

WEBINAR Q&A: CONDITIONAL PARATRANSIT ELIGIBILITY

BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Thank you for participating in our Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit webinar highlighting conditional paratransit eligibility! We received a lot of great questions during the Q&A session that we are sharing below. If you have follow-up questions, please reach out to our panelists using the contact information below.



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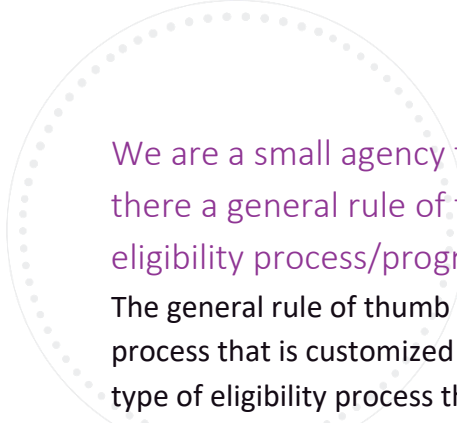
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How can we get access to FACTS? Is it possible to obtain a copy of the assessment and learn how it is administered?

The Functional Assessment of Cognitive Transit Skills (FACTS) tool is publicly available through the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center. Please visit their website at <https://www.nadtc.org/> to access the FACTS assessment and accompanying resources.

Did your customer communication process include working with any stakeholders from the elderly and disability community? If so, what did that look like?

Yes, San Diego MTS absolutely worked with stakeholders in the community when making changes to the paratransit eligibility process. In San Diego, the Accessible Services Advisory Committee (ASAC) is comprised of stakeholders that represent the elderly and disability community—including organizations representing people with physical disabilities, people with vision and hearing loss, social services groups, and more. MTS ran all ideas past this group first, taking their input to help modify the program before any changes were made. MTS also sought their input on communications to paratransit clients and applicants, with advisory group members helping to tweak those communications and distribute final copies to their clientele.



We are a small agency that provides service in a small town (45,000 population). Is there a general rule of thumb of when it would be the right time to implement an eligibility process/program?

The general rule of thumb is that you are always going to want a comprehensive eligibility process that is customized to fit your area and work for your service. Many variables go into the type of eligibility process that best suits your service; however, any size agency needs to make sure it has a good gatekeeping process—such as an eligibility contractor like MTM Transit—to ensure all riders meet eligibility requirements. This doesn't necessarily mean a fancy eligibility center with an indoor assessment course. However, you can't conduct an effective eligibility assessment based on paper only. In-person is necessary for the best results.

For San Diego MTS, explosive growth was the red flag that made the agency realize it was time for an in-person eligibility process. MTS wanted to provide the best quality service possible to those who truly met eligibility criteria, and that meant an in-person program facilitated by a third-party contractor.

How many days out do you schedule paratransit to accommodate for conditional eligibility factors?

San Diego MTS does not schedule same-day paratransit service. In general, MTS likes to have two days advance notice, which gives a sufficient window to look at all conditional eligibility considerations. In some cases, conditional trips can be evaluated with one day notice. When a rider requests their first ride to a specific destination and has conditional considerations in place, MTS typically provides that first ride without conditions applied. The evaluation is still conducted and saved for future rides. MTS then communicates those conditions for future trips to the rider. As a rule of thumb, MTS makes sure they provide at least 24 hours advance notice before any upcoming trip that does not meet the conditions; if 24 hours cannot be given, the trip is provided.

How many paratransit trips does MTS perform daily? How many employees work strictly on the eligibility process?

Like all transit agencies, MTS's paratransit volume is lower than usual due to COVID. Pre-COVID, MTS performed approximately 500,000 paratransit trips per year. During the height of COVID, MTS saw a 90% decrease in ridership. Today, MTS is back up to about 500 paratransit trips per weekday, which is about 45% of pre-COVID volume.

All Eligibility Center staff are staffed by MTM Transit. MTM Transit has five employees dedicated to the MTS eligibility program, including a Program Manager, two Mobility Assessment Evaluators, and two administrative staff.

Do you have an estimate of how much staff time is spent per week researching criteria in the field for conditional eligibility?

Unfortunately, MTS does not have a man hour estimate for this. MTS's paratransit service provider (First Transit) has on-staff Road Supervisors. Field observations were absorbed by the Road Supervisors as part of their daily tasks, with no additional staff necessary.

Are skilled nursing facilities utilizing your process or do they have other special programs or transportation available in your area?

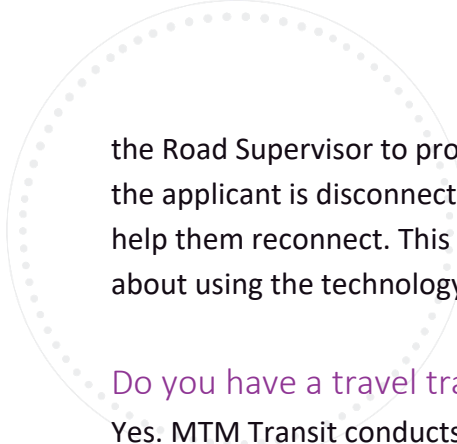
In San Diego, skilled nursing facilities aren't big users of paratransit service. Heavy users include adult day care centers (approximately 20% of trips) and a countywide social service agency (approximately 20% of trips). Oftentimes, these centers and the social service agency provide their clientele with paratransit or reduced fare vouchers.

Is there anything different in how the process plays out for individuals on dialysis?

From a paratransit eligibility standpoint, treatments like dialysis and chemotherapy are heavily considered. MTM Transit's Mobility Assessment Evaluators look at things like duration (did they just start treatment, or have they been going for years?) and treatment vs. non-treatment days (how do days they receive treatment look different from days they don't?). The impact of treatment varies from person to person, making individual and day-to-day considerations incredibly important as they can significantly change eligibility outcomes.

During Virtual In-Person Assessments, what happens when the Road Supervisor drops off the tablet for someone without technology access? Does the Road Supervisor remain present during the interview, or do they set up a return pick-up time to retrieve the tablet?

When the Road Supervisor delivers a tablet to an applicant for a Virtual In-Person Assessment, they set it near the door. Then, they call the applicant to inform them the tablet is there. The tablet is already connected to the Mobility Assessment Evaluator from MTM Transit. The Road Supervisor stays on-site in their vehicle until the interview is complete. When the interview is complete, the applicant returns the tablet to their doorstep. The Road Supervisor retrieves it, disinfects it, and moves on to the next assignment. This process has worked well, and allows



the Road Supervisor to provide any technical support that may be necessary. For example, if the applicant is disconnected from the Mobility Assessment Evaluator, the Road Supervisor can help them reconnect. This is a great way to help ease any discomfort the applicant may have about using the technology.

Do you have a travel training program?

Yes. MTM Transit conducts train the trainer sessions on behalf of MTS. MTM Transit reaches out to local social service agencies and coordinates time for their staff to complete the training program. Staff from those agencies are then able to take that training back to their clientele to help them use public transit. During training, MTM Transit is also able to get to know more about the agency's clientele, their needs, and how we can better partner to help them use the fixed route system.

Who facilitates the train-the-trainer sessions for MTS?

MTM Transit's Mobility Assessment Evaluators facilitate the train-the-trainer sessions.

How do you handle customers who push back on their conditional eligibility status past the appeals time frame?

MTM Transit and MTS follow all FTA guidelines. Each applicant has a specific window to file their appeal. If they appeal outside of the window, they must reapply for paratransit service to reinitiate the process. However, MTM Transit's Mobility Assessment Evaluators always walk the applicants through their eligibility determinations. 80% of the time after the applicant talks to an evaluator and learns their public transit options, they become more comfortable with their conditional eligibility status.

How do we go about getting proof of a no show when a rider has been marked as a no show?

There are many ways to do this, and it will depend on the level of technology your agency uses. If your agency uses RSD technology that has the ability to document timestamps of arrival, that's a great way to mark no shows. Another simple way is to have the driver put a sticky note by the door/address marker of the pick-up destination and take a picture of it with the date and time to prove they were there at the correct time.

How do applicants access MTS's eligibility process? Only the web or are there other routes utilized by some constituents?

Applicants are welcome to access the eligibility process in multiple ways. MTM Transit's Eligibility Center staff guide them through the method of their choice. Applicants can obtain the application and information by:

- Calling the Eligibility Center
- Sending an email to Eligibility Center staff
- Walking in to the office to speak with Eligibility Center staff in-person
- Visiting the MTS Access website

Our goal is to make the eligibility process accessible to all. When designing these methods, we incorporated accessibility features for each, and continue to meet the needs of each applicant as they arise.

How do you communicate conditions to your riders?

When an applicant receives conditional eligibility, we mail them a letter detailing any condition(s) associated with their eligibility. Their letter also includes a Conditional Eligibility Flier, which provides additional examples and information on conditional eligibility. The certification letter also includes the phone number for the Eligibility Center, where they can call for additional information or with questions.

How is an appeal trip handled? What is done between the time of the request and the time of the appeal for the specific trip they are appealing? Are they given that trip pending the outcome of the appeal?

When an appeal is filed, Eligibility Center staff call the applicant to schedule the appeal. At this time, information is gathered regarding the need for a ride to and from the assessment. If a ride is requested, Eligibility Center staff send the trip information to First Transit via SFTP. During this call, Eligibility Center staff also inform the applicant that they will be provided with temporary eligibility for the duration of the appeal process.

Does your routing software have the ability to show conditional accepted trips for each rider?

Yes it does.

What is the reason you decided to bring individuals who are recertifying in for an in-person assessment? Do you have stats on the percentage of change in decisions on those individuals?

MTS decided on this approach for recertifications because its conditional and ineligible percentages were below that of other agencies analyzed during benchmarking.

The chart below outlines determination breakdowns for 2015 and 2020 to show the change in decisions.

Year	Unconditional	Conditional	Temporary	Ineligible
2015 (Before In-Person Began)	67%	13%	18%	2%
2020 (After In-Person Began)	51%	30%	12%	6%