

**Understanding**  
**“Specialized or Paratransit**  
**Service Systems”**

aka

**ADA Complementary Paratransit**  
**Human Service Transportation**  
**Social Service Transportation**  
**Categories, Perspectives, and Models**

July 18, 2008

**PARATRANSIT, HUMAN SERVICE, SOCIAL SERVICE, SPECIAL SERVICE**

**Paratransit** in contrast to pre-scheduled fixed route, grouped-ride mass transit, are services of a personalized nature (i.e. trending more to a smaller field of trip origin and trip destination as viewed by the numbers of riders served on a per-vehicle trip basis) in auto's, vans, or small buses generally operating on a door-to-door or curb-to-curb basis in response to a set of pre-defined limitations made by an agent or funding source and defining the level of effort afforded a participating rider. With possible exceptions such as “Subscription Service” whereby a rider generally contributes to the “full” cost of the labor and equipment required to provide the ride, the cost of providing paratransit services are either shared by the rider and a parent organization, or totally born by the parent organization as part of its greater service obligation.

**FOUR PRIMARY CATEGORIES OF PARATRANSIT, HUMAN SERVICE, SOCIAL SERVICE, SPECIAL SERVICE**

As a generalization, current paratransit services were historically designed as individual responses to specific areas of need not served by traditional transit. This document positions “Paratransit” as the combined activities of special transportation services that are funded and/or based in the following four categories:

1. Municipal governments
2. Transit Authorities or Special Districts
3. Human Services (social service agencies)
4. For-Profit private enterprise

**FOUR PRIMARY CATEGORIES CONDENSED TO TWO**

These four categories can further be simplistically reduced to two:

- A. Commercial paratransit, and
- B. Non-commercial paratransit

**HOW YOU CAN PLACE THESE SERVICES AND SYSTEMS WITHIN THE SMART MOVES CONTEXT- START BY CHOOSING ONE OF THE FOLLOWING THREE “PERSPECTIVES” FROM WHICH TO VIEW THE PARATRANSIT SERVICES AND SYSTEMS each of the three perspectives has a very unique and differing value structure:**

The **Three “Decision-Making” Perspectives** of Paratransit -

1. The **“Users”** perspective - User’s of paratransit services by nature, are defined as persons whom for physical, mental, or economic reasons, are unable to access or ride on conventionally scheduled and fixed route transit. Paratransit delivery systems can be designed that place the decision making authority in the hands of the USER. These delivery systems usually rely upon “coupons, scrip, subscription, passes, or other similar type of an eligibility “access key” to the delivery and accountability system. The primary concern that triggers the User, either as a recreational or captive rider, is **“quality of service”** measured in terms of time, convenience, and comfort when personally compared to the privately owned and operated family car.
2. The **“Operators”** perspective - Operators, at times synonymous with **Administrators**, of paratransit services generally fall into one of four categories:
  - (A) The private non-profit social service agency The transportation concern is to that paratransit support the **agency’s greater mission** e.g. child care, nursing home, sheltered workshop, Independent living, senior citizens, general public, etc.,
  - (B) The public non-profit service agency, whose transportation concerns tends to be the same as the first i.e. support the **agency’s greater mission**,
  - (C) The public non-profit municipality, whose primary concern is Transportation as a **civic responsibility and economic stabilizer**, or
  - (D) The Private Sector, when the operator is independent of the client group or independent from the Agent’s concerns, the operator generally is incorporated into the arena of the private-sector. The **profit motive** has long been the capital motivator of decisions regarding “maximum utilization of resources” e.g. efficiency and profit margin.
3. The **“Funders”** perspective - (Sometimes synonymous with **Administrators**) the funder of paratransit service purchases a “Product.” The product may be one-way passenger trips, hours of passenger service, passenger or vehicle miles or any of many other costing mechanisms. Regardless, the funder of a paratransit product wants the quality of service that most approximates the ease and convenience of the personal auto in terms of time, convenience, and comfort. Funders of paratransit services, especially under purchase-of-service arrangements with operators other than themselves, usually want these qualities at close to or less than their full market costs citing **“economies of scale”**. **Fiscal accountability** is also a prevailing concern for paratransit funders.

## **SERVICE DELIVERY OPERATING MODELS THAT PROVIDE MOBILITY AKA PARATRANSIT, HUMAN SERVICE, SOCIAL SERVICE, SPECIAL SERVICE**

**PARATRANSIT MODELS** - When constructing a paratransit delivery system(s), certain **commonalities** are shared among the **components** of the particular system regardless of the level of funding or the geographic areas to be covered by the paratransit system being designed.

In general, there are **two types** of paratransit models, direct and indirect. The **Direct Services Model** is an independent delivery system, whereas the **Indirect Services Model** is built upon one or more of three commonly “shared” features. When viewing these models, it might be helpful to REPEAT THE SELECTION OF A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH TO VIEW A MODEL and try to view the model from that perspective (i.e. user, operator, funder). Then change perspective and try to view the model again. Do this three times. This exercise might provide greater insight into the intricacies of paratransit inter-relationships.

### **TWO PRIMARY OPERATING MODELS**

- **DIRECT SERVICE** - Under the direct service model, paratransit is a built-in feature of a program with vehicles, drivers, and associated employees operating in an autonomous fashion from all other transit and paratransit operations and systems in the area. These operations tend to be referred to as “client specific” systems.
- **INDIRECT SERVICE** - Proviso; written and properly executed interagency agreements are strongly recommended for all indirect service arrangements, as inherent in these “shared” models is the assumption that the cost of associated areas of concern such as labor, insurance, consumables etc. will be distributed in a mutually beneficial manner. Three Commonly Shared Features of Indirect service:

**A. SHARED FUNDS** - An agency that has a transportation budget, especially “direct Service “agencies, can elect to either solicit other agency funds, or forfeit/award its transportation funds to another agency in exchange for transportation considerations as a commodity. Sharing funds may be accomplished in several ways, some of which might be:

- third party contracts
- brokerages (mobility managers)
- joint purchases
- coordination, e.g. transfers, single fares, etc.
- consolidation
- interagency agreements

**B. SHARED PASSENGERS** - An agency that usually “operates “transportation services, as a financial consideration, can forego its operational component either permanently, temporarily, or on reciprocating schedules with other agencies to transport each others clients.

**C. SHARED VEHICLES** - Pools of vehicles can be acquired, if desired, and/or single agency vehicles can be made available to other agencies needing transportation services. As well, clients from one agency can share another agencies seating space per interagency agreement.

**OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS** - The following operating mechanisms to deliver transportation service can be viewed from the three “paratransit perspectives” from above, or from either of the “paratransit models” also presented above. In doing so, the reader can theoretically dissect components of an existing system or construct entirely new ones.

**DEMAND RESPONSE** - refers to paratransit systems that are well defined by Procurement Documents or operating manuals and other marketing material informing the eligible riding population about the characteristics of the system. The concept is that the “user demands a transportation response.” In the clinical sense, pure taxicab/limousine service best approaches true demand response systems. Paratransit demand response is generally based on 24 hour advanced notice.

**DIAL-A-RIDE** - refers to demand response type systems. Also used as a generic name for various systems As in demand response type systems, Dial-A-Ride systems are usually defined within an operating or funding agencies written agreements.

**DEVIATED ROUTES** - refers to transit or small bus routes that as standard operating procedure, accept prearranged or demand response calls causing the vehicle to “deviate from its standard route” to service a riders request.

**SERVICE ROUTES (Collectors)** - refers to service arrangements in defined geographic areas whereby riders using contracted carriers or transit buses are connected “on demand” to transit stations or transfer for extended travel.

**SUBSCRIPTION** - refers to systems that accept reserved seats at desired times for desired trips for desired duration’s at agreed upon cost. Seat subscriptions can be purchased by individuals or agents on behalf of individuals.

**USER-SIDE SUBSIDY (scrip)** - refers to coupons or other valued substitutes being placed in the hands of riders who in turn can pick from a variety of transportation venders.

**THIRD-PARTY CONTRACTING** - refers to written agreements (contracts) initiated by the funding source with transportation providers to transport clients of the funding source.

**DIRECT SERVICES** - refers to an entity owning and operating transportation vehicles supported entirely by employee personnel as drivers and administrators generally in support of “client specific” transportation service.

**PRESCHEDED ROUTING** - refers to mostly rural or single vehicle operations that establish a vehicles location on given days or times and accepts person in those areas who schedule to ride to those destinations from those origins at the specified times.

**VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION** - refers to a centralized activity enlisting and assigning volunteers usually in their own vehicles to serve the needs of persons seeking transportation assistance.