Role of Paratransit in Serving the Needs of Special Groups

Workshop 6 Report
Louis J. Pignataro, Polytechnic Institute of New York

Objectives
Discuss the mobility needs of special groups, such as the young, the elderly, the handicapped, and the poor, who do not usually have available or cannot operate a private automobile, and give special emphasis to the transportation needs in the inner city.

Identify the special mobility needs of each of the groups and determine the advantages and disadvantages of various paratransit options in meeting those needs, the barriers to the implementation of promising options, and the mechanisms and strategies for overcoming those barriers.

Give particular attention to the question of whether promising paratransit options should be separate from or part of an integrated paratransit and conventional transit system.

Examine the appropriate balance between those services that can or should be provided to these groups by regular transit systems and those that can or should be provided by specially designed systems.

Examine the role of governmental agencies in providing these services and the role of nontransportation agencies in providing or financing auxiliary transportation services to client groups.

Participants
Louis J. Pignataro, chairman; Roger P. Roess, secretary; John L. Crain, resource paper author; and Ronald Adams, Sally H. Cooper, John C. Falconchio, Eunice Fiorito, Raymond Jurkowski, Karla H. Karash, Ira Laster, Jr., Lillian C. Liburdi, Douglas J. McKelvey, Sharon E. Mistler, John B. Schnell, Linda Watkins, and Jim F. Young, members

For the purposes of this workshop, the phrase "special groups" refers to the elderly, the handicapped, the poor, and the young, who by the nature of their special travel needs are often transit dependent. The workshop concentrated its efforts on the development of policy statements regarding 7 critical issues identified by the group.

ISSUE 1
Should the emphasis in serving special groups be on modifying existing integral transit systems or on providing special services?

In providing transportation services to special groups, we must stress balanced systems. Paratransit services should be part of those balanced systems. The use of special services for these groups should not create an atmosphere of neglect in making conventional transit systems, particularly new systems, as usable as possible to the
elderly, handicapped, poor, and young. However, even if all conventional systems were made totally accessible to all groups, only a portion of desired trips would be served. For those special groups that cannot be adequately served by conventional transit, some form of accessible paratransit should be made available. Paratransit will also continue to serve a useful function in providing coordinated access to new or modified conventional systems. In all cases, cost-effectiveness analysis will be one of the factors in determining how balanced services will be provided.

Table 1 gives the forms of paratransit that are felt to be most useful in serving the needs of the various special groups. In Table 1, functional groups are classified according to their special transit needs.

Young

The needs of the young are basically community oriented or local in nature. They can easily make use of a generally available demand-responsive transportation (DRT) system or rely on car pools operated by parents or social agencies. The magnitude of their needs, unless they are also poor or handicapped, does not seem to justify the inauguration of specially operated services, except in extreme cases.

Poor in Labor Force

The needs of the poor vary greatly depending on whether the individual is in the work force. For one who is, the need is most critical with regard to job search and work commuting. Such needs can be satisfied by a generally available DRT, but are often not served by conventional transit. The conventional systems do not well serve connections to suburban industrial developments where a number of unskilled employment opportunities exist. In addition to generally available DRT systems, these needs can be met with employer-operated van pools or car pools, contracted subscription jitney or bus services, and possibly short-term rental vehicles.

Handicapped and Handicapped Elderly

Those whose travel is restricted primarily by physical or emotional disabilities (full or partial) will most often require specially equipped vehicles (to varying degrees) for travel. These vehicles can be provided through a generally available DRT service having appropriately equipped vehicles or through a specialized DRT system catering only to the needs and service of the handicapped and handicapped elderly. Special car pools are possible for persons privately owning specially equipped vehicles.

Elderly Poor and Poor Not in Labor Force

The needs of the elderly poor and poor not in the labor force are not employment oriented, but are general in nature. Generally available DRT services can be used; special DRT tailored to the service only of the poor is also a possibility. Car pools or van pools operated by individuals or social organizations also can provide service.

Elderly Not Handicapped or Poor

The elderly who are neither economically nor physically disadvantaged do not have problems so severe as other special groups. They can be effectively served by regular taxi services, generally available DRT systems, and car pools.
Table 1. Paratransit services amenable to special groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Type of Paratransit</th>
<th>Principal Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>General demand-responsive transportation, Car pool</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor in labor force</td>
<td>General demand-responsive transportation, Employer van pools, Short-term rentals</td>
<td>Local and nonlocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped and handicapped elderly</td>
<td>Special purpose demand-responsive transportation, Car pools, Special car pools</td>
<td>Local and nonlocal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly poor and poor</td>
<td>Special purpose demand-responsive transportation, Car pools</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly not handicapped or poor</td>
<td>Regular taxi, General demand-responsive transportation, Car pools</td>
<td>Local and nonlocal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Operation and licensing of paratransit services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Group Served</th>
<th>Most Likely Operator</th>
<th>Licensing Requirements</th>
<th>Registration Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General demand-responsive transportation with accessible vehicles</td>
<td>All groups</td>
<td>Transit or taxi operators, private or public</td>
<td>Chauffeur’s license</td>
<td>State inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special purpose demand-responsive transportation</td>
<td>Elderly handicapped</td>
<td>Agency for operation of special service; transit operators through contract arrangement</td>
<td>Special license with training in handling and care of handicapped</td>
<td>Special vehicle standards established through federal guidelines and state law, regular state inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer van pools</td>
<td>Poor in labor force</td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Appropriate operator’s license</td>
<td>Regular state inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term rental cars</td>
<td>Poor and elderly</td>
<td>Private enterprise</td>
<td>Driver’s license</td>
<td>Regular state inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscription bus and jitney</td>
<td>Poor in labor force</td>
<td>Private sector or public bus operator</td>
<td>Chauffeur’s license</td>
<td>Regular state inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car pools</td>
<td>All groups</td>
<td>Individuals and social agencies</td>
<td>Driver’s license</td>
<td>Regular state inspections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Federal role in paratransit for special groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Functions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Establish, draft legislation, interpret, implement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Coordinate, establish methodologies, evaluate national market and needs, implement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Develop concepts, hardware, and software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and development</td>
<td>Provide capital, operating, administrative, and planning assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing</td>
<td>Establish guidelines for safety, licensing, insurance, labor, and operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory</td>
<td>Centralize, publish, and refer information; have referral system to allow inquiries with ease of access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Create better management information systems and provide adequate funding for the task; provide interagency coordination of programs for special groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information dissemination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ISSUE 2

Who should operate special services: separate groups charged specifically with responsibility solely for such services or existing transportation agencies? Who should be responsible for licensing and registration of paratransit vehicles?

Table 2 gives the recommendations for the most feasible operators of the various types of special and general paratransit forms mentioned above as being useful in the service of special groups. It is critical that these be accepted as the workshop’s view of the most generally feasible arrangements. Local options must be kept open to respond to particular local conditions.

Table 2 also gives suggested licensing and registration procedures. In this regard, it is recommended that federal guidelines regarding vehicle design (particularly for the handicapped) be established and made a requirement for federal funding. Particular consideration should be given to the safety of passengers in paratransit.
vehicles and the compatibility of wheelchairs and other mobility aids to such vehicles. Further, insurance requirements should be carefully devised to protect passengers, drivers, vehicles, and property for all forms of paratransit. All states should institute regular inspection policies for paratransit vehicles. In regard to licensing, a specific problem with respect to motorized wheelchairs and their operation on sidewalks and in the streets has arisen in many areas; tickets are being given for such operation. This, although not directly a paratransit issue, is a problem deserving notice.

ISSUE 3

Should special services themselves be subsidized, or should the individuals using the services be directly subsidized? In the latter case, how should the subsidies be administered? How can diverse funding sources be coordinated?

The issues surrounding the types and means for administering subsidies are many and complex. They involve issues of equity, efficiency, possible abuses, cost, and others. As such, the workshop was not able to resolve or make recommendations concerning all of these. Several key recommendations were agreed to, however.

1. Where paratransit services for special groups are operated by the private sector, no direct operating subsidies should be given to the operator. Subsidies should be given directly to the user.
2. Where services are operated by public transportation agencies, operating subsidies can be provided either to the operator or to the user directly or to both.
3. To foster a greater coordination of the required sources of funding for special paratransit services and to provide a more centralized climate for administering such subsidies, a central agency, such as a state transportation department, should administer all transportation subsidies for services to special groups, either to services or to users directly. The central agency may delegate authority to a single agency at a local level, should establish operating guidelines, and should determine distribution and quality of transportation services.

The third recommendation clearly requires changes in current federal legislation and administrative practices, which now funnel money for transportation of special groups through a variety of federal programs, each with differing mechanisms and some of which do not go through a state transportation department. The clear feeling of the workshop was that all money for transportation services for special groups should go through the transportation agencies and not through nontransportation agencies.

ISSUE 4

How can individuals be certified as being eligible for special group services or subsidies?

No consensus could be reached on the questions involving certification of individuals for eligibility to either use special services or obtain direct subsidies.

ISSUES 5 AND 6

How should demonstration projects be structured to test effectively innovative services and operational paratransit concepts?

How can the results of myriad paratransit special service demonstrations be coordinated and synthesized into a consistent body of knowledge?
A number of recommendations were formulated with regard to the coordination of para-
transit special group demonstrations to obtain maximum utility and transferability of
the results of such demonstrations.

1. The demonstrator should not be involved in the evaluation of the demonstration
test or experiment if significant grant funds are involved.
2. In the planning of a demonstration, the following concerns must be adequately
treated: (a) state objectives, ascertain measures of attainment, and take steps to
ensure that user group expectations are commensurate with likely results; (b) evaluate
impact of the demonstration on other transit services; (c) determine the methodologies
and levels of confidence needed for appropriate evaluation; (d) because of the difficulty
in transferability of results, exercise care and effort to ensure maximum applicability
of results, use standardized terms and measures for greater universality, and identify
external variables peculiar to a site; (e) take appropriate steps to ensure participation
of the user, the operator, and governmental sectors; and (f) ascertain the necessary
information to be established concerning the base (existing) case.
3. The U.S. Department of Transportation should be responsible for ensuring that
the results of local, state, and federal paratransit demonstrations are synthesized into
a meaningful form and disseminated appropriately. This should include use of the
National Technical Information Service (NTIS); sponsorship of an annual conference on
paratransit under the leadership of TRB; holding of regional seminars on how to orga-
nize, fund, and implement effective paratransit services; and distribution of informa-
tion through other agencies and forms as appropriate.
4. A general evaluation framework should be developed jointly by the Transporta-
tion Research Board and the U.S. Department of Transportation to ensure that relevant
and comparable measures of cost, performance, and effectiveness are collected.

ISSUE 7

What are the respective roles of the federal, state, and local governments in the development of
special paratransit services?

Discussion on the respective roles of various governmental levels in paratransit for
special groups was limited by time to the federal role. Table 3 summarizes the work-
shop view.