip or providing the consumer with a voucher for emergency trip purposes. Call-taking, eligibility screening and payment procedures would be needed.

21) Dialysis Cost Sharing

- Transportation for dialysis patients requires a level of service that exceeds ADA minimums, including the provision of guaranteed subscription service, rigid trip negotiation times, narrow on-time windows, and potentially longer than required driver wait times as patients recover from treatment. Due to the inflexibility of these trips, they are likely more costly to provide than the average cost per trip, and are not required under the ADA. However, dialysis clinics do not share in the costs of this premium demand-response service beyond the standard fare, even though they are totally reliant on it to ensure the efficient use of their dialysis equipment.
- The constraints of providing public transportation to dialysis clinics is a concern facing paratransit programs nationwide. In FY 2021, TheHandi-Van provided 105,060 trips to dialysis clinics, or 18.2% of all TheHandi-Van trips. In the 14 months prior to COVID-19, dialysis trips made up 9% of all TheHandi-Van trips.
- This strategy calls for the negotiation of cost sharing agreements with dialysis clinics to alleviate the financial and operational burdens on DTS. If DTS' proposal to raise fees on Medicaid trips is successful in generating revenues for dialysis trips, this may replace the need to negotiate contributions from the dialysis clinics.