

Paratransit Situation Update

On September 10, Paratransit sent a letter to all its users informing them of the temporary measures taken to correct the problems that have been occurring since September 2, when Paratransit's new reservations processing methods were implemented. These measures have enabled us to resolve several of these difficulties.

The following is a brief overview of Paratransit's current situation. Indeed, difficulties related to delays, to contacting the Reservations Centre to signal late vehicles (Option 2) and to questionable pairings, have all been expressed by paratransit users and their representatives (RUTA, etc.). Their causes, as well as the steps taken to resolve them as quickly as possible, are also outlined below.

CURRENT SITUATION

- In September 2003, the number of trips carried out was 6.8% higher than in September 2002. So far, in October, the number of trips has increased by 6.4% over the same period last year.
- On any given weekday in October 2002, an average of 5 178 trips were provided. This year, during the same period, the average has risen to 5 573 trips, an increase of 395 trips a day, which represents the transportation needs of nearly 200 users.
- Last September, an average of only one call was answered for every 10 attempts. By October 22, the number of attempts had dropped to 6 for every answered call, compared to 8.5 attempts in October 2002.
- In September 2003, the average processing time for each reservation request was 4 minutes, while calls to Info-Retard took an average 2.5 minutes. By October 22, the average processing time was shorter, down to 2.9 minutes for reservations and down to 1.7 minutes for Info-Retard.
- All requests for regular transportation schedules have been processed and new requests are being answered as soon as they are received. At the same time last year, requests were still backlogged for over 200 paratransit users.

In addition, the problem of reaching the Reservations Centre to request transportation (Option 1) was identified as a priority in the first days following the new system's implementation. The corrective measures outlined in our September letter have indeed led to improvements in the situation. Remember that it is always possible to submit regular and advance requests for transportation by fax at 514-280-6313.

DELAYS

Causes

The delays reported so far seem to show that the problem occurs more frequently with users whose regular transportation schedule was confirmed prior to September 2, 2003. The main reason behind this appears to be that the new system makes maximum use of the 30-minute time allowance for pick-up, in order to provide a maximum number of trips. Before September 2, manual processing of requests made less use of this margin and resulted in trip schedules that changed very little. However, now that schedule planning has been automated, the time allowance is fully used. As a result, departure times scheduled within that 30-minute margin are more likely to be affected.

Although the new system optimally targets the requested arrival time at destination, an analysis of complaints received reveals that the arrival times registered by the system do not correspond to those requested by users.

Steps taken

Paratransit staff has undertaken an in-depth review of all regular trips confirmed prior to September 2 to validate them and modify them according to the actual needs of users currently experiencing scheduling problems. The arrival time at destination and the requested departure time for the return trip are the two parameters requiring validation and correction.

• Review process

Paratransit staff has or will contact all affected users by telephone. Because reaching all users could be difficult, we have enclosed a form that you must fill out and return to us by fax at 514-280-6313, or by mail at the following address:

STM Paratransit Service
3111 East Jarry Street
Montreal, Québec
H1Z 2C2

Please note that these measures do not concern users whose requests for transportation are handled by an organization, such as leisure activities groups and readaptation centres. Other corrective measures have been taken for these groups.

• **More vehicles temporarily available**

Additional vehicles have been temporarily allocated to help out paratransit users experiencing problems with delays.

We will continue to follow up on reported delays in order to quickly resolve any further problems that may arise.

ACCESSING THE RESERVATIONS CENTRE – INFO-RETARD (OPTION 2)

Being unable to reach an agent at the Reservations Centre to signal a late vehicle can result in feelings of insecurity for many paratransit users, and make simple matters unnecessarily worse.

Cause

The problem stems from a large number of delayed vehicles and an insufficient number of employees at the Reservations Centre. In fact, it was not possible to implement the staffing plan that called for an increase in the number of agents taking telephone calls when ACCES was initially put into service. Negotiations are currently underway with the union to ensure that everyone adapts to the Reservations Centre's new ways.

Step taken

Additional resources have been temporarily assigned to Info-Retard so that it may be reached more easily by users who are experiencing delays.

Moreover, some clients have indicated that, with the new telephone system, they had incurred calling fees, either 25¢ for a public telephone or more for their cellphone time, when they had not even spoken to an agent at the Reservations Centre. A group of experts is currently studying solutions to this particular problem.

QUESTIONABLE TRIP PAIRINGS

Some paratransit users do not understand how two vehicles can show up at the same address to pick up two users going to the same destination. It should be pointed out that such situations occurred before, when the former processing methods were in use.

Cause

The individualized reservations process has had a considerable impact on trip planning. In fact, because each request is considered as a single unit, answering all requests as quickly as possible has become Paratransit's priority. With our new methods, final trip assignments to individual vehicles are determined later in the process.

Step taken

The automated system will be modified to automatically take into account the trips requested by users departing from the same address and going to the same destination at the same time. Should you plan on travelling at the same time as another paratransit user (same points of departure and destination), please bring it to the attention of the agent at the Reservations Centre. A manual checking system has been set up until such time as the automated system becomes available.

Rest assured that we will continue to closely monitor the situation as it evolves and that we will pay close attention to all problems brought to our attention.

In the meantime, do not hesitate to contact Customer Service as needed. Finally, we invite you to review the information kit that was sent to you last August, including the new *User's Guide* which was designed to help you plan and organize your transportation needs.



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