

Servicing the Industrial and Government Complex

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This paper describes a six-company taxicab and delivery service corporation that provides for varied paratransit needs in the Washington, D.C., area, particularly serving the needs of business and government.

A significant application of diversified taxicab paratransit services lies in the business and government complex. The ever-increasing need for transportation of both personnel and materials has created a demand for specialized services that can only be met efficiently by various forms of paratransit, with their inherent flexibility.

For clarification, the definition of the industrial-government complex should be expanded. It includes both offices and plants in the business sector, government offices and military installations, and airports and other transportation terminals. The transportation services required may range from individual commuting to the handling of vital documents for business and government.

My organization consists of six companies that operate taxicabs and delivery vehicles in the Washington metropolitan area. Red Top Cab Company in Arlington, Virginia, has a 190-car fleet that handles an average of 4000 trips a day, with a high of 5000 trips on Friday and a low on Sunday of 1500. The Yellow Cab Companies in Arlington and Fairfax Counties operate approximately 200 cars, with daily ridership roughly equal to Red Top's. The Airport Cab Companies, one at Dulles and another at Baltimore-Washington International Airport, consist of 60- and 30-cab fleets, respectively, with average daily trip counts of 400 and 250. We also now have an application pending for operating authority to institute a limousine service using vans to serve both National and Dulles Airports on a scheduled basis. All-State Messenger and Delivery Service operates 85 vehicles, including trucks, vans, sedans, station wagons, and motorcycles; it handles 750 priority deliveries a day in addition to hundreds of low-priority bulk shipments. Thus ours is a multimodal operation using approximately 565 vehicles of various sorts and serving two large metropolitan areas.

All of these companies combined operate eight different two-way radio transmitters. These transmitters

are located throughout the metropolitan area wherever the service demands of the particular company are best met. For example, Red Top Cab Company uses two UHF radio frequencies and has broken Arlington into two geographical areas with one transmitter responsible for each area. All-State Messenger and Delivery Service has two transmitters also, but these both operate on the same frequency. This is necessary because this company serves the entire Washington metropolitan area, a much larger territory than is covered by any one of the taxicab companies. Good two-way radio communication is essential to any demand-responsive transportation system.

TAXICAB SERVICES

Our most prevalent form of paratransit to date is standard exclusive-use taxicab service. The bulk of taxicab ridership across the country, at least 60 percent, is made up of the elderly, handicapped, housewives, and students. However, many users, especially in urban areas, are business people traveling to and from work, between offices, and to and from air and train terminals. This is certainly true in the Washington area, which houses the offices of the federal government and many major business concerns and thus has a large white-collar population. For many years taxicabs have provided for the specialized transportation needs of business and government, although the impact of these services has until recently received little recognition by transportation officials.

Those who use our taxicab service between 7:00 and 10:00 a.m. and between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. make up 40 percent of our ridership. Those are the peak commuter hours, and the vast majority of those passengers are going either directly or indirectly to or from their offices. They are primarily business people, government workers and officials, and military personnel. Many use taxicabs to connect with Metrobus routes, thus eliminating some of the need for fringe parking and helping to ease downtown traffic congestion. When the subway system is completed, it is anticipated that taxicabs will serve as feeders to and from the subway stations, serving further as a vital segment of the overall transportation system.

Arlington County was awarded a grant by the Urban

Mass Transportation Administration to study the feasibility of shared-ride taxicab service for Arlington. Red Top Cab Company participated in an earlier unsubsidized shared-ride demonstration project and is cooperating with the Arlington Department of Transportation on the current study. Incorporated into the new program, in addition to neighborhood service, is the concept of shared-ride service in coordination with Metrobus and Metrorail lines, thus amplifying the role that taxicabs play in transporting business and government personnel. In addition, the new program will encourage the use of subscription service. With the many government and business offices located in Arlington and a high concentration of professional people in the community, this should enable us to offer an efficient service, similar to van pooling, using taxicabs to transport employees to and from their offices on a contractual basis.

Taxicabs are often used during the day by people traveling between offices. Interoffice travel is especially frequent between businesses and government installations in the Rosslyn and Crystal City sections of Arlington County and downtown business and government districts. Business and government people going to and from the airports and other transportation terminals also rely heavily on taxicabs for that purpose. In fact, most airlines and railway companies use our taxicabs and vans to transport crews between terminals or between the terminals and area hotels during layovers. These and other businesses use our services so frequently that most have established charge accounts with us in order to better control their transportation expenditures.

The reasons for the increase in this particular facet of our business are easily understood. The scarcity and cost of parking and the traffic congestion in downtown areas and at the airports have made it more and more infeasible for people to drive from office to office. Bus service, while relatively inexpensive, is time consuming except when traveling between in-line points via express service. The expense of maintaining in-house drivers and vehicles for transporting personnel and running errands is great in relation to the degree of use. The logical choice of transportation mode that offers both convenience and comparative economy has been the taxicab.

Our airport cab companies at Dulles and Baltimore-Washington International Airports are more specialized operations. Both are operating under government contracts and specifically serve passengers going to and from these airports. The ridership primarily consists of incoming air travelers going to locations within the metropolitan area, although we are actively promoting return business to the airports. Government and business activity in the Washington area generates a high volume of air travel, with the majority of the passengers being professional and government personnel traveling on business. While taxicabs are generally more expensive than limousine or bus service, to the professional traveler the convenience of efficient door-to-door transportation and the attendant time saving are among the most significant factors determining selection of travel mode. As a sidelight it might be noted that the open cab system in effect for nearly two years at Washington National Airport, where no controls were enforced, resulted in a high incidence of fare overcharges and passenger inconvenience due to undertrained and largely incompetent drivers. This is indicative of the advantages of a well-run franchise taxicab operation.

In addition to passenger service, all of our taxicab companies offer rapid courier service. The airport operations primarily carry mishandled luggage for the airlines, although they also deliver newspapers and

special mail. The regular taxicab operations provide a more diversified service, carrying interoffice memoranda, documents, blood for area hospitals, and work orders and equipment for telephone, electronics, and computer companies.

COURIER AND FREIGHT SERVICES

In the past 5 years the demand for courier service has increased at such a rate that it has become a full-time business. Two years ago the volume reached a level that mandated the formation of a separate company, All-State Messenger and Delivery Service, to take advantage of this growing market. Using a radio-dispatched fleet and a full-time sales staff, the company has experienced a continual growth that indicates that, for the foreseeable future, much of the expansion of taxicab paratransit services in urban areas will include the delivery field.

The increase in demand for this service can, as in the case of taxicab use, be attributed to time- and cost-effectiveness. Under today's pressures, businesses find it necessary to maximize their use of their employees' time and to scrutinize carefully all overhead items in an effort to maintain peak operating efficiency. The ability of a specialized courier service, such as All-State, to provide a high level of performance (minimal delivery time for priority items) with a competitive price structure has become an essential commodity. The use of couriers frees office employees from time-consuming, less productive tasks, which enables them to perform their intended functions and thereby reduces tangible and intangible costs.

All-State's service is predicated on a 15-min service response time and completion of the delivery within 60 min. That goal is accomplished, except during unusually heavy peak periods, while still achieving a high degree of vehicle productivity by routing the drivers so that each handles at least two deliveries simultaneously whenever possible. The dispatchers are able to exercise the necessary operational control by coordinating our staff of well-trained drivers who, while they are employees, work on an incentive basis.

By using several types and sizes of vehicles, All-State is able to fulfill a variety of customer delivery needs. Started initially as a courier or small-parcel delivery service delivering papers for law firms, accountants, and other service-oriented businesses, All-State has grown substantially and now even offers delivery capabilities up to and including small freight shipments. Several customers are computer firms that use us to transport both software and hardware items. Much of our work is done for airlines at National and Dulles Airports. Mishandled baggage, special deliveries, and crew transportation are some of our airport service specialties. In addition, All-State acts as the Washington, D.C., area agent for Emery Air Freight, handling both large and small express-freight deliveries. Thus, while it was initially an offshoot of the taxicab operation, All-State, or any similarly run operation, is able to offer a greater diversity of delivery capabilities while maintaining the flexibility and convenience of demand-responsive paratransit.

CONCLUSION

As is evident from our operations, taxicab and paratransit can be synonymous terms. In urban areas like Washington, we have become essential supportive services for the business and government communities. Taxicab companies have grown to fill the service requirements in very specialized areas of demand, i.e., airport service, exclusive use, shared-ride modes, courier ser-

vice, and the whole spectrum of what we now call paratransit. This is indicative of the fact that demand-responsive transportation is virtually assured of success when it is operated in an efficient, conservative manner, particularly when the private entrepreneurial instinct is allowed to function.

There is nothing really new about what we are doing—taxicab companies have been providing these services for years. When these service demands can be met in a market area that is reasonably free of restrictive government controls, and when there is no unfair competition with government-subsidized operations, paratransit can and should remain in the private tax-paying sector, while it fulfills a necessary role in the urban transportation picture.