OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES – LOWER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS/ AIKEN COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM BEST FRIEND EXPRESS and DIAL-A-RIDE

Introduction

It is the goal of the Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride system to provide for the efficient and effective delivery of transportation services to the general population of the urbanized portion of Aiken County. Toward this end, all policies and program guidelines shall be prepared by the Lower Savannah Council of Governments Best Friend Express Transit Department. Lower Savannah Council of Governments' staff shall properly and consistently implement policies and shall do so without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin of any person requesting services.

General Policies, Activities and Procedures

Information and Referral

All persons desiring to be transported by the Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System may call Aiken Area Council on Aging dba Aiken Senior Life Services Mobility Managers (hereinafter referred to as the contractor) to request scheduling, routing, fare and other information relative to the available services. All contractor staff shall be familiar with the services provided by the Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System.

Preferred Travel Mode – Fixed Route

Based on the requested travel and need of riders, a determination will first be made whether the available fixed route services will satisfy the trip request. In the event that fixed route service will meet the travel need, patrons will be instructed on the scheduled departure times at the nearest, most convenient, and safe location along the bus route for each patron to flag the bus driver for boarding. Information on fare charges and on obtaining any applicable fare coupons will be explained in sufficient detail so that the patron has an essential understanding of procedures.

First Alternative Travel Mode – Advanced Reservation Paratransit Service

In instances where a pure fixed route trip is not practical due to a patron's disability which impedes their ability to use the fixed route service, Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System will attempt to schedule a paratransit trip. This service has been created to meet the travel needs of persons pre-certified by Aiken Senior Life Services mobility management staff for Dial-A-Ride paratransit transportation. A determination will be made at the time the trip is requested whether or not paratransit services will satisfy the origin to destination travel request. The patron will be instructed on the service area and all essential information.

Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System ADA paratransit certification will require completion of an eligibility form, signed by a physician. Paratransit service cannot be provided until the certification process is complete and the

patron is issued a card certifying eligibility. Please see *Eligibility Determination and Appeals Process for ADA Paratransit Services* to learn more about qualifying for paratransit service. All patrons will be referred to Aiken Senior Life Services to begin the eligibility process and to receive applications for service.

Demand Response Taxi Service

In the event that a patron's travel need cannot be accommodated by the preceding fixed route or paratransit travel modes, the Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System mobility manager will refer the patron to the appropriate local taxi cab operator serving the area. Travel on the taxi mode does not require an advance reservation and is provided by private taxi companies on demand. Taxi service is provided by the taxi company at actual cost. Full cost of the trip must be borne by the patron and is not a service of the Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System. Patrons are advised to inquire directly with the private taxi provider about special discount coupons that may be in effect.

Advanced Reservation Guidelines for Paratransit Services

Trip Reservation Policy

No advance reservation shall be required for regularly scheduled fixed route transportation.

For next day, origin to destination travel on the paratransit system, patrons are directed to call the Aiken Senior Life Services' Mobility Manager during regular business hours or to the contractor's transportation department after hours or weekends for a reservation. Persons may elect to schedule a trip up to two weeks prior to the desired travel date. In addition, persons may choose to pre-schedule a series of trips or "standing orders" for travel on selected days of the week on an indefinite future basis (i.e., Every Tuesday, every first Monday of the month, etc.).

In cases where cancellations or additional capacity creates opportunities for additional services, same day service may be acceptable. Contractor shall first determine whether or not additional trips can be scheduled without causing other patron delays. In the event that it is determined that additional trips can be scheduled, same day requests will be honored on an "as available" basis at the discretion of the contractor.

Trip Scheduling Policy for Paratransit Services

All persons requiring paratransit service shall provide the necessary information to the Aiken Senior Life Services mobility manager or to the contractor's dispatch staff at the time of the trip request. This shall include such items as name, address, telephone number, destination, nature of any physical limitations, etc. The time of pick-up and return shall be established at the time of trip scheduling.

Regulatory requirements state that reservations must be accepted during normal business hours on a "next day" basis -- not a 24-hours in advance requirement. Advance reservations may be accepted up to 14 days before a desired trip.

Dial-A-Ride may not limit the availability of service to eligible individuals by restrictions on the number of trips or by waiting lists. Contractor must avoid an operational pattern or practice that significantly limits availability.

It is acceptable to negotiate pickup times with Dial-A-Ride (DAR) riders within a one-hour window. If the contractor cannot schedule a ride that is no more than one hour before or one hour after the desired departing time, the trip must be tracked as a denial, even if the rider accepts an offer of a trip that is outside the one-hour window. The trip must be tracked as a denial due to our inability to meet the ADA service criteria. Contractor may still collect a fare from the rider and Contractor may still invoice LSCOG for paratransit services rendered, even if a trip is tracked as a "denial."

If only one leg of a trip request can be reserved within the one-hour window, AND the rider declines the trip, it should be tracked as two denials. It means Contractor was not able to accommodate a reasonable request from an eligible consumer of ADA paratransit services and that rider did not schedule a trip as a result. The ADA policy assumes that trip would have been a round trip event and wants it identified as two denials.

If a rider refuses an alternative negotiated time that IS within the one-hour window, it is not a denial for ADA tracking compliance purposes.

For travel to medical centers and facilities where the return time is difficult to determine, the contractor's reservation desk staff or the Lower Savannah COG mobility manager may provide assistance to the patron by calling the appropriate facility attempting to arrange a return pick-up time agreeable to the medical facility. In instances where a specific medical facility is unable or unwilling to cooperate in the coordination of transportation services, returns from medical appointments will be accommodated on a call-in, time-available basis. In no event will a patron be left stranded in these situations.

Cancellation Policy for Paratransit Services

Patrons who must cancel a previously scheduled paratransit trip shall provide as much notice to the Aiken County Transit Best Friend Express and Dial A Ride System as possible. Notice of cancellation which is given less than 2 hours prior to the scheduled pick-up time, may be considered the same as a "no-show." The determining factor will be the availability of the contractor's reservation desk staff to cancel the trip from the daily work assignments of the provider assigned the specific trip.

No-Show Policy for Paratransit Services

The term "no-show" as used within this policy statement shall mean any trip which has been scheduled by a patron, but that patron is not present at the time and place of requested pick-up, without benefit of an advance cancellation. Recognizing that the failure to properly cancel a scheduled trip results in the consumption of time and resources, a pattern of rider "no-shows" must be addressed. Patrons who no-show five times or more in a rolling 30-day period will constitute a pattern. The contractor is to notify Lower Savannah Council of Governments mobility management staff once a pattern has been recognized so a mobility manager may individually contact the rider and

try to be of assistance in resolving the issue. If the problem persists, then the rider may be at risk for suspension.

Pickup Time Policy for Paratransit Services

In order to be considered "on-time" a properly scheduled vehicle will be at the pick-up point from between 30 minutes prior to and 30 minutes after the scheduled pick-up time (patrons using a "will-call" option for pick-up may be subject to a longer waiting period, but no longer than one hour). Patrons should not be late for their requested drop off or appointment time and should not be late for their requested returned scheduled pick up if not using a "will-call" option. Patrons must be ready, therefore, throughout this time period. The operator shall blow the vehicle horn at the time of arrival. In the event a patron is not at the scheduled pick-up point between the designated times, the operator shall be required to wait no more than 5 minutes to receive verification from the patron that he/she is still planning on making the scheduled trip. In the event that the patron does not make his intent known to the Aiken County Best Friend Express and Transit System driver within that 5 minute period, the operator shall assume that a no-show has occurred and the trip will be treated in accordance with the no-show policy. Patrons are encouraged to cooperate with Aiken County Best Friend Express and Transit System operators and immediately proceed to board the vehicle upon its arrival. However, passengers should not be pressured or expected to board and depart earlier than the established pickup window.

When reporting on-time performance if early pickups are combined with on-time pickups when compiling an on-time performance report, the contractor will report this as "early arrivals plus on-time arrivals" and track the number and rate of early pickups as well as late pickups separately from on-time pickups. The contractor will also report how early the early pickups were.

If the contractor does not meet or exceed 80% of ADA trips on-time in a 3-month period, without documented valid reasons that has been approved by the LSCOG Transit Manager at the time of service delivery, LSCOG will require a corrective action plan within 15 days from LSCOG notification. A valid reason may include inclement weather, unpredicted traffic delays, and/or occasional vehicle breakdowns.

Accessibility for the Fixed Route

Best Friend Express vehicles are all equipped with a mechanical lift for use with a passenger with a mobility device. The transit operator must also permit people with disabilities who do not use wheelchairs, to stand on a vehicle's lift or ramp to enter or exit the vehicle; upon request. This includes anyone who has difficulty using steps.

Transit operators must make stop announcements at major intersections, transfer spots, major destinations, and upon passenger request, so that persons with a disability can orientate themselves to their desired destinations. Due to the small size of the Best Friend Express vehicles and the number of passengers onboard, some passengers may prefer to simply tell the driver upon boarding of their desired destination – especially since the fixed route system

is a “flag down along the route” vs. a “bus stop” transportation system – so they can be verbally notified of their upcoming destination and stop.

Reduced Fare Policy for Fixed Route Services
Senior riders (age 60 and over); persons with disabilities; or Medicare card holders are allowed to ride the fixed route system for one-half fare. Necessary escorts for the passenger with a disability on the fixed route system may also ride for the one-half fare when accompanying the passenger. *Half-fare for Disability Discounts Cards* are available, if desired and requested by the passenger, to provide for the ease of the vehicle operator and the person with the disability to claim the discount.

Children under the age of six (6) years, who are accompanied by a fare-paying rider, may ride the bus free of charge. Children six and over will pay the regular fare.

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