



November 2, 2009

This factsheet is designed to address frequently asked questions about Paratransit and introduce some changes in policy. The transition period for policy changes is through November 30, 2009. If you have questions or need more information, please contact Paula Aalgaard, Mobility Manager, at 701-476-5967 or paalgaard@matbus.com. Paula may also be contacted at Metro Area Transit, 650 23rd St. N, Fargo, ND 58102.

Background

Fargo-Moorhead Metro Area Transit provides fixed route service to Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo. These are the long buses that travel on predetermined or fixed routes on regular time schedules. The buses have ramps and the ability to accommodate wheelchairs. Special fasteners are used to secure the wheelchairs and scooters to the floor in the bus. Riders are not required to use stairs on a MAT fixed route bus.

Metro Area Transit follows the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for Paratransit service. The ADA mandates that any community that provides fixed route service is required to provide ADA Paratransit service to people who are unable to navigate the fixed route system because of their disability. Some factors considered for Paratransit eligibility include the ability to independently get to the bus route, manage transfers, recognize destinations, and cognitively manage the fixed route. If a professional with access to the rider's medical records indicates that a rider can do these activities, the rider would not be eligible for Paratransit.

ADA Paratransit service is comparable to the fixed route, not to a taxi service. Paratransit is a shared ride service and driver schedules are created to accommodate as many riders as possible during the day. Drivers need to follow their schedule closely to accommodate multiple riders at one time. Passengers are not allowed to change their destination once in the vehicle because it impacts the driver's ability to provide service to other passengers who are picked up or dropped off on the way or will be picked up next. It is possible for a passenger to be on the vehicle for up to 1 hour.

The ADA requires Paratransit service within a ¼ mile of the fixed route only. The cities of Fargo, West Fargo, Moorhead, and Dilworth choose to provide service to the city limits.

No-Show Policy

When a passenger is not present when the driver arrives to pick up the passenger and the driver waits 5 minutes without the passenger appearing, the driver is allowed to leave and the ride is called a **no-show**. The driver is not required to return if the passenger calls and expects a ride after the driver moved on to their next destination.

In the past, if a ride was a no-show, we automatically cancelled the return trip. We are no longer allowed to do that according to the federal government. For example, if a ride is a no-show at 9:00 am and the return ride is scheduled for noon, we **will not** automatically cancel the return ride. The rider will need to call 701-235-4464 to cancel the return trip.

A late-cancel is a ride that was cancelled within 2 hours of the scheduled pick-up time. A late-cancel is considered the same as a no-show because the driver is already en route to pick up the passenger.

If a rider has 4 no-shows or late cancels during a 4 week period of time, the rider will be penalized with a one week suspension from service. The penalty increases for repeat offenses. Under the new policy, if a ride is a no-show at 9:00 am and the noon return trip was not cancelled, that will count as 2 no-shows. A fee is no longer charged for a no-show or late cancel.

The Window

If a passenger schedules a ride for 9:00 am, the driver has the flexibility of arriving between 8:45 and 9:15. This half hour time period is called the **window**. The passenger must be ready near the door during the window time period. The driver is supposed to keep the vehicle in sight at all times; therefore the driver is not supposed to go past the first door of the building to find the passenger.

If the driver appears before the beginning of the window, the rider is not required to get on the vehicle. The 5 minute wait time starts at the beginning of the window, regardless of when the driver arrives. Unfortunately a driver occasionally arrives later than the window. This is not encouraged. If it happens, the rider is not obligated to take the ride.

Any rider who feels obligated to get on the vehicle prior to the beginning of the window or the vehicle arrives later than the window can report it by calling 701-476-5967 or send an e-mail to transit@cityoffargo.com. Please be prepared to report the passenger name, date, time, and location of the incident when submitting a complaint.

5 Minute Rule

When the driver arrives during the window and the passenger is not present, the driver is required to wait 5 minutes for the passenger to appear. If the passenger does not appear, the driver can leave after 5 minutes. The 5 minutes does not include the time it takes for the passenger to get to the vehicle. It is only the amount of time the driver must wait for the passenger to appear at the door of the building. The driver is not expected to go into the building to look for the passenger.

The reservationist will no longer call if the rider is not present when the driver arrives. A call will only be made when special arrangements have been made with MAT administrators ahead of time. The call will be arranged because of a limitation associated with the rider's disability.

Sometimes passengers aren't ready and expect the driver to wait more than 5 minutes for the passenger to appear. Waiting for a passenger for more than 5 minutes can impact the driver's ability to pick up their next passenger on time and makes the other passengers on the vehicle wait longer to get to their destinations.

Personal Care Attendant

Paratransit is a shared ride service. The drivers and ridership can change every day. It is possible for a passenger to ride with strangers on the bus for up to 1 hour. Metro Area Transit does not provide aides or personal care attendants on the fixed route bus. As a service comparable to the fixed route, Paratransit does not have aides or personal care attendants on the vehicle. The driver is responsible for safely securing and transporting riders in a 19 passenger vehicle. It is not unusual for the driver to leave the vehicle unattended while assisting another passenger to the door. Drivers do not have the specialized training required by the school district, day program providers, or residential providers. Drivers have training in First Aid, passenger assistance, abuse prevention and defensive driving.

It is the responsibility of the passenger to bring a personal care attendant if the passenger cannot ride unattended with strangers for up to an hour. If it is not safe for the passenger to be alone with strangers or is not capable of responding to emergency situations in other aspects of their life, please give Paratransit the same consideration. If the rider is medically fragile or needs personal attention while traveling, bringing a personal care attendant is recommended. The personal care attendant rides free of charge with an eligible passenger.

Recertification

Every 3 years MAT Paratransit eligible rider files are reviewed during the recertification process. All files must be reviewed by April 2010. This winter a letter describing the process will be sent to people currently eligible for Paratransit.

Conditions

The ADA allows Paratransit systems to grant Paratransit eligibility on a trip by trip basis. As the costs of providing Paratransit service increase, more systems are enforcing this protocol. When you applied for MAT Paratransit, you may have been determined conditionally eligible and your conditions were typed on your special user card. This summer MAT Paratransit started enforcing conditional eligibility.

Conditional eligibility means under certain conditions you would be eligible to use Paratransit. When the condition designated for you is not present, you are expected to take the fixed route bus. Keep in mind, Paratransit is for people who are functionally unable to use the ramp equipped, fixed route bus. Examples of conditions include the following:

- Snow or ice: Many people with mobility devices are eligible for Paratransit during the winter due to snow or ice. During the summer, that individual would not be eligible for Paratransit.
- Temperature below 32 degrees due to cold intolerance.
- Temperature above 80 degrees due to heat intolerance.
- Blocks to the bus route: For example, if the professional with access to your medical records indicates you can independently go 2 blocks and the bus route is 1 block from your house, you would need to take the fixed route bus. If the fixed route is 3 blocks from your house, you would be eligible for Paratransit.
- Non-routine trips: If the professional with access to your medical records indicates you can take the fixed route bus to a routine destination you go to on a weekly basis, you would not be eligible for Paratransit. If the professional indicates you are functionally unable because of your disability to use the fixed route bus to places unfamiliar to you, Paratransit eligibility would be granted for those non-routine trips.

Reservations

It is most effective for the reservationist to ask when you want to be at your destination, not when you want to be picked up. Please be prepared to identify when you want to be at your destination and the reservationist will suggest a window for the vehicle to arrive so you can be to your destination on time.

Rider Responsibilities

- Please keep mobility devices in good working condition. For example, it is not safe to use the lift when the brakes on the wheelchair do not stop the chair from moving.
- Please be mindful of effective infection control practices; wash your hands, cough into your sleeve, keep your money and tickets out of your mouth.
- A pattern of disruptive behavior impacts the ability of drivers and reservationists to be effective. Examples of disruptive behavior include:
 - Not having a ticket and expecting a ride on credit. This includes people who rely on others, such as residential providers or parents, to give them tickets for rides.
 - Calling repeatedly to ask when your rides are scheduled for the week. We suggest you write your booked rides on a calendar for future reference.
 - Booking multiple rides for the week then calling the next day to reschedule or cancel them.
 - Arriving at the vehicle for a return ride with more packages than can be carried on one trip.
 - Hostile behavior towards drivers or reservationists, including yelling and demanding changes in service.
 - Strong body odor, soiled clothing or perfume.
- Please make sure a path is clear to your door during the winter. Drivers are not equipped to shovel sidewalks or ramps. If you leave on Paratransit in the morning during a snow event and have not made arrangements for snow to be cleared before your return trip home, it puts the driver in a very difficult position. Pushing a wheelchair through snow is a safety issue for the driver and the passenger.

Driver Assistance

Drivers provide assistance through the first door of a building when requested by the passenger. Drivers do not bring passengers into the building because they would have to leave the vehicle with other passengers on it unattended.

Drivers are responsible for securing wheelchairs and scooters to the floor with 4 straps. It is the driver's responsibility to make sure everyone who rides Paratransit uses a seat belt. If a rider falls to the ground or floor of the vehicle and could be injured, MAT will call the fire department for a lift assist. If assistance with a transfer between your mobility device and the passenger seat inside the bus is needed, please bring a personal care attendant.

Packages

Space for packages is limited. Packages must be carried in one trip and the packages must be safely secured in the vehicle. The driver will assist with carrying 2 packages or 1 small collapsible cart. Any more than 6 packages is too much for one individual to carry in one trip.

Vehicle safety

Backing in and out of driveways is dangerous with a 19 passenger vehicle, especially in winter. The administrators at Metro Area Transit and First Transit are reviewing locations where vehicles are expected to back into areas that are unsafe, including blind spots and traffic. Passengers will be contacted if this is an issue at their location.

Sunday Service

The law requires ADA Paratransit service only when the fixed route bus is operating. The fixed route bus does not operate on Sunday; therefore Paratransit is not required on Sunday. The cities of Fargo and West Fargo choose to fund one vehicle during the hours of 7:00 am and 5:00 pm for people who are eligible for Paratransit service. Reservations for Sunday service will be received no earlier than 8:00 am on the Monday prior to the Sunday when service will be provided. Reservations will be made in the order they are received starting on Monday at 8:00 am. Handi-Wheels expressed interest in providing service on Sunday if there is enough demand. Please call them at 701-232-3231 if you would like another option for service on Sunday. This would be especially useful for people who live at New Horizons since Handi-Wheels operates out of that building.

Complaints

If you have a complaint or concern about the service you received from Paratransit, please report it as soon as possible. We take complaints, incidents and accidents seriously and investigate every one. If we are alerted to an issue we pull the video from that vehicle and watch it. We only have video footage for 4 days from the incident. It is best to call 701-476-5967 or contact transit@cityoffargo.com within 3 days of the incident to make sure the video is available. If the incident happened 2 or more weeks before reporting it, we will not have video to help with the investigation and those involved may not have a clear memory of the details.

Community Resources

- Check out www.fmrideresource.com for information about transportation providers in the Fargo-Moorhead area.
- Handi-Wheels has lift-equipped vehicles and accepts North Dakota Medicaid. Call 701-232-3231 for more information.
- Metro Senior Ride provides door to door transportation and group grocery trips for people age 60 and over. They do not have lift/ramp equipped vehicles. Call 701-293-1440 for more information.
- Clay County Rural Transit provides group grocery trips in Moorhead. Call 218-236-0303 for more information.
- City of Fargo residents can call 701-241-1474 to see if they are financially eligible for snow removal assistance designated for people with disabilities and/or over age 65.
- Call Freedom Resource Center for Independent Living at 701-478-0459 for information about resources available to people with disabilities and senior citizens.

Alternate Formats

- This fact sheet and Paratransit brochure are available on www.matbus.com under the Paratransit tab. Please call 701-476-5967 if you need a large print or an audio version of this information.
- Metro Area Transit utilizes the Metro Interpreter Resource Center for language interpreter services. Please call 701-235-4464 to request an interpreter.