

Taxi Pilot Project Report

Executive summary

TransLink and Coast Mountain Bus Company (CMBC) conducted a pilot program to explore the viability of expanding the use of taxis within the HandyDART system to provide more trips with existing funding while maintaining customer satisfaction.

The pilot, called the Taxi Pilot Project, was initiated in early 2013 and ran from April onwards.

Results from the Taxi Pilot Project demonstrate that increased use of taxis can be a cost-effective way to provide HandyDART trips. This was demonstrated by the increase of more than 9,000 additional taxi trips over what would have been delivered only using dedicated HandyDART vehicles.

Scheduling flexibility and efficiencies resulting from increased use of taxis enabled the system to accommodate a further 2,000 dedicated HandyDART vehicle trips for a total of 11,000 additional trips resulting from the Taxi Pilot Project.

Importantly, customer feedback received (voluntarily and solicited through research) during the pilot project also identified the need to ensure any significant increase in taxi use meets the reasonable service expectations of our HandyDART customers, particularly as it relates to consistent safety and service quality standards. As training and driver skills increased throughout the Taxi Pilot Project period, customer satisfaction increased to a level consistent with overall satisfaction levels among conventional transit users region-wide.

Background

In 2012, a provincial audit of TransLink and the Regional Transportation Commissioner's Efficiency Review both identified potential improvements to custom transit services to increase efficiency and continue to meet the needs of customers. Both audits specifically suggested using more taxis for HandyDART service delivery.

The use of taxis in custom transit service delivery is much higher in other Canadian cities:

- 87% in Montreal
- 49% in Calgary
- 22% in Toronto
- ~2% in Metro Vancouver in 2012

The City of Vancouver's Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee and BC Coalition of People with Disabilities have also been advocating for increased use of taxis within the HandyDART system for customers who have the ability to use a taxi, to increase the overall availability of trips for all HandyDART customers. 75 per cent of HandyDART customers are ambulatory, and 25 per cent use a mobility aid.

TransLink and CMBC began the Taxi Pilot Project in April 2013 to determine where and when taxis could be used to deliver more cost-effective and efficient custom transit service while maintaining customer satisfaction. Under this pilot, 10,000 service hours were converted into taxi budget, with the goal of being able to deliver approximately 7,000 more trips with the same budget.

The taxi companies were expected to provide service that is similar to a HandyDART driver and vehicle's service, including:

- Same pick-up window as with HandyDART
- Door-to-door service
- Proper securement for mobility aids
- Proper use of safety belts
- Proper fare collection (same fare for customers as a HandyDART vehicle)

Results and learning

An incremental 11,000 trips were provided to HandyDART customers as a result of the Taxi Pilot Project:

- 9,000 taxi trips (exceeded goal of 7,000)
- 2,000 additional dedicated HandyDART vehicle trips due to efficiencies

Based on 23,925 total taxi trips provided in 2013, approximately 90 per cent greater productivity gains were realized within the same funding envelope. Further, there were no issues meeting the demand of the Taxi Pilot Project based on supply of taxi licensing in the region.

Service quality measures

To monitor customer satisfaction and feedback as a key metric of the Taxi Pilot Project, Ipsos Reid was contracted to survey a random sample of 100 customers who participated in the pilot. The survey results indicated that taxi service was well accepted. Key findings from customer satisfaction related questions as follows;

| | <i>Average score (out of 10)</i> |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| How would you rate the taxi service that was provided to you? | 7.4 |
| How would you rate the taxi driver's skills to assist passengers who have a physical disability? | 6.3 |
| How would you rate the taxi that HandyDART provided for on-time, reliable service? | 7.8 |

Compared to TransLink customer satisfaction ratings of 7.6 out of 10 across the entire system in 2013, including bus, rail and SeaBus, customer satisfaction measures for the taxi pilot were consistent with current levels.

While operational and customer satisfaction survey results from the taxi pilot were favourable overall, service quality and safety-related concerns from HandyDART customers were carefully monitored. All service complaints were followed up by TransLink's contractor responsible for operating the HandyDART program, MVT, with the taxi company management. The taxi companies took action (coaching and/or suspensions) to successfully ensure that service quality improved.

| <i>Taxi Pilot Project service quality measures</i> | <i>Apr to Nov 30 2013 results</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Number of complaints about the quality of HandyDART taxi service | 145 |
| Number of safety-related complaints about HandyDART taxi service | 29 |

Further investigation of the safety-related complaints found that they included a broad range of issues such as: improper mobility device securement, lack of seatbelt use, perceptions of

distracted driving, perceptions of driving too fast or dangerously, lack of door-to-door service for people with poor balance, and a very late drop off for a dialysis treatment. All of these complaints can be addressed with training.

During the early part of the taxi pilot, the most common complaint noted was the lack of specialized training for drivers to serve people using mobility aids. MVT delivered a full day train-the-trainer session to specific taxi companies participating in the pilot. By the end of October, 70 per cent of the taxi drivers had undertaken training delivered by MVT to the taxi company trainers.

An encouraging result is that the ratio of complaints per trip declined as the training was implemented (table below).

| | <i>May</i> | <i>June</i> | <i>July</i> | <i>Aug</i> | <i>Sept</i> | <i>Oct</i> | <i>Nov</i> |
|---------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Complaints per trip | 0.009 | 0.007 | 0.014 | 0.008 | 0.006 | 0.005 | 0.003 |

In the later months of the pilot, the ratio of the number of complaints per trip declined significantly from 1.4 per cent in July to .3 per cent in November. It was determined that the increased training, orientation and service level expectation compliance management contributed favourably to the service quality and overall customer satisfaction and experience.

Conclusions and recommendations

As a proof of concept, the Taxi Pilot Project concluded that—through conversion of service hours to taxi service—a significant number of additional trips could be provided to HandyDART customers within the same funding envelope. The pilot also indicated that customer satisfaction increases with driver training – levels consistent with overall HandyDART service customer satisfaction could be achieved if TransLink outlines clear and consistent service level expectations for participating taxi companies.

It is recommended that any future expanded use of taxis within the HandyDART system include:

1. Training requirement for taxi drivers to ensure that HandyDART service delivery is similar, no matter what kind of vehicle or service delivery model is used.

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2. Optimized registration process and communication with customers to ensure customers included in the taxi program have the ability to use a taxi, and understand they may potentially receive HandyDART service by taxi.
 3. Improved sharing of HandyDART pick-up and drop-off locations to ensure taxis can deliver good quality door-to-door service.
 4. Further technologies to better incorporate taxis in a shared dispatch system to ensure good on-time and passenger data monitoring. Improved reporting in general is needed to minimize the labor-intensive work in reporting.
 5. Expanded Integrated Voice Response (IVR) calling process (an automated call to a customer when their trip has been dispatched) to include details about a taxi being dispatched, and stating which taxi company has been sent to pick-up the customer.
 6. Contractual agreements signed by the taxi companies to ensure compliance with established service level expectations, a better quality assurance process and more rigorous performance monitoring.