

MEMO

TO: TRAC

From: CASTA, Colorado Association of Transit Agencies

Date: September 8, 2020

Purpose

The memo provides TRAC with an update on the statewide Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) Brokerage and asks TRAC for feedback.

Action

For information and discussion. No action requested.

Background

The Colorado Association of Transit Agencies (CASTA) represents over 50 transit agencies from around the state, not only large agencies like RTD but also small rural agencies like Prowers County Transit and All Points Transit in Montrose. While these agencies may differ in their ridership numbers or the type of public transit they provide, one thing many of these agencies have in common is their concern about a new statewide Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) Brokerage, which Colorado's Department of Health Care Policy and Financing put in place on July 1, 2020.

When we first started hearing rumors that a statewide NEMT brokerage was being considered CASTA worked with CDOT to hire a national consulting firm and conduct a study of Colorado's NEMT situation to help CASTA and its members better understand the issue. The study, completed in 2019, provides an opinion regarding the best NEMT solution for the state, one that would serve our communities, riders, and transit providers. The study's conclusion was that many regions had well-run programs and that helping develop solutions for areas that didn't have good coverage would provide the best statewide solution.

Due to the challenges around this year's legislative session, the program was put into place quite quickly. There were only two and a half weeks between the state budget being signed into law and the start of the program implementation.

This lack of planning, outreach, and coordination with the new brokerage has made it difficult for rural agencies to provide the level of service to their NEMT riders that they have given in the past. Intelliride and HCPF did not supply any communication for transit providers to use with their riders at the start of the program. There was no communication about what was happening, and no attempt to address concerns raised by rural transit agencies at the time. It

was very challenging for providers to ease the transition for their riders. The lack of knowledge about rural transit has also made it challenging for Intelliride to even get contracts signed with rural providers because rural transit looks so different from Colorado's metro area brokerage which Intelliride also oversees.

Many issues rural agencies tried to raise before implementation are now realities as transit providers in rural and metro counties work through this transition to the brokerage. Some of the issues that continue to plague riders around the state include:

- 30-90 minute wait times to schedule a ride.
- The call center representatives don't know Colorado well and don't always choose providers that operate in the area where the client lives.
- There are challenges transitioning riders from a one-call system to them having to know which number they call for different types of rides or destinations.
- There are numerous clerical mistakes made by the call center personnel regarding scheduling times, ride destinations, and other issues
- Agencies are not able to fix issues made at the call center so the rider has to call into the broker a second time to get it fixed.
- Rides for inappropriate destinations are being scheduled.
- Riders are getting fed up with trying to work with Intelliride and deciding not to go to their appointments.

There are also significant consequences for rural transit agencies, including:

- Most agencies use ride scheduling systems different from Intelliride's so they now have to go back to *paper itineraries* for their drivers.
- Additional administrative issues with rides (wrong addresses, incorrect times, etc.) Most agencies now have to double-check appointments by calling every rider to confirm the ride, thereby doubling their work,
- 40-90% decrease in NEMT rides assigned to agencies. Agencies don't know if riders aren't scheduling or if the rides are being assigned to another entity.
- Agencies are fielding many complaints about the new system that they can do nothing about
- Riders are asking agencies to use another funding source to pay for their rides so they do not have to go through Intelliride.

This statewide brokerage has already resulted in one non-profit organization going out of business and others trying to raise additional funding so they can pay for NEMT rides in their community without having to join the brokerage. In addition, reliable FTA and CDOT funding dedicated to coordinated one call regional systems that make ride scheduling easy for the rider and also allowed rural agencies to braid funding streams while providing better service is rendered ineffective as NEMT rides have to be separated out. Prior state and federal funding that went into paying for sophisticated routing software for rural and regional agencies is now rendered ineffective unless agency personnel hand enter data from the NEMT broker. They must do this data entry from Intelliride reports to add the NEMT rides to their software for routing otherwise they send drivers out with printed itineraries.

The lack of NEMT riders will have serious consequences for many rural agencies. Typically, NEMT rides result in earned income which is used by transit agencies to match or draw down federal funding. As agencies are dealing with decreasing income from other sources due to COVID and its impact on the economy, CASTA knows there are agencies who may not be able to match their share of federal funding in 2021. There are better ways to approach the concerns around the NEMT program than to perpetuate the current situation which is harming both riders and transit agencies.

Policy Options (for Discussion)

- Currently, CASTA is working to request a legislative audit of the statewide brokerage program to help legislators understand the impacts of the program on the NEMT riders and providers.
- Request that HCPF provide customer service tracking metrics to show progress toward “working out the bugs” of the current statewide brokerage.
- CDOT hire a consultant to document the impacts on transit agencies and transit customers as part of tracking the outcomes of the Statewide Transit Plan.

Next Steps

TBD based on TRAC discussion.

Attachments

None