2025 STAR Audit

Overview of STAR Updates and Challenges

September 9, 2025

STAR Audit Overview

Audit Report Overview

- **Audit Objective**
  - Assess Transit Bureau effectiveness in managing the STAR program efficiently
  - Overseeing the operational performance of service providers
- **Audit Scope**
  - November 2024 through February 2025 operational data and invoices
- **Test Areas**
  - Accuracy and completeness of billing and operational data
  - Adherence to customer service standards and ease of program use
  - Adequacy of systems applications to support program execution
  - Transit Bureau oversight of WeDriveU and Transdev
  - Operational effectiveness over safety and driver training

Audit Report Overview

- **Conclusion**
  - Program succeeds with delivering STAR transportation services
  - Deficiencies identified in operations, oversight and data quality
  - Data provided by WeDriveU needed improvement
  - Office of County Auditor supports that some requirements and recommendations will require contract modifications
- **Management Responses**
  - *Implementing some recommendations will require contract modifications, which may impact cost and timelines*
  - Corrective actions are actively underway, and several have been implemented

Audit follow-up tentatively scheduled for Q1 of FY 2027

Audit Report Findings

Overview of major findings:

1. *Performance metrics did not cover accurate oversight of the STAR program*

2. *Bill amounts for paratransit services were not consistent with contract terms*

3. *Daily trip manifests were not properly checked after shifts*

4. *Operational inefficiencies due to underutilized and misconfigured scheduling tools*

Challenges

Challenges

Service Coverage:

- STAR goes well beyond ADA and other Federal requirements as it covers the same geographical area as MetroAccess.

- STAR is the only jurisdictional paratransit service in the region that provides this level of service coverage.

- Future considerations may include reducing STAR service area to shift resources to program oversight activities that have been identified in this audit while simultaneously improving the quality of service by reducing logistical challenges associated with STAR's geographically large service area.

Challenges

Staffing:

- To effectively implement the measures agreed to as result of the OCA audit, a significant increase in staff would be required, or the STAR service area must be reduced. For example, MetroAccess employes 39 FTEs for an area of 1500 square miles, in comparison to the Transit Bureau staff of 1.25 FTEs covering the same 1500 square miles area.

Transit Bureau's Response to Audit Findings

Items Completed & What's to Come

Finding 1: Performance metrics did not cover accurate oversight of the STAR program

- **Audit Finding:**
  - Existing metrics fail to demonstrate that STAR is meeting its program goals of providing a safe, equitable, accessible, reliable, and convenient transportation system

- **Recommendation:**
  - The Transit Bureau should strengthen performance metrics to improve goal monitoring.
  - Establish a formula for calculating preventable crashes.
  - Develop and implement a formal process to monitor aggregate monthly no-show data.
  - Work with WeDriveU and Transdev to develop a checklist to ensure STAR vehicles and customer assistance practices comply with ADA standards.
  - Use available data to monitor program performance on a daily or at least weekly basis and establish key measures and tolerance levels for key indicators to help identify when performance is slipping below program standards.

Finding 1: Performance metrics did not cover accurate oversight of the STAR program

- **Status: In development**
- Actions taken so far:
  - Strengthening language around safety (preventable crashes)
  - Unified trip management system (Spare)
  - Updating rider website
- Actions in development:
  - ADA compliance checklist is currently in draft stage and being moved forward for review
  - Greater oversight over no-show data is being developed
  - To strengthen oversight over STAR, contract modifications are being developed to more rigidly define liquated damage thresholds and introduce greater oversight over aspects of contract performance (e.g. distracted driving).
- *"The Transit Bureau has taken key actions to strengthen STAR program controls and address audit findings, including defining preventable crashes, launching a unified trip management system (Spare), updating the rider website, and drafting an ADA compliance checklist for vehicle inspections and customer assistance practices."*

Finding 2: Bill amounts for paratransit services were not consistent with contract terms

- **Audit finding:**
  - Charges for paratransit services do not consistently reflect contractually agreed-upon rates.
  - WeDriveU used a Billed Revenue hour calculation methodology that is not stated in the contract. A three-month analysis noted the following overbilled amounts:

    September 2024, $3,967
    October 2024, $6,652
    November 2024, $3,050

  - WeDriveU billed the Transit Bureau for an additional 487 trips in the month of December. Amount overbilled was $32,127, and did not adjust for Deadhead Hours.
- **Recommendation:**
  - The Transit Bureau should examine WeDriveU invoices for the past five years to determine the total amount overbilled due to rounding practices and seek full reimbursement for those charges. The Transit Bureau should also request the number of Deadhead Hours from WeDriveU. Also review December invoice for accuracy and seek reimbursement.

Finding 2: Bill amounts for paratransit services were not consistent with contract terms

- **Status: In development**
- Transit Bureau examined WeDriveU invoices for the past five years and determined the total amount overbilled due to rounding practices and sent a letter to WeDriveU requesting reimbursement on May 29, 2025. Discussions are currently taking place to correctly remedy the issue.
- The December 2024 invoice was also reviewed for proper trip validation and strengthening future billing procedures. The amount overbilled in December 2024 was corrected prior to payment.

Finding 3: Daily trip manifests were not properly checked after shifts

- **Audit Finding:**
  - Trip manifests are not properly reviewed or verified by WeDriveU at the end of service shifts. A review of 25 sampled routes per month in November and December found discrepancies between cash reported, coupons collected, and passenger counts versus the amounts reported on the monthly STAR Service Hours Report when compared to route manifest.
  - Management should strengthen internal controls over the fare collection and reporting processes to address the high rate of discrepancies noted between STAR coupons, cash collected, and amounts reported in the monthly STAR Service Hours Report.

Finding 3: Daily trip manifests were not properly checked after shifts

- **Status: Complete**
- The Transit Bureau recognizes the importance of robust controls in the fare collection process to ensure accountability, minimize revenue loss, and support accurate financial reporting.
- Greater oversight controls for daily trip manifests have been implemented
- With Spare, daily trip manifests are automated and have gone paperless, removing any possibility of tampering or fraud
- Monthly spot inspections (secret shopper inspections)
- Monthly revenue analysis to ensure revenue matches daily manifest reports
- Reconciliation procedures have been refreshed and re-trained with staff to ensure data completeness on manifests and has been largely automated with Spare

Finding 4: Operational inefficiencies due to underutilized and misconfigured scheduling tools

- **Audit Finding:**
  - Poor configuration and underutilization of scheduling tools by WeDriveU and Transdev result in avoidable inefficiencies and wasted resources.
  - A module within Trapeze called Trip Broker is not used to manage last minute trip change requests.
  - The STAR on the Web portal allows customers to schedule trips that do not conform to program requirements.
- **Recommendation:**
  - Provide comprehensive training for Call Center and transportation provider on the current version of Trip Broker
  - Assess the feasibility of requiring the Call Center and all contracted transportation service providers to use the same technology platform.
  - Reconfigure the booking engine to enforce program requirements.
  - Implement clear and accurate error messages to guide users in scheduling trips.

Finding 4: Operational inefficiencies due to underutilized and misconfigured scheduling tools

- **Status: Complete**
- New technology has been implemented, called Spare, which replaced aging TripBroker, STARontheWeb and Trapeze technology.
- Spare has revolutionized operations and oversight with STAR, including:
  - Unifying operational data under a single source
  - Allowing for easier on-the-fly trip changes and requests
  - Allowing customers to book trips via a mobile application
  - Granting greater oversight for Arlington County by allowing for live operations viewing and easier data collection
- With Spare, issues identified in old systems have been corrected.

THANK YOU