



Columbus Consolidated Government

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Following are the reports of the Paratransit Dial-A-Ride Service and Parking Services programs.

Paratransit Dial-A-Ride Services

METRA operates a Paratransit Program, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which is a Civil Rights bill that prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. The intent of ADA is to ensure that persons with specific disabilities have equal access to public transportation. In accordance with ADA, METRA Transit System must provide a variety of services, including paratransit service. Paratransit service is a specialized service providing a curb-to-curb shared ride for eligible individuals with disabilities who are unable to use the regular fixed-route bus service, even though all fixed-route buses are ADA accessible.

METRA is required to determine the eligibility for paratransit service for individual applicants. Categories of eligibility for Dial-A-Ride are as follows:

- A. The applicant has a specific impairment-related condition(s) that prevents the applicant traveling to or from METRA Transit Transfer Station or Bus Stops.

- B. The applicant needs assistance of a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance devices and is able, with such assistance, to get on, ride, and get off vehicles, which are accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

- C. The applicant is unable, as the result of a physical condition,, including vision impairment, mental impairment, and without assistance of another individual (except the operator of a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance device, to get on, ride or get off vehicles on METRA Transit System which are accessible and usable by individuals with disabilities.

Persons believing their disability may fit into one of the categories described above must apply for certification by completing a Dial-A-Ride Paratransit Application. In addition, a licensed professional must very verify your eligibility application.

METRA Transit will review applications for completeness. Incomplete applications are returned to the applicant with an explanation of the missing information.

Upon receipt by METRA, completed applications will be date-stamped. METRA may consult the appropriate licensed professional regarding eligibility and request an interview with the applicant if an accurate determination cannot be made, based upon the written application.

METRA will determine eligibility within 21 days of receipt of the completed application and professional verification. If approved, the applicant will be notified and eligibility will be granted for a period of 6 months to 3 years. Eligible applicants must request an appointment to receive their photo identification card and will be given materials explaining the rules and regulations governing the service. After certification has expired, METRA will request applicants to reapply for certification.

If the application is not approved, METRA will send a written statement, including the reason for ineligibility and full description of the process for appeal.

The Paratransit Application includes Part A: Applicant Profile & Acknowledgement, and Rules and Regulations & Acknowledgement, Instructions and Applicant Checklist, and Part B: Professional Verification.

The fare for a Dial-A-Ride transit is \$2.50, each way. Riders must pay on each leg of the trip, rather than paying \$5.00 at the beginning, for a round trip. Payment

can be made with cash, a METRA Smart Card, or Pre-paid cards of either a \$12.50 or \$22.50 amount, the latter of which is available at the Transfer Center Ticket Office. The METRA Smart Card costs \$5.00, plus the purchased pre-loaded amount. Replacement Smart Cards are free, unless lost. Then, the charge is \$5.00.

Auditee Response

The initial I.D. card for Dial-A-Ride service is free. Replacement I.D. cards are free. Smart Cards are \$5.00 for each card purchase.

The Dial-A-Ride Paratransit service enables disabled persons mobility and independence for a nominal cost. Door-to-door service, on a day's notice, in a shared-ride bus with wheelchair accessibility. Transportation to and from most any location in the city where transit service is available. It provides the ability to take care of business, get to medical appointments or care facilities, go shopping, dining or travel to fitness or recreational facilities. Once qualified, via application and medical provider certification, you are in.

Auditee Response

METRA's Paratransit (Dial-A-Ride) service extends ¾ miles around METRA's Fixed Route bus service and operates during the same hours as the Fixed Route bus service.

Dial-A-Ride provides service to up to 250 disabled individuals each day, with a range from 140-250. Many patrons subscribe for standing appointments for repetitive medical services or fitness activities. Others call in for random trips to different locations around the city. Scheduled ridership and location variability determine the number of paratransit vehicles in service for a particular day, Monday through Saturday.

Auditee Response

The number of vehicles usually varies from about four to seven. METRA's Dial-A-Ride service requires 7-8 buses Monday-Friday and 3-4 buses on Saturday.

Paratransit vehicles have a useful life of five to six years, according to Paratransit Coordinator, William Jenkins.

Auditee Response

METRA Dial-A-Ride buses have a useful life of 5-7 years or 100,000-150,000 miles.

With about half the life of a 35-Foot Bus, these vehicles are much less expensive and are replaced more frequently. The smaller vehicle also provides better maneuverability in tight locations. The hot, humid summers experienced in Columbus sometimes challenge the temperature control system of these vehicles. The newer vehicles are equipped with an improved roof-mounted air conditioning system that is more reliable and has greater cooling capacity due to improved airflow. Air conditioning failure and malfunction have been a source of complaint this summer on some of the older vehicles. One new vehicle was recently received, and additional ones are ordered for future delivery. The paratransit dispatcher is careful to schedule rider pick-up enough time in advance of a scheduled appointment to allow travel time to the location.

(See Application Form and Instructions)

The service began in 1993, as an ADA requirement of all public transit systems by the American Disabilities Act.

The Paratransit Service has experienced increased ridership since its inception in 1993, and it will likely continue to grow as the population ages. Older populations have a higher rate of disability than younger populations. Their disability qualification for ridership tends to either be permanent or last longer than those of younger riders. Because of the requirement for disability certification, the Paratransit Operation does not provide the same opportunities for ridership growth, as does the Fixed Route Operation.

Audit Testing:

The audit testing of the Paratransit Dial-A-Ride service included riding a paratransit route, observation of the Paratransit Dispatcher, and interviews with the Dispatcher and the Paratransit Coordinator, and a comprehensive review of the Paratransit Application Form, the application process, rules and regulations, payment methods, and operational procedures.

Audit Findings:

The operators performed well through all parts of the operation observed and tested. Drivers, dispatchers and the coordinator are very familiar with the operation and schedule rider appointments with routes and lead times designed to get the patron to their destination on time. This can be quite challenging when considering the multiplicity of locations from which riders hail, and a wide variety of destinations. Interviews with drivers and passengers revealed a high satisfaction rate for the service with the major complaint being the air conditioning on the older vehicles. I rode on the newest one, and the temperature was consistent and cool throughout the route. The service provides needed assistance to those riders with disabilities, and although the ridership continues to grow, it is not a market segment with significant opportunity for rapid growth, due to the qualification requirement and its limited eligibility.

Audit Recommendation:

Continue to purchase vehicles with the higher capacity roof-mounted air-conditioning system that provides the most reliable climate control as many of these riders are frequent users, and spend long periods of time on vehicle as these routes tend to be longer than the fixed routes.

Auditee Response:

Agree. We have had some challenges with the intense heat index. METRA staff in all divisions have work jointly to support the DAR division by transporting customers in vans and cars when we experience AC or other mechanical problems.

Parking Management

Parking Management is a division of the METRA Transit System. It is headed by a Parking Division Manager and a staff of eight part-time Enforcement Officers that assist with parking management and enforcement in the Uptown District, bounded by 9th Street on the south, 14th Street on the north, Bay Avenue on the west and 3rd Avenue on the east, or 25 city blocks. They also enforce parking regulations and issue citations for parking violations in the following garages: Rivercenter, Front Avenue, Bay Avenue and the garage adjacent to the Citizens Service Center and the Columbus Aquatic Center. They also service the ninth Street Surface Parking Lot and the Lakebottom Parking Lot.

Parking Revenues of approximately \$250,000 per year consist of Fines generated from citations issued for parking violations (77%), Parking Fees (16%), and Rents/Leases of (7%).

The Uptown District has become very vibrant and robust over the past several decades with the movement of a portion of Columbus State University's Campus to Uptown, and riverfront activities, which have spawned the addition of numerous restaurants, bars, retail stores, recreation and businesses. This has generated more traffic and parking needs in the Uptown Area, particularly during the midday and early evening hours. Frequently, patrons are circling the blocks waiting for spaces to be vacated. Much of this parking deficiency of curbside spaces could be eliminated if the business owners and employees would use garage parking and leave the curbside parking for their customers. Uptown provides a unique experience to its visitors and patrons, unlike any other area of Columbus. It provides a wide variety of experiences and many of the stores, restaurants, vendors and business located there that are locally owned.

Audit Testing:

The auditor observed street parking in the Uptown District, particularly from Bay Avenue eastward through 2nd Avenue. The auditors observed streets and blocks at various times of the day, noting the number of spaces available. We observed traffic flows at various times of the day. Potential safety concerns were addresses, as were walkability and cleanliness.

The auditors also observed The Uptown parking garages at similar times for available open capacity. We inspected the garages for safety and cleanliness issues, including day and night illumination. While garages provide a degree of safety from inclement weather such as hail and storms, many people have safety concerns of being alone in a large, relatively dark, unattended facility; particularly after dark.

We received comments from patrons on the street, in the garages, and in other places of observation. Some shared them at the Y, and in a few stores and restaurants visited. Uptown Executive Director, Ross Horner, also shared comments that he has received from visitors and patrons to the District. We asked Mr. Horner if his Board had discussed parking concerns during their meetings. He stated they had done so on several occasions over the time that he has been in his position. While he provided some general comments of their leanings, he suggested that he get them together and invite the auditors to obtain their comments directly. He noted the biggest complaint that he hears is of the \$40 tickets, some patrons and owners receive that they feel are unjust and frequently inaccurate.

Audit Findings:

Mornings, before 10am, Broadway had ample empty spaces, as did Bay Avenue. The spaces on other streets were more than 85% filled, the recommended maximum by *Parking Management Best Practices*. The spaces on those streets represent workers and students that must be in place before mid-morning. Most of the people parking in our parking garages are similarly early starters of their day, indicating they are most likely office workers, students or faculty. This is true for Front Avenue, 1st Avenue, 2nd Avenue, and 3rd Avenue. Some CCG workers use the Ninth Street and 10th Street for spaces for parking, but more are likely citizens and attorneys there to conduct business with the Administrative, Judicial and Law Enforcement offices located in the buildings. Eleventh Street largely provides

parking for the adjacent churches and St. Luke School. The westerly blocks provide spaces for corporate offices, CSU, restaurants and small retail shops. Twelfth Street borders law offices, churches, Ralston, Federal Court and the post office, flower shop, restaurants and a mixed-use building including retail, professional offices, and residential housing and CSU. Thirteenth Street is a major transportation corridor, connecting with Phenix City. It is lined with automotive shops, car lots, several vacant buildings, insurance offices, banks, law offices and retail. Fourteenth Street is bordered by gas stations, Columbus Water Works Business and Administrative Office, Physician Offices, a special event house, Uptown Elementary School, YMCA, the TSYS Campus, Country's Barbecue, Loft Housing and ends at the Frank K. Martin Recreational Bridge. The limited number of parking spaces on these east/west streets are near capacity most mornings through afternoon business hours.

From 10AM, Broadway spaces fill as retail shops, restaurants, and specialty stores begin to open and prepare for the mid-day rush. By eleven thirty, Broadway is at capacity and few spaces are open until the first round of the lunch crowd leaves, with the next wave coming in to fill the spaces. Cars are circling the blocks, awaiting someone to leave. Observations made as late as one-thirty to two still note nearly every space filled.

The current parking ordinances primarily provide zoned time limitations, usually by block, most of which are either 2-hours or 4-hours. These are intended to create turnover of the parking spaces at periodic intervals. There are also prohibitions against parking in front of fire hydrants, driveways, etc. With no alleys behind the buildings, delivery vehicles from automobiles to large straight trucks jockey for the few loading zones that are available. Restaurant owners frequently park in spaces near their stores to unload during the early morning hours. Parking enforcement is patrolling and strictly enforcing time limits from 8am-6pm, Monday through Friday. This results in citations for some business owners servicing their own businesses and customers as well. Some blocks have businesses of mixed uses that need differing time allowances. While most retail store and restaurant patrons are in and out within a two-hour timeframe, and can adhere to a two-hour parking limitation, it does not work for others. There is a beauty salon located in the 1200 block of Broadway. It is located in a block with numerous restaurants and shops for which a two-hour parking limitation is realistic. The same is not true for this

business. While some of their clients are in and out within two hours, a number of them are there four or more hours, for extensive services. This makes it impractical for them or their stylist to go move their cars to another block and they are receiving numerous tickets for time zone violations at \$40 each. In many instances, the business is covering the cost so as not to lose their most profitable customers.

The bottom line is that zone parking time limits results either in a citation or in the movement of the vehicle from curb parking in one block to a space in another. It is not causing a shift to those employees and patrons to park in one of the parking garages with an abundance of empty spaces, as should be the goal and the result of an effective parking management program. The current system causes harm to the Uptown businesses and their patrons which ultimately could lead to an exodus of businesses from Uptown to other locations such as malls and strip centers where parking is plentiful.

Best Practices states that metered parking for the convenience for curbside street parking is a more appropriate approach and one that provides employees and patrons a financial motivation to park in garages a bit further away at a lower cost rather than in a more expensive and convenient curbside space. With this shift in behavior, there would be more than adequate curbside parking for patrons and if that eventually reaches capacity; patrons can shift the overflow to remaining spaces in the parking garages.

Inconvenience is not the only concern of employees and patrons when considering garage parking. Safety becomes an important concern, particularly for those employees and customers that must retrieve their vehicles after dark or late into the night. The expectation is that parking garages must address their safety concerns. What conditions must exist to satisfy their expectations? Illumination is a major concern. Illumination must be bright enough to provide the visual ability of the user to see their path through the garage from the access point to their destination. For parking on an upper floor, the route must include well-lit elevators and stairwells, similar illumination of their path to the location on the level they are parked. Garages need to be clearly marked with wayfinding and informational signage so the patron is confident of their whereabouts and does not feel disoriented or lost. The garage needs to be clean and spaces well marked. Trash and recycle receptacles need to be conveniently located at entrances, exits, and

adjacent to elevators and stairwells on each floor for disposal of cups, soda cans, food wrappers, and other trash they wish to discard. The garage lighting and equipment should be serviced, washed, cleaned and receptacles emptied on regular basis to provide assurance that service workers often frequent the garage. The servicing must include the prompt replacement of non-working light bulbs or fixtures, gate arms or ticket boxes (if applicable). Emergency alarm buttons and call boxes at strategic locations also provide a mechanism for summoning help in case of an emergency. At least two of the city-owned garages have upper levels that are not covered. Access to these levels need to be restricted, via chained off ramps as do stairwell and elevator access, except when needed to provide overflow parking for highly attended events in the area. These areas are frequently used as a gathering or party location primary used by youngsters to loiter. Their activities range for gathering and socializing to smoking, drinking, vaping, drug usage, bonfires and reckless driving, including "burn-outs" that could easy result in serious damage to the garage, vehicles and persons that could be seriously injured or killed by such activity. A final measure would be to have security patrolling the garage, particularly after dark or having a courtesy vehicle available to drive patrons to their cars during late evening hours. This service could be provided for a nominal fee or it could be included in the parking fees from the metered parking.

Cost estimates for metered parking equipment and installation are being developed for use in preparation of a pro forma for Parking Management that include metered parking on the streets in the Uptown Parking District and the necessary parking garage upgrades to increase the desirability for using garage parking. The cost of staffing and operations of Parking Services should also be included in the total cost.

Audit Recommendations:

We recommend that the Uptown Parking District be metered to affect the parking practices of business in that area that do not have adequate off-street parking on their premises, to shift their employees to garage parking. The financial difference in cost of free garage parking versus paid curbside street parking and improved garage amenities should accomplish this goal that would leave curbside parking

available to patrons if the Uptown business establishments. The cost of parking would effectively encourage patrons to use the space as long as necessary and then vacate the space. This is a fee-for-service approach of a nominal cost for parking rather than a punitive approach of expensive citations for exceeding a zone time limit that does not work for all types of business in a block zone. Parking staff would still issue citations for parking time beyond the paid time purchased, as well as improperly parking in front of fire hydrants, driveways or in loading zones.

Parking garages would continue leases/agreements with corporate customers for reserved space for their employees and customers as currently exist. Other garage parking would remain available for business owners, employees, patrons and visitors preferring the free garage parking.

An ordinance would be necessary to establish the hourly rate for street parking, likely in the \$1.00-\$2.00 per hour range, for parking from 8am to 5pm, Monday through Saturday. The fees collected would be used to cover the cost of the parking services operation, equipment and software maintenance, and the proper maintenance of the garages. Fees should be evaluated annually to ensure they are adequate to cover budgeted costs for parking and any adjunct services that might be provided. It should include a fine schedule that is reasonable and appropriate to the nature of the violation.

We recommend that the ordinance that established the zone parking time limits and the current fine schedule be repealed in its entirety. This will eliminate much of the ill will that currently exists and that is negatively affecting the Uptown businesses, their customers and employees.

Auditee Response:

In terms of enforcement, METRA's role in Parking is solely to enforce City Ordinance in the Uptown district, all City owned Parking garages, 9th St. surface lot, 9th Ave., Lakebottom, and the City's Annex building. Decisions related to parking in Columbus are approved by our City Council. METRA detail cleans the parking garages daily. We agree that garage improvements/upgrades are needed to promote use of the garages. The City's Facilities Maintenance division makes repairs as needed with replacing lighting and securing access to the 5th floor during

after-hours and weekends. The CPD patrol in the area also monitors the garages when possible. It is a continuous effort to discourage loitering in the garages, primarily the top levels. We agree that hired security at the River Center garage is recommended to monitor loitering while encouraging the use of the facility. To our knowledge, there have been very few incidents occurring in the garages that would substantiate that the garages are unsafe.

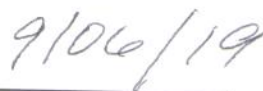
Audit Recommendation:

An ordinance would be necessary to establish the hourly rate for street parking, likely in the \$1.00-\$2.00 per hour range, for parking from 8am to 5pm, Monday through Saturday. Uptown merchants suggested the addition of Saturday, noting that Market Days vendors frequently abuse on-street parking.

Auditee Response:

Our opinion is that business owners and their employees will pay the hourly rate and continue to use the parking spaces closest to their place of business, leaving no spaces for patrons to conduct business in Uptown. Parking is currently enforced in Uptown from 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Monday thru Friday.





John D. Redmond, Internal Auditor & Compliance Officer