

Whitepaper on Accessibility and Mobility on Demand (MOD) Options

Table of Contents

	Pages
Introduction	1
Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Transportation Organizations	1
Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) & Taxis – Private Transportation Requirements & Regulations	2
Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) & Taxis – Private Transportation Benefits & Restrictions	2-3
Paratransit	3
Technology	3
Conclusion	3-4
References	4

Introduction

Transportation and mobility play extremely important roles in people’s daily lives. More specifically, people with disabilities need accessible, efficient, and reliable modes of transportation to fulfill daily activities. The rights of people with disabilities to access transportation for their everyday needs are guaranteed under the federal law – the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. With advancement in transportation modes, more options are now available for accessibility than ever before. Innovations in transportation and technology make it possible for people with disabilities to live more independently. Accessibility is a civil right and it must be assured in all operating decisions, including safety measures for all passengers with and without disabilities. (Transit Report – Volume 22, Number 12 & Transit Report – Oct. 13, 2015).

Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Transportation Organizations

The Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) region has a few organizations that are dedicated to linking people with disabilities and older adults to the most appropriate transportation options. My Ride Dallas, My Ride Tarrant, and My Ride North Texas, are dedicated to helping people with disabilities and older adults understand the transportation options available to them. My Ride Dallas offers over-the-phone transportation counseling, e-mail, and printed guides for accessing rides that are available throughout Dallas County. My Ride Tarrant also offers assistance over-the-phone, e-mail, and via text message. Contacting a MyRide Navigator can help with finding the best transportation for needs for Tarrant County and Dallas County. My Ride North Texas is a website that offers users an easy-to-use database option using origin and destination information, time, date, and mobility options based on the riders’ needs. My Ride North Texas also provides other resources such as flyers, travel assistance resources, and frequently asked questions (FAQs). All three of these resources help people with disabilities and older adults understand transportation options for easier accessibility.

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) & Taxis – Private Transportation Requirements & Regulations

Taxi companies in Texas are regulated at the municipal level and comply with ADA requirements for engaging in the transporting of people to provide demand-responsive transportation. Within the DFW region, wheelchair accessible taxicabs are available upon request. Texas policies state that taxicab services cannot deny rides to people with disabilities. Similar to TNCs, if a person is using a wheelchair or other mobility aids that can be stowed in the cab and can also transfer from a wheelchair to a vehicle seat, the company and driver must provide service. In situations where a person cannot transfer to a vehicle seat, the driver and/or company must connect them to the appropriate service options that operate ramps and lifts or other similar accommodating needs for transport purposes. This could be an additional accessible vehicle from the taxicab company or another transit provider that is within the specified area.

TNCs such as Uber and Lyft have specific accessibility requirements that they must follow in order to operate services. In May 2017, Texas lawmakers passed House Bill 100 that requires all TNCs to provide people an opportunity to indicate whether they need a wheelchair accessible vehicle when booking a ride. Moreover, TNCs cannot impose any additional charges for transporting people with disabilities. If an accessible vehicle is not available, the company directs the requesting person to an alternate provider that can provide an accessible vehicle and does not unreasonably delay the service.

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) & Taxis – Private Transportation Benefits & Restrictions

To help solve transportation challenges in DFW, major transit agencies including Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) and Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) have formed public-private partnerships with Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) such as Uber and Lyft to help people get to and from where they need to go. Partnerships that exist between TNCs and transit agencies can:

- Lower transit provider's operational costs
- Serve additional riders outside of public transit agency coverage areas
- Improve access and provide improvements on services
- Provide more convenient services for paratransit riders

TNCs and Taxis, have made significant positive increases in mobility for people with disabilities, although, they operate with benefits as well as restrictions. TNCs are beneficial for people who choose and are able to use them, by offering same day spontaneous services, connections to public transportation, flexible schedules, and can be a cost effective option. TNCs offer an additional option, instead of having to reserve rides a day or so in advance. By TNCs partnering with transit agencies, within the DFW region, it increases the reach and coverage areas of transit for riders.

There can also be some limiting measures for TNCs, such as having a limited number of options for people with disabilities in rural communities. Since TNCs operate personal vehicles, accessibility is a major restriction because they are not all equipped with lifts or ramps. Other restrictions include recruiting 24/7 drivers, long distances between destinations, accessibility of technology, and costly for people with low incomes.

An operational benefit for taxis includes accessible vehicles. Several taxi services in the DFW region offer rides that are wheelchair accessible. They offer better chances of rides during difficult times such as peak periods, have a wider coverage area, and are easier and safer to serve mobility users. Some of the main operational restrictions for taxi services can be when an accessible vehicle is requested for a spontaneous ride, it can be difficult to obtain because many services require wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles to be requested at least one day or more in advance. This can restrict people with disabilities from being mobile, especially if they are in an area where there are a limited number of public and private transportation services.

Paratransit

In the context of transportation planning, mobility has been defined as the potential for movement, the ability to get from one place to another. More specifically, mobility is having services that are going to and from destinations that people want to travel to, information and/or data about such services, how to use them, accessible for everyone to use, and affordable. Paratransit services help to empower people with disabilities by focusing on their mobility needs. “Disability need not be an obstacle to success” –Stephen Hawking.

Paratransit is a specialized transportation that serves people who are physically unable to use a fixed-route transit system. According to ADA, paratransit must provide service within a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile radius of fixed-route services that are comparable to the service provided to people who use fixed-route systems. Paratransit must be provided to all eligible riders if it is requested in the appropriate timeframe, which in most cases is one day ahead of time.

The three transit agencies in DFW that provide paratransit service are Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Trinity Metro, and Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA). All agencies offer services in accordance with ADA regulations and provide demand-responsive service to qualified riders.

Technology

Transit agencies' technology has increased mobility options and made it easier for people with disabilities to find rides. The GoPass app, which is an easy-to-use and personalized means to planning rides, allows users to purchase tickets on DART, Trinity Metro, and DCTA transit systems. Regional tickets and passes are also available to travel on any combination of the three transit agencies' systems. For getting around the Fort Worth area specifically, NextBus is a mobile app that provides real-time service information on fixed-route buses. Riders can find the exact service and routes to get to and from their destinations.

Conclusion

Public and private transportation organizations in the DFW region continually strive to make it easier for people with disabilities to meet their daily mobility needs by offering opportunities for transportation. As Mobility on Demand (MOD) continues to improve the accessibility of people with disabilities, the focuses include: fostering public and private relationships between public transit agencies and MOD operators, leveraging around-the-clock services, implementations of fare payment options, and employing services and technologies that cater to people with physical disabilities. People with disabilities have identified transportation equity as an issue that should be addressed, not only to increase mobility, but also to increase community participation, economic stability, and social inclusion.

As transportation services, both public and private, continue to grow and technology becomes more advanced, restrictions on mobility for people with disabilities will decrease, thus providing a higher quality of life. “Let’s improve services to help assure greater access to transportation options” – Shared Use Mobility Center (SUMC).

References

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Shared Use Mobility Center (SUMC)

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Texas Legislature House Bill 100

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