



# Guam Transportation Forum Report

May 27, 2011

Location: Multi-Purpose Room, UOG School of Business



## Background

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On May 27, 2011, Guam CEDDERS hosted a Transportation Forum for transit riders at the Leon Guerrero Building on the University of Guam campus. The forum was preceded by the Island Summit on Disabilities, held in February 2003, which identified Transportation as the third priority of eight areas of emphasis addressed in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000. In June 2010, a luncheon forum for policy makers, sponsored by CEDDERS and hosted by self-advocates, focused on transit issues and concerns. Across this span of eight years, public transportation has made some improvements in the training of operators, but continues to be a serious and critical challenge for individuals who must rely solely on this system to get from place to place.

Thirty-one individuals participated in the forum and provided input, addressing the benefits the system provides and identifying existing and continuing problems. Half of them provided additional written comments on evaluation cards. At the close of the Forum, several recommendations were put forth by persons in attendance. Prior to the event, two individuals, who were unable to participate on the day of the event, provided verbal input over the phone. This report is a synthesis of their verbal and written comments.

The May 27, 2011 event, being the most recent forum to address transportation, was held eight weeks after a reduction in service occurred. The fleet of 15 buses was reduced to 12, and all neighborhood demand response service was eliminated. Sundays and holidays were removed from the service schedule. Funding resources were redirected to replace the neighborhood demand response service with new fixed route service in the north and southeastern sectors, and two paratransit buses were added on route. The comments provided in this document reflect this period.

Services were again reduced on July 1, 2011 from 12 to 10 buses, which cut the number of paratransit buses back to five in number. This cut created significant problems in attaining paratransit rides. At the same time, the reservation window for paratransit service was pared down from 7 days to 2 days prior to travel. The following input does not reflect the impact of the additional cuts in service due to budgetary restrictions, which as of December 2011, remain at the same reduced level as in July.

## Benefits of Public Transportation

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Riders liked the increase of fixed route schedules and the reliability of set schedules. Some riders viewed the change from demand responsive neighborhood service to fixed route service as improved efficiency. Though the demand response service was often unreliable and unpredictable, other riders called for the return of the service. The accompanying addition of two paratransit buses on route was met with favor, as there was greater flexibility in getting rides at various hours. One person stated he got reservations to where he needs to go. It was noted that some drivers go beyond their line of work and provide excellent customer service.

# Issues and Concerns

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**Personal space:** Two riders indicated there was no personal space on the bus, making people feel uncomfortable. This may be attributed to the use of buses retrofitted from school bus usage, where aisles are narrower and leg room is short.

**Bus Stops:** Multiple comments focused on the need for greater frequency of bus stops for ridership convenience to match population growth. Four individuals requested the addition of benches and shade structures/shelter, especially for riders who can't be in the sun. One rider suggested relocating unused shelters to the new bus stops. Signage at stops is desired as is maintenance and cleaning of shelters, particularly near Macys, Agana Pool, and Chamorro Village, where areas smell of urine.

**Safety:** Street crossings at or near stop areas should have pedestrian crossing lights for safety. The Red Line stop at the Mangilao Payless was noted as an area of concern. Busy intersections should have pedestrian street railings where stops and pedestrian crossings are nearby. It was recommended that drivers should wait for passengers to sit before moving the bus.

**Maintenance and Infrastructure:** Riders complained about the apparent lack of back-up buses to fill in service for vehicles taken out of service for repair. One participant reported speaking to a lot of bus drivers about buses breaking down and where customers weren't "strapped down." One concern of drivers, as reported by a rider, is that buses are made for stateside roads, and access to Guam roads is like SUV (terrain). The participant indicated the Mong Mong-Toto-Maite roads are so bad, that the budget needs to include maintenance and repair.

**Courtesy & Customer Service: Staff:** At least one individual asked for more supportive staff in the offices, and that they be more receptive and respectful. **Drivers:** An individual asked if there was courtesy training for drivers and stated that the staff blame riders for arguments. A participant felt the drivers are "very rusty in their training." Another stated that some do and some do not beep (the horn for notice of arrival).

While two persons reported that drivers were rude or in need of a better attitude, another spoke up about professional courtesy of drivers and their willingness to extend good service. There was one comment about the need for drivers to slow down when making turns. The individual felt that some drivers think turns and hitting bumps are jokes, without considering the impact on wheelchair passengers. Another person added that for those drivers not taking their job seriously, they should have some consequences. In spite of training, one rider noted that a driver argued with clients on cancellations. Two individuals suggested annual sensitivity training (currently required) of all personnel.

**Accessibility/Universal Design:** Riders desire visual and audio announcement of stops and color-coded route designation signs and use of electronic fare systems. There is a noted shortage of wheelchair locations in paratransit vehicles. Although all vehicles meet the allocation requirements based on size of vehicle, there is need for more spaces. It is desirable to have flexibility for more than two wheelchair securement locations.

Riders also noted the need for routine use of route signage at the front and side of the bus and the need for better AC maintenance.

**Communications/Phone Response:** Improvement is needed in communicating rider eligibility to the scheduler. Communication to riders on changed schedules, early arrivals, and early departures has been a problem. Communication between dispatchers and replacement bus drivers sometimes breaks down and rides are missed. Three individuals spoke up about communication problems between dispatch, driver; and scheduler; cancellations not being recorded; and a lack of notice to the driver that the pickup is a rider who is blind.

Paratransit riders need quick response to reservations, stating their use of mobile phone minutes is costly and at times they are not able to load minutes until monthly checks arrive. (Mobile phone usage is essential for independent individuals with disabilities.) One rider noted the impact on no-shows, which the rider tried to avoid. The rider requested a system for email/internet communication for reservations and notices to ease the requirement for phone access.

**Need for Rider Education:** Some riders complained about drivers making unnecessary stops and waiting 5 minutes for ‘nobody,’ or leaving a home location after a short wait, without the passenger. Others related a driver denial of a customer’s drop request and the refusal to allow a ride due to amount of merchandise bought at a store.

Yet another individual asked how many bags of groceries are allowed. One individual was frustrated with the ID renewal process being too frequent when the disability was permanent. The comments on communication to riders on changed schedules, early arrivals, and early departures indicate a lack of understanding of a rider’s right to be a part of decision making of changes in schedules. Another rider asked if a rider with a disability could ride the fixed route without a personal care attendant (PCA).

These concerns appear to be focused on requirements/design and rules and regulations of the system as well as awareness of rider rights. Such comments indicate a need for better public/rider education.

**Operational/design Inefficiencies:** There was concern about fare collection and drivers placing money in their pockets, not the fare box. The suggested solution was for riders to place the fare in the fare box; however, it was paired with a comment that the drivers would complain.

**Fixed Route:** Riders are adjusting to the walk required to access fixed route stops. Several spoke up about having to walk 1-2 miles to get a ride. One northern rider walks two hours daily to access the service. One rider using a mobility device is intimidated by driver questions as to why she uses fixed route over paratransit. She is also startled by rough handling of securement devices. There was concern about a bus departing prior to passengers with disabilities being seated.

Multiple comments arose about passenger overflow on Blue 1 buses. Riders also note very tight time scheduling on Grayline and they see a need for better service to the Dededo/Tamuning/Yigo areas.

**Paratransit Service:** Riders reported inefficient scheduling to common areas.

Dispatchers are requesting pickups earlier than scheduled or requested. Sometimes the bus comes early and leaves early without dispatch letting the rider know their pick-up time was switched. Buses are routinely delivering passengers later than scheduled times. Several people shared concerns about drivers not pulling up and waiting the five-minute pickup window.

Changed schedules were high among related problems: dispatchers had not put it in the book, riders were told it is not on schedule and it cannot be put down; schedules changed a day before, didn't result in a pickup; and schedule adjustments could not be made on the same day.

Denied rides are a noted problem. One rider requested a scheduled ride for a meeting at 10:00 am, but was told they had to be picked up at 6:00 am. When dispatch was asked if they could schedule a later time, the response was that the bus was full. One person noted that when individuals have to go to clinics, they must arrive on time. Whenever a ride cannot be scheduled within an hour of the arrival or departure request, it is counted as a ride denial, even if the passenger takes the ride at an earlier or later hour. This example seemed to be commonplace.

Riders were having problems scheduling two days in advance across the weekend, reporting the reservation office was closed. This problem has since been addressed and reservations are now open, as required, seven days a week.

**Reliability and confidence:** One parent would not utilize the paratransit for school transition work because she felt her son would be denied a ride. While the school requires the student to use the paratransit, the parent stated it was not reliable. The parent was told her son was scheduled to ride the 6:30 am bus, but the teacher called and said her son was not picked up.

## Educational Information for Riders

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Participants were presented, throughout the forum, with information regarding their **Rights** and Responsibilities. They were informed that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) assures equal access to transportation and that major streets and intersections are to be called out by the driver. Eligible riders may bring a personal assistant on the bus with no additional fare required.

**Under their responsibilities**, riders were informed that the ADA and transit operations expect riders to use fixed routes whenever possible. It is the rider's responsibility to be visible and available for the pickup, unless in stormy weather conditions. Riders were advised to call dispatch to describe their pick-up location. It is also the responsibility of riders to call in cancellations. Transit has had a problem with excessive No Shows, and an empty bus still costs \$65 /hr. The shortened reservation window is an attempt to reduce No Show activity.

If a rider should refuse securement of their mobility device, operations will be halted. Securement is a safety issue affecting all riders should there be vehicle impact. Discounted fares are offered to senior citizens and eligible people with disabilities.

Riders were informed that they can bring an amount of groceries that fits within the rider's space. They were also informed that neither drivers nor passengers may eat or drink on the bus. The exception is for individuals with diabetes, who may require food or drink for health reasons. In these cases, the exception is noted on the paratransit ID card. Riders may request subscription service for regular and routine rides for specified purposes.

Participants were also guided through **the Complaint Process** and shown how to file a complaint, addressing all relevant information. A good practice is to include what the complainant wants to happen. Guam Regional Transit Authority (GRTA) is to provide written feedback to the complaint, and if there is no notice of resolution, it must be followed up. Some complaints are taken verbally, but all must be documented and require feedback to the customer. Complaint resolution is shared between the provider and GRTA.

## Overarching Rider Recommendation

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A request was made for a group of policy makers to attend meetings to listen to people who are able to articulate the issues. Paratransit needs more buses to be available, to be more accessible; however, the request was to address all aspects of service, not to a certain operation. Leaders need to educate themselves on the importance of transportation to the community.

Riders expressed interest in participating in discussion sessions, where they can meet to discuss specific topics. There is a concern about the loss of demand (neighborhood) service and fixed route changes. One person wanted to know the reason for the changes in the routes. One participant emphatically stated that when you cut funds with transit, you are really affecting a lot of lives (livelihoods, food on the table, providing for family). **“YOU ARE NOT CUTTING ROUTES, YOU ARE CUTTING LIVES!!!”**

## Other Recommendations

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Development of rider educational tools is a clear need. In addition to the Rider’s Guide, signage on buses and shelters with the addition of “Rider Tips” or “Frequent Q & A” on the GRTA website ([www.grta.guam.gov](http://www.grta.guam.gov)) would greatly improve the public’s understanding of transit services.

Inadequate funding contributes to many of the concerns brought forward by riders. Since 2010, ridership has experienced a 65% reduction, creating loss of fare revenue, loss of jobs and income, and a reduction in the tax base. Cuts to service, due to budgetary constraints, have impacted the ability of the system to provide service to meet community need. Riders are taking extraordinary measures to get to work and training sites, meet an appointment, buy groceries, participate in government councils, and contribute to the community.

There is a need to prioritize funding of public transportation to an adequate level, sufficient to properly serve the broad community. Community leaders need to recognize that public transportation is and can be a vital part of Guam’s economic sector. It is the great connector of people to jobs, to training, and to all aspects of our community.





This report was prepared by Ginger S. Porter, M.Ed, and facilitated by the University of Guam Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (Guam CEDDERS) with 100% funding support from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Grant No. 90DD0647-03.