



Agenda Action Form Overview

The Board is requested to receive a presentation from GoDurham ACCESS. The presentation will provide a summary of the Paratransit Improvement Services Study and its findings.

Background/Justification

GoDurham ACCESS is the coordinated demand response transit service for the City and County. GoDurham ACCESS provides curb-to-curb (or door-to-door upon request) ADA paratransit service to eligible riders within the City limits. GoDurham ACCESS also provides transportation options for County residents who are age 60 or older, have a disability, or reside in rural areas of Durham County.

As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, the GoDurham ACCESS on-time performance target was consistently below the 95% target. In FY 2023, on-time performance was below 80% for most months. This resulted in customers consistently arriving late to important destinations such as work or healthcare appointments. Customers also expressed the need to improve the service during public outreach for the 2023 Durham County Transit Plan. In May 2023, the City and County created a Paratransit Task Force to identify and recommend improvement measures. The task force is comprised of customers, City/County staff, and staff from WeDriveU (formerly National Express Transit) – the contractor that operates the service. The Durham County Transit Plan provided \$120,000 in funding to provide a comprehensive assessment of the GoDurham ACCESS program and identify opportunities to improve the service. The City contracted with Benesch to conduct the study in September 2023.

The study team conducted data analyses and held conversations with task force members, customers, and other key stakeholders to better understand issues that were affecting the customer experience. Recommendations from these groups and best practices from other agencies were used to identify opportunities to:

- Improve customer communications
- Streamline and digitize the eligibility/certification process
- Improve call center protocols
- Reduce late cancellations and no-shows
- Improve on-time performance
- Implement a travel training / mobility management program

The City is assuming sponsorship of the Durham Connect Microtransit Service (funded by the Durham County Transit Plan) in FY 2025. This presents an opportunity to explore a consolidated service delivery model that supports the co-mingling of ADA paratransit, Microtransit, and other demand response trips using directly operated vehicles, along with other non-dedicated providers. The new concept is designed to address five key performance-related goals:

1. Prioritize fixed route service options when available
2. Optimize the customer's trip experience
3. Minimize the overall trip cost
4. Maximize the overall trip productivity
5. Provide excellent customer service



On July 23, 2024, GoDurham ACCESS went live with a new scheduling platform from Spare Labs. The new system offers online eligibility applications, electronic management of customer eligibility, automated trips reminders and notifications, real-time arrival information, and tracking customer satisfaction. Most importantly, the system provides the capability to co-mingle trip requests for different funding programs and dispatch across multiple service providers. During the first month of operation, GoDurham ACCESS has experienced a 40% reduction in no-shows, a 23% reduction in average trip time, and an average customer satisfaction rating of 90%.

In FY 2024 GoDurham ACCESS saw an 18% increase in trips compared to FY 2023. However, due to improvements led by the task force's work, on-time performance increased 9% and the cost per trip only increased 0.2%. The following activities will occur in the current fiscal year to continue to improve the customer experience, manage increased demand, and control costs:

- Implement Microtransit in East and North Durham in October 2024
- Continue to explore pilots with additional service providers to supplement services and manage demand increases
- Issue an RFP in early 2025 for a new GoDurham ACCESS management and operations contract with financial incentives and penalties tied to key areas such as customer service, safety, efficiency, and on-time performance.

Recommendation

The County Manager recommends that the Board receive this presentation from GoDurham ACCESS.