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Title: New potential for paratransit? The benefits and limitations of using e-hailing services to provide ADA Paratransit rides

Abstract: Recent technological advances have enabled a range of new mobility services, including e-hailing through companies like Uber and Lyft, which are providing an increasing share of urban transportation trips in the United States (TRB "Between Public and Private", 2015). There are concerns about the accessibility of e-hailing, as the companies have options for people with disabilities, but wheelchair accessibility remains a major limitation. Transportation systems worldwide often lack options for disabled people, creating substantial barriers to access to opportunity and quality of life. In the US, ADA-mandated paratransit programs are unfortunately notorious for poor service and high costs (Kaufman et al, 2016). Several local agencies have been conducting pilot programs with on-demand e-hailing services to improve paratransit service quality. Two of the most prominent of these are Boston's MBTA, which has continuously extended their pilot program since 2015, and New York City's MTA, which began its program in 2018. These programs represent significant service improvements, allowing customers to request rides on demand (as opposed to 24 hours in advance), and offering increased reliability (as opposed to a wide time frame to wait for a ride). While several key benefits have been identified, including flexibility and efficiency of service for riders, and cost reductions for local transit agencies, these programs raise both old and new questions. What are the benefits and limitations, in economic and operational terms, of providing paratransit service through e-hailing programs? Additional questions include: What is the extent of differential service levels for people with different mobility limitations? What implications and lessons can be drawn from the pilots when thinking about the future of accessible transportation, and how might these apply in different contexts? This presentation addresses these questions, based on a review of each program and interviews with stakeholders and riders. In addition to disabled people, the elderly population is growing, and other groups, such as children, are also potential users of paratransit services. By examining implementation issues in using e-hailing services for paratransit rides, this research will also provide insight into barriers that may emerge in using further technologies, such as driverless vehicles, for paratransit rides for selected populations.