

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Transportation agencies strive to build new ridership and retain existing riders by providing high-quality customer service. There are several components of high-quality service that include not only improved elements of transit services, such as reduced travel times and improved service reliability, but also direct customer service elements, such as real-time arrival and departure information, on-board information and amenities (e.g., wireless Internet), and automated fare payment. This synthesis focuses on the effective communication with transit customers in a variety of situations.

The synthesis report documents the state of the practice in agency communications with customers, using the following elements as a way to determine what constitutes successful communication:

- Who the agency is communicating with (e.g., regular commuters, persons with disabilities, tourists, and potential riders) and their location;
- Content (e.g., timetables, route maps, trip planning, and next vehicle arrival and departure time), format, and accessibility of communication;
- Communication timing and frequency (e.g., real-time, periodic, and one-time);
- Communication dissemination media (e.g., hardcopy, electronic signage, mobile phones, and Internet) and access [push (send text message for information request) or pull (use Internet to obtain information)]; and
- Capital, and operations and maintenance costs associated with communication (including all resources, such as staff time).

For the purposes of this synthesis, effectiveness is defined as providing accurate, clear, accessible, understandable, and timely information, and reaching the intended audience. The report includes an examination of how effectiveness is measured, including its impact on transit ridership.

A review of the relevant literature in the field is combined with surveys of selected transit agencies and other appropriate stakeholders to report on the current state of the practice. The survey's purpose was to obtain information on communication characteristics, effectiveness, costs, and best practices. Based on survey results, several case studies and profiles were developed to describe innovative and

successful practices, as well as lessons learned and gaps in information. An important element of this report is the documented interviews with key personnel at agencies regarding their communication methods.

TECHNICAL APPROACH TO PROJECT

This synthesis project was conducted in five major steps. First, a literature review was undertaken to identify the methods currently used by agencies to communicate with riders and to identify the issues associated with deploying methods of communication.

Second, a survey was conducted to collect information on factors such as types of communication; content, accessibility, and frequency; the types of media and technology used to disseminate the communication; and the effectiveness of communication. In addition, data on the techniques used to develop communication, relationships with dissemination providers (e.g., mobile telephone companies), communication costs, and best practices in communications were collected.

Third, the survey results were analyzed. Fourth, follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with key personnel at agencies that have exemplary methods of communication. Finally, the results and conclusions were prepared and documented.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

Following this introductory chapter, this report is organized as follows:

- Chapter two summarizes the literature review.
- Chapter three describes the types of travelers that agencies are communicating with (e.g., regular commuters, persons with disabilities, tourists, and potential riders), the content and format of the communication (e.g., timetables, route maps, trip planning, next vehicle arrival and departure time), the timing and frequency of the communications, and the dissemination media and type of access (e.g., push or pull).
- Chapter four presents information about capital, and operating and maintenance costs.

- Chapter five provides examples and discusses the effectiveness of rider communication techniques.
- Chapter six presents case studies from selected agencies that have exemplary methods of communicating with riders.
- Chapter seven summarizes the results of the synthesis, and presents conclusions.
- A Bibliography is presented that contains citations for literature that is not specifically referred to in the text.
- Appendix A contains the survey instrument, Appendix B is a list of responding agencies, and Appendix C contains “Good Practice Cards” that were developed by The Ministry of Transport and Communications in Finland.