

# Memorandum



**Date:** September 25, 2015

**To:** Honorable Chairman Jean Monestime  
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

**From:** Carlos A. Gimenez  
Mayor 

**Subject:** Report on Feasibility of Centralized Dispatch for Wheelchair Accessible Taxicabs

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This report is provided pursuant to Resolution No. R-1069-14, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners (Board) on December 2, 2014, which directed the Mayor or Mayor's designee to prepare a report on the feasibility and advisability of issuing a request for proposals for the purpose of selecting one (1) entity to provide dispatching services for wheelchair accessible taxicabs.

On March 3, 2003, the Board adopted Ordinance No. 03-45 to introduce wheelchair taxicabs to the community, which at the time had no wheelchair accessible taxicabs. The Ordinance established a goal of three (3) percent of all taxicabs being wheelchair accessible no later than 2006. Of the 2,121 taxicabs currently operating, 3.86 percent or eighty-two (82) taxicabs are currently wheelchair accessible. The wheelchair accessible taxicab medallions were issued through the medallion lottery process, and, once a wheelchair accessible taxicab medallion is issued, the taxicab registered to that medallion must always be a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

Prior to 2009, wheelchair accessible taxicabs were not required to have a two-way radio system. In 2009, the Board adopted Ordinance 09-11, which required all for-hire taxicab licenses that operate using accessible vehicles to have a mobile two-way radio or electronic dispatch system installed and operating properly, and connected to and subscribed to a passenger service company that has a fixed-base call center operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by which a dispatcher may communicate with the taxicab chauffeur during all hours of vehicle operation to provide for-hire transportation to a passenger.

There are currently 41 taxi companies in Miami-Dade County registered with the Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources (RER). Six (6) of the 41 companies provide the radio dispatch service required by Ordinance No. 09-11. While the 82 wheelchair accessible taxicabs are currently affiliated with only 14 of the 41 taxicab companies, all 82 taxicabs subscribe to radio dispatch service provided by the six (6) companies mentioned above. However, even though all of the wheelchair accessible taxicab operators are currently in compliance with the requirements of Ordinance No. 09-11, the ordinance does not require these operators to utilize the service to accept radio requests for wheelchair accessible taxicab service. As a result, someone in need of a wheelchair accessible taxicab may have to call many taxicab companies before obtaining service.

Wheelchair users, as well as advocates for the wheelchair user community, have expressed concerns about the inability to obtain wheelchair accessible taxicab service. Information provided to RER indicates that it is almost impossible to obtain same day service. When requests are made to a company that has affiliated wheelchair accessible taxicabs, wheelchair users are frequently informed that service cannot be booked that day or even the next day. If service can be arranged, it must be between the hours of 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. and there is no assurance that the taxicab will show up.

Accordingly, since wheelchair accessible taxicabs cannot be relied upon to show up and to provide quality of life service, wheelchair users have informed RER that wheelchair accessible taxicabs cannot be used for trips of any importance and they have given up on taxicab service as a viable means of transportation.

On July 23, 2013, the RER Taxicab Advisory Group (TAG) approved its Wheelchair Accessible Sub-Committee's recommendation for the issuance of a request for proposals for a single company to provide dispatch services for wheelchair taxicabs. Among other things, the sub-committee recommended that the selected entity be capable of providing GPS-based dispatch service 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week, and would dispatch the closest available vehicle to the passenger requesting service. They also recommended that the selected company be required to develop and provide a smartphone application, which will allow the passenger to request service and track the location of the dispatched taxicab.

New York City has contracted with a private operator to dispatch 233 wheelchair accessible taxicabs to locations only within the Borough of Manhattan. The city has 11,300 taxicabs and currently assess each medallion holder a \$260 annual fee to cover the costs associated with the centralized dispatch service (11,300 medallions x \$260 = \$2,938,000/year). The company is required to provide: 1) a central telephone number operated 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week; 2) to request a wheelchair accessible taxicab for immediate pick up or to pre-arrange a future trip; 3) a telephone number to text a request for service; 4) a website to request service online; and, 5) a smart phone application to place a request for service. All wheelchair accessible taxicabs are required to participate in the centralized dispatch service.

The City of Chicago has contracted with a private operator to provide the centralized dispatch service for 165 wheelchair accessible taxicabs. The city currently assesses each wheelchair accessible taxicab license holder a monthly fee of \$235 to cover the costs associated with the centralized dispatch service (165 licenses x \$235 x 12 months = \$465,300/year). The company is required to provide: 1) a central telephone number operated 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week; 2) to request a wheelchair accessible taxicab for immediate pick up or to pre-arrange a future trip; 3) a telephone number to text a request for service; 4) an email address to request service; and, 5) a smart phone application to place a request for service and track the driver. All wheelchair accessible taxicabs are required to participate in the centralized dispatch service.

Implementing a centralized dispatch program for the existing wheelchair accessible taxicabs in Miami-Dade County would require amendments to existing for-hire ordinances. Amendments would include, but not be limited to, creating a centralized dispatch program, requiring all wheelchair accessible taxicab medallion holders to participate in the program, and, since operators of wheelchair accessible taxicabs would not be prohibited from providing service to non-wheelchair users, requiring operators of wheelchair accessible taxicabs to give priority to requests for wheelchair accessible service. Amendments would also be necessary to establish penalties when the operator or medallion holder fails to participate in the program, and to establish a fee structure for funding the program.

An analysis of the centralized dispatching programs in New York and Chicago shows that the costs vary greatly between the programs. The cost per accessible taxicab in New York is \$13,000 and the cost per vehicle in Chicago \$3,000. Miami-Dade County has half the number of wheelchair accessible taxicabs as Chicago, 82 and 165, respectively. Using Chicago's figures, the cost to operate a centralized dispatch service in Miami-Dade County could be

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approximately one-half of Chicago's cost, or \$230,000. The actual costs will depend on the structure of the program.

RER relies on licensing, operating permit fees and inspection fees to support regulatory functions, which do not presently contemplate operation of this program should it be implemented. Possible funding sources for a centralized dispatch program could include one or more of the following options: (1) establishing a surcharge to be added to each taxicab trip. For example, a \$0.03 per trip surcharge for 10 trips per day would generate \$232,250 ( $\$0.03 \times 10 \text{ trips} \times 365 \text{ days} \times 2,121 \text{ taxicabs} = \$232,250$ ); (2) assessing each wheelchair accessible taxicab medallion holder a monthly fee of \$236 ( $82 \text{ licenses} \times \$236 \times 12 \text{ months} = \$232,224$ ) and (3) increasing the annual taxicab medallion renewal fee for all 2,121 medallions. An increase of \$110 would raise the renewal fee to \$735 and generate \$233,310 ( $2,121 \text{ taxicabs} \times \$110.00 = \$233,310$ ).

It should be noted that while the New York program is approximately six (6) times more expensive than the Chicago program (per wheelchair accessible vehicle), the Chicago program was used as a conservative estimate. As noted above, costs and fees could vary significantly depending on the results of the solicitation. If that is the case, options for the funding would have to be adjusted accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Joe Mora, Division Chief, For-Hire Transportation Division, at (786) 469-2366, or me directly.

Attachment

c: Jack Osterholt, Deputy Mayor/Director, Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources  
Lourdes M. Gomez, Deputy Director, Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources  
Joe Mora, Division Chief, For-Hire Transportation, Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources