

JTRAN Paratransit Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes – DRAFT September 20, 2023

This meeting was held at the Hood Building (200 South President Street, Jackson, MS) but was also via ZOOM (Hybrid). Attendees included:

1. Ms. Ollie Beaton (Paratransit Committee Vice-Chair, Ward 3)
2. Ms. Lee Cole (ADA Advisory Council Chair)
3. Ms. Pam Dollar (MSCCD)
4. Ms. Yolanda Canada (TransDev Customer Service)
5. Mr. Jason Bunch (Ward 6)
6. Mr. David Chia (Collaborative Consulting Group – DOT Consultant)
7. Ms. Clarethra Cranford (Paratransit Rider)
8. Dr. Scott Crawford (JTRAN Paratransit Committee Chair, Ward 7)
9. Atty. David Knight (US Department of Justice)
10. Atty. Mitzi Dease-Paige (US Department of Justice)
11. Atty. Katherine Henderson (Disability Rights Mississippi)
12. Atty. Hunter Robertson (Disability Rights Mississippi)
13. Atty. Clayton Giles (Disability Rights Mississippi)
14. Mr. Herbert Humphrey (City of Jackson ADA Coordinator)
15. Ms. Comma McDuffey (City of Jackson Transit Services)
16. Ms. Cynthia Rasco (Transdev/JTRAN General Manager)
17. Mr. Radford Shearrill (Transdev/JTRAN Assistant General Manager)
18. Mr. Joe Spicer (Mississippi Industries for the Blind)
19. Mr. Desmeon Thomas (Ward 2, LIFE of Mississippi)
20. Ms. Janice Williams (MDOT Public Transit Division)
21. Mr. Mick Hintz (Ward 7)
22. Mr. Ralphael Byrd (Paratransit Rider)
23. Heather Bowser (Addie McBryde Rehab Center for the Blind)
24. Ms. Christine Welch (City of Jackson Transit Services – JTRAN ADA Coordinator)
25. Ms. Marilyn Guice (City of Jackson Transit Services)
26. Mr. Desmeon Thomas (Living Independence for Everyone of MS)
27. Ms. Janice Williams (MDOT Public Transit Division)

I. Call to Order

Dr. Scott Crawford called the meeting to order at 1:08 pm. Members and guests introduced themselves.

II. Approval of Minutes

Dr. Crawford sent out the minutes for July 12th, 2023 in advance and asked if anyone wanted them read aloud. Ms. Cole said she would like them summarized. After that, Mr. Joe Spicer motioned to adopt the minutes as written, and Mr. Raphael Byrd and Ms. Ollie Lester-Beaton both seconded. The minutes were adopted without opposition.

III. Updates/Presentations

Updates - Attorney Kattie Henderson of Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS) gave a brief update on the Consent Decree. It remains in place, pending a ruling from the Federal Court overseeing the matter, which could come “at any time”. She also announced that this will be her last meeting with us, as she has accepted another position. Ms. Cole, Ms. Dollar, and the Chair all expressed their gratitude for her service and the committee wished her well in her new endeavors. Attorney Hunter Robertson will be taking over oversight of the Consent Decree and attendance at the Paratransit Committee and Attorney Clayton Giles will be his “backup”.

Ms. Christine Welch – Updated the committee on the release of the new JTRAN Application coming up this weekend, which should include real-time tracking of the fixed route buses. She also confirmed that new bus stop signs are being ordered and are expected to be deployed this Fall in preparation for the new Fixed Route System Routes due to start in January.

Ms. Welch went on to update the Committee on the JTRAN paratransit app and the Committee’s request to have it schedule appointments after hours (for trips at least one day out), as it had done in the past. Over the past months, the Committee has been given several different reasons for the loss of after-hours scheduling. At one point, Ms. Welch claimed that it was a recommendation of the FTA consultants. Months ago, that was found to be inaccurate and based on a misunderstanding. Attorney Knight clarified today that the Department of Justice is taking no position one way or another, but is leaving the decision to the City. Several members (Mr. Hintz and Ms. Bowser) expressed their frustration over this decision, noting that it reduces the usefulness of the application and will inevitably mean more staff time is spent manually scheduling over the phone. The Chair and Mr. Hintz asked what is “problem” with letting people schedule after hours via the app (what harm does it do)? Ms. Welch said she believes it is unfair to the other customers. This Committee disagrees.

Finally, Ms. Welch said that the updated Rider's Guide was mailed out this week. Ms. Bowser asked if it was available online, as this would make it readable by most screen-reading software. Dr. Crawford noted that "as of 11am this morning" it is not. Ms. McDuffey said she would ensure that it is corrected as soon as possible. Several (Ms. Cole and Ms. Byrd) asked if the Rider's Guide would be available in "accessible formats". Ms. Welch said it would be "upon request".

IV. Discussion

Mr. Raphael Byrd asked several questions. First: "Is it proper that a client has to pay when the bus arrives after the pickup window has passed?" Ms. Welch said that payment is still due by the rider.

"Is it proper that a client should get a second alert when their bus schedule changes?" - It took some discussion to clarify that Mr. Byrd was stating a common request: riders would like and benefit from updated and accurate trip information in real-time when there is a delay. This topic is an ongoing problem discussed for more than a year now. Riders are getting inaccurate texts and phone calls regarding their buses' arrival time. Mr. Byrd said he would like to get information on what bus will be picking him up and when.

"Does JTRAN comply with vocational rehabilitation training?" – After some discussion, Mr. Byrd clarified that he would like to get dropped off at a particular location when he arrives to work, because he has been trained to be able to find his way from that specific point to the front entrance. He said he cannot adequately describe that location because he is blind, and will need assistance to do that. Solutions were discussed, but the one he decided upon was to have a colleague help him describe the exact drop-off location and communicate it to JTRAN staff so it can be placed in his notes.

Finally, Mr. Byrd complained about bus operators having discussions about other clients on the bus. Ms. Welch asked Mr. Byrd to call her because that should not be happening.

Ms. Clareth Cranford complained about long ride times and that it was hurting her back to be on the paratransit buses more than an hour. She explained that operators told her that there are clients being "added" to their schedule. Ms. Rasco clarified that paratransit is a shared ride system and that routes are updated "in real time" as situations change so as to maximize efficiency. "No one is being added" [to the schedule], it is merely that the particular bus in question has a pickup reassigned to them. Regarding the definition of excessive ride times, Dr. Crawford explained that the paratransit

trip time should be “comparable” in length to the same trip on the fixed-route system. So, if the trip normally takes one hour on the fixed route, it is acceptable that the same trip on paratransit take a similar amount of time.

Ms. Cranford also complained about the timing of a return trip from her doctor’s office. She would like a return trip at 4:30-4:45pm, but said she is being told that 6pm is the earliest possible appointment. Dr. Crawford explained that during the negotiation process, Paratransit systems are allowed to offer a trip within one hour of the requested pickup time. Any-time outside that hour would be regarded as a “trip-denial”. Ms. Welch asked Ms. Cranford to discuss the details with her in a phone call, so she can further investigate.

Both Dr. Crawford and Mr. Humphrey noted that it is imperative that riders file complaints as soon as possible and **not wait** until the Paratransit Committee to report them. That way, details remain fresh on the client’s mind and it is easier for staff to investigate and resolve the matter.

Dr. Crawford relayed a complaint from rider Mike Duke. Mr. Duke emailed Ms. Welch on September 5th about the front row seatbelts on Bus 808. It seemed they were not functional. As of this morning, he reported receiving no response. A discussion ensued about timely response to JTRAN rider complaints and corrective actions.

VI. Announcements

Mr. Humphrey said that there will be a Senior Health Fair on Thursday, October 19th, 2023, at the Jackson Convention Complex, 105 East Pascagoula Street.

The next meeting of this committee is Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at 1pm in the Hood Building. Zoom will still be available for those who wish to remain remote. The login details will be the same.

The Meeting Adjourned at 2:35pm.

These minutes were recorded by Committee Chair Dr. Scott Crawford.