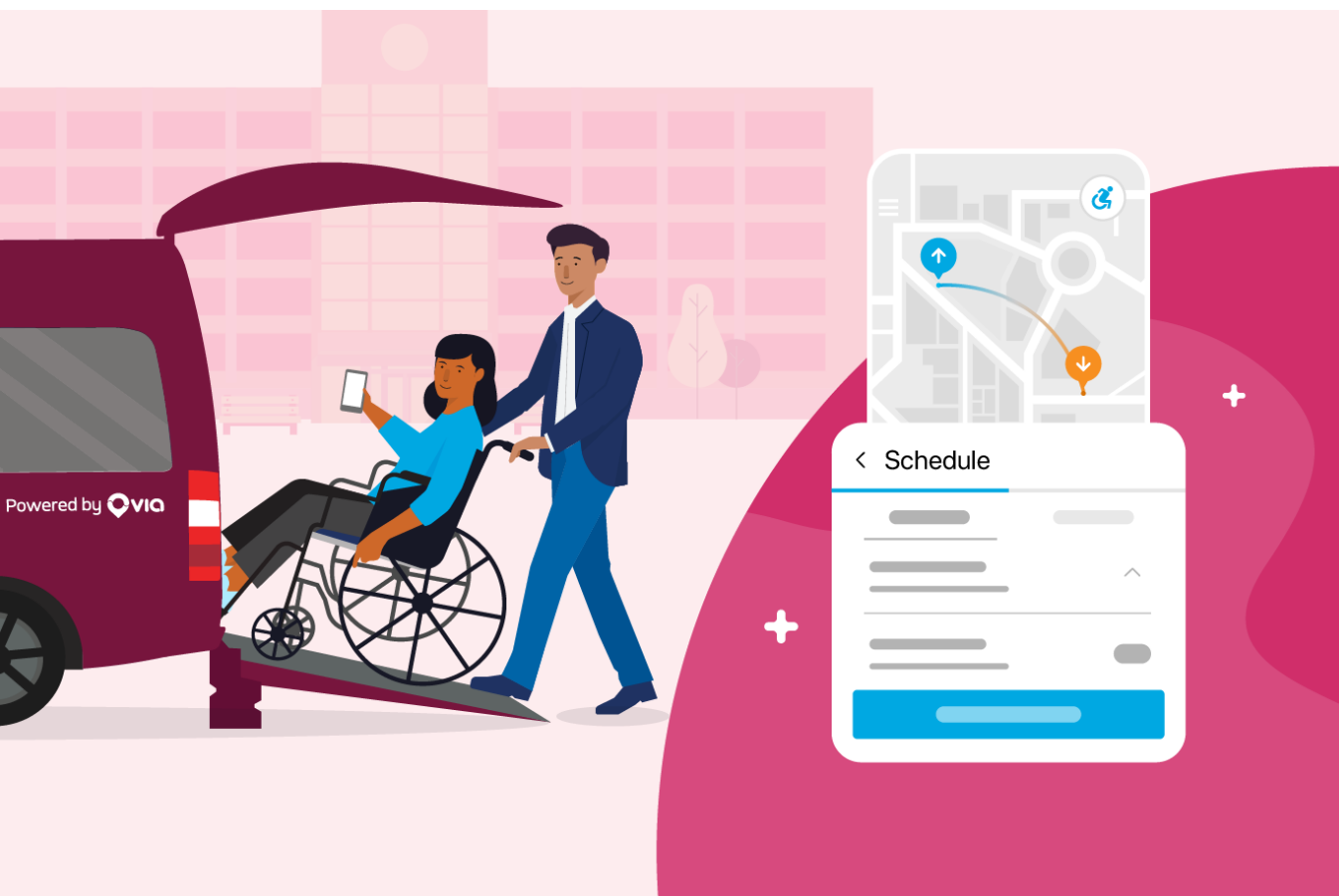




Paratransit Playbook:

Choosing the right software for your ADA paratransit service.





A search for paratransit software is no easy task. TransitTech is never one-size-fits-all and that rings especially true when providing service to people with disabilities. But with the current paratransit software market, you're expected to distinguish between platforms that all promise to accomplish the same goals – cutting costs, increasing efficiency, and improving rider experience. How can you know which is the right fit?

The answer lies in asking yourself and your team a few questions at the start of your journey to make your job easier in the long run. **With the guide below, you'll be able to take what you know – i.e. the specific requirements and goals you have for your service – and flip it into what you should be asking of your software provider.**



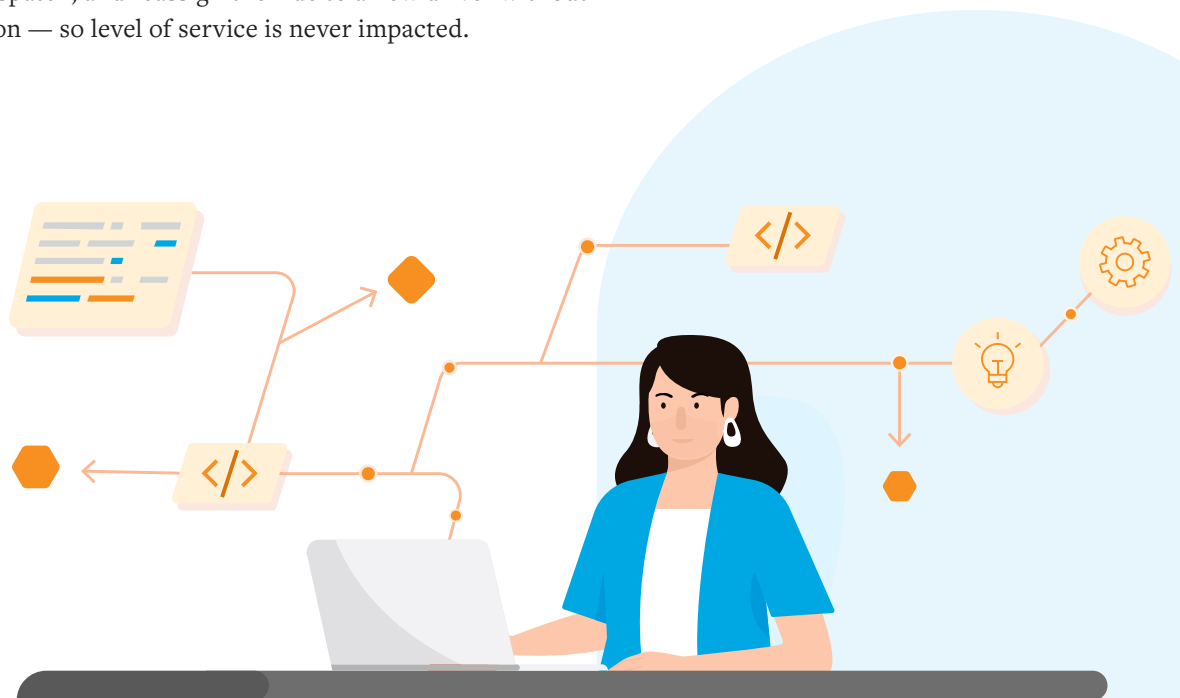
1. How will you manage costs while providing the right level of service?

Paratransit providers face a range of regulatory requirements in the United States, including [those mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) and varying local guidelines. Before starting a software search, it's important to determine the relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) that will ensure your service stays compliant.

Depending on your specific (and potentially evolving) needs, you might require a software that is able to **customize the parameters of its routing and dispatching algorithm** to achieve cost, quality of service and compliance goals. Of course, in order to tailor algorithms appropriately, it's helpful if your software provider has **in-house paratransit operations experts** who can provide continuous guidance and support — especially when it comes to making adjustments if certain goals are not being met.

In order to guarantee ease of compliance, many paratransit providers also look for a full suite of administrative, driver, and rider products. Qualities to look for in these products include:

- 1. Demonstrated track record in improving utilization.** It is important to choose a technology that allows you to publish the optimal shift schedule and optimize the runs the day before, but also automatically make adjustments during execution to balance fleet productivity and quality of service.
- 2. Driver app** that displays all routing and pickup/dropoff information with real-time traffic updates and even an offline manifest — so in areas of low cell connectivity, service quality is not sacrificed.
- 3. Rider app** with booking information, real-time vehicle tracking, and an intuitive interface so riders and/or caregivers can easily book and manage trips and see where their vehicle is in real time.
- 4. Administrative dashboard** for dispatchers to monitor service operations and plan for the days ahead.
- 5. Automation** to immediately detect if a ride is running late, promptly notify dispatch, and reassign the ride to a new driver without manual intervention — so level of service is never impacted.





2. How will you best cater to different customer needs?

As you probably know better than anyone, paratransit riders are not a monolith. To that end, in order to run a successful paratransit service, you'll need to support varying customer needs.

In the vast majority of cases, paratransit providers take bookings by phone — staffing a call center in order to do so. Strong paratransit software usually comes with a smartphone application, enabling a new option for riders and/or their caregivers to book trips. But while a call center is an essential resource for paratransit riders and an app can bring ease to the process for some, you may want to consider providers that engage with **a broader spectrum of communication channels** to serve a more diverse ridership.

Examples of these other modes include automated calls, interactive voice response (IVR), SMS, and app-based push notifications — all of which a software provider should be able to support, in addition to a standard smartphone app and live dispatchers. These communication channels should be utilized for both booking and trip reminders, so riders don't need to worry about forgetting when their pickup is.



Automated calls



Interactive voice response (IVR)



SMS



App-based push notifications

Paratransit riders also commonly need to book recurring rides (e.g. for regular doctor's appointments) as opposed to just one-off trips. Some may need transportation in wheelchair accessible vehicles, while others may not, and paratransit riders may have personal care attendants (PCAs) accompanying them on all trips.

In order to accommodate these variations in rider preferences and needs, you'll want to look for a software that supports detailed **rider profiles**. These profiles can indicate favorite locations, if a rider always has a +1, and recurring ride schedules. In addition, modern paratransit services need to accommodate **a range of payment preferences** that do not only rely on riders and PCAs having exact change for each trip. Your software provider should easily support multiple payment types, including card, cash, and vouchers.

After accomplishing all of the above, you'll want to verify that the software provider is meeting the needs and expectations of your riders. This is where **in-app service ratings and comments** come in handy — providing an efficient and data-based pulse check on quality of service and customer satisfaction, while helping to quickly identify any lingering pain points.



3. How will you measure success?

There are many ways to evaluate the success of a paratransit service — we've categorized the concerns we've seen most frequently among our paratransit partners, and the tech that helps to address each.

A) Service metrics.

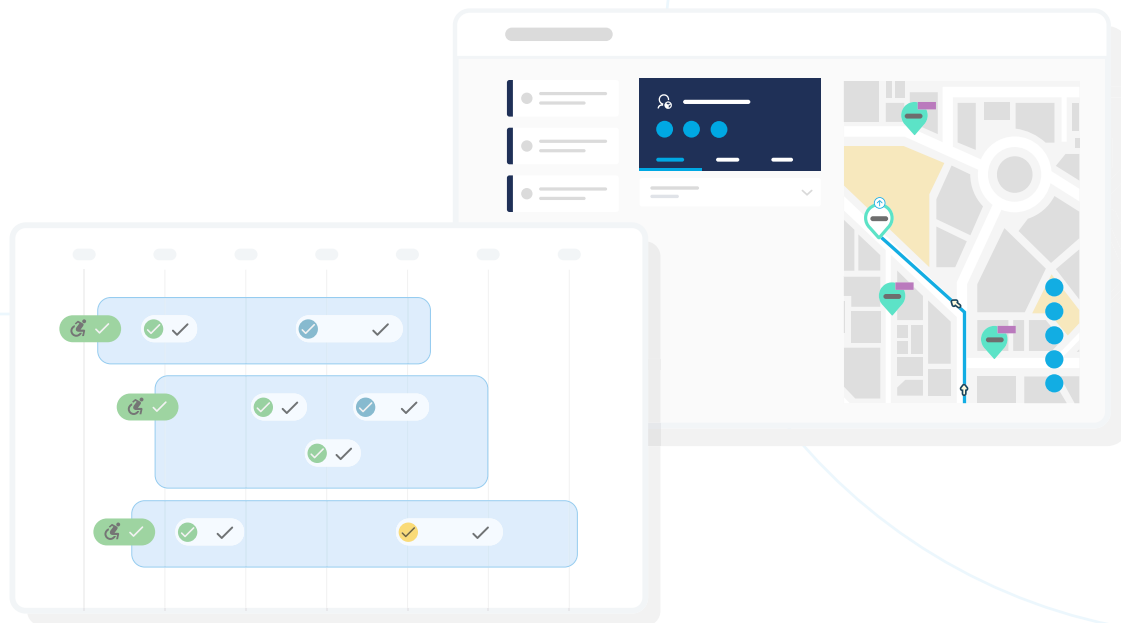
Think about all of the quantitative metrics you care about: Utilization, on-time performance, trip volume, call volume...the list (probably) goes on. Accurate and comprehensive data is key to staying on top of all of these KPIs and more — ensuring your service is ADA compliant and as efficient as possible. To keep tabs on the metrics that matter to you, look for **a platform that is always collecting data** and makes it simple for managers and key stakeholders to analyze performance with streamlined dashboards. A reporting suite should allow day-to-day, **hour-to-hour, and real time tracking of operational performance metrics.**

B) Rider satisfaction.

Not everything can be captured through data. Rider input and qualitative feedback can let you know exactly what's working and what isn't, allowing you to make thoughtful, informed improvements to your service over time. That's why you'll need a partner that has developed **expertise in [community engagement](#)** practices that yield strong service awareness and valuable rider insights. With this level of on-the-ground experience, your technology partner can help you work out the kind of feedback you want to receive and how you will aggregate and analyze it to determine the right next steps.

C) Cost savings.

If your search for a new software provider is motivated by a desire to cut costs through efficiency gains, you should be seeing these benefits in several places. Firstly, you'll want to make sure your software's **algorithm automatically optimizes the ride plan** as new trip requests come in, rearranging rides within quality of service constraints to improve efficiency wherever possible. Secondly, by encouraging riders with smartphones and/or their caregivers to **manage their bookings through the app**, you should see a markedly reduced workload for your call center. And thirdly, **automation** will free up time for your planning and dispatching staff and allow them to focus on value-add tasks.



Finally, a consolidation of multiple transit services into one platform through an [Integrated Mobility Solution \(IMS\)](#) can provide efficiencies to all stakeholders, including drivers, dispatchers, administrators, and riders — with or without **commingling**. Even if you don't plan on integrating services immediately, contracting with a provider who has this capability can make your job much easier in the long-term.

And that's it! You're now armed with all of the information you need to get the most out of your next conversation with a paratransit software provider.

Eager to learn more about Via's paratransit solution?
Shoot us an email at the address below — we'd love to hear from you.

platform@ridewithvia.com
ridewithvia.com/solutions