

TriMet Accessible Transportation Program (ATP) LIFT Eligibility Process Improvements FINAL PLAN

Background

In April 2009, TriMet announced plans for improvements to the eligibility determination process beginning in February 2010. A public workshop was held on April 28, 2009 to which approximately 375 individuals, agencies and service organizations were invited to attend. National experts presented information on the ADA criteria, eligibility determinations and national trends in revising processes to ensure a more accurate eligibility determination.

Workshop attendees and the general public were given an opportunity to provide public comment on the process improvements through June 10, 2009. In addition to the comments at the Workshop, ten public comments were received through the public comment period. These comments primarily addressed how to meet the needs of LIFT applicants for immediate medical treatment (chemotherapy, radiation, dialysis, etc.).

TriMet staff reviewed and considered all comments from the discussion at the April 28th Workshop and the comments received through the first general public comment period. The original plan was revised to address public comment where appropriate and a second revised plan was distributed on August 17, 2009. Public comment was taken through September 17, 2009; five additional comments were received. These comments were considered in the preparation of the Final Plan as presented in this document.

Goals of eligibility process improvements

The goals of the LIFT eligibility process improvements are to:

- educate the applicant and the community on the appropriate use of the LIFT service,
- ensure that LIFT eligibility determinations are accurate and consistent with the ADA,
- enable TriMet staff to work with each applicant to identify the most appropriate mode of travel based on his or her functional abilities; and
- increase the applicant's knowledge of the resources available to promote independent travel on fixed route when appropriate.

Eligibility determination for new applicants beginning in 2010

Most individuals who apply for the LIFT service will be required to complete an in-person interview at the TriMet Transit Mobility Center. Applicants might also be asked to complete a functional ability assessment to help determine if an applicant can independently access TriMet's fixed route transit and, if so, under what conditions. Any exceptions to the requirement for an in-person interview will be limited and made on a case-by-case basis.

If required, the functional ability assessment will be completed through a simulated and/or actual transit trip. The assessment might include, but not be limited to, an evaluation of the applicant's ability to:

- get to and from transit stops/stations
- wait at a stop or station
- board and disembark the bus/train
- understand and remember how to use the transit system
- independently navigate the system

Applicants with a cognitive disability may be asked to complete the Functional Assessment for Cognitive Transit Skills (FACTS), which evaluates whether the applicant has the mobility skills to use fixed route transit independently or under some conditions.

TriMet LIFT Eligibility Coordinators will conduct the personal interviews and make the final eligibility determinations. Independent mobility professionals who are not affiliated with TriMet will complete functional assessments at the Transit Mobility Center. Upon request, TriMet will provide complimentary transportation to and from the evaluation.

Steps for determining LIFT eligibility beginning in 2010

1. Applicant will complete and submit an application including the required Medical Release Form to TriMet. The Medical Release form asks for the applicant's permission to contact the applicant's designated health professional to confirm diagnosis. **This is not a request for medical records and completion of this form will not require a medical appointment.**

Upon receipt of the application, TriMet will send a Professional Verification form to the health professional asking them to document the diagnosis and to provide any additional information about the applicant's functional abilities.

2. The LIFT Eligibility Coordinator will review the application and the applicant will be contacted to schedule an in-person interview as needed.
3. The LIFT Eligibility Coordinator will conduct the interview and determine if there is a need for further assessment. The interview will provide an opportunity for the applicant to discuss his or her conditions, functional abilities, and any concerns about further assessment.
4. If the applicant uses a mobility device, LIFT staff will complete a mobility device evaluation to document the measurements of the device and the combined weight of the device when occupied.
5. If required, a functional ability assessment will be completed by a mobility professional immediately following the interview. The evaluator will review the application and confirm any additional information with the applicant, and conduct a simulated transit trip at the Mobility Center. The evaluator may also take the applicant out on a short trip on a bus or MAX vehicle.
6. If appropriate, the applicant will receive additional information on the RideWise program and other transportation services available based on the applicant's functional abilities.
7. Each applicant will receive written notification of his or her eligibility determination within 21 days of completing the eligibility process.

Temporary Eligibility

Temporary eligibility will be granted immediately for 21 days for applicants who:

1. Have a disabling condition requiring immediate treatment (i.e., chemotherapy, radiation, dialysis, and other life-sustaining outpatient treatment) based on professional verification of the required treatment, or
2. Have a disabling condition (recovering from surgery, lower extremity fractures or recent stroke) based on professional verification with the health professional.

Temporary eligibility beyond 21 days would be based upon completion of the application process and professional verification on the length of treatment and/or recovery not to exceed one year. An in-person interview may or may not be required to complete the process. Any exceptions to the need for an interview would be considered on a case-by-case basis. Any requirements for temporary eligibility beyond one year would be subject to review at the end of the eligibility period.

All other applications for temporary eligibility will be determined on a case-by-case basis using an in-person interview and functional assessment as needed.

Assessment of Visual Abilities

Applicants with visual impairments will be asked to complete an in-person interview. A functional assessment may not be required dependent upon the level of the vision loss.

Appeals process

If an applicant is determined ineligible or does not agree with the conditions identified, he or she may request an appeal within 65 days of the initial determination.

Recertification of existing LIFT riders beginning 2010

Under the ADA, transit providers are allowed to require that users of paratransit services be periodically recertified. While a person's disability may be permanent, other factors which impact the determination of eligibility may change over time.

TriMet will establish a recertification period of every three years. Existing active LIFT riders will be recertified over an initial three-year period beginning 2010. Existing riders will be asked to complete a new application and most riders will be asked to complete an in-person interview. Functional assessments will be conducted as needed.

The recertification process will enable TriMet to:

1. Review any changes in functional abilities and/or health conditions. As an example, some riders may initially have been determined to be conditionally eligible and are now unconditionally eligible.
2. Update mobility device information. The LIFT program needs to maintain current information about each rider's mobility device to allow the appropriate space on the vehicles when scheduling rides.
3. Update emergency contact information. It is helpful for LIFT staff to have current emergency contact information on file for each rider.
4. Provide additional information on other services available, based on the rider's functional abilities. The TriMet fixed route system has become more accessible in recent years and some LIFT riders may now be able to use the bus or MAX for at least some of their trips.
5. Current LIFT riders will be notified by mail of the requirement to recertify and will be asked to contact the TriMet LIFT program for application materials. TriMet LIFT will provide transportation to and from the recertification appointment at no charge.

Transit education is an important component

RideWise, a program of Ride Connection in partnership with TriMet, offers free personal assistance in finding transportation options and in learning to ride regular buses and MAX trains. RideWise can also provide information about other transportation services that may be available in the community.

Another valuable component of the new eligibility process will be that the RideWise Program staff will partner onsite with TriMet staff and provide:

- transit orientation to familiarize applicants with the entire transit system
- personal or group travel training to provide instruction on using transit
- introduction to other transportation services including Rider's Clubs, community shuttles and transportation services, and other transit systems within the region

Timeline for eligibility process improvements

January–March 2009	Review improvements and plan for public participation with CAT
By April 10, 2009	Distribute workshop materials
April 10–June 10, 2009	Public review and comment
By August 17, 2009	Distribute final draft
August 17–September 17, 2009	Final public comment period
October 16, 2009	Distribute final plan

Implementation of new process

February 1, 2010	Begin process improvements for new applicants
March 1, 2010	Begin recertification process for existing riders

The estimated start dates for the new process are dependent upon completion of the Transit Mobility Center and staffing. It is expected that process improvements will begin in early 2010. All current LIFT clients will be notified of the recertification process by mail at least sixty days in advance of the start-up of the process. It is estimated that it will take approximately three years to recertify all current LIFT clients.

Though the formal public comment period has ended, you may still ask questions and/or comment on the process improvements by contacting LIFT Customer Service at 503-962-8000.



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