



A Pace Paratransit vehicle serving the Rosemont Transit Center, in Rosemont, Illinois.

S-3 Paratransit Upgrades

Initiative: Explore further partnerships, wheelchair-accessible vehicles and improvements to the fixed route system to serve Paratransit-eligible customers.

implement
now

implement
later

FURTHER
INVESTIGATE

Supports Goals:

Accessibility, Equity, Productivity, Responsiveness, Safety, Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, and Fiscal Solvency

Pace provides regional ADA paratransit service that is split between Chicago service (within the city limits) and Suburban service (the north, west, and south portions of Suburban Cook County and the five “collar counties”). Pace also administers a Taxi Access Program (TAP) that offers discounted taxi rides for ADA Paratransit-eligible riders in the City of Chicago.

As a regional service, the ADA paratransit program will require continued partnership with the City of Chicago, RTA, county-level partners, and civic organizations like MPC and others to advance potential changes.



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Pace Paratransit service.

ACTION ITEM 1 Make Fixed-Route System Easier to Use

Given the high cost of ADA paratransit service, Pace will continue exploring new and innovative ways to make its fixed route bus system easier to use for people with disabilities. Not only does this free up more Paratransit resources for those with the greatest need and allow greater independence for many current ADA passengers, it will also naturally make the fixed-route system easier to use for able-bodied passengers. This strategy embraces a “one size fits one” approach that encourages excellence in design for both vehicles and infrastructure.

Specific ways Pace will explore this action item include:

- Pace can work to reduce barriers to non-ADA transit usage in communities with the highest Paratransit utilization on Chicago's South Side. Trips with long wait times are often requested between South Side and Near West Side areas that are well-served by fixed-route transit. Pace will work with community partners to identify and address issues for how service is accessed at bus stops and transit stations in these areas.
- Pace will continue to work closely with RTA to evaluate practices for determining Paratransit eligibility against industry best practices. There may be opportunities to utilize more conditional eligibility (trip-by-trip).
- Pace will continue working with the county planning and transportation staff, the RTA, CTA, Metra, MPC and others to explore Paratransit and ADA accessibility issues.



Metropolitan Planning Council

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ACTION ITEM 2 Explore Paratransit Partnerships

Pace has begun to explore cost-effective measures to meet the needs of Paratransit customers. The cost per trip for the Taxi Access Program (TAP) trips in Chicago is approximately \$20 less than the operational cost of providing Pace's traditional Paratransit service (\$38/trip). Pace will look for ways to expand this successful program and explore partnerships with TNCs and local taxis to provide these services for all Paratransit customers. This concept is also supported by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Paratransit Innovation Study Action Plan produced by the RTA.



Lessons for this type of program can be learned from the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA). In 2016 MBTA entered into a partnership with Uber, Lyft, and Curb to provide paratransit services.¹⁶ MBTA found that during the initial pilot program, customers experienced shorter wait times, same day booking, and faster trips. An evaluation of the first five months found that the program allowed customers to take 28 percent more trips at a reduced cost of 80 percent for MBTA. The evaluation also found that participants that required wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs) experienced extended wait times and service delays, as WAVs are not widely owned by ride-share drivers due to high costs.¹⁷

¹⁶ On-Demand Paratransit Pilot Program <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/the-ride/on-demand-pilot>

For a similar program to be successful for Pace, financial incentives may be necessary to TNCs to increase availability of WAVs. TNC reimbursement can be tied directly to the number of "WAV Supply Hours," which is a measure of the availability of wheelchair-accessible vehicles for use by customers.

¹⁷ Popular MBTA ride-share program leaving many wheelchair users with no ride. Boston 25 News. 2019. <https://www.boston25news.com/news/popular-mbta-ride-share-program-leaving-many-wheelchair-users-with-no-ride/942829494>



A wheelchair lift in operation.



An example of a wheelchair accessible vehicle equipped with adaptive driving devices.

Participants in this program could use accessible Vanpool vehicles to improve mobility options for people with disabilities who are unable to use standard ride-hailing vehicles.

ACTION ITEM 3 Integrate Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs)

The Vanpool Advantage program uses Pace's Vanpool vehicles to allow human-service organizations to provide work-related transportation service to people with disabilities. Pace will explore utilizing this fleet to establish a new Vanpool option focused on expanding availability of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) for local ride-hailing providers.

Participants in this program could use accessible Vanpool vehicles as contractors for regional TNC service. This would increase the number of WAVs available in the Pace service area and improve mobility options for people with disabilities who are unable to use standard TNC services.

To accommodate the needs of disabled drivers, Pace will investigate piloting a Vanpool program featuring vehicles with Adaptive Driving Devices for passengers who are unable to utilize standard pedals and vehicle controls. Adaptive Driving Devices may include hand controls, left foot accelerators, spinner knobs, and pedal extenders. These technologies are low cost and installed by a licensed professional.

Combining the hand-control options with WAV integration may allow disabled drivers to participate in the sharing economy. This would be a novel method for Pace to support the employment and mobility needs of people with disabilities.



Pace Vanpool service in downtown Chicago, Illinois.

Coming Soon! Pace ADA Paratransit Upgrades

In June 2019, the Illinois General Assembly passed Rebuild Illinois, a package of legislation to fund a variety of capital infrastructure projects, including mass transit. Pace is designating \$15.8 million of this funding toward the Regional ADA program in the 2021-2025 Regional ADA Paratransit Five-Year Capital Program.

Based on input from the riding public, Pace's two ADA Advisory Committees, and disability advocacy groups, Pace is developing several upgrades to improve the customer experience, including:

- **Trapeze Software:** The scheduling and database system will be upgraded to the newest version, paired with new hardware to improve service.
- **TripCheck:** This online tool, which allows riders to view or cancel trips online, will be improved with the ability to also book trips (which currently must be done via phone). Enhancements to the "Where's my Bus" feature will allow riders to track vehicle location, while a new smartphone app will be developed to make the process more user-friendly.
- **TripCheck IVR:** For customers without online access or who prefer to use the phone, the TripCheck Interactive Voice Response system will allow riders to review and cancel trips, eliminating the need to call carriers.
- **Notifications:** Riders will be able to receive text or email notifications such as trip booking confirmation, cancellation, vehicle arrival, next day itinerary, and rider no-show alerts.
- **Payments:** While customers must currently pay with cash or coupons, soon Ventra® cards will be able to be used to pay for paratransit fares. In addition, TaxiAccess Program (TAP) card upgrades will include an improved user portal.
- **Transfer Locations:** In areas with frequent transfers, funding will be used to purchase land, build facilities, and provide amenities for riders. These locations are planned to have security features, such as cameras, for improved customer safety. Pace has identified a location that is adjacent to the Northwest Transportation Center in Schaumburg that is planned to be the first of these transfer locations.

REBUILD
ILLINOIS

