

CONSENT CALENDAR

March 30, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Terry Taplin (Author), Councilmember Ben Bartlett (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Kate Harrison (Co-Sponsor), and Councilmember Sophie Hahn (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Discussion on East Bay Paratransit and the Transportation Needs of Berkeleyans with Disabilities

RECOMMENDATION

Refer the Disability Commission and the Transportation Commission to hold a joint public discussion on the use, effectiveness, and accessibility of East Bay Paratransit as well as the transportation needs of the members of our community with disabilities and seniors, and return recommendations to Council.

BACKGROUND

East Bay Paratransit is a public transit service for people who are unable to independently use or access public transit because of a disability or disabling health condition. Since 1990, the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) has required all public transit agencies to provide paratransit services to eligible disabled people. East Bay Paratransit transports riders from their origin to their destination in vans equipped with a wheelchair lift. East Bay Paratransit was established by AC Transit. Service is provided during the hours of AC Transit's bus and BART's rail operations. Service is limited to areas within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of an operating bus route or BART station.¹

East Bay Paratransit provides a critical service to the members of our community with disabilities. Unfortunately, the service has been reported to be characterized by long wait times, poor treatment of its riders, and overall deficient service and reliability.²³ The importance of the program makes the repeated reports of its issues especially troubling. Two years since these problems with East Bay Paratransit's service were reported, deficiencies in wait times and consistency still persist. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the difficulties that people with disabilities have faced and access to

¹ <https://www.eastbayparatransit.org/frequently-asked-questions.htm>

² <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2018/12/27/east-bay-paratransit-shaken-up-following-kpix-investigation/>

³ <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2018/08/31/paratransit-disabled-detours-east-bay/>

safe and reliable transportation has been remarkably difficult during the pandemic.⁴ The City of Berkeley must develop a better understanding of the quality of service East Bay Paratransit currently offers to its riders and the ongoing transportation needs of Berkeleyans with disabilities.

CONTACT

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ATTACHMENTS

1. All About East Bay Paratransit
2. The Center for Independent Living Focus Group Report - Paratransit

⁴<https://cal.streetsblog.org/2020/04/21/pandemic-underscores-difficulties-accessing-transportation-for-people-with-disabilities/>



All About East Bay Paratransit

What East Bay Paratransit can do for you and how to contact us.



March 2020

What is East Bay Paratransit?

East Bay Paratransit is a public transit service for people who are unable to use regular AC Transit buses or BART trains because of a disability or a disabling health condition. East Bay Paratransit was established by AC Transit and BART to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Where does East Bay Paratransit go?

East Bay Paratransit serves the following cities:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alameda ▪ Albany ▪ Berkeley ▪ Castro Valley ▪ El Cerrito ▪ El Sobrante ▪ Emeryville ▪ Fremont ▪ Hayward ▪ Kensington 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Milpitas (part) ▪ Newark ▪ Oakland ▪ Piedmont ▪ Pinole (part) ▪ Richmond ▪ San Leandro ▪ San Pablo ▪ Union City
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You can also go to and from any of these cities to anywhere in San Francisco.

You can go elsewhere in the Bay Area, beyond these cities by transferring to other ADA paratransit services.

When does East Bay Paratransit run?

ADA paratransit is complimentary services to fixed route, such as bus or BART. Therefore, East Bay Paratransit service is only available near operating bus and BART lines. Specifically, paratransit service is available within 3/4 of a mile of an AC Transit bus route or within 3/4 of a mile of a BART station during the same hours that buses and BART trains are running on those routes. Both the origin and destination of the paratransit trip must meet this standard. The East Bay Paratransit Customer Service Center will tell you if paratransit will be available for any particular trip you might want to make.

How does someone become able to use the service?

To use East Bay Paratransit, you must apply through the Eligibility Certification Department and be found eligible for the service. The process includes both a paper application and an in-person interview. Only people who have a disability or a disabling health condition that prevents them from using buses or BART trains are eligible to use the service. Please note that not all disabilities will make a person eligible for paratransit.

Once eligible, how are rides arranged?

Travel on East Bay Paratransit is by advance reservation only. No same day reservations are accepted. Reservations are made on the phone to the East Bay Paratransit Customer Service Center. Reservation calls are accepted from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every day, including weekends. You can make a reservation as early as seven days in advance.

Either you or your caregiver can call to make a reservation for you. Your reservation request will be entered into our reservation system where your trip will be assigned to a vehicle. Assignment to a particular vehicle is at East Bay Paratransit's discretion.

Do I travel alone in the vehicle?

East Bay Paratransit is a "shared-ride" service. This means that other riders with different destinations will be picked up and dropped off along the way and the routing is not necessarily linear. Your trip may take longer than if you took a taxi or drove yourself.

Your ride may take a similar amount of time as the same trip would take on an AC Transit bus, including transfers and wait times.

How much does East Bay Paratransit cost?

One Way Fares:

For Service in the East Bay	
<i>Fare</i>	Distance
\$4.00	0 to 12 miles
\$6.00	>12 miles, up to 20 miles
\$7.00	>20 miles

Travel to and from San Francisco is distance based and costs between \$6.00 and \$10.00, depending where you start and end. However, San Francisco Trips which go beyond the BART service territory that are carried by East bay Paratransit also pay an additional MUNI paratransit fare of \$2.50.

When you make a reservation for a trip on East Bay Paratransit, you will be told the fare for your trip. You must pay your fare as soon as you board the vehicle. You may pay in cash, with tickets, or with a combination of the two. If you are paying with cash, bring exact change because the drivers cannot make change. Tickets are available in \$4.00 or \$1.00 denominations and come in books of ten.

Does the driver give any assistance?

Yes, the driver will help in several ways. For example, the driver can assist with up to two small grocery bags, or lend an arm to lean on while riders get on or off the van. The driver will help riders using wheelchair(s) on and off the lift and secure their chair in the van. But drivers must be able to see the Vehicle at all times, so they cannot go into a home, or go past the ground floor lobby of any building. They cannot look for riders in an office, apartment or waiting room. And they cannot move someone in a wheelchair up or down steps.

When will my ride come?

When you make your reservation, the Customer Service Representative will confirm your trip by giving you a 30-minute “pick-up window.” Your vehicle may arrive at any time during the window, but you must be ready at the start of your pick-up window. It is your responsibility to wait where you will be able to tell that the vehicle has arrived.

Be ready! The driver is allowed to wait only 5 minutes for you. It is your responsibility to be ready to take your trip. If you do not meet the vehicle when it arrives, your driver will attempt to find you and East Bay Paratransit will attempt to telephone you. If you cannot be located or choose not to start boarding within five minutes, the driver may leave and continue to their next pick-up.

If you miss your pick-up, there may be a substantial wait for another pick-up from East Bay Paratransit. In addition, you may be penalized for failing to take the trip.

What do I do if I think my ride has not arrived for me?

If your vehicle has not arrived by the end of the pick-up window, you can telephone East Bay Paratransit to find out the estimated arrival time. If your ride arrives after the end of the pick up window, you may decline to take the trip and you will not be penalized.

What if there is a problem with a trip?

Customer services staff is available on the telephone during all hours that East Bay Paratransit operates. They can help with things like an estimated arrival time for a ride that is running late. To register a commendation or a complaint, you can speak to an agent or leave a telephone message with the details.

Can I get more information on how to use East Bay Paratransit?

All certified riders are given a "Rider's Guide" that has many details about using East Bay Paratransit. Riders may request materials in accessible formats, including large print, Braille, audiotape, or computer disc. If you have misplaced your Riders' Guide, call the certification department at 510-287-5000 to ask for another copy.

How to contact East Bay Paratransit:

East Bay Paratransit Office
1750 Broadway
Oakland, CA 94612

(510) 287-5000

Toll Free 1-800-555-8085
Fax (510) 287-5069
TTD/TTY (510) 287-5065
www.eastbayparatransit.org



The Center for Independent Living Transit Focus Group Report: East Bay Paratransit

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Organization and Transit Focus Group Background

The Center for Independent Living (TheCIL) is an independent living center based in the East Bay that provides advocacy and services to increase awareness, collaboration and opportunity among people with disabilities and the community at large. The Community Connections (CoCo) program under TheCIL strives to help community members gain the skills to confidently and independently navigate the Bay Area. During the pandemic, The CoCo Program conducted five transit focus group sessions between September to December, grouping focus groups by their age or disability. Focus group participants were invited through a transit survey we posted on our social media platforms and shared with contacts. Both the survey and focus groups aimed to capture more consumer data on their current public transit traveling experience, from comfort level to concerns they have. Both the survey and focus group questions focused mainly on public transit, but in all focus groups we did bring the discussion to paratransit through the question: “Do you use paratransit?” Below is a summary of the responses related to paratransit.

Transit Focus Group Data

One Alameda County consumer with a physical disability commented: “I hate [paratransit]! How do people get home [if the rider's temperature is checked and they don't pass, but that is after they get to their destination]?”. We've gotten a few asks regarding not being able to get a ride back home if they fail to pass the temperature check as well.

One Alameda County senior, also with a physical disability, mentioned she never used Paratransit, and is unsure if it is even available where she lives, which is in Richmond. She says “I wouldn't even know how to access Paratransit where I live; I don't know [if] there is a disability network in Richmond...”.

An Alameda County consumer who identifies as having a neurological disability mentions Paratransit “hasn't really helped out people like me throughout all the time I've had a disability in our community because I can't qualify for it.” They also bring up the lack of support for the disability community to support those who want to pursue jobs, and Paratransit is one of those that can't help in this realm.



General CoCo Paratransit Data

Between August to December of 2020, the CoCo program received four inquiry calls related to Paratransit services. One Berkeley resident had inquiries regarding a change in their paratransit eligibility and assistance to appeal the change. The three other calls were to learn more about other transportation options if they could not rely on or travel using public transportation, in which case I brought up Paratransit and the application process.

Results and Conclusion

From the focus group responses, there can be more outreach and information dissemination regarding how Paratransit and other transit agencies are responding to COVID-19. When asked if they knew about certain COVID-19 regulations for different transit vehicles, most participants responded that they were not aware. Those who were age 34 or below brought up getting information through Twitter or the news, but would still check the transit websites for accuracy.

More outreach can be done through social media or word-of-mouth from workers to transit-oriented nonprofits and programs. We especially believe building relationships and creating structured information sharing with independent living centers, senior centers, travel training or information referral programs like TheCIL's CoCo program or Information and Referral Team can be beneficial for Paratransit and transit agencies to disperse relevant updates and materials to their target audiences (people with disabilities and seniors). Both these communities face digital divide or digital inaccessibility issues, making phone calls and word-of-mouth sources extremely important to them.