

**MINUTES OF PVTA'S  
PARATRANSIT COMMITTEE MEETING  
September 9, 2016**

The Paratransit Committee meeting of the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority was held on Friday, September 9, 2016 at Hulmes Transportation Office located at 80 1<sup>st</sup> Ave, Chicopee, MA, at 10:00 A.M.

**PRESENT:**

Carolyn Brennan, East Longmeadow; Marilyn Ishler, South Hadley; Becky Moriarty, Hampden; Paul Burns Johnson, Palmer; Steve Huntley, Chicopee; Mark Gold, Longmeadow;

Other's Present: Mary MacInnes, PVTA; Josh Rickman, PVTA; Brandy Pelletier, PVTA; Price Armstrong, PVTA; Robin St. Amand, PVTA, Paul Anziano, Hulmes Transportation; Sean Piendel, Hulmes Transportation;

**NOT PRESENT:**

Richard Theroux, Agawam; Brian O'Leary, Belchertown; Paula Dubord, Wilbraham;

A quorum being present, Chairperson of the Paratransit Committee, Carolyn Brennan, called the meeting of the Paratransit Committee to order at 10:16 A.M.

**1. APPROVAL OF PARATRANSIT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Chairperson Brennan asked for a motion from the Paratransit Committee to approve the meeting minutes from the Paratransit Committee meeting held on May 24, 2016.

**Motion:** Moved and seconded (Gold/Huntley) to approve the minutes of May 24, 2016 Paratransit Committee Meeting.

Chairperson Brennan asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none. Asked for all those in favor to say aye.

Motion passed by a unanimous vote.

Chairperson Brennan asked for a motion from the Paratransit Committee to approve the meeting minutes from the Paratransit Committee meeting held on June 29, 2016.

**Motion:** Moved and seconded (Gold/Huntley) to approve the minutes of June 29, 2016 Paratransit Committee Meeting.

Chairperson Brennan asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none. Asked for all those in favor to say aye.

Motion passed by a unanimous vote.

## **2. DISCUSSION ON CURRENT DELIVERY OF SENIOR SERVICE**

Chairperson Brennan stated the following:

I called this meeting today to address some concerns and problems arising from splitting the fleets for ADA and senior rides that went into effect August 1st. Some of the committee members, myself included, have received several complaints from senior riders about denied rides and rude customer service.

As a board member for PVRTA, our role is to ensure that PVRTA has a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical and legal governance and financial management policies as well as making sure that PVRTA has adequate resources to fulfill its mission. We are not here to micromanage but responding to these concerns is our role which is why I called this meeting. Our role is to provide foresight, oversight and insight.

We began our discussions earlier this year about challenges PVRTA had regarding on time performance for paratransit ADA rides. Information that was provided revealed that the increase of senior riders was the major factor impacting on time performance.

PVRTA staff members worked tirelessly to provide options to address OTP challenges and I want to make sure they know that we as a committee did not take that for granted and recognize all of the work the staff has put in.

I have summarized the complaints we have received and experienced with Hulmes customer service.

- Refusal of trip with no negotiating times. Just flat refusal, advance time made no difference.
- Trip cancellations with no notice, especially early AM
- Riders are inconsistently told they are calling too early or too late (cannot call 8 days in advance, etc.)
- Several riders who have been on standing trips are no longer available to schedule in that manner.
- When a rider has asked for available time, they are told that absolutely nothing is available.
- When asking for a supervisor, responses include there is no supervisor here or messages are left and not returned.
- One rider who for years has had the same trip was told that she needed to go to the senior center in her own town, not in the adjacent town she had been going to for several years.
- No human oversight, riders are told it's up to the computer.

I think I speak for this committee that there was an understanding that the split fleet option would be

adequate to meet the demands of the senior rides. I know that is why I voted in favor of it. We agreed that there would be occasional denials, but that group riding and negotiating trips would be utilized.

Chairperson Brennan asked if there are any other issues the committee has concerns about.

Steve Huntley asked if there is a resolution on the Adult Day Health Trips.

Mark Gold stated that he has spoken to the Longmeadow Council on Aging Director and there were no comments, negative or positive.

Paul Burns stated that he heard from several Springfield riders that have not been able to book a ride.

Mary MacInnes, PVRTA Administrator, stated that we have continued our investigation and had Robin St. Amand, Manager of Paratransit Services, spend times at Hulmes Transportation. We have discovered two items.

First was that Hulmes staff was not negotiating with all seniors when their trip could not be booked. Secondly, Hulmes staff also introduced a scheduling policy that was not approved by PVRTA that was limiting senior trips within a specific region.

PVRTA directed Hulmes Transportation to begin the split fleet plan as of August 1st for the Senior Van Service. The service was to be provided as tested and discussed with the Advisory Board. The testing included operating service with all vans open to serve all areas in the 24 communities. These 24 communities are broken down into 7 service zones.

Hulmes developed and instituted an internal protocol regarding the zones not discussed or approved by the PVRTA that impacted senior's ability to travel around the region. The internal Hulmes protocol removed the ability that all zones be connected. This meant that if an individual wanted to travel from one zone to another it would be denied outright and the system would have no ability to schedule the trip. PVRTA caught this error and directed Hulmes to fix it immediately. Hulmes provided a memo to the PVRTA on August 31st recognizing this blatant disregard of operating this service as discussed.

Since the resolution has been in place the majority of the denial issues have been resolved for individuals calling for trips multiple days in advance. In some instances individuals calling in for trips two days out have been scheduled as well.

Mark Gold stated that it sounds that it sounds like presumption of the system is one passenger per van but the dispatcher is telling callers that no vans are available when there are vans going in the same vicinity.

Marilyn Ishler stated that she has the same concerns as what Mark stated. Why can't trips that are going maybe not to the same destination but at least in the same direction be grouped.

Paul Burns Johnson discussed recent ADA issues within the last 30 days and stated the following:

- Rude treatment by reservations and dispatch staff, chronic complaints from my staff and consumers as well as my first-hand experience
- On one occasion staff hung up on me intentionally 2 consecutive times
- Often told there are no supervisors on duty, one occasion I asked three separate employees to speak with a supervisor and was told by each that no one was in the office at that time.
- Client not picked up, no notations as to who or why when we call and ask staff was dismissive and rude when asked to verify why the trip was cancelled and could not provide any information This trip is a standing order so should not have been cancelled.
- Client not picked up, no notations as to who or why when we call and ask staff was dismissive and rude when asked to verify why the trip was cancelled and could not provide any information. This trip is a standing order so should not have been cancelled.
- Client TD reports to us that her driver is "always late"
- Client dropped off in extreme heat at the wrong location despite the fact that the client informed the driver who ignored her. The client then called a staff person here who informed the driver and it was later confirmed that the trip log indicated the client should have been dropped off at a stop identified as Work Opportunity Center but with the address of six flags.
- Due to ongoing inconsistencies and dropped trips, at least one of my staff routinely calls in advance of scheduled trips for consumers to verify that trips are indeed scheduled even then he has had trips cancelled at the last minute (usually for 7 am rides).

Paul Anziano, Hulmes Transportation, stated that customer service is an issue that continues to pop up. We've tried to really instill professionalism in our staff and are looking to hire a professional that relies heavily on customer service to train and retrain the customer service staff to put a new set of eyes and give diffusion points.

Ms. MacInnes stated please do not call Hulmes with complaints. All complaints should be directed to PVRTA so we can record the complaint and look into the incident.

Mark Gold asked if Hulmes has a policy that spot monitor's phone calls.

Paul Anziano stated that Hulmes does spot check calls but does not record calls.

Carolyn Brennan stated that it's very hard to navigate the phone system. Any Council on Aging Director I'm sure would be more than happy to come out and explain what it's like for seniors to schedule a trip.

Paul Burns Johnson stated it's the same thing with disability training. I would be more than

happy to do some training with Hulmes.

Mark Gold stated that my take is this general behavior is unacceptable. Are we here to say Hulmes fix it or as a committee are we here to look into this and do something about it. We need to hear an unbiased opinion to see and find out what's going on and need to move more towards a solution.

Steve Huntley stated that it sounds like Hulmes has a plan in position as a committee we should evaluate how it's working out in approximately a month.

Josh Rickman discussed senior van and ADA service solutions stating the following:

The senior van service could be provided solely for private citizens of the valley to travel to medical appointments, shopping, and other trip purposes, excluding agency trips. Agencies could provide the transportation for their clients (often mandated) or they could apply for PVRTA's ADA service. This service decision is within the powers of the subcommittee and Advisory Board. The senior van program is not required under the FTA or State.

PVRTA expects to be challenged to attain on-time performance for the ADA population due to the inability to hire and retain the appropriate number of drivers. Going above and beyond the ADA  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile is acceptable; however it may be deemed unacceptable to go above and beyond if the agency cannot meet the minimum standards of the ADA law. PVRTA's current standard of going beyond  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile creates an operational challenge that exasperates the capacity constraint issue.

Steve Huntley asked when does the paratransit contract end.

Josh Rickman stated the contract ends June of 2018. In the next contract we will be looking for multiple vendors.

Carolyn Brennan asked if she could sit on the paratransit RFP.

Mary MacInnes stated yes or you could compile questions that could be included in the RFP.

Paul Burns Johnson asked if there is a breakdown if we changed the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile distance. Do we know what the savings would be.

Mr. Rickman stated that 2/7<sup>th</sup> of the budget is going to operating beyond  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile.

Ms. MacInnes stated that this would have a cost savings that could be used for other service that PVRTA is required to provide.

Mark Gold stated that majority of service in Longmeadow is farther from  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile so much of our community would not be eligible to be served.

Steve Huntley stated that he thinks we are going down a path we don't want to go down. When we eliminated some trips the phones rang off the hook.

Mr. Rickman stated that PVRTA has an FTA Audit next week and one finding that we expect to have is on-time performance.

Steve Huntley stated that Agencies are getting money for adult day health. If someone was to go to a council on aging can we limit the time to be less than 6 hours.

Paul Burns Johnson stated that the simplest way is to stop providing adult day health trips unless there is no funding and would be a case by case basis.

Josh Rickman stated that the Department of Elder Affairs is doing a fraud investigation on adult day health trip funding.

Paul Burns Johnson stated that agencies are paid on the amount of time the client is at the agency so if there is no transportation available the agency is going to figure out a way to get the client to the agency so they can be paid.

**Motion:** Moved and seconded (Burns/Ishler) for PVRTA to come back to the Paratransit Committee with a plan to begin implementation of eliminating adult day health transportation from dial-a-ride services excluding the communities of Hampden and Leverett.

Chairperson Brennan asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none. Asked for all those in favor to say aye.

Motion passed by a unanimous vote.

### **3. OTHER BUSINESS**

Chairperson Brennan reported that there is no other business to discuss.

### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the Paratransit Committee Meeting adjourned (Burns/Johnson/Huntley) at 11:40 A.M.

**A TRUE RECORD**

ATTEST:

  
**BRANDY PELLETIER**

Documents filed with Paratransit Committee Meeting packet:

- Paratransit Minutes from 5-24-16 Meeting
- Paratransit Minutes from 6-29-16 Meeting
- PVRTA Paratransit Service Memo 9-7-2016
- Memo from Paul Burns – Recent ADA Issues

**MINUTES APPROVED ON MARCH 29, 2017**