

Chapter 11: ADA Paratransit Services

This chapter examines the transit program's policies and procedures for serving disabled individuals who cannot board regular route buses. These services appear to be in full compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The chapter also briefly discusses strategies for improving transportation options for disabled residents. And it identifies ADA-related issues that may affect transit operations and costs in the future.

The chapter includes four sections:

- Section 11.1 ADA Requirements and Services
- Section 11.2 ADA Ridership and Costs
- Section 11.3 Improvement Strategies
- Section 11.4 ADA Planning Issues

11.1 ADA Requirements and Services

The U.S. Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 in an effort to end discrimination against persons with disabilities and to ensure that individuals with disabilities have an opportunity to fully participate in society. A provision of the law requires public transit systems to offer comparable paratransit service to individuals with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed-route system.

Paratransit service must be provided to individuals who cannot board a regular fixed-route bus for a particular trip due to a disability. Individuals requesting ADA paratransit rides must be certified as eligible for the service. Each transit system must establish a process for determining ADA paratransit eligibility in accordance with federal guidelines.

There are six service criteria for ADA paratransit operations:

1. Service Area Paratransit service must be offered to origins and destinations within three-fourths of a mile on each side of a fixed route.
2. House of Service Paratransit service must be available during the same hours and days as regular fixed-route service.

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| 3. Capacity Constraints | The public transit system cannot restrict the number of trips made by an individual, nor can the agency employ waiting lists. Operating practices that significantly limit the availability or quality of service are also not allowed. |
| 4. Response Time | Rides must be provided in response to requests made the previous day. Reservations must be taken during normal business hours and during comparable hours any day before service is provided (e.g. Sunday reservations for Monday service). Pick up times cannot be more than one hour before or after an individual's desired departure time. |
| 5. Fares | The fare for paratransit service can be up to two times the regular full fare, including relevant transfer fees. Companions pay the same fare. A certified personal care attendant rides free. |
| 6. Trip Purpose | The public transit agency cannot impose restrictions or priorities based on trip purpose. |

In the Bangor region, Penquis Community Action Program provides ADA paratransit service for the fixed-route transit program under a contract agreement with the city of Bangor. The transit program reimburses Penquis CAP a fixed amount for each ADA trip provided. The transit program receives a credit for any passenger fares collected by Penquis CAP.

Managers in the BAT office determine ADA eligibility. Individual trip requests are received and reviewed by transit system staff, and then forwarded to Penquis CAP. Penquis dispatchers schedule trips and notify passengers of their pick-up times.

The BAT's policies and services appear to be in full compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

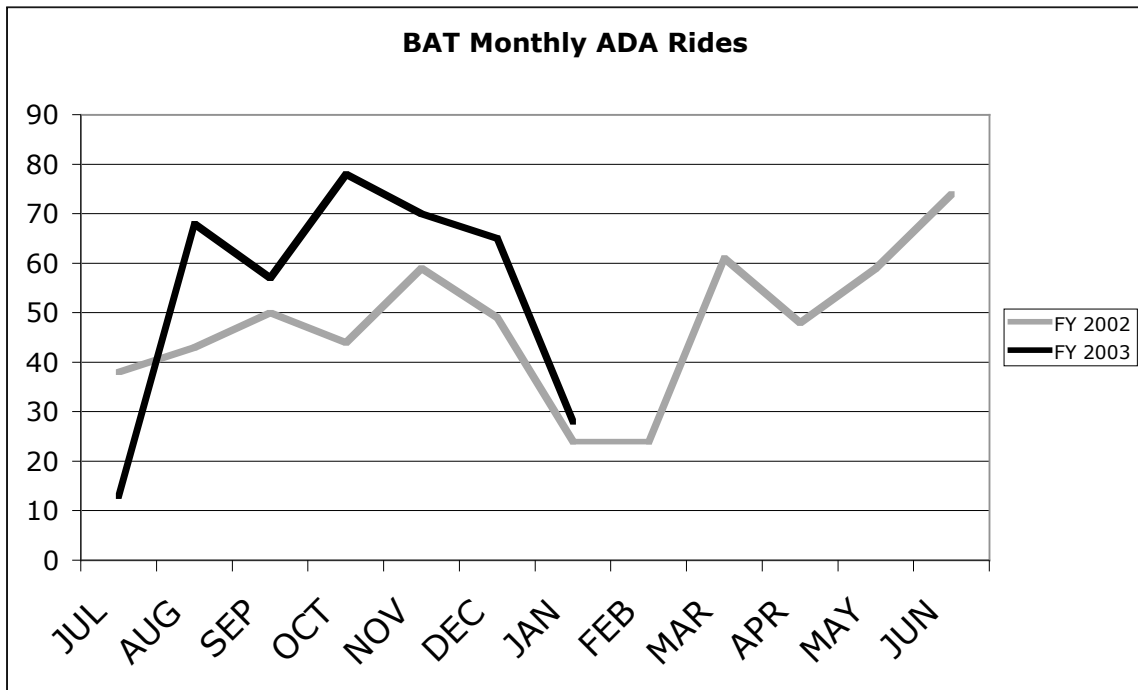
- Trips can be scheduled to or from all areas within 3/4 mile of regular fixed routes.
- Service hours mirror regular fixed-route service hours.
- There is no limit to the number of trips a person can take.
- Reservations can be made 24 hours in advance, and pick-up times are scheduled up to one hour before appointments.
- The fare is two times the regular fixed-route fare.
- There are no restrictions regarding trip purpose.

The transit program publishes a brochure that describes the purpose of the ADA paratransit program and explains procedures and guidelines for obtaining service.

11.2 ADA Ridership and Costs

Penquis CAP delivered 573 ADA paratransit trips for the BAT in FY 2002, for an average of 48 trips per month. During the first seven months of FY 2003, the total number of ADA trips was 379, with a monthly average of 54. The seven-month total for FY 2003 is 23% higher than the same seven-month period in FY 2002. Monthly ADA trips are shown in Figure 11.1.

Figure 11.1: Monthly ADA Trips Provided by Penquis CAP



The transit program paid Penquis CAP a fixed fee of \$11 per trip in FY 2002. This rate increased to \$15 per trip in FY 2003. The total cost for service delivery in FY 2002 was just over \$6,000. If demand increases by 23%, the cost for FY 2003 is likely to total approximately \$10,000.

11.3 Improvement Strategies

One of the best ways for Bangor's transit system to improve its ADA program is to provide persons with disabilities better access to the regular fixed-route service. Disabled persons who can use fixed-route buses can travel whenever they wish, without having to make special arrangements in advance. And shifting disabled persons from paratransit to regular-route buses allows the transit system to devote more of its financial resources to improving and expanding fixed-route service.

It is important to remember that ADA paratransit eligibility is determined on a trip-by-trip basis. A disabled person may be able to use regular buses for some trips, but not others. Physical barriers may interfere with an individual's ability to travel between the bus and a particular destination. This can be particularly true during the winter, when inadequate snow removal at bus stops or on connecting sidewalks makes wheelchair travel difficult or impossible.

The BAT should remove barriers for disabled riders whenever possible. The transit system should also look for opportunities to adjust regular routes to offer wheelchair-friendly bus stops. In some cases, this may involve adding or extending routes to new locations. Examples include the Odlin Road and outer Hammond Street. Disabled persons currently need paratransit service to reach these areas because of the distance involved and because there is no sidewalk between the Odlin Road and the end of the Hammond Street route.

Another important fixed-route improvement involves adjusting routes so that drivers have more time to complete scheduled trips. If extra time is available in a round trip schedule, a driver is better able to offer custom stops and relaxed service for passengers who require the use of wheelchair lifts.

11.4 ADA Planning Issues

This section addresses two planning issues that may be important for the future of the Bangor-area transit program. The first involves the need to expand ADA service to include evening hours if evening service is added on regular routes. The second involves potential growth in demand for ADA paratransit service, and the significance of Medicaid and other paratransit programs in reducing the demand and cost for ADA paratransit operations.

Evening Service

One of the service changes recommended in Chapter 7 involves extending fixed-route bus service on Bangor routes until 9:15 p.m. and on the Old Town route until 11:00 p.m. Since ADA service must mirror fixed-route service, adding evening service will require an expansion of paratransit service as well.

One possible approach involves negotiating an agreement with Penquis CAP to extend the current arrangement to include evening hours. Penquis would probably rely on private taxis whenever possible for evening trips. Evening requests from wheelchair users would likely require (1) overtime pay for Penquis drivers, (2) changes in Penquis work schedules to include regular evening assignments, or (3) increased reliance by Penquis CAP on higher-priced chair-car services from local ambulance providers.

An alternative strategy would be for the city of Bangor to obtain funding to purchase a lift-equipped taxi. This vehicle could be leased to a private taxi operator for provision of evening ADA paratransit service through a competitive bid process. Such a vehicle

would likely cost approximately \$35,000. With 80% federal funding, the local share cost would total about \$7,000. If evening demand for door-to-door service is equal to half the current daytime demand, the cost for providing evening ADA service is likely to equal between \$5,000 and \$7,500 per year.

Potential Growth in Demand for ADA Paratransit Service

The federal government's *ADA Paratransit Handbook* suggests that roughly 1.5% of the total U.S. population may be eligible for ADA paratransit service. This estimate includes approximately 1% with visual or mental impairments, 0.1% who are physically unable to board or ride a bus, and 0.4% who are unable to reach boarding locations.

According to the 2000 U.S. census, total population for the BAT service areas is 67,773. If the FTA estimate holds true, this would suggest that there are roughly 1,000 people in the Bangor region who might qualify for ADA service. BAT officials report that there are currently about 100 certified ADA-eligible transit users in the region. According to the nationwide estimate, potential demand could be ten times higher. Currently the annual cost for the ADA paratransit program is about \$10,000. If the service were to increase tenfold, the cost might rise to as much as \$100,000 per year.

One of the key factors that limits demand for ADA paratransit service is the availability of transportation alternatives. Individuals who may qualify for rides under ADA may already be served by previously existing transportation programs. This appears to be particularly true in the Bangor region.

Penquis CAP operates an important door-to-door transportation program known as "The Lynx," providing rides for Medicaid recipients, DHS clients, developmentally disabled adults, and other client groups. Penquis CAP provides an estimated 800 wheelchair-lift paratransit rides per month in the greater Bangor region. Medicaid funding pays for a large percentage of these trips.

The ADA program provides less than 80 rides per month. This represents just 10% of the total number of wheelchair-lift rides provided by the Lynx.

(The Medicaid program is also important for the fixed-route transit program because Penquis CAP purchases large numbers of monthly passes for distribution to Medicaid clients who are able to utilize fixed-route buses.)

Another specialized transportation project in the region is the University of Maine's "Maine Bus" program that provides lift-van service for students with disabilities. In addition, the Bangor Mental Health Institute operates a fleet of vans providing local transportation for mental health patients.

These alternative transportation programs play an important role in limiting the demand and cost for ADA paratransit service. Local municipalities should be aware of the importance of these services. They should take steps whenever possible to help ensure their continued operation, and they should be alert to future impacts on the transit program if existing programs are cutback or eliminated.

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