



# How Paratransit Could Be Less Expensive

By Charles Chieppo

In an era of scarcity for transit systems, there is growing pressure on paratransit, the expensive programs for transporting those with limited mobility, to operate more efficiently. A new study from New York City's Citizens Budget Commission (CBC) and reforms underway in other cities suggest that the goals of operating more efficiently and better serving those who need additional assistance getting around need not be at odds.

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) spends more than \$70 per paratransit trip and has high per-capita paratransit usage. As a result, the MTA subsidized its Access-A-Ride service last year to the tune of \$256 million.

One thing the CBC recommends to reduce costs is for Access-A-Ride to stop automatically providing door-to-door service. Many customers are not wheelchair-bound and, where appropriate, the vehicle could transport them to a convenient subway or bus stop, where they would receive

free rides. The CBC estimates that the change would save as much as \$22 million annually.

But far more savings could be realized from better matching vehicles to the needs of riders for each trip. Instead of automatically transporting customers in vehicles that can accommodate those with the greatest challenges, taxicabs and other for-hire vehicles could be used for many trips. Providing the least expensive appropriate vehicle would save a projected \$126 million annually, according to the CBC. Partnerships between transit systems and ride-hailing companies to do that are underway in the Washington, DC, and Boston areas.

That's a particularly welcome development for Boston, whose famously cash-strapped Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has been finding it increasingly difficult to keep up with the cost of its paratransit system, known as The Ride. Paratransit cost the system more than \$100 million last year, and the per-trip subsidy was over \$45. In comparison, the MBTA provides a 61-cent subsidy for the average subway trip.

As of September 2016, many MBTA riders can get subsidized transportation from Uber or Lyft



instead of waiting for The Ride. The rider pays the first \$2, the MBTA picks up the next \$13, and the rider is responsible for any additional cost. As acting MBTA General Manager Brian Shortlee told the *Boston Globe*, "Customers are going to get reduced

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Contact [DBETeam@tzc-llc.com](mailto:DBETeam@tzc-llc.com) and RSVP by sending a note with your company name, attendees name(s), and telephone number via e-mail. Be sure to note 'Overcoming Hurdles' in the Subject line.

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