

Service at the T's Ride improving, but still lagging

By Adam Vaccaro GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 09, 2017

Service on the MBTA's door-to-door service for riders with disabilities has improved somewhat after [a spike this spring](#) in missed trips, long wait times, and customer complaints.

The company hired by the T to handle scheduling and dispatch services has made a number of changes in its Medford office — such as firing its local general manager — in response to mounting customer complaints and fines from the T.

But even with the recent improvements, the number of missed trips under Global Contact Services is still higher than under the previous operators that managed scheduling for The Ride.

The T shifted dispatching services in 2016 from the three longstanding regional operators of The Ride to North Carolina-based Global Contact. The \$38.5 million contract runs through 2020, with options for the T to extend it.

Global Contact is assuming control over dispatching the three regional Ride providers in stages through much of this year. But within just a few months of operation under Global Contact, service on The Ride began to deteriorate, with on-time performance dropping to as low as 85 percent, and drivers failing to pick up passengers 2 percent of the time some weeks. By June the T had levied \$100,000 in fines against Global Contact for missing performance targets.

Since then, service has improved, with on-time performance now above the T's goal of 90 percent, and average wait times for callers under the target of 90 seconds every week. Over the past three weeks, the average call wait time has been below 30 seconds, after topping out at 3.5 minutes in late May.

And while the rate of missed trips has also improved, the performance for July, ranging from 0.4 to 0.9 percent, is still above the rate of about 0.3 percent before Global Contact took over.

Bryan Overcash, chief operating officer of Global Contact, said the company has implemented new training programs and hired about 75 new call center workers since June.

Global Contact also fired its general manager at the Medford site, Christine Woznac, in July. She was replaced by Raymond Croteau, who previously worked as a manager for another vendor for The Ride, Greater Lynn Senior Services.

Overcash declined to discuss Woznac's dismissal, but said Croteau's experience with the system was "valuable" for quickly addressing the call center issues. Attempts to reach Woznac by phone were unsuccessful.

Ride passengers and advocates say they still have concerns.

"Things have definitely improved but there are still incidents that are kind of extreme, both in terms of late trips or trips that don't happen at all," said Carolyn Villers, executive director for the Massachusetts Senior Action Council, which represents many Ride users.

Global Contact has so far begun dispatching and scheduling rides for two of the three Ride service providers, with the third and final operator coming under its purview later this year. Villers said the company should not be allowed to take over that third dispatching service until it improves performance at the first two.

Ben Schutzman, the MBTA's director of transportation innovation, said the agency has also hired management consulting firm Accenture to analyze the call center problems and suggest improvements. He said Global Contact will not be allowed to take over dispatching for the third provider, Veterans Taxi, which services the metro-west area, until those recommendations are implemented.

The MBTA said using one company to schedule and dispatch rides for the service providers would result in more efficient routing and yield nearly \$40 million in savings through 2020. Despite the troubled rollout, Schutzman said he remains optimistic about Global Contact's performance.

"We are months into a years-long operational change. While I would love to see us progress a little further from where we are right now, taking a step back, I know this is a multiyear contract," he said.

Adam Vaccaro can be reached at adam.vaccaro@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@adamtvaccaro](#).