



Palm Tran Connection

Applicant Eligibility Manual

*An overview of the new Eligibility Process
for Palm Tran Connection (PTC)
Door-to-Door Service*





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Services Provided and Process Overview	2
Eligibility Department	2
Eligibility Category	3
Eligibility Criteria	3
Eligibility Standards	4
Eligibility Categories by Type	4
Eligibility Determination by Type:	4
Eligibility Determination	5
Conduct Standards	5
Assistance Level	5
Customer-first call	7
Applicant Responsibilities	8
Eligibility APPEALS PROCESS	9
Customer Responsibility:	9
FTA Office of Civil Rights Complaint	10
Recertification Process and Categories	11
Visitor Requirements	12
Program Definition	12

SERVICES PROVIDED AND PROCESS OVERVIEW

Palm Tran CONNECTION provides public transport in Palm Beach County by providing a door-to-door shared ride paratransit system. Riders who qualify can receive transportation via these programs:

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Program Definition

Transportation Disadvantaged (T.D.) Program Definition

Division of Senior Services (DOSS) Program Definition

1. Palm Tran Connection accepts applications by fax, mail, e-mail, or in person.
2. Received applications are date stamped and logged in into the Eligibility Dashboard in the order they received.
3. An Eligibility Customer Service Representative will review applications.
4. Each application will be filed in order of receipt and processed in such order.
5. To ensure that all applications are processed within 21 days, all received applications are recorded in the Eligibility Dashboard (the Eligibility Paratransit Operation Supervisor oversees the dashboard).
6. All processed applications will be assigned an account number that will be used as the Client ID. The client's account file will have a link with a copy of the submitted application and any other documentation about the applicant's eligibility.
7. Once the Eligibility Customer Service Representative processes an application, such application will then be reviewed by the Eligibility Paratransit Operation Supervisor to ensure accuracy and completeness on a case by case basis (application audits)

ELIGIBILITY DEPARTMENT

The Eligibility Department can be reached at 561-649-9838 Option 7 for questions regarding eligibility and the application process.

ELIGIBILITY CATEGORY

There are two categories of eligibility: permanent (chronic condition) and temporary (acute). Any person who has a physical, mental, or psychological disability or incapacity of fewer than six months' duration covered in the eligibility criteria is considered temporary. Their eligibility is limited to the course of meeting the requirements. All other persons meeting eligibility criteria have chronic conditions. Applications will remain on file as a medical record, not subject to public view. Applicants whose requests for certification are denied have the right to appeal the decision.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

PTC's eligibility criteria were developed under the guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Transportation Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which defines "ADA paratransit eligible" as:

1. Any person with a disability can use an accessible vehicle, but any desired trip cannot be made because the fixed-route service they need to use is not yet accessible. This category includes those who use wheelchairs, walkers, or braces and others whose disabilities prevent them from utilizing an inaccessible vehicle or facility.
2. Persons who, because of the nature of their disabilities, cannot navigate a transit system that is otherwise accessible. This category includes persons who, because of their disability, cannot independently board, ride or disembark from an accessible vehicle. This is based on the assumption that the individual will not and need not be able to operate a boarding system, such as a wheelchair lift, ramp, or securement device. The presence of a traveling companion does not affect this eligibility.
3. Persons with impairment-related conditions prevent them from getting to or from a boarding or disembarking location. This relates to an individual's particular functional disability. This eligibility requires a functional evaluation of its application to one specific system and a particular trip.

ELIGIBILITY STANDARDS

Paratransit eligibility is directly related to the functional ability of individuals with disabilities to use city bus services. Eligibility is not based on a diagnosis or type of disability. Individuals with the same diagnosis or disability can have very different functional abilities to use city bus services. Similarly, eligibility is not based on the type of mobility aids that individuals use. For example, using a wheelchair or being blind does not imply automatic eligibility. Many individuals who use wheelchairs can use city bus services for many or all of their trips. Paratransit eligibility is not based on age, income, or whether or not individuals can drive or have access to private automobile transportation.

ELIGIBILITY CATEGORIES BY TYPE

Category 1 – Inability to Navigate the System independently.

Category 2 – Lack of accessible Vehicles, Stations, or Bus Stops.

Category 3 – Inability to Reach a Boarding Point or Final Destination.

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION BY TYPE:

Unconditional: Unconditional eligibility means that an individual cannot use city bus services under any circumstances and is thus eligible to make all trips using complementary paratransit.

Conditional: Conditional eligibility applies to individuals who can use city bus services under some circumstances independently.

Temporary: Individuals who experience a temporary loss of functional ability that prevents them from using the city bus service may apply for temporary ADA paratransit eligibility. For example, an individual may need to undergo two months of treatment for a health condition, resulting in severe fatigue that prevents them from using fixed-route service. This individual would be ADA paratransit eligible for the duration of the treatment period.

Ineligible/Denial: Based on the information provided, the applicant can use city buses and is not prevented by a disability from using the regular city bus transit service.

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION

Generally, the following four tests are applied when determining an applicant's eligibility:

1. Does the individual's disability prevent him/her from getting to and from a bus stop at the point of origin or destination?
2. Can the individual board utilize and disembark the vehicle at the bus stop?
3. Can the individual recognize the destination and disembark the bus?
4. If the passenger's trip requires transfers, are the travel paths between routes accessible and navigable by the individual?

CONDUCT STANDARDS

Presuming certain conduct will occur based on specific disabilities is not appropriate. For example, it is incorrect to assume all riders with particular psychiatric disabilities will behave violently that constitutes a direct threat to others. Suppose during the ADA paratransit eligibility process; however, an agency obtains documentation indicating a pattern of violent behavior that likely will recur or documents an individual's pattern or practice of violent behavior on its services. In that case, this information might be used to deny service or require such an individual to travel with an attendant, following the process in Appendix D to § 37.3 of the ADA circular. FTA emphasizes that direct threat refers to an immediate threat to other individuals and not to the person with the disability.

ASSISTANCE LEVEL

It is assumed that transit personnel is prepared to provide a reasonable level of assistance to customers with and without disabilities as part of their routine job of serving the public and in the interest of customer service. In the ADA context, personnel is not required to provide "attendant services" and take on the role typically provided by a PCA.

Examples of Assisting Individuals with Disabilities

- **Fare Handling:** A passenger's request for the driver to handle the fare media when the passenger with a disability cannot pay the fare by the generally established means should be granted on fixed route or paratransit service (e.g., in a situation where a bus passenger cannot reach or insert a fare into the fare box). Transit personnel is not required to go into pockets or backpacks to extract the fare media.
- **Personal Care Attendant (PCA):** While PCAs may travel with a passenger with a disability, transportation agencies are not required to provide a personal care attendant or personal care attendant services to meet the needs of passengers with disabilities on paratransit or city bus trips.

For example, a passenger's request for a transportation entity's driver to remain with the passenger who, due to his or her disability, cannot be left alone without an attendant upon reaching his or her destination may be denied. It would be a fundamental alteration of the driver's function to provide PCA services of this kind.

- **Luggage and Packages:** A passenger's request for a fixed route or paratransit driver to assist with luggage or packages may be denied in those instances where it is not the standard policy or practice of the transportation agency with luggage or packages. Such assistance is a matter for the passenger or PCA. Providing this assistance would be a fundamental alteration of the driver's function.
- **Hand-Carrying:** Except in emergencies, a passenger's request for a driver to lift the passenger out of his or her mobility device will be denied because of the safety, dignity, and privacy issues implicated by hand-carrying a passenger. Hand-carrying, a passenger, is also a PCA-type service outside the scope of driver duties, hence a fundamental alteration.

CUSTOMER-FIRST CALL

First, call assessment questions:

- An eligibility representative will conduct a pre-assessment questioner.
- An overview of Palm Tran Connection paratransit services information will be provided to the applicant.
- If applicable, an application will then be sent to the applicant via U.S. Mail.
- Each application will have a unique applicant I.D.

Applicant Identification Number

- The Eligibility Department is the only department that can provide an applicant's I.D. number and applications.
- The applicant will then receive an application via U.S. Mail 2-3 days after the first call is made. (PTC cannot control mail delays)
- The applicant or representative is responsible for completing the application entirely.
- Incomplete applications will delay the Eligibility process and determination.
 - Applications are available in alternative formats upon request.
 - Application is available in English, Spanish, and Creole.

Customers may mail, fax, drop-off, or e-mail completed applications to:

- **Address:** Palm Tran Connection, Eligibility Department
50 S. Military Trail, Suite 101
West Palm Beach, Florida 33415
- **Fax:** 561-656-7156
- **E-mail:** connpalmeligibility@pbcgov.org

Applications will be processed in the order in which they are received.

APPLICANT RESPONSIBILITIES

The applicant will need to call the Eligibility department approximately seven (7) business days after mailing the application to confirm receipt and schedule the second assessment interview.

1. The phone interview will **ONLY** be completed at the prescheduled date and time.
2. The interview will last approximately 15-30 minutes.
3. After the interview, the eligibility representative will determine if a medical provider's medical verification form must be signed.
4. Eligibility determinations will be made available to the applicant via U.S. mail.

PROCESSING TIME is determined by

1. Submitting a complete application.
 2. The applicant goes through the interview process.
 3. Processing time can take up to 21 days (with a completed application):
 - a. The 21 days' count will commence after the 2nd phone interview.
- or
- b. After the Customer's medical representative completes a medical form verification submitted by PTC.
 - c. Medical Forms Verifications may be waved based on information acquired during the phone interview.

ELIGIBILITY APPEALS PROCESS

The purpose of these procedures is for Palm Tran to outline our current protocol for an individual to file an Appeal.

Scope: This process addresses and details the process undertaken by the PTC Operations Manager. The Operations Manager will review, hear, and make final determinations in Palm Tran Connection service eligibility related to each customer's ADA and immediate needs.

CUSTOMER RESPONSIBILITY:

Suppose a customer disagrees with the determination made in regards to their Palm Tran Connection Paratransit Application. In that case, they have sixty (60) days from the date of the denial to appeal the decision made by the eligibility staff. All appeals are to be submitted in writing with any additional documentation to support the appeal. Appeals are to be sent to:

Palm Tran Connection, Operations Manager
50 S. Military Trail - Suite 101
West Palm Beach, Florida 33415

All appeals received will be responded to in writing with fourteen (14) days of receipt.

If the appeal is received or made after the sixty (60) day time frame, there is no need to review the files. At this point, the case will be considered closed, and the appellant will be notified by U.S. mail. At that time, they will be informed that they may re-submit a full and completed application in the future if they still want to re-apply for the Palm Tran Connection services.



FTA OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT

Customers who wish to file a complaint regarding the PTC Operations Manager decision may do so by completing an FTA Office of Civil Rights Complaint form at www.fta.dot.gov and mailing it to:

Director, FTA Office of Civil Rights
1200 New Jersey Ave., S.E. -East Building – 5th Floor, TCR
Washington, DC 20590

Palm Tran Connection ELIGIBILITY APPEAL FORM

Please complete this form in its entirety if you seek to file an appeal based upon the decision made regarding your Palm Tran Connection eligibility. All forms and additional documentation must be received within sixty (60) days of the Palm Tran Connection service's denial date. You can submit all documents to:

Example Form

Palm Tran Connection
Appeal Form

Please complete this form if you would like to appeal our determination regarding your eligibility for the Palm Tran Connection paratransit service. Once completed, please return it to the address listed below. Completed forms must be postmarked within 60 days of the date of your service suspension determination letter.

Print Client First and Last Name: _____

Print Client Home Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone number with area code: (_____) - _____

Select one of the following:

I choose to submit additional information for the Appeal Panel to consider but **do not want to appeal in person.** (If you choose this option, please send all additional information you would like the Appeal Panel to consider along with this form.)

I choose to **appeal in person.** (If you choose this option, we will contact you to schedule a mutually agreeable day and time for the appeal hearing. You may bring additional information to the hearing and can attend with others who are able to provide information on your behalf.)

Applicant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Return completed form to:

Palm Tran Connection
Attn: Operations Manager, Appeal Process
50 S Military Trail, Suite 101
West Palm Beach, Florida 33415
Fax: (561) 514-8365

OR

E-mail: palm-ptcappeals@pbcgov.org

RECERTIFICATION PROCESS AND CATEGORIES

All paratransit service customers must be recertified for eligibility every three (3) years, regardless of age or medical condition. Certification and recertification requirements may change without advance notice.

Recertification (Recerts) Categories

Category A-Active

1. Extension of services will be completed by the Eligibility Department if:
 - a. A client who has an active subscription or has 24 or more trips in the last 90 days.
 - b. An eligibility letter advising the applicant of the renewal of the account will be mailed after processing.

Category B – Inactive

1. A client account that has expired but has not been used within the last 365 days.
2. A client who has an account that has been inactivated will be required to re-apply. Nonetheless, temporary eligibility may be granted for thirty (30) days. The client must submit and undergo the eligibility process and a new applicant;
3. The eligibility department will make this case-by-case determination basis.

Category C – Re-certs

1. Everyone who has not used the service 366 or more days of an active account will receive an application.
2. Application may undergo the complete eligibility process
3. Eligibility Determinations will be made without an interview.
4. If an interview is needed, the client will be contacted by the Eligibility Department on a case-by-case basis.

VISITOR REQUIREMENTS

Visitors to the region unable to use the fixed-route system may use paratransit eligibility credentials from other transit agencies. Suppose the visitor has been certified as ADA paratransit eligible by another public entity. In that case, PTC will honor the certification, and the visitor may use the paratransit service for up to 21 days. It is recommended that the visitor call PTC in advance to have their information added to PTC's database of persons eligible for the paratransit service. Suppose visitors have not been certified as ADA paratransit eligible by another public entity but claim they meet PTC's eligibility criteria. In that case, they are entitled to "presumptive eligibility" and shall be allowed to use the paratransit service for 21 days. Visitors who are not certified by another transit provider and who claim presumptive eligibility may be requested to provide specific documentation, such as residence and the nature of their disability.

The 21 days of service provided to visitors with disabilities are to be calculated as any combination of 21 days during any 365 days, beginning with the visitor's first use of service. For example, a person may visit two days a week. Eligibility would be extended in this case over 11 weeks, within which 21 days of paratransit service would be provided.

Visitors who require more than 21 days of service within 365 days must apply for local eligibility through the certification process. Visitors with disabilities shall be provided the same service level as other eligible passengers and are subject to the exact service policy requirements.

Standing or subscriptions will not be available under this category.

PROGRAM DEFINITION

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Applicants must have a mobility disability that explicitly prevents them from riding the city bus.

Service is provided within the ADA core Service Area and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of a Palm Tran bus route during the same hours and days as Palm Tran city bus service.

The ADA core service area boundary encompasses all the area east of the Florida Turnpike in Palm Beach County from the South County Line to Donald Ross Road; and within corridors that extend three-quarters of a mile on either side of the fixed-route bus service and will be adjusted as these routes are adjusted. This area may expand and contract during the same days and hours as the city bus service (hours/days/service area).

The fare is \$3.50 per one-way trip.

Transportation Disadvantaged (T.D.)

To become eligible for T.D. Service, an individual must either meet the economically disadvantaged requirements of the T.D. program OR have a disability that prevents them from riding the fixed route bus as defined by the ADA Program. The applicant must submit either proof of income or a physician-approved medical verification form with their completed application. The application will be evaluated based on the information supplied, and their eligibility to use the T.D. program will be determined. Certification will remain in effect for one (1) year. The fare is \$3.50 per one-way trip.

Federal Poverty Level Guidelines will be used for economically disadvantaged T.D. Certification is as follows:

1. The applicant will be considered T.D. If under 150% of the Federal Poverty Level Guidelines.

Low Income:

1. T.D. Customers who only meet the disadvantaged economic requirements and do NOT have a disability that prevents them from using the fixed-route bus and whose origin and destination are within the core area or 3/4 of a mile from a fixed route bus route must use the fixed-route system and will be eligible to purchase a T.D. 31-day bus pass.
2. Riders who meet the income criteria of the T.D. program – regardless of disability - and whose trip origin and/or destination are outside the core fixed route service area will be eligible for paratransit service under the T.D. Program.

Low Income NOT Disabled:

1. If customer travels outside the ADA Core Service area, they will receive paratransit.
2. If customers travel within the ADA Core Service area, they will qualify to purchase a T.D. 31-day bus pass and are required to use the fixed-route service.

Disabled Only/Disabled and Low Income and Outside the ADA Core Service Area

1. Eligible T.D. Disabled only or Disabled and Low-Income Riders outside the ADA core area and whose trip origin and/or destination are outside the ADA core service area will be eligible for paratransit service under the T.D. Program.
2. The fare is \$3.50 per one-way trip.

Division of Senior Services (DOSS) Program Definition

1. A pre-approval by DOSS is required.
2. Registration for individuals 60 years of age or older is completed via an application verifying the applicant's age and eligibility to a DOSS meal site. Service is provided north of Hypoluxo Road for DOSS certified Nutrition Site trips only.
3. DOSS service is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with the last scheduled pickup of 4:30 p.m. There is no Fare required for DOSS transportation.
4. The fare is \$0.00 per one-way at the designated times only.