

Improving Transportation for People with Special Needs

Customer Complaint Process

The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT), as directed by RCW 47.06B.030 (3), developed Customer Complaint Process guidelines for public transportation providers. Partner transportation agencies collaborated with advocates for the disabled in their communities to create the guidelines.

ACCT members representing the following organizations contributed to the development of the Customer Complaint Process:

- the Developmental Disabilities Council
- the Washington State Transit Association
- Governors Committee on Disability and Employment
- Community Transit Association of the Northwest.

ACCT staff conducted a series of community outreach events throughout the state to gather input from people in numerous communities.

ACCT approved the guidelines in April 2008. Council staff then initiated a technical assistance plan that helped transportation providers understand their new obligations and requirements under the legislation.

The technical assistance plan included:

A briefing paper on requirements and intent of the Customer Complaint Process— ACCT distributed the paper at meetings, public events and via the ACCT Web site. The Council also mailed the paper to transportation providers

A template to assist agencies in designing their own process — This template included all the required elements of the customer complaint policy and provided agencies a “ready-to-go” policy that could be tailored to their unique needs

A technical assistance Web page explaining the Customer Complaint Process— The Web page included basic information

about the complaint process and best practices, as well as the template.

In-person and telephone technical assistance by WSDOT consolidated grant project managers complimented the written technical assistance materials.

ACCT developed a series of performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the Customer Complaint Process. During stage one, the Council surveyed 37 transportation providers receiving Paratransit Special Needs funds (PTSN) to learn how many providers have a process for receiving complaints and which of those processes meet the requirements of 47.06B. Based on the information gathered in stage one, the Council set benchmarks to measure progress and effectiveness of its technical assistance.

One year later, ACCT staff began stage two of the evaluation by conducting a second survey or similar questions to test benchmarks and ensure that transportation providers are meeting the standards. Evaluators determined that all 37 transportation providers were meeting the following four benchmarks:

- Transportation providers receiving PTSN funds shall develop a policy that allows riders a venue for submitting comments and complaints to the agency.
- Transportation providers receiving PTSN funds shall develop a method of promoting their customer complaint policy.
- Transportation providers shall use e-mail, phone, fax and at least one accessible format to communicate with others.
- Transportation providers shall make complaint/comment cards available on all transit routes.

ACCT staff will continue to monitor the Customer Complaint Process as part of the annual WSDOT Consolidated Grant site visits.

ADA eligibility training

During work plan development council members identified a need for education and clarification of the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements regarding eligibility for paratransit services. They determined that such training would benefit councilmember's, transportation providers and members of the disability community. ACCT staff coordinated with Easter Seals Project ACTION, nationally noted experts on the topic, to provide training via video conference. Thirty participants completed the training. Evaluations

from the training were positive, and many participants requested that ACCT provide further training opportunities.

Work with DDC and GCDE

ACCT is committed to working with our partner agencies, councils and organizations. ACCT staff has collaborated with both the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC) and the Governors Committee on Disability and Employment (GCDE). In addition to ongoing communication and collaboration, ACCT staff works directly with each council on specific projects.

In October 2009, ACCT staff worked with the DDC on a DDC-produced video about transportation and people with disabilities. ACCT staff provided a valuable link between the disabilities community and the community of transportation providers. In addition to providing technical assistance on ADA transit provisions, ACCT staff also advised the DDC on the most effective ways to promote the video within the transportation community.

ACCT staff is an ad-hoc member of the GCDE Outreach Committee. In this role, staff participates in GCDE quarterly outreach events. These outreach events provide an opportunity to hear from communities throughout Washington about their transportation challenges and explain to citizens the role that public transportation plays.