Dear Fellow NFBNJ Members:

Access Link, a form of transportation many of us rely on, is planning new ways for riders to book, cancel and pay for rides using technology to do so. Much of the information was shared at the Access Link public forums held last month and is summarized here as well. Details of these innovations are included below and in the attached MS Word file. Also included are some statistics on the incredible volume of riders and trips made through Access Link as well as a glossary of commonly-used terms and protocol to use when arranging transportation through Access Link. If you have any questions or comments regarding Access Link please contact the Customer Service Department at 800-955-2321 Option 5 or by emailing them at adaservices@njtransit.com.

​​All the best,
​​Linda Melendez
Chair, NFBNJ Transit Committee
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Highlights OF MAY 2018 ACCESS Link Customer FORUM
Hasbrouck Heights, NJ

* During the 2017 calendar year Access Link certified an additional 3,7 93 individuals for a total of 48,341 customers
* They received 2,432,457 calls and 58,347 email reservations and transported 1,606,736 individuals in 1,454,327 trips.
* This year, Access Link plans to retire some older vehicles and will purchase 483 vehicles including cars, mini buses, and standard buses.
* Currently, Access Link offers the traditional call in , e-mail or web-based options for making, cancelling or checking on status of a ride reservation as well as customer service
* All current features will remain the same when the new features are enacted later this year.

NEW FEATURES FOR AccessLink riders:

1. Shorter Window: Beginning June 30, 2018 the window time will be reduced to 30 minutes.
2. Electronic Fare Payment: Beginning September 2018 customers can use their credit or debit card to pay Access Link fares. Customers can transfer money into a personal Access Link account, like an EZ Pass account. When making a reservation, tell the agent which method of payment you will be using. Fares still can be paid with exact change in cash when boarding your vehicle. When using electronic funds transfer, no money will be deducted until you have boarded your vehicle and are confirmed by the driver. The price of any cancelled ride will be credited to your account. When your balance is low you can transfer additional funds into the account.
3. Manage trips using technology: With an anticipated start date sometime in October 2018, riders will be able to confirm and cancel trips over the phone without speaking to an agent. Customers also will be able to login online and make a reservation as though they were speaking with an agent. If the time is not acceptable the time can be declined, and you will be able to search for another window time. Once you find an acceptable window time you can book your trip. For this feature to work customers must update their frequently used pick up location and their five most popular destination locations. Common locations such as Joseph Kohn Training Center, malls etc. will also work with online reservations. If your location can not be found, you will need to call Access Link to book your reservation. Riders should login non-common locations in their Access Link on-line profile as frequently used locations.
4. Texting ride information:
5. Mobile users, including those who are Deaf-Blind, will be able to receive ride details including window time and the driver’s estimated time of arrival by sending a text message to Access Link. This text only number will be established prior to implementation.
6. Customers can choose to receive a text, e-mail message or a phone call when their vehicle is nearby. Access Link will determine the definition of nearby, could be 5, 10 or 15 minutes away. This decision will be made closer to the October target date. . Access Link is recommending clients choose the text message method because a phone call or email will take an agent off the phone. Remember the goal is to not tie up the phone lines or take an agent off the phone.

The NFBNJ Transit Committee would like to share some suggestions regarding Access Link:

When making reservations and choosing a window time it is important to understand Access Link is a Federal Para Transit system that mirrors fixed bus routes and time schedules; if there is no bus route there is no Access Link.

We should manage our expectations by understanding we can be picked up at the end of the window and will have other pickups and drop-offs along the way because this is a shared ride service

Be mindful of the weather, traffic and things beyond the driver’s control

Be ready when the window begins and give yourself ample time to reach your destinations when making your reservation

Also cancel reservations so other passengers will not be inconvenienced by no shows

Above all remind yourself that it is NOT the drivers fault when things go wrong

ADDITIONAL ACCESS LINK INFORMATION:

1. The telephone number for Access Link is 800-955-2321
2. The email address for Access Link is adaservices@njtransit.com
3. Booking your trips 7 days in advance could help in getting your desired window time.
4. Have all the required information needed before making your reservation, such as window times, name of location, exact address, cross street and if you will be bringing a PCA.
5. Have the agent taking your reservation put the name of your location in the Additional Comments Section to make finding you easier for the driver. Some locations may not have their address visible.
6. Never expect to be picked up at the beginning of your window.
Remember this is a shared ride service so please allow enough time for additional pick-ups and drop offs along the way in order to reach your destination on time.
Allow for transfers, weather or traffic conditions when calculating how much time is needed to reach your destination.
7. Always be ready when your window begins. Being late can cause a backup for the following pickups and drop-offs.
8. Always cancel your reservation if you are not using the service; it is not fare to the driver and any passengers who may be on the vehicle who are inconvenienced by a no show. Typically no shows cause others to wait a minimum of 15 minutes for them in addition to the time it took to drive there.
9. It is recommended to use the feeder option with multiple transfers. Access Link will drop you off at the closest NJT Rail Station from your pickup location and pick you up again at the closest NJT Rail Station to your destination. Access Link will pick you up from this Rail Station and transport you the short distance to your final destination. Access Link will not charge for the Rail Station drop off and pick up because a train fare will be paid. Both the pickup and drop off locations must be Access Link Accessible.
10. Group Trips: Please contact customer service when multiple clients will be making a reservation to be picked up and dropped off at the same location. For example; If a group of you plan to attend an event after your chapter meeting call customer service with all the Client ID numbers so they will dispatch as few vehicles as possible.
11. This fall, Access Link online will be redesigned. At the spring forums, members of the NFB NJ who use screen reading software volunteered to assist in making the modern design an accessible one.
12. Access Link has maxed out its office working space. Therefore, they will be using technology to improve service. This can be a success only and help their overburdened phone system if we use the new features as often as possible.

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ACCESS LINK GLOSSARY

Here are definitions for some of the common terms that are used with Access Link Online.

1. Access Link Online is a self serve application that allows you to use the Internet to confirm and cancel rides and to access other valuable customer and general information 24/7.
2. Date: The date for which the ride has been requested.
3. Drop-off Location: The address at which you will disembark the Access Link vehicle.
4. Estimated Pick-up Time: The current estimated time that the vehicle will arrive. The estimated time is always subject to change and may differ from the scheduled time and may vary based on current traffic, road and weather conditions.

Password: The private code that you must enter at the login page to gain access to the online system. This is the same password that you use with ALICE.

1. Pick-up Location: The address from which you will be picked up by the Access Link vehicle.
2. Preferred Space: The space requirement for you within a vehicle (i.e. requires space for a wheel chair)
3. Requested Pick-up Time: The time at which you are requesting to be picked up.
4. Ride Status: The status for the ride can be one of the following:
5. Requested Not Scheduled: Your ride request has been entered into the system however a vehicle has not yet been scheduled.
6. Scheduled: Your ride request has been scheduled to a vehicle.
7. Arrived: Your ride has arrived at your location.
8. Completed: Your ride has been completed and you have been dropped off.
9. No-Show: The vehicle arrived for you and you did not come out to the vehicle in the allotted 5 minutes that the driver will wait.
10. Cancelled in Advance: You cancelled your ride at least 90 minutes prior to your pick-up time.
11. Cancelled Late: You cancelled your ride between 50 and 90 minutes prior to your pick-up time.
12. Cancelled: The ride was cancelled more than 90 minutes prior to the schedule window time on the day of service.
13. Schedule Window: The range of time determined in which Access Link will arrive to pick you up. You must come out within 5 minutes of the vehicle's arrival.
14. Subscription Ride: A subscription ride is a recurring reservation from the same origin and destination on multiple days of the week at the same requested time. Example: I want to travel from my home to work every weekday between 7:40 AM - 8:20

Regards,
National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey Transit Committee