



EL DORADO TRANSIT

Dial-A-Ride Focus Group Final Report

Prepared by:

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DIAL-A-RIDE FOCUS GROUP FINAL REPORT

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I. Background

For many years the El Dorado County Transit Authority (El Dorado Transit) Dial-A-Ride (DAR) service has provided an important lifeline transportation link to the residents of El Dorado County, especially for the transit dependent senior and disabled community who reside in areas where there are no local fixed route services. DAR is used for a variety of purposes such as trips to medical appointments, pharmacies and grocery stores to name a few.

DAR operates primarily using Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accessible minivan vehicles and currently has twelve (12) geographic zones within El Dorado County (EDC) in which the population density varies. Examples of some of the areas with higher population are Placerville, Cameron Park and El Dorado Hills. Areas served with lower population are Garden Valley, Lotus, Rescue and Pleasant Valley.

To make the service as efficient as possible schedulers attempt to book trip requests together within a reasonable range of distance however, there are factors which limit the ability to do so due to challenges such as the timeframe of the trip request, travel time in the van and capacity constraints. It's much easier to group like trips together when they travel at relatively the same times and same general geographical locations. It is quite challenging to provide a trip that originates in Lotus going to Cameron Park and others originating in Placerville with the same general destination.

Another factor for consideration is the cost of the trips in the more rural parts of the service area. It goes without saying that multiple grouped trips in more populated areas with more services can be provided at much lower costs.

In February 2016, the El Dorado Transit Board of Directors adopted the Dial-A-Ride Zone Assessment Study and Implementation Plan for the Western Slope of El Dorado County (study) produced by LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. (LSC). As cited in the document the goals of the study were:

- *Increase the equity of the Dial-A-Ride program by ensuring that passengers imposing equal costs on the system are treated equally.*
- *Improve the cost-effectiveness of the program by focusing limited resources on those trips that can be more effectively served.*
- *Provide an opportunity to refine the zone system in a systematic and careful manner.*
- *Aid the ability of El Dorado Transit staff and management to clearly communicate information on the system, and to explain the rationale behind its design.*
- *Provide clear maps of the zone system.*
- *Improve understanding among transit staff, riders, and decision makers regarding the actual cost of Dial-A-Ride service to various portions of the community.*
- *Fully meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.*

- *Ensure that Dial-A-Ride services best meet the overall goals of El Dorado Transit.*
- *Develop concise, accurate and readily-understandable summaries of the financial and managerial conditions of El Dorado Transit.*
- *Provide local decision-makers with valuable information regarding the condition of the transit operations and transportation planning organizations.*
- *Allow El Dorado Transit staff to gain an understanding of their organization's strengths and weaknesses, from an objective perspective.*

The study provided the following service improvement recommendations to the Dial-A-Ride program:

- *Eliminate General Public Service*
- *Eliminate Service to High Subsidy Zones*
- *Eliminate Individual Zones and Adopt a Flat Fare*
- *4 Zone System*

It is important for El Dorado Transit to evaluate each of these proposed service improvements and make changes if necessary. To do this, El Dorado Transit staff formed an objective ad hoc Dial-A-Ride Focus Group (group) consisting of users and stakeholders within the community. This group was asked to evaluate and make recommendations on service improvements and review the following customer service policies to determine if changes were warranted:

- *Reservation Process*
- *No Show and Cancellation Policy*
- *Ride Pickup Window*

Midway through this evaluation process staff research found several transit districts throughout the country were using a “mileage-based fare system” for their DAR services. A mileage-based system is similar to using a metered taxi service in which the length of a trip would determine the fare charged. To ensure that the Focus Group was evaluating all potential types of fare systems, LSC was asked to conduct further analysis of a mileage-based fare system and on January 12, 2018 LSC produced a memorandum of their analysis. In their memorandum it states, “*The current system has added confusion among passengers and added staff time to identify the specific zones associated with a specific trip. It has also raised questions of equity, in that a short trip in an outlying zoned requires a higher fare than a trip of similar length in a core zoned. With the recent improvements in mapping technologies, it is now simple to identify the point-to-point roadway trip length of any specific requested trip. The current proposal under consideration is to change the fare program to a base fare of \$2.00 plus \$0.50 for every additional mile (with no upper limit).*”

Under the current 12 zone fare structure for DAR, Table 1 demonstrates a 42% increase in operating subsidies per passenger over the last five (5) fiscal years. Continued increases can be expected if the service remains as status quo.

Table 1 Dial-A-Ride Operating Subsidy Per Passenger

Fiscal Year	Operating Subsidy Per Passenger
2012/13	\$48.99
2013/14	\$57.04
2014/15	\$58.32
2015/16	\$64.11
2016/17	\$69.58

I. Summary of Dial-A-Ride Focus Group Recommendations

Through this process the DAR Focus Group recommended the following changes to the services:

- Eliminate the general public’s use of DAR
- Eliminate service to high subsidy zones
- Eliminate individual zones and do not adopt a flat fare
- Do not implement a four (4) zone fare system
- Implement a mileage-based fare system
- No changes to the existing reservation system
- No changes to the no show or cancellation policy
- Change the pickup window to a 30 minute window (15 minutes before and after the requested time)

II. Dial-A-Ride Focus Group Members

The Focus Group consisted of the following members:

User / Stakeholders

Ms. Ellen Yevdakimov, Dial-A-Ride user

Ms. Gloria Webster, Dial-A-Ride user

Ms. Star Walker, Program Coordinator, El Dorado County Health and Human Services Agency

Ms. Jody Bailey, Mother Lode Rehabilitation Enterprise

El Dorado Transit Staff

Mr. Scott Ousley, Operations Manager, El Dorado Transit

Mr. Brian James, Planning and Marketing Manager, El Dorado Transit

Ms. Alicia Kennedy, Operations Supervisor, El Dorado Transit

Ms. Haley Van Horn, Office Assistant II, El Dorado Transit

III. Dial-A-Ride Service Overview

DAR has long been an important element of El Dorado Transit services. DAR is the only service that is accessible to the lower density rural and suburban portions of the service area, where fixed or flex route service is not feasible. Dial-A-Ride is an important additional service for the more urban areas as well. Dial-A-Ride services are a strategic part of the overall goal of addressing traffic congestion, air quality, and other “quality of life” issues.

DAR service began in 1975 and prior to 2001, DAR consisted of three zones: the area within 10 minutes of Placerville where service was available to elderly, disabled and general public, the area between 10 and 20 minutes of Placerville where service was only available to the General Public on a space available basis, and the area between 20 and 30 minutes of Placerville, limited to elderly and disabled passengers only. In 2001, a DAR Zone Assessment Study was conducted and formally defined the current zone system with graduated fares, which has been the basis of the program ever since. Since that time, there has been growth in various portions of the service area, as well as shifts in needs for transit services.

DAR service is a curb-to-curb demand-response service. The service is available weekdays between the hours of 7:30 AM and 5:00 PM and weekends between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM. The service area consists of 12 geographic zones (Figure 1) surrounding the Placerville/Diamond Springs area (Zone A). Zones B, E, C, and D provide service to Cameron Park, Camino, and other areas that can be reached from Zone A in 10-20 min. These zones are open to the general public on a space available basis. The remaining zones can be reached from Zone A in 20-30 min, and include El Dorado Hills, Coloma, Pollock Pines, and Garden Valley. In these seven remaining zones, DAR does not provide service to the general public. Reservations are accepted for all zones up to three business days in advance.

Figure 1. Current Dial-A-Ride Zone Map

DIAL-A-RIDE SYSTEM MAP and ZONE FARES

Effective April 6, 2009

ZONE D FARE
\$3.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
\$5 General + \$1 per zone crossing

ZONE E FARE
\$3.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
\$5 General + \$1 per zone crossing

ZONE F FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public

ZONE G FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public

ZONE H FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public

ZONE I FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public

ZONE A FARE
\$2.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
\$4 General + \$1 per zone crossing

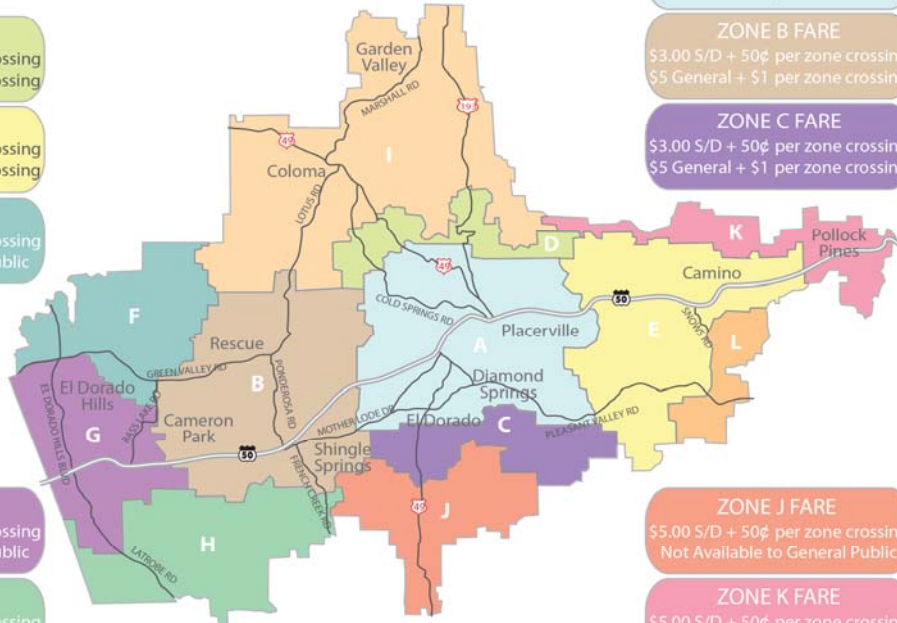
ZONE B FARE
\$3.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
\$5 General + \$1 per zone crossing

ZONE C FARE
\$3.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
\$5 General + \$1 per zone crossing

ZONE J FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public

ZONE K FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public

ZONE L FARE
\$5.00 S/D + 50¢ per zone crossing
Not Available to General Public



IV. Evaluation of Service Improvement Recommendations

This following section provides the service improvement analysis by the Focus Group and their recommendations.

A. Eliminate General Public Service

Study Recommendation

“A review of a full week of service indicated zero ridership other than elderly or disabled persons. Transit staff confirms anecdotally that general public riders are very infrequent. It is recommended that service no longer be offered to the general public. While it could be argued that there is effectively no cost to continuing to offer general public service, there is also benefit of simplifying the service. In particular, area residents sometimes see the availability of this service to the general public and call for immediate service, which the Dial-A-Ride program is

unable to accommodate due to capacity constraints, leading to frustrations. It is preferable to focus the program on doing a good job for seniors and persons with disabilities by eliminating the option of service to the general public.”

Typically, general passengers are categorized into “space available” trips. At the time of the reservation request no ride confirmation is given and the request is automatically placed into *will call*. Based on the demand on a particular day, not all *will call* requests are exclusively general passenger requests. Elderly and disabled requests may also be placed in *will call* due to capacity constraints.

When the reservation window (9:00am – 3:00pm, Monday – Friday) is closed, the schedulers will review all unscheduled reservations and prioritize scheduling for elderly and disabled first, then attempt to schedule the general passengers requests if there is space. In most cases if not all, these general ride requests are refused due to capacity constraints.

Focus Group Recommendation

Considering the low demand by the general public and the unlikelihood of the general public request being accommodated due to capacity constraints, the group recommends discontinuing service to the general public on DAR.

Staff Recommendations

Staff concurs with the group recommendation

B. Eliminate Service to High Subsidy Zones

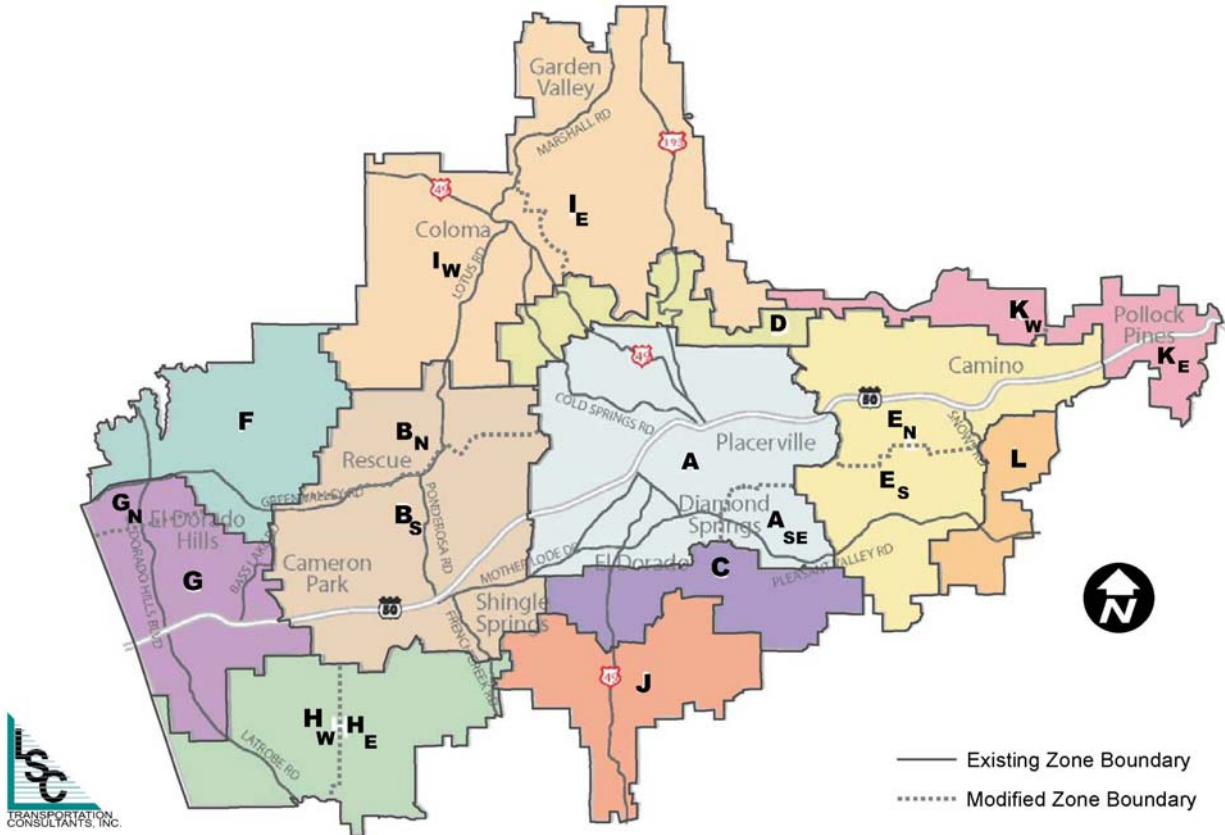
Study Recommendation

Per the study, “*Service should be eliminated to the eastern portion of Zone I (Garden Valley area), to Zone L (Starks Grade Road area), to Zone F (near Folsom Lake) and to the western portion of Zone K (north of Camino), due to high subsidy per passenger levels that exceed standards. These zones require between \$103 and \$156 in subsidy for every passenger-trip served (or between \$206 and \$312 for a single round-trip), which exceeds recommended standards. On average, service to these zones requires \$125 in subsidy per passenger-trip. Elimination of service to these areas will reduce operating subsidy requirements by an estimated \$22,000 per year.*

These zones generate only an estimated 173 passenger-trips per year (or less than a single one-way passenger-trip per day). Service to these areas is an inefficient use of limited operating dollars – comparing the cost efficiency with the average subsidy per trip for the system as a whole (\$51) indicates that El Dorado Transit could provide 2.5 trips in the remainder of the system for every 1 trip in these outlying areas.

While eliminating existing service is always a difficult decision, in this case it is recommended to enhance the overall benefits provided by the Dial-A-Ride program to the region as a whole. While the eastern portion of Zone K (Pollock Pines) also has high subsidy requirements, this area has a concentration of residents with high potential need for transit services. It is therefore recommended that service continue to be provided to this relatively limited area.” Figure 2 is a map of low ridership zones.

Figure 2. Map of Low Ridership Zones



Zones recommended for eliminations: F, Iw, L and Kw.

Aside from the high-subsidy of providing these long distance rides, a major challenge for scheduling these rides is the length of the ride in relation to providing a “shared ride” service. Shared ride service is the practice of scheduling multiple rides into the same vehicle to maximize the number of rides that can be accommodated. This process helps to reduce the subsidies and increase efficiency.

When a customer requests a ride which originates and ends in one of the high-subsidy, low ridership zones, it is usually impossible to group other rides within the same vehicle due to the length (both time and distance) of the ride. The DAR scheduling operates under the guidelines that a customer should not ride in a vehicle on a one-way trip longer than sixty (60) minutes in duration. In most cases, grouping other trips in the vehicle with these types of rides violates this scheduling strategy and significantly impacts the versatility in scheduling.

Focus Group Recommendation

Appreciating the difficult and sensitive decision of eliminating Dial-A-Ride services to a portion of our community, the group concurs with the recommendation to eliminate service to areas of high-subsidy, low ridership. The group believes the elimination of the high-subsidy, low ridership zones will improve the availability of ride opportunities to customers needing service in higher populated areas where more services are available.

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with the group recommendation.

C. Eliminate Individual Zones and Adopt a Flat Fare

Study Recommendation

Per the study, *“It is recommended that the existing 12 zone system be eliminated, and a single flat fare be applied across the recommended service area. This will greatly simplify the service, aiding passenger’s ability to use the system as well as making it easier for dispatchers, drivers and management staff to market, explain and monitor. The recommended flat fare is \$3.00 per trip.*

As suggested in the study, the zone boundaries would be eliminated and a flat fare of \$3.00 would be charged for a ride within the entire Dial-A-Ride service area. Potential results of this change are:

- No overall annual ridership increase
- Decrease in Zone A trip due to a \$1.00 increase in local rides
- Increase of ridership in the outlying zones due to fare decrease
- Increase in annual vehicle revenue hours
- Increase in annual operating cost of roughly \$41,000

The advantages of eliminating individual zones and implementing one flat fare is Dial-A-Ride service will be easier and less confusing for passengers to use and, for staff to administer. An important factor is that a flat fare system would also make the system more equitable when you consider all passengers would pay the same fare. However, this change would reduce equitability for those passengers making longer trips (and thus costing the service more to provide) because they would be paying a smaller proportion of the overall costs.

Per the plan, with the implementation of this option the ridership, service and costs associated with a flat fare indicate:

- Overall ridership would decrease slightly by approximately 200 passenger-trips per year. There would be a 1,212 or 7 percent reduction in ridership in existing Zone A (Placerville). The largest ridership gains are in Zone B (Cameron Park) of 440 passenger-trips, and a 254 increase in Zone G (El Dorado Hills).
- Annual revenue vehicle-hours would remain unchanged (a calculated decrease of 23 vehicle-hours per year).
- Operating costs would decrease by approximately \$1,600 annually.
- Fare revenues would decrease by an estimate \$800 annually.
- Overall operating subsidy requirements would be increased by approximately \$800 annually.

Focus Group Recommendation

Although a flat fare may simplify the system and possibly make it more equitable to some degree, the group thought the impact of a reduction in ridership within Zone A is a concern. As an equitable solution, the group recommends considering the implementation of a graduating flat fare based on the distance from Zone A. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with the group recommendation

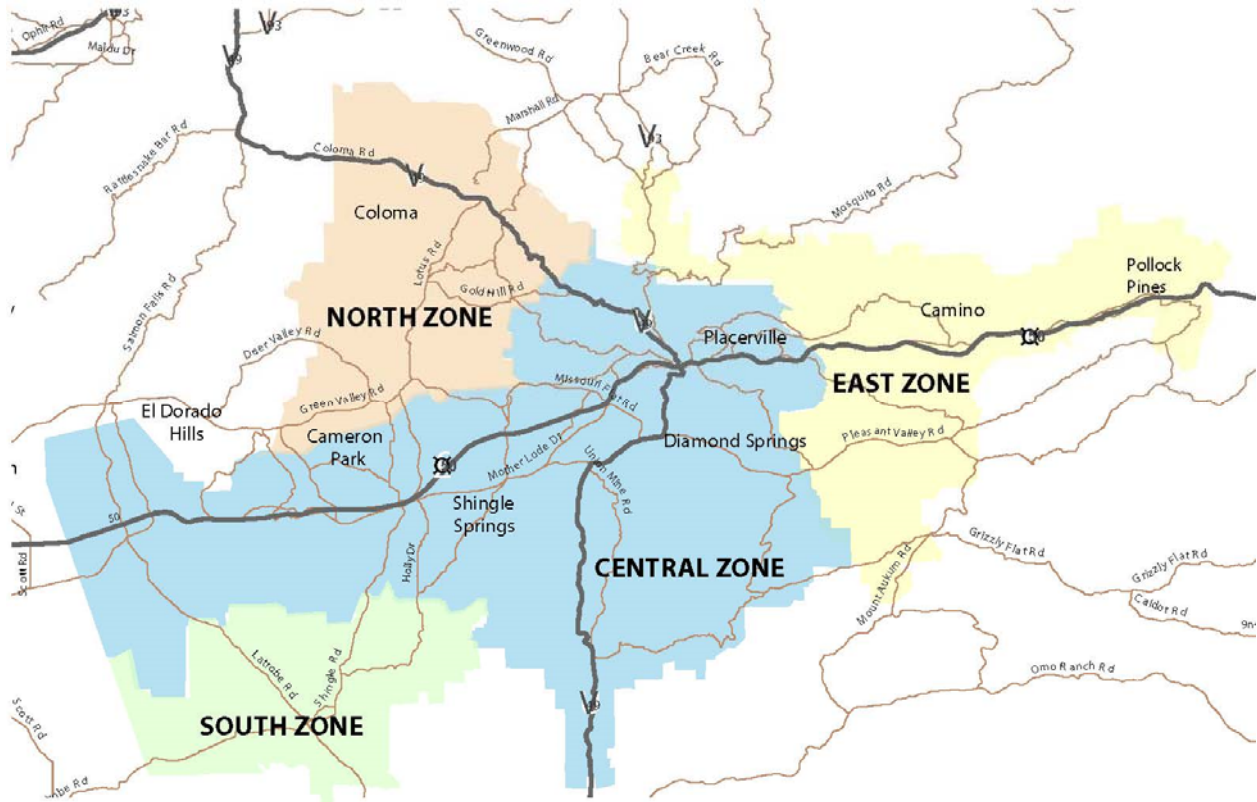
D. Four (4) Zone System

Study Recommendation

Per the study, *“If the impacts of the individual fare changes under the recommended flat fare system are a concern, another feasible option would be to simplify to a 4 zone system, with only two fare levels rather than the current three fare levels. These zones were determined based upon the relative operating subsidy of providing service to each area. Under this option, the fare for the Central Zone is \$2.50 per one-way passenger-trip, while the fare for the South, North and East Zones would be \$4.00. Note that the reduction in the number of zone boundaries would*

reduce the number of boundary crossing charges paid, reducing the impact of any increases in base fares. The current \$0.50 boundary crossing charge would remain.” Figure 3 for is a map of the four (4) zone system.

Figure 3. 4-Zone System



E. Mileage-Based Fare System

With this fare system, passengers would be charged based only on the distance of the trip regardless of where the trip originates or terminates. In their analysis LSC makes three (3) key points regarding this system:

- Most of the communities would see an increase in fares. The largest proportionate increase would be to/from Pollock Pines, Cameron Park and Shingle Springs.
- Average fares for all trips to/from/within Placerville would increase \$.063.

- The greatest reduction in fares would accrue to passengers making trips to/from or within El Dorado Hills, where the average fare would be reduced by \$1.53.

Per the consultant, overall changes to the mileage-based would result in a modest increase in fare revenue. However, a 3 to 5 percent reduction of ridership should be expected. It would also shift the burden of fare payments between communities and make the fare system more equitable as passengers making trips of similar distances would pay a similar fare. Table 2 shows what the fare would be if DAR went to a mileage-based system compared to Uber. Lyft’s rates are very similar to Uber. A comparison with a private taxi service is not provided due to the much higher rates they charge for trips.

Table 2 Comparison of DAR Trip Distance Pricing Vs. Uber

Miles	DAR Cost Per Trip (\$0.50 per mile - \$2.00 minimum)	Uber-X Cost Per Trip (\$1.15 Base Fare, \$0.14 per minute, \$0.86 per mile, \$2.30 booking fee)	Cost Difference	% Difference
1	\$2.00	\$7.50	\$5.50	275%
2	\$2.00	\$7.50	\$5.50	275%
3	\$2.00	\$7.50	\$5.50	275%
4	\$2.00	\$8.01	\$6.01	301%
5	\$2.50	\$9.15	\$6.65	266%
6	\$3.00	\$10.29	\$7.29	243%
7	\$3.50	\$11.43	\$7.93	227%
8	\$4.00	\$12.57	\$8.57	214%
9	\$4.50	\$13.71	\$9.21	205%
10	\$5.00	\$14.85	\$9.85	197%
11	\$5.50	\$15.99	\$10.49	191%
12	\$6.00	\$17.13	\$11.13	186%
13	\$6.50	\$18.27	\$11.77	181%
14	\$7.00	\$19.41	\$12.41	177%
15	\$7.50	\$20.55	\$13.05	174%
16	\$8.00	\$21.69	\$13.69	171%
17	\$8.50	\$22.83	\$14.33	169%
18	\$9.00	\$23.97	\$14.97	166%
19	\$9.50	\$25.11	\$15.61	164%
20	\$10.00	\$26.25	\$16.25	163%

Focus Group Recommendation

The Focus Group recognizes the inequity and confusion of a zone-based fare system and determined a mileage-based system would significantly reduce confusion and be a more equitable system. Most people understand this system based on their experiences using a taxi.

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with the Focus Group recommendation.

F. Reservation Process

Under the current reservation process customers must call between 9:00am – 3:00pm, up to three (3) business days in advance. If the ride is able to be accommodated, the ride confirmation will be made at the time of the initial call. If no ride is available, the reservation request will be placed in “will call”.

Focus Group Recommendation

The group recommends no changes to this process.

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with the group recommendation

G. No-Show and Cancellation Policy

Current Policy

Customers must call at least 24 hours before the scheduled pickup time to cancel their ride. Non-cancelled rides are declared a no-show. Any pickup no-show will result in the automatic cancellation of the return ride unless dispatch is contacted. Customers accumulating three (3) no-shows in a 30-day period will be suspended from using Dial-A-Ride for 14 days. Customers accumulating six (6) no-shows in a 90-day period will be suspended for 30 days. Eight Cancellations in a 30 day period results in a 14 day suspension. Customers will be notified via US mail each time a no-show is declared and a written notice of the proposed suspension period will be provided to the customer.

Focus Group Recommendation

The group recommends no changes to this policy.

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with the group recommendation

H. Ride Pickup Window

Current Policy

The DAR van will not depart for pickup any sooner than three (3) minutes after the scheduled ride time. For example, if a customer has a confirmed ride pick up at 10:00am, the van will wait until 10:03am before departing. If the van arrives earlier, it will wait until 10:03am unless the customer is ready to go early. Failing to meet the van by 10:03am will result in a no-show. The van is not technically “late” unless it does not arrive by 10:15am.

El Dorado Transit staff conveyed to the group that this policy was too restrictive and inhibits flexibility in scheduling trips each day. In a comparison of other DAR systems throughout the country, most systems use a 30 minute pickup window for the customer. For example, if a customer makes a reservation request for 10:00am, the scheduler will give the customer a ride window of 9:45am – 10:15am. This means the customer must begin looking for the van at 9:45am and the van is not technically late until 10:15am. Whenever the van arrives in that window of time, it will wait three (3) minutes before departing.

El Dorado Transit staff believes expanding the pickup window will allow the ability to schedule more shared rides and ultimately offer more opportunity to schedule rides especially during the peak reservation times of 10:00am – 2:00pm.

Focus Group Recommendation

The group concurs with El Dorado Transit recommendation to expand the pickup to a 30 minute window (15 minutes prior and 15 minutes after the scheduled time).

Staff Recommendation

Staff concurs with the group recommendation