

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNICATING WITH RIDERS

The synthesis survey covered several key characteristics of rider communications. Before examining these characteristics, the overall and modal annual ridership and types of riders served by each respondent were noted. Most agencies provide fixed-route bus service and cover many types of riders, including commuters, the elderly and disabled, K-12 and college students, and tourists. Total annual ridership for each agency is shown in Table 3. Ridership among the respondents varied from 276,000 (paratransit-only agency) to 685,300,000.

COMMUNICATION TYPES AND FREQUENCY OF DISSEMINATION

Nearly all of the survey respondents provided the following types of communication to their riders:

- Operational information (e.g., route detours),
- Route and schedule information,
- Proposed service changes,

TABLE 3
AGENCIES THAT RESPONDED TO SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Agency Name	Abbreviation	City/State	Annual Riders
Ann Arbor Transportation Authority	AATA	Ann Arbor, MI	4,900,000
Berks Area Reading Transportation Authority	BARTA	Reading, PA	2,600,000
Capital Area Transportation Authority	CATA	State College, PA	6,044,141
Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority	CMTA	Austin, TX	33,873,000
Charlotte Area Transit System, City of Charlotte Public Transportation Department	CATS	Charlotte, NC	18,000,000
City of Colorado Springs Transit Services Division	CSTSD	Colorado Springs, CO	2,800,000
CityLink (Greater Peoria Mass Transit District)	CityLink	Peoria, IL	2,330,000
Fort Worth Transportation Authority	The T	Fort Worth, TX	7,126,567
Fresno County Rural Transit Agency	FCRTA	Fresno, CA	425,946
GO Transit	Go Transit	Toronto, Ontario	46,000,000
Greater Bridgeport Transit Authority	GBTA	Bridgeport, CT	4,675,000
Greater Hartford Transit District	GHTD	Hartford, CT	276,000
Interurban Transit Partnership	ITP	Grand Rapids, MI	6,400,000
Kitsap Transit	KT	Bremerton, WA	5,100,000
Metro Transit	Metro	Minneapolis, MN	69,500,000
Milwaukee County Transit System	MCTS	Milwaukee, WI	47,000,000
Montgomery Area Transit System	MATS	Montgomery, AL	749,554
Norwalk Transit District	Wheels	Norwalk, CT	1,783,595
Orange County Transportation Authority	OCTA	Orange, CA	66,590,000
Pace Suburban Bus	Pace	Arlington Heights, IL	36,877,892
Pierce County Public Transportation Benefit Area Authority Corporation	Pierce Transit	Lakewood, WA	14,476,000
Port Authority of Allegheny County	PAT	Pittsburgh, PA	70,000,000
River Valley Transit (Williamsport Bureau of Transportation)	RVT	Williamsport, PA	1,200,000
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority	VTA	San Jose, CA	39,380,000
Shore Line East, Connecticut Department of Transportation	SLE	New Haven to New London, CT	425,000
Singapore Mass Rapid Transit Ltd.	SMRT	Singapore	685,300,000
South Bend Public Transportation Corporation	TRANSPO	South Bend, IN	3,112,602
South Coast Area Transit	SCAT	Oxnard, CA	3,234,465
Southern California Regional Rail Authority	SCRRA	Los Angeles, CA	9,946,566
Transfort/Dial-A-Ride	Transfort	Fort Collins, CO	1,570,000
Transit Link Pte Ltd	Transit Link	Singapore	Not applicable
Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon	TriMet	Portland, OR	39,380,000
York County Transportation Authority	YCTA	York, PA	1,699,735

- Public meeting information,
- Security,
- Safety (e.g., “mind the gap”),
- General information (e.g., how to ride and fare information), and
- Transit in the community (e.g., transit agency teamed with local business).

In larger agencies, the responsibility for communicating with riders is often assigned to multiple parts of the organization. For example, at Pace Suburban Bus, TriMet, Port Authority of Allegheny County (PAT), and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), the responsibilities are divided as shown in Table 4.

For smaller agencies, most of the communication is done by one or two groups within the agency (e.g., operations and business development). The division of responsibilities is one of the key factors in the effectiveness of communication, as discussed in chapter seven.

As shown in Table 5, there is a wide variation in the content and frequency of communication reported by the survey respondents. In terms of operational information, the most prevalent information provided in real time is next vehicle arrival and departure time. This reflects the trend that shows more agencies deploying real-time information by means of DMSs and on the Internet. The most common type of information provided periodically and on a one-time basis concerns detours and delays. The next most prevalent type of operational information provided on a one-time basis is trip and/or connection time.

As expected, communication of all types of general information is the most prevalent of all of the communications. Under safety and security, reminders about suspicious activities and packages were most prevalent in the periodic category. The responses to this question were not unexpected. However, the dissemination of safety and security information is not being done by as many agencies as those that are disseminating general or real-time information. Given the focus on safety and

TABLE 4
EXAMPLE OF COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITIES

Communication Type	Pace	TriMet	PAT	VTA
Operational information	Planning services	Marketing	Media relations and operations	Service operations
Route and schedule information	Planning services/graphics	Marketing	Operations and customer service	Marketing and service operations
Proposed service changes	Planning services and government affairs	Marketing and communications	Media relations, operations, and marketing	Marketing and service operations
Public meeting information	Government affairs	Marketing and communications	Engineering, planning, media relations, and marketing	Marketing
Security	Bus operations	Marketing and operations	Safety, marketing, and media relations	Marketing and protective services
Safety	Safety	Marketing and operations	Safety, marketing, and media relations	Marketing and protective services
General information	Marketing and communications	Marketing	Marketing, customer service, and media relations	Customer service and marketing
Transit in the community	Business development, and marketing and communications	Marketing and capital projects	Sales, marketing, and operations	Community outreach

Source: Survey responses.

Notes: Pace = Pace Suburban Bus (Illinois); TriMet = Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon; PAT = Port Authority of Allegheny County (Pennsylvania); VTA = Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (California).

TABLE 5
FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION (No. of agencies reporting)

Type of Information	Frequency			
	Real Time	Periodic	One Time	Other
Operational				
Next bus/train/ferry arrival/departure time	10	2	4	7
Detours/delays	6	15	12	6
Vehicle location	5	1	1	3
Trip and/or connection time	3	5	11	4
Parking availability	1	3	4	4
Other	1	0	1	0
General				
Maps, routes, schedules, and fares	5	23	10	8
Rider's guide	2	18	11	5
Information for disabled riders	4	20	11	7
Trip planning (including Point A to Point B planning, find closest stop, find service at a location)	12	12	9	8
Other	0	2	0	0
Safety/Security				
Reminders about notifying officials about suspicious packages or activity	3	17	9	4
Evacuation of transit facilities/vehicles	4	8	6	2
Escalator/elevator outages	3	3	2	2
Amber alerts	1	0	0	3
Other	1	1	0	2

Source: Survey responses.

security at the time this report was prepared (June 2006), the overall results in this information category are somewhat unexpected. Overall, Table 5 shows the trend toward providing certain operational information in real-time, while continuing to provide general information on a periodic basis.

COMMUNICATION DISSEMINATION MEDIA

The dissemination media used by the survey respondents are shown in Table 6. The contents of the table directly correspond to the results of the aforementioned FTA study (4), which indicates that riders prefer to obtain information in printed form, through the Internet, and by telephone (see Figure 11). This strong correlation between the FTA research report and what is actually being provided by the survey respondents indicates that the top three types of media are the most effective methods of communicating with riders.

In terms of information accessibility, Table 7 shows the number of survey respondents that provide different types of information in various accessible formats. Some types of information easily lend themselves to specific accessible formats, such as large print for maps, routes, schedules, and fares; information for disabled riders; and rider's guides.

Overall, the information in this table indicates that the majority of responding agencies provide general information in multiple accessible formats. The most widely used format for general information is large print, followed by a Section 508-compliant website. Safety and security information in accessible formats is somewhat limited in reporting agencies.

The survey asked respondents to note the methods that are used to determine the content of rider communication. For operational and general information, complaint information provides the majority of input to determining content [reported by 30 and 26 agencies, respectively (of the 33 responding agencies)]. Consulting with riders is the next most common method of determining the content of operational and general information (reported by 25 and 20 agencies, respectively). Surprisingly, many agencies reported that they determined the content of operational, general, and safety and security information in-house with no external input (21, 17, and 10 agencies, respectively). Nineteen agencies reported that they consulted with an external source in determining the content of general information and safety and security information. In addition, several agencies reported that they base the content of their operational, general, and safety and security communication on another agency's communication (13, 16, and 15 agencies, respectively).

TABLE 6
CURRENT DISSEMINATION MEDIA (No. of agencies reporting)

Type of Information	Dissemination Media												
	Paper (23%)	Static sign at transit stop/station (13%)	Electronic sign at transit stop/station (3%)	Public address system (3%)	On-board electronic sign (1%)	Internet (website) (22%)	Telephone (19%)	Mobile telephone (1%)	Wireless application protocol-enabled device (1%)	Kiosk (5%)	E-mail or page (5%)	Wireless device (e.g., PDA, iPod) (1%)	Other (3%)
Operational													
Next bus/train/ferry arrival/departure time	15	15	10	6	3	15	19	1	2	8	2	1	1
Detours/delays	23	18	7	8	1	20	22	3	1	5	10	3	4
Vehicle location		1	0	1	2	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trip and/or connection time	14	10		2	1	16	16	1	1	6	3	1	1
Fare payment	26	15	0	0	1	24	21	2	1	6	7	1	5
Parking availability	5	1	2	0	0	6	6	1	1	3	3	1	0
General													
Maps, routes, schedules, and fares	30	22	0	0	0	30	23	0	1	10	5	2	4
Rider's guide	27	6				24	13			4	1	0	4
Information for disabled riders	26	7		1	1	25	21	1	1	2	4	1	2
Trip planning (including Point A to Point B planning, find closest stop, find service at a location)	10	4				17	20	2	1	3	2	1	4
Safety/Security													
Reminders about notifying officials about suspicious packages or activity	19	13	5	7	2	13	3	1	0	3	4	0	0
Evacuation of transit facilities/vehicles	8	5	2	4	0	5				0	1		3
Escalator/elevator outages	1	3	1	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	0
Amber alerts		1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Source: Survey responses.

Note: Blank cells indicate that providing information is not applicable using the specific dissemination media.

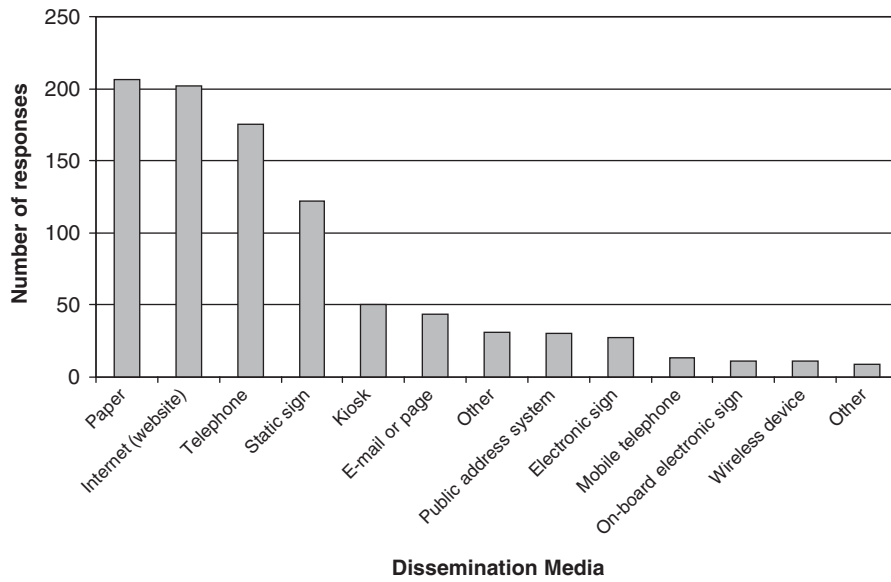


FIGURE 11 Dissemination media (Source: survey responses).

TABLE 7
COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY (No. of agencies reporting)

Type of Information	Accessible Format						
	Braille	Large print/large font size	Audio version of visual information	Visual version of audible information	Website is Section 508-compliant	Interactive voice response technology	Other
Operational							
Next bus/train/ferry arrival/ departure time	3	10	8	6	6	5	5
Detours/delays	3	8	6	4	7	4	5
Vehicle location		1	3	2	2	1	4
Trip and/or connection time	4	6	3	4	8	4	4
Parking availability		1		1	5	2	3
General							
Maps, routes, schedules, and fares	9	20	8	6	14	7	5
Rider's guide	7	13	5	3	12	4	3
Information for disabled riders	8	15	7	4	11	5	5
Trip planning (including Point A to Point B planning, find closest stop, find service at a location)	1	5	7	6	10	4	4
Safety/Security							
Reminders about notifying officials about suspicious packages or activity	2	7	7	6	6	3	2
Evacuation of transit facilities/ vehicles	1	1	3	3	2	2	2
Escalator/elevator outages			1	1	2	2	1
Amber alerts			0	0	0	0	1

Source: Survey responses.

Note: Blank cells indicate that providing information is not applicable using the specific format.