

## PARATRANSIT NO-SHOW POLICY IMPLEMENTATION *METROLift, Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Houston, Texas*

### SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY:

To reduce paratransit no-shows, METROLift adopted “No-Ride Policy 10-10-10” under which customers who no-shows at least ten times in a month and at least 10% of total scheduled trips are suspended from riding for 10 days. The policy is implemented with written communications to customers who are provided ample opportunity to appeal and work with METROLift to resolve any misunderstandings.

### DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

METROLift defines a No-Ride as a trip for which the customer doesn’t show up and has not called at least 60 minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. When this occurs, the driver radios in to the dispatcher, who records the trip as a no-show and puts all of the customer’s remaining trips for the day on hold. The customer can call in after the no-show and have his or her remaining trips for the day reinstated.

At the end of each month, METROLift identifies any customers which exceed the allowable no-show threshold for that month through a query of ride data available through METROLift’s scheduling and dispatching software (Trapeze). The query filters out any rides for which the driver arrived more than 15 minutes late, since these are considered a missed trip at the fault of the transit agency. The customized query was developed by an in-house staff member who is a programmer.

METROLift staff enter the results of the query onto an Excel spreadsheet and

### AGENCY PROFILE

**Organization Type:** Public Transit Authority

**Service Area:** Houston metropolitan area (very large urban)

**Resources:**

- **Fleet size:** 249 paratransit; approx. 2,200 total
- **Staff size:** approx. 3,800 total
- **FY 2012 Operating Budget:** approx. \$33.8 million paratransit; approx. 406 million total

**Service Summary:**

- **Modes Operated:** METROLift is paratransit (METRO also operates and/or contracts for bus, light rail, vanpool, and accessible taxi)
- **Days and Hours of Service:**
  - Monday-Friday: 5:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.
  - Saturday: 7:00 a.m. – 12:00 midnight
  - Sunday & Holidays 7:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.
  - 3:45 a.m. - 1:30 a.m. 7 days/week for persons living within ¾ mi of local bus route
- **General Public Cash Fare:** \$1.15
- **Passenger Trips/Year:** 1.4 million

**Contact:**

Mary Ann Dendor  
ADA Administrator  
METRO

P.O. Box 61429  
Houston, TX 77208-1429  
713-750-4271

<http://www.ridemetro.org/Services/Lift.aspx>

identifies the appropriate communication for each customer - warning, final warning, or suspension, with a warning sent after the first month of 10+ no-shows 10+% of

customers total rides, final warning sent after the second month, and a 10-day suspension after the third month. Suspension notices are sent by regular and certified mail.

Letters are sent during the first couple of days in the month, with the 10-day suspension occurring at the end of the month (for example, April 20-29), so that the customer has time to appeal the suspension. All letters include a copy of the 10-10-10 policy and a print-out of the trips scheduled for the customer the preceding month, so that they can see which trips they failed to make. Warning letters also include a reminder of the three ways a customer can cancel a trip: by calling the dispatcher, by using the METROLift Automated Calling System (MACS), and online (MACS-WEB) using a client ID and password.

This approach allows customers ample time to contact METROLift Customer Service, discuss particular trips and appeal the impending suspension before it goes into effect.

When customers, or their caregivers or case managers do call in, METROLift staff work to solve any potential problems (e.g., identifying a waiting location where both driver and customer are visible to each other) and educate the caller on why no-shows are problematic. In some cases a human service agency schedules their clients' riders on their behalf, and as a result the customer was unaware of what trips were scheduled; in this case, improvement communications are needed from the human service agency rather than the individual customer.

The current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Administrator proposed the 10-10-

10 policy as something that would be easy to remember. She first ran the idea by her staff and management, and consulted with the in-house programmer to see if it was feasible to implement with existing staff and technology. Next, METROLift presented the idea to the community at their bimonthly meetings held at the local independent living center, where the idea was also well-received.

Once the policy was adopted, it was mailed to all customers. METROLift was able to include the one-page policy within another mailing already being prepared on emergency communications. The policy is included in the METROLift Program Guide (given to all customers) and discussed with new applicants for service as part of their in-person interview.

#### **CONDITIONS THAT PROMPTED THE STRATEGY:**

Prior to adopting the 10-10-10 policy METROLift had an approximate no-show rate of 6% of scheduled trips.

METROLift initially planned a different approach to a no-show policy, one in which abusive no-showers would be required to call prior to each future trip or the trip would be cancelled. However, they found that they did not have the dispatching programming capability, telephone line capacity, or staffing that would be needed to implement.

#### **RESULTS OF THE STRATEGY:**

METROLift's no-show rate has dropped to 5% of all trips scheduled. Given that METROLift carries some 5,500 passenger trips every day, reducing the no-show rate from 6% to 5% is significant, allowing METROLift to accommodate more riding passengers using the available resources.

While METROLift continues to experience 5% no-shows, there are very few repeat abusers. Once an individual begins receiving the warnings, they no-show less often. However, there do continue to be other customers who exceed the allowable thresholds each month.

METROLift has been able to implement the strategy with little push-back from customers.

#### **METHODS USED TO DOCUMENT RESULTS:**

METROLift no-shows were not closely tracked prior to implementing the 10-10-10 policy. However, they are now tracking each customer's total trips, no-show trips, and no-show rate per month.

#### **KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS:**

- **Excellent customer service staff** - The ADA Administrator credits her very professional customer service staff with effective customer communications.
- **Programming ability on staff** - To design the customized query to identify problem no-showers and generate the appropriate reports each month. Scheduling and dispatching technology that records actual ride data.
- **Staff input** - Running the idea by staff early in the planning process helped to ensure that what was planned was feasible within existing in-house capabilities.
- **Community consultation and buy-in** - The proposed process was presented to the community - people with disabilities who use METROLift service, at one of the METROLift

Advisory Committee's bimonthly meetings, this time conducted at an independent living center. This helped ensure community buy-in on the policy.

- **Customer education and communications** - METROLift mailed the new policy to all current customers before it went into effect, and explains to all new customers as part of their in-person interview required as part of the eligibility application. Warning letters and suspension notices include the policy, a print-out of all of the customer's scheduled trips for the preceding month, and instructions for how to cancel a trip - which can be conveniently done by automated phone or website. 10-10-10 is also relatively easy to remember.
- **A Well-Timed Process** - The monthly no-show query is run promptly at the end of the month with warning and suspension letters mailed to applicable customers no later than the first couple of days of the second month. This way, the month in question is still fresh in the customer's memory. The 10-day suspension period is always set for the end of the month, so that customers have enough notice and can appeal the decision. This timing also ensures that customers who rely on getting financial support at the beginning of the month will not miss that due to lack of transportation.
- **Meaningful but Not Severe Punitive Action** - Losing 10 days of service is significant for most customers - enough to change their behavior regarding cancelling rather

than no-showing. However, 10 days is relatively short (and customers receive ample warning), so the policy is not so harsh as to be unfavorable with customers. The policy does allow for progressive longer suspensions for continued abusers, but so far this has been necessary for only one individual.

#### CHALLENGES:

- While no challenges were encountered in implementing the policy, one area that could be improved is driver communications regarding no-shows. Drivers call in to dispatch to report a no-show but sometimes additional details regarding the trip would be beneficial.
- One improvement management would eventually like to implement is to query for excessive no-shows within the month. This would enable METROLift to send a first warning letter after 2 weeks with 5 no-shows, a second warning letter after 3 weeks with 8 no-shows and the suspension at the end of the month with 10-10-10. This would involve a rewrite of the program (currently not possible because of all the projects on the programmer's list) and would take more staff time, but would be more in tune with the customer's travel experiences and possibly bring down the number of no-shows

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## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

#### RECOMMENDED FOR:

- Paratransit services
  - experiencing a significant rate of no-shows
  - with computer-aided scheduling and dispatching record-keeping
  - with in-house ability or contracted technical expertise to design custom queries

#### RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS:

- Staff and community input and buy-in before adopting policy
- Written policy provided to all customers
- Ease of cancellation (adequate phone capacity, preferably automated phone and web-based methodology)
- Consistent documentation
- Consistent follow-through
- Willingness to work with customers to problem-solve

## **METHODS FOR DOCUMENTING RESULTS:**

- Clearly define what constitutes a no-show
- Before implementation, begin systemwide tracking of:
  - number of no-shows
  - total number of trips scheduled
  - total number of trips completed
- Compare before and after
  - no-show rates (number of no-shows divided by total trips scheduled)
  - total trips completed
- If operating capacity or other cost factors change (e.g., additional staff hours needed to institute program), compare before and after:
  - total trips completed per revenue vehicle hour
- cost per completed trip

## **IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS:**

- METROLift's No-Ride 10-10-10 policy
- Sample warning and suspension letters
- Sample query of customers exceeding 10 no-shows/10% during the month
- Sample list of one client's monthly trips

# No-Ride Policy 10-10-10

**September 1, 2010**

A No-Ride is when the vehicle arrives at the scheduled time and location but the customer and driver do not connect and the driver leaves without the customer. A No-Ride by any patron hurts the service but excessive No-Rides are abusive to the METROLift system, affecting other riders, drivers and dispatchers.

In a one month period, if you have ten (**10**) No-Rides equaling **10%** or more of your total trips, METROLift staff will send you a certified and regular letter that suspends your riding privileges. The **10** day suspension will start on the 20th day of the month. Continued abuse of the No-Ride policy will lead to progressively longer suspensions.

We realize that there are times when you cancel and the vehicle still arrives to pick you up. We strive to communicate with the driver to avoid this but sometimes it can't be done. If you cancelled your trips using MACS at 713-225-0410, or MACS-WEB at [www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org), we have a record of your cancelled trips, and they will not count against you.

All non-permanent suspension appeals must be made immediately to METROLift Customer Service at 713-225-0119. All non-permanent suspensions are issued by certified and regular mail. METRO encourages patrons to provide information that may explain or clear the reason for suspension.

Sample Monthly Query of METROLift Customers Exceeding No-Show Thresholds for that Month

noshow Listing Date: 20120301 To 20120331\*\*\* suspect \*\*\*

Client Nam	Client Id	Phon	Address	Schedule Trips	No Show	%
H	16			114	17	14.91%
C	3			86	10	11.63%
F	46			34	10	29.41%
F	41			102	16	15.69%
F	41			102	16	15.69%
F	27			110	16	14.55%
F	27			110	16	14.55%
F	75			101	14	13.86%
F	16			26	12	46.15%
F	31			14	12	85.71%
F	31			14	12	85.71%
F	59			48	18	37.50%
F	59			48	18	37.50%
F	18			44	12	27.27%
F	04			29	15	51.72%
F	17			44	18	40.91%
F	17			44	18	40.91%

work sheet from programmer  
 staff enters on Excel spreadsheet  
 and identifies what letter to  
 print  
 W - warning  
 F - final warning  
 S - Suspended



1900 Main  
P.O. Box 61429  
Houston, TX 77208-1429  
713-225-0119  
713-652-8969 TDD  
[www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org)

April 2, 2012

Subject: METROLift service \*Warning\*

Dear

Your METROLift service is in jeopardy of being suspended because of excessive no-shows, 10 in the month of March equaling 11.6% percent of total trips.

On-time service depends on a partnership between our riders, drivers and METRO staff. Please understand that a No-Show by any patron hurts the service but excessive No-Shows are abusive to the METROLift system, effecting other riders, drivers and dispatchers. Continued abuse of the No-Show Policy will lead to progressively longer suspensions, up to a permanent suspension of service.

There are three ways to cancel unneeded trips:

- 1) calling 713-225-0410 to talk to a dispatcher,
- 2) calling 713-225-0410, pressing 1 at the prompt to be connected with MACS, the METROLift Automated Calling System.
- 3) [www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org), - "Services" - "MACS-WEB, (METROLift Trip Planner)", METROLift Automated Computer System using the internet.

To access MACS or MACS-WEB all you need is your client ID and password. Begin using these quick and easy tools to cancel any unneeded trips, 24 hours a day - 7 days a week, to avoid future no-shows on your record.

We appreciate your consideration in this matter and if you need further assistance please call METROLift Customer Service at 713-225-0119.

Sincerely,

METROLift Customer Service  
ENC : No-Ride policy 10-10-10

Sample Monthly Report of All Rides Scheduled for a Customer Exceeding No-Show Thresholds for that Month

Associated Trip Dates: 03/01/12 To 03/31/12



Status	Trip Status	Schedule	User	Pick Up Address	Estimated	User Time	Actual Arrival	Actual Depart	Distance	Drop Off Address	Actual Arrival	Actual Depart	Requested Late Time
DEM-Demand Trips	MTT	20120302	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:00	09:15	08:45	09:21	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	MTT	20120302	1	ST, HOUSTON	14:30	14:19	14:57	14:59	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
SND-Send Back	S	20120302	1	ST, HOUSTON	16:34	00:00	16:56	17:03	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	17:21	17:27	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120303	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	12:30	12:15	13:20	13:26	1.431018	DR, HOUSTON	13:33	13:39	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120303	1	DR, HOUSTON	15:30	15:30	15:25	15:44	1.431018	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	16:25	16:25	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120304	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	19:00	18:45	18:31	18:52	2.550729	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	CA	20120304	1	ST, HOUSTON	21:30	21:26	00:00	00:00	2.550729	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120305	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:30	09:48	09:48	09:56	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	CA	20120305	1	ST, HOUSTON	15:30	15:24	00:00	00:00	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120307	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:00	08:47	08:48	08:59	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	CA	20120307	1	ST, HOUSTON	14:30	14:48	00:00	00:00	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120309	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:00	09:10	09:36	09:52	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	10:01	10:07	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120309	1	ST, HOUSTON	14:45	15:03	15:41	15:55	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	16:08	16:11	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120312	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:43	09:28	09:15	09:21	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	10:15
DEM-Demand Trips	CA	20120312	1	ST, HOUSTON	14:30	14:44	00:00	00:00	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120314	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:43	09:45	09:33	09:44	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	10:15
DEM-Demand Trips	CA	20120314	1	ST, HOUSTON	14:30	14:36	00:00	00:00	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120316	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:43	09:28	09:21	09:27	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	10:15
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120316	1	ST, HOUSTON	15:30	15:49	16:35	16:39	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	17:00	17:01	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120318	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	19:00	18:45	18:28	18:50	2.550729	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	CA	20120318	1	ST, HOUSTON	21:30	21:40	22:24	22:36	2.550729	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	23:50	23:57	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120319	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:43	09:28	09:50	09:57	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	10:15
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120319	1	ST, HOUSTON	15:45	15:35	15:33	15:45	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120324	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	11:30	11:40	11:50	11:59	1.432261	DR, HOUSTON	12:06	12:09	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120324	1	DR, HOUSTON	16:00	16:03	16:06	16:13	1.432261	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	16:20	16:24	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120325	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	18:30	00:00	19:15	19:25	2.550729	ST, HOUSTON	19:44	19:50	00:00
SND-Send Back	S	20120325	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	18:30	18:15	18:09	18:31	2.550729	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120325	1	ST, HOUSTON	21:30	21:19	22:17	22:17	2.550729	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	22:38	22:38	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120326	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	09:30	09:26	09:52	10:03	2.445717	ST, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	NS	20120326	1	ST, HOUSTON	15:30	15:15	15:15	15:21	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
SND-Send Back	S	20120326	1	ST, HOUSTON	17:45	00:00	18:32	18:37	2.445717	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	18:51	18:51	00:00
SND-Send Back	CA	20120326	1	ST, HOUSTON	18:37	00:00	00:00	00:00	2.550729	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	00:00	00:00	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120331	1	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	11:30	11:43	11:45	11:57	1.432261	DR, HOUSTON	12:08	12:09	00:00
DEM-Demand Trips	S	20120331	2	DR, HOUSTON	16:05	16:22	16:13	16:38	1.432261	BLVD, 915, HOUSTON	16:51	16:53	00:00



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April 2, 2012

Client ID:

Subject: METROLift service \*Final Warning\*

Dear

Your METROLift service is in jeopardy of being suspended because of excessive no-shows, 10 in the month of March equaling 29.4% percent of total trips.

On-time service depends on a partnership between our riders, drivers and METRO staff. Please understand that a No-Show by any patron hurts the service but excessive No-Shows are abusive to the METROLift system, effecting other riders, drivers and dispatchers. Continued abuse of the No-Show Policy will lead to progressively longer suspensions, up to a permanent suspension of service.

There are three ways to cancel unneeded trips:

- 1) calling 713-225-0410 to talk to a dispatcher,
- 2) calling 713-225-0410, pressing 1 at the prompt to be connected with MACS, the METROLift Automated Calling System.
- 3) [www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org), - "Services" - "MACS-WEB, (METROLift Trip Planner)", METROLift Automated Computer System using the internet.

To access MACS or MACS-WEB all you need is your client ID and password. Begin using these quick and easy tools to cancel any unneeded trips, 24 hours a day - 7 days a week, to avoid future no-shows on your record.

We appreciate your consideration in this matter and if you need further assistance please call METROLift Customer Service at 713-225-0119.

Sincerely,

METROLift Customer Service  
ENC : No-Ride policy 10-10-10



1900 Main  
P.O. Box 61429  
Houston, TX 77208-1429  
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713-652-8969 TDD  
www.ridemetro.org

April 3, 2012

Client ID:

Subject: METROLift service suspension

Dear

Your METROLift service is being suspended for 10 Days, from April 20 to 29, because of excessive no-rides, 13 No-rides in the month of March 2012, equaling 29.5% percent of your total trips.

On-time service depends on a partnership between our riders, drivers and METRO staff. Please understand that a No-Rides by any patron hurts the service but excessive No-Rides are abusive to the METROLift system, effecting other riders, drivers and dispatchers. Continued abuse of the No-Rides Policy will lead to progressively longer suspensions, up to a permanent suspension of service.

All non-permanent suspension appeals must be made immediately to METROLift Customer Service at 713-225-0119.

Sincerely,

METROLift Customer Service  
Enc: No-Ride policy 10-10-10

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