



## PASSENGER HANDBOOK

**Rural Economic Assistance League, Inc.**  
301 Lucero Street  
Alice, Texas 78332

**361-668-3158**

## **PURPOSE**

Rural Economic Assistance League, Inc. is the public transportation provider for Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Live Oak, Refugio and San Patricio Counties.

This passenger handbook provides the policies pertaining to passenger safety and responsibilities for using REAL's public transportation services.

It is for the benefit of all passengers that policies regarding passenger safety and responsibilities are followed. The policies in this booklet are critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of REAL's public transportation services.

All policies will be enforced in a consistent and fair manner. If a passenger feels they have been treated unfairly, there is a process to address any issue or concern which is included in this handbook.

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## **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**

REAL, Inc. prides itself on providing safe and reliable transportation services to the public of Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Live Oak, Refugio and San Patricio Counties. Transportation services are open to everyone. REAL, Inc. operates a demand response service. Request must be made at least 24 hours in advance for local trips and at least 48 hours in advance for out of town trips, prior to the desired trip date, and may be scheduled up to 60 days in advance.

### **Public Transportation**

- Hours of service are Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.
- Other hours may be scheduled by special arrangement with REAL.
- Services are not provided on the following holidays unless otherwise deemed by management:
  - ✓ New Year's Day
  - ✓ Memorial Day
  - ✓ Veteran's Day
  - ✓ Independence Day
  - ✓ Labor Day
  - ✓ Thanksgiving Days (4<sup>th</sup> Thursday and Friday of November)
  - ✓ Christmas Day (3 days dependent on when the days fall within the week)
  - ✓ Good Friday
  - ✓ Easter (2 days dependent on when the days fall within the week).
- If a holiday occurs on Saturday, the preceding Friday will be observed, if on Sunday, the following Monday will be observed

## **SCHEDULING RIDES**

Requests for service shall only be accepted by calling REAL at 361.668.3158 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Each original and return trip will be recorded separately, and each direction shall be recorded as a one-way trip. The trip shall be scheduled to show the required time to be at destination.

To schedule a trip, passenger must speak with a Reservations Specialist who requires the following information to scheduling a trip:

Passenger Name

Address  
Phone Number  
Destination Name  
Destination Address  
Desired Arrival Time

### **Advance Scheduling**

A request for demand service should be made at least 24 hours in advance day or up to 14 days prior to the desired trip time.

### **Same Day Scheduling**

Request for same-day service will be considered and accepted based on availability from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday for local services.

### **Demand Response Services**

In demand responsive services with service availability or capacity constraints, this means having the same constraints for all riders. Trips are provided on a first come first serviced basis.

### **RIDING WITH REAL, INC.**

REAL, Inc. is a public transit system, providing rides for many passengers each day. Vehicle Operators cannot be at three or four pick-up points at one time and must allow for time to ensure that customer makes it from origin to destination by scheduled appointment time. Therefore, passengers must be ready for pick-up and allow for travel time for transportation to destination. For local scheduled trips, passengers should be ready during the window provided at the time of when the reservation was made. In the event, that a rider will be required to be ready earlier, then the Dispatcher will contact passengers by telephone as to the approximate pick- up time.

REAL, Inc. will attempt to drop off passengers within the 30 minute drop off window to expected arrival time. And will also attempt to pick up passengers within the 30 minute pick up window to expected pick up time for the return trip. Passengers who chose to use electronic means, will be notified prior to the vehicle arrival, through a text message of the actual pick up window to ensure that the passenger is aware that their vehicle is on their way.

When the Driver arrives at the pick-up location, he/she is not required to wait more than six (6) minutes for the passenger. Services are a curb to curb service unless the rider is a person with a disability and prior arrangements have been made with Mobility Management staff

assistance. If the passenger does not appear, the Driver will mark the passenger as No Show and continue on their route.

Service may not be rendered if origin or destination location cannot be accessed by the vehicle or if the location does not provide safe passage for the vehicle or safe access to and/or from the vehicle by the passenger. The Driver shall attempt to make reasonable accommodations and if not possible then they shall immediately call the Dispatch office for further instruction in such a case. Steep driveways, deteriorated sidewalks, etc., may result in unpassable means.

To increase efficiency, REAL, Inc. is a “shared-ride” service; passengers must often ride while other passengers are picked up and dropped off.

Drivers will provide door-to-door service for persons where reasonable accommodations can be made and arranged in advance.

Under no circumstances can a Driver enter a passenger’s home.

Drivers are not permitted to maneuver a mobility device up or down steps.

Drivers are not permitted to lift passengers.

Drivers are not allowed to enter upon property (fences or porches) unless animals are restrained to avoid possibility of biting.

Drivers have the right to determine whether they are safely able to drive vehicles through covered driveways, low hanging tree areas, damaged roads and driveways, or non-structured/non-paved roads during inclement weather. Drivers are required to contact Dispatch office immediately for further directions.

Drivers will not enter private homes for any reason.

Drivers may assist passengers to board and to exit the vehicles only. Drivers will not assist passengers past this point unless prior arrangements have been made.

It is the individual’s personal care attendant, or care provider’s responsibility to ensure that passengers are on time and waiting for their ride.

Drivers will not enter any facility including nursing homes, medical facilities, shopping centers, or businesses to find passengers. Passengers must be waiting at the designated pick-up point.

## **Cancellations**

It is requested that passengers notify the dispatch office of any necessary cancellations at least

the day prior to the scheduled pick up date. Same day cancellations will be considered a No Show. Timely cancellations allow the dispatch office to reassign that time to another passenger who may be in need of that service.

## **No Shows**

A No Show is defined as any instance in which a passenger does not keep their scheduled ride and fails to notify REAL, Inc. at least 24 hours in advance.

If a passenger who No Showed on their trip, and they call back to see about another trip that same day, REAL, Inc., will determine based on availability if the trip can be provided.

Abuse of the system, such as scheduling rides and repeatedly not taking them may result in a review of past services provided and a suspension of transportation services for up to 30 days.

The No-Show Policy for all Public Transportation customers will be as follows:

- Three consecutive No Shows will result in a 30 day service suspension
- Non consecutive No Shows will result in discussions with the passenger to discuss the No Show policy
- Repeated No Show will prevent a passenger from making Standing Reservations but require passengers to make a reservation before every trip to be taken.
- Suspension periods cannot be split or otherwise divided or altered without approval by Director or Executive Director.

## **FARES STRUCTURE**

All passengers are required to pay a fare for each one-way trip. Fares may be paid with cash, check, bank card/credit card (in advance).

**Cash:** A fare per each one-way trip shall be charged to all eligible passengers and their escorts with the exception of required personal care attendants for the disabled, who may travel with an eligible passenger at no cost. Fares are based on a one way trip. This means that each time the vehicle is boarded, the fare must be paid by cash, or check, based on the fare schedule. Drivers cannot make change. All fares must be paid by exact change only. If a passenger must be transported to obtain exact change, then they will be charged the fare for that additional trip. Failure to do so will result in no service for that trip and the trip will be reported as a No show.

**Charge Accounts:** Charge account will be provided to only those individuals whose rides are charged to an approved agency or facility with an agreement for services with REAL, Inc. Individuals will not be allowed to charge rides.

**Credit Card or Bank Card**

Credit card or bank card payments may be made via telephone or in person when scheduling a trip. There will be a processing charge for paying with credit card or bank card.

**SEAT BELT POLICY**

The Driver and all passengers are required to use seat belts. If a passenger refuses to wear his or her seat belt, the Driver should call the dispatch office for further instructions. REAL, Inc. adheres to the Americans with Disability Act requirements.

Passengers with the inability to wear a seatbelt for any reason including medical or refusal to wear a seatbelt will not be serviced for safety reasons and must disembark the vehicle immediately.

Passengers utilizing mobility devices including common and non-conventional mobility devices will be required to have their mobility device properly secured with a six point tie down safety restraint system, including shoulder and lap belts.

If a passenger is unable to fit within the seat belt due to size, then an extension will be utilized. Passengers needing a belt extension must request one at the time they schedule their trip. Drivers will also notify the Operations Manager so that a seat belt extension can be ordered.

**ESCORTS/GUESTS**

Personal care attendants are persons who are directly involved in the mobility assistance of their attendee and will be allowed to ride free of charge while accompanying their attendee. Generally, the following conditions would warrant a fare free attendant: immobility, disorientation, non-comprehension, and communication impairment, and others as recommended by the Director or Executive Director.

Personal care attendants are required to specifically assist the passenger. This assistance includes, but is not limited to, the following duties:

- Assisting the passenger from his/her door to the bus and back again;
- To and from the restroom;
- Opening doors;
- Pushing mobility device to and from the vehicle;
- Carrying packages; and



- Communicating with the Driver (if passenger is unable).

Any other person riding with a passenger will be considered a guest and will be required to pay full fare.

### **CHILD RIDER POLICY**

It is the policy of REAL, Inc. to provide the most effective, efficient, safest, and uninterrupted transportation service. In providing this service it is necessary to establish policies that govern REAL's role and responsibilities in the transportation of children and youth under the age of 17. All passengers must follow all rules, regulations, and policies. Violations of these rules by either the child or parent may lead to service suspension. These roles and responsibilities are as follows:

- All children who are under eight years of age are required to be restrained in an approved child passenger safety seat unless the child is at least 4 feet, 9 inches in height as State law mandates.
- Passengers traveling with infants, as their escorts will be required to provide their own infant carrier approved for use in vehicles.
- Children under 1 year of age should have child safety restraint facing seat.
- The passenger escorting the child will be responsible for placing the infant into the carrier and securing the carrier with a safety belt.

### **WEATHER**

#### **Discontinuing Service Due to Weather Conditions**

Drivers will make every effort to provide service whenever scheduled. In the event extreme weather conditions exist which make travel unsafe, the Director or Executive Director reserves the right to discontinue services until conditions have improved and are more favorable. If service is temporarily discontinued, employees are to report to work unless otherwise instructed by Supervisor. The dispatch office shall attempt to contact any scheduled passengers at the telephone numbers listed in the agency customer profile database.

#### **Severe Weather Condition Riding Tips**

- Keep current on weather conditions, which may affect REAL, Inc. services
- If streets are icy or flooded, allow additional travel time.
- Avoid delays by being on time and having correct fare ready.
- Clean footwear of mud before boarding so it does not gather on the steps and floor of the bus, causing danger to others.
- Wait until the bus comes to a complete stop before unbuckling seatbelt and leaving your seat and before boarding.

- At all times, watch your step, wear your seatbelt, and wear appropriate winter clothing.

### **Severe Weather Passenger Guide**

Severe rainstorms, thunderstorms, and icy roads can affect REAL's services. The following may occur any time hazardous road conditions exist:

- Travel time may increase
- Bus service on less traveled streets, especially those not sanded or that is flooded, may be cancelled.
- In case of severe weather, the Director or Executive Director may approve all passengers to be taken home immediately.
- If passengers are not able to get to vehicle prior to severe weather arriving, passengers will be asked to remain in facility until severe weather has passed.
- If vehicle is caught in severe weather, then the Driver will make every attempt to get to the nearest safe area and have passengers exit the vehicle until severe weather has passed.

Passengers and/or care providers are responsible for ensuring that passengers are properly dressed for their ride. Drivers will not assist passengers with their clothing. This includes proper coats, hats, gloves, and footwear.

### **SERVICE FOR MOBILITY DEVICE USERS**

Service will be provided utilizing specialized equipment (lifts, ramps, etc.) for mobility device users.

REAL, Inc. drivers are not allowed to assist passengers in mobility device up or down any steps. If such condition exists, passengers are responsible for arranging assistance from someone other than REAL, Inc. driver.

#### **Accommodation of Common mobility devices:**

REAL, Inc. will accommodate common mobility devices. Common mobility devices are devices, which do not exceed 30 inches in width and 48 inches in length when measured two inches above the ground, and do not weigh more than 800 pounds when occupied.

#### **Accommodation of Non-Conventional Mobility Devices:**

REAL, Inc. will make every reasonable effort to accommodate various mobility device models and mobility devices available to passengers. However, due to the increasing size and weight of such equipment, some limitations will be necessary to ensure the safe transport of these mobility devices and passengers. The following policy will apply to all oversized, three-wheeled, or other non- conventional mobility devices.

Passengers may be allowed to ride on small, non-conventional mobility devices, and may independently transfer to a regular vehicle seat once inside the vehicle if there is seat availability. Such a request should be made at the time of scheduling the trip for better planning purposes. If the passenger is unable to independently transfer, either an attendant may assist them, or the passenger will be allowed to stay in non-conventional mobility device.

### **SERVICE ANIMALS & ACCOMMODATION OF ANIMALS**

REAL, Inc. complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, which states, "No otherwise qualified person with a disability in the United States...shall, solely on the basis of a disability, be denied access to, or the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity provided by any institution receiving federal assistance." REAL, Inc. intends to provide the broadest possible access to service animals in all its public areas.

The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) defines a service animal as "any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability."

A service animal is not a pet but can perform some of the functions and tasks that an individual with a disability cannot perform himself or herself. Animals are considered "service animals" under ADA, if they meet this definition, regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government. Therapy animals are not considered service animals. Below are basic policy guidelines for REAL, Inc.:

- Customers with disabilities accompanied by a service animal are welcomed.
- The service animal is the responsibility of its owner and must always be under the control of its owner. (Such as leash, harness, or carrier)
- The service animal must ride in the vehicle within the customer's space.
- Service animals may not travel in the aisle or occupy a seat.
- Rural Economic Assistance League, Inc. reserves the right to refuse passage to any animal that poses a direct threat to the health and safety of other consumers, personnel, or contractors.
- The service animal must be clean, in good health, with current rabies vaccinations.
- Service animals are required to meet all city ordinances.
- All owners or users of service animals are responsible to clean up after and properly dispose of their animal's feces while on agency's property.
- All concerns or questions must be addressed to the agency's supervisor.

## **BACKING POLICY**

REAL, Inc. drivers are instructed to avoid BACKING UP if at all possible. If a driver must back up they should:

- Get to know the vehicle's blind spots. In a medium-sized truck, blind spots can extend up to 16 feet in front and 160 feet behind a vehicle. Drivers need to remember that mirrors can never give the whole picture while backing.
- Think in advance. Drivers should not put themselves into unnecessary backing situations.
- Park defensively. Drivers must choose easy-exit parking spaces that don't crowd neighboring vehicles and park their vehicle in the center of the parking space.
- When parking in an alley. If an alley doesn't permit driving all the way through or room to turn around, a Driver should back into it (if local ordinances permit) so that when leaving the vehicle can pull forward into the street.
- Do a walk-around. Walking around a vehicle gives a Driver firsthand view of the backing area and any limitations. They can check for children, soft or muddy areas, potholes, tire hazards, and other dangers.
- Know the clearances. When performing a walk-around, Drivers can check for obstructions, low-hanging trees and wires, and any other potential clearance-related problems.
- Every backing situation is new and different. Sometimes a Driver visits the same location several time a day and should be watchful each visit for changes and any new obstacles.
- Use a spotter. A Driver should use another person to help them when backing if possible. The Driver and spotter should use hand signals instead of verbal ones and make sure they understand each other's signals. Don't have the spotter walking backwards while giving instructions.
- When Driver's spot for themselves, they need to return to the vehicle and start backing within a few seconds after finishing the walk-around. This will allow very little time for people and/or obstacles to change behind the vehicle. Backing without a spotter should only take place after a Driver has as much information about the area as possible. A back up alarm can help warn away pedestrians and Drivers of other vehicles who may try to enter the area the vehicle is backing into.

### **MEDICAL OXYGEN FOR PERSONAL USE**

Oxygen will be transported only when medically necessary. It will be in a cylinder maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The manufacturer's instructions and precautions are usually printed on a label attached to the cylinder. Drivers will inspect each cylinder to assure that it is free of cracks or leaks, including around the valve area and pressure relief device. Drivers will also listen for leaks. Leaking, dented, gouged, or pitted cylinders will not be transported. Cylinders will be limited to the extent practicable. Cylinders will be secured to prevent movement and leakage. They will not be placed in aisle or sources of heat or potential sparks. Under no circumstances should smoking or open flames (cigarette lighter or matches) be permitted in the passenger compartment when medical oxygen is present.

### **CARRY-ON PACKAGES**

Passengers shall limit their carry-on packages to no more than the equivalent of what they can carry in plastic grocery bags/items at one time unless they have an attendant traveling with them to load/unload the packages. Oversized packages will be refused for transport. No one package shall weigh more than 10 pounds. Passengers must make other arrangements for delivery of any item larger than specified. Drivers will not assist with the loading or unloading of carry-on packages.

### **RULES FOR PASSENGER CONDUCT**

REAL desires to build, establish and operate a safe, efficient, and effective rural transportation system. For the safety and comfort of all persons, REAL has the following regulations that apply to the conduct of a person that may adversely affect others using or operating the REAL transportation system.

#### **A. Prohibited Conduct**

1. A person is prohibited from committing the following acts on a REAL vehicle, REAL facility, or REAL property:
  - a) Smoke or expel the residue of any tobacco product including chewing tobacco on a REAL vehicle or at a REAL facility;
  - b) Consume any alcoholic beverage or possess an open container of any alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverage on a REAL bus;
  - c) Eating on a REAL bus;

- d) Engage in disruptive, disturbing behavior including: loud conversation, screaming and/or yelling, profanity, rude insults, disparaging remarks or operating any electronic device used for sound without an earphone(s);
- e) Take any animal onto a vehicle unless the animal's purpose is to assist a person with a disability, or unless the animal is in training to assist a person with a disability;
- f) Make any threat of violence or of physical aggression or other similar actions towards REAL, a REAL Operator or any other REAL personnel;
- g) Carry or possess any illegal weapon;
- h) Possess or transport any flammable liquid, combustible material or other dangerous substance such as gasoline, kerosene or propane;
- i) Litter;
- j) Vandalize the vehicle or property by writing, marking, scribbling, defacing or causing destruction to the vehicle or property in any manner;
- k) Beg or solicit by forcing yourself upon another person;
- l) Spitting, urinating, defecating or exposing oneself;
- m) Possess, use or sell any controlled substance;
- n) Ride a REAL vehicle without the proper fare has been paid;
- o) Stealing in the bus from other passengers
- p) Any other disruptive behavior that Interferes with the safe operation of a REAL vehicle.

If a passenger is violation any of the above prohibited conduct, the Driver will immediately pull over where safe and contact the Dispatcher for additional direction. In extreme situations, the Driver will immediately contact law enforcement for intervention.

Continued violation of the prohibited conducts listed will result in 30 day service suspension as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> offense - A warning letter

2<sup>nd</sup> offense - A second letter will be sent and service will be suspended for thirty (30) days.

3<sup>rd</sup> offense - A third letter will be sent and service will be suspended for sixty (60) days.

### **APPEAL PROCESS**

If you do not agree with the determination of a decision made by REAL, Inc., you have the right to appeal the decision by the following the Appeals Process.

#### **Procedure**

The passenger must provide notice of the intent to appeal to REAL, Inc. within five (5) business days the denial notice is received.

REAL, Inc.

Attn: Appeals Officer Martin Ornelas, Director

301 Lucero Street

Alice, TX 78332

361-668-3158

[martin.ornelas@realinc.org](mailto:martin.ornelas@realinc.org)

#### **Appeals Provisions**

The appeal will be heard by an Appeal Committee composed of three (3) Senior REAL Personnel who are familiar with various policies of the agency. The appeal will be heard within ten (10) days of receipt of the written appeal. Passengers will be allowed to be present at the hearing and will have an equal opportunity to give testimony on their behalf. REAL, Inc. will tape record all appeal hearings. It will require a majority vote to sustain and approve assistance or deny the appeal and provide written notification to the passenger on the results of the appeal by close of business on the following day.

If the passenger does not agree with the decision reached, he/she may appeal in writing to the Executive Director of REAL.

REAL, Inc.

Attn: Gloria Ramos, RN, Executive Director

301 Lucero Street

Alice, TX 78332

361-668-3158

[Gloria.ramos@realinc.org](mailto:Gloria.ramos@realinc.org)

The appeal must be performed within five (5) days of the adverse determination made by REAL, Inc.

### **Hearing Impaired**

The agency utilizes Relay Texas to ensure access to a telecommunications system for the deaf (TDD/TTY) to facilitate communication with hard of hearing, hearing impaired and deaf

recipients. “Relay Texas”, a telecommunication service established for the sensory impaired by the 71st Texas Legislature in 1989, allows an individual to make and receive calls from anywhere in the United States.

### **COMPLAINT/GRIEVANCE POLICY**

REAL, Inc. serves a large diverse population of individuals with varying ages (children, teenagers, adults, and elderly), physical challenges, economic and financial status, and ethnic backgrounds.

REAL, Inc. shall ensure that no person shall be excluded from the participation be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity undertaken by REAL, Inc., solely by the reason of his/her race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other characteristic protected by law.

It is REAL, Inc’s intent to provide courteous and professional services to the general public. If a person has a complaint, they may follow the complaint/grievance procedures.

Complaint Procedure will be as follows:

In the event of a complaint, the complainant should contact the Administrative office at 361-668-3158.

Contacts:

REAL, Inc.

Martin Ornelas, Director

301 Lucero Street

Alice, TX 78332

361-668-3158

[martin.ornelas@realinc.org](mailto:martin.ornelas@realinc.org)

Upon receipt of the complaint, the REAL, Inc. representative will request written detail of complaint or take an oral statement from the complainant. The complaint should include details regarding the situation: i.e. date, time, Driver, problem, etc. All complaints or statements should be signed or if by telephone the actual complainant should be the person that calls. Complaints received by telephone will be investigated and resolved prior to ending the call. A written response will not be required if complainant is satisfied with the resolution. The Executive Director will be notified upon receipt of all complaints, and the Director or an assigned staff member will investigate written complaints. Upon completion of the investigation, a decision regarding the complaint will be rendered and a written response issued to the complainant no later than ten (10) days after receipt of the complaint. A copy of the complaint and action taken will be kept on file at the REAL, Inc. Administrative office.



In the event, the complainant is not satisfied with the decision and action taken by the Director, the complainant should notify the Executive Director in writing at the below listed address.

Gloria Ramos, RN  
Executive Director  
301 Lucero Street  
Alice, TX 78332  
361-668-3158  
gloria.ramos@realinc.org

The Executive Director will review all information regarding the complaint and shall have the discretion to form an impartial panel of reviewers to assist that may be comprised of a Board member, or public and private social service representatives. Following a review of the complaint, the Executive Director shall inform the complainant of the findings of the review panel or the decision and action to be taken regarding complaint. A decision regarding the complaint will be rendered and a written response issued to the complaint no later than ten (10) days after the Executive Director receives the complaint.