Evaluation of Recent Ridership Increases

DETAILS

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EVALUATION OF RECENT RIDERSHIP INCREASES

This TCRP digest is the final report of Task 51 for Project J-6, "Quick Response for Special Needs." It should be helpful to transit managers and planners, local officials, and policy-makers. The digest was prepared by Robert G. Stanley and Robert Hyman of Cambridge Systematics, Inc.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This digest assesses key factors and initiatives that led to ridership increases at 28 transit agencies, nationwide, for the period 2000 to 2002. This information will be of particular use to transit managers and planners interested in better understanding the various mechanisms and dynamics that have played a role in recent ridership increases. Similarly, it should be of interest to those local officials and policy-makers who seek to assure that the most effective use possible is being made of funds and resources committed to the design and delivery of public transit services.

This assessment of recent ridership increases is based on review of transit ridership statistics published by APTA, on operating statistics reported to and published in the FTA's National Transit Database, and on interviews and discussions with more than 35 senior transit managers:

- APTA *Quarterly Transit Ridership Reports* from 2000 through 2002 were used to identify 31 systems with the largest reported increases in ridership, including 15 systems that had reported increases from 1994 to 1996 and that experienced continued increases from 2000 to 2002.
- FTA National Transit Database data were used to profile changes in system operating performance—using passengers per mile, passengers per hour, and cost per passenger measures—over the 2000 to 2002 period as ridership increased.
- The interviews were conducted with staff of 28 of the 31 systems to explore what actions, initiatives, or circumstances may have been responsible for the ridership increases that took place.

Based on the assessment, several general observations can be made about factors that have contributed to the most significant ridership increases between 2000 and 2002. As was noted in the report on 1994 to 1996 ridership increases, many of the observations drawn from the current study mirror those made in the earlier studies. In addition, new types of initiatives and responses also played a role in the ridership success stories that were reported.

The most significant ridership increases are generally the result of a combination of initiatives or actions. Seldom does a single initiative result in significant or sustained increases. Eighteen transit systems in the study showed ridership increases ranging from 17 percent to 57.6 percent between 2000 and 2002. Of these 18 systems, virtually every

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one indicated that it had undertaken initiatives in more than one of the five identified categories.

The initiatives that influenced ridership increases fell into five broad categories:

- **Service adjustments** *(including service reconfiguration, service expansion, and new service models)*. Nearly three-quarters (13 of 18) of the systems indicated that service expansion was a major reason behind ridership increases. Nearly half (8 of 18 systems) described major efforts to reconfigure service and/or expand the types of services offered as a major factor leading to increased ridership.
- **Fare and pricing adaptations** *(including introduction of new fare media and technologies)*. Half (9 of 18 systems) suggested that fare and pricing initiatives had played a major role in increasing ridership in the period. Pass programs for university students as well as introduction of new pass programs and electronic fare media were also cited.
- **Marketing and information initiatives** *(including the application of emerging electronic information technologies)*. Surprisingly, only 3 of 18 systems indicated that stand-alone marketing campaigns or initiatives were significant factors in ridership increases.
- **Shifts in planning orientation** *(including increased emphasis on strategic planning and customer-oriented planning)*. Nearly half (8 of 18 systems) indicated that changes in planning orientation were a major factor in ridership increases. Many cited new efforts to understand and monitor customer needs more effectively as an important factor.
- **New efforts in service coordination, collaboration, and partnering.** More than half (10 of 18 systems) credited collaborative relationships for ridership increases. The most frequently cited of these were relationships with local universities. Nine of 18 systems were in university communities and cited service from campuses to the community as a major reason for ridership increases.

Most of the 18 systems experiencing the highest ridership growth, 2000 to 2002, improved their ability to serve more riders with greater efficiency.

Among the transit systems examined in the current study, there was no apparent correlation between high ridership organizations and community or system size:

- 4 systems have bus fleets ranging from 100 to 500 vehicles;
- 14 systems have bus fleets with fewer than 100 vehicles; and
- 9 systems—half of those with the largest 2000 to 2002 ridership increases—serve major university populations.

INTRODUCTION

This digest is a followon to two previous assessments of transit ridership increases across the country. The first charted increases in ridership between 1991 and 1993 (*TCRP Research Results Digest 4: Transit Ridership Initiative,* February 1995). The second charted increases in ridership between 1994 and 1996 (*TCRP Research Results Digest 29: Continuing Examination of Successful Transit Ridership Initiatives,* August 1998).

This digest contains the findings and conclusions of a third round of inquiries into the factors influencing recent increases in transit ridership across the country. The digest describes the circumstances and initiatives that are thought to have been most important in achieving ridership increases in communities that have experienced the largest ridership growth in the period from 2000 to 2002.

In addition to being the third in a series of TCRP assessments of transit ridership increases, the current study serves to reinforce a renewed focus at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on increasing transit ridership. Ridership growth is the first of four "Core Accountabilities" embraced by the FTA (*1*).

Interest in transit ridership increases at the system level also has been fed by soaring ridership in the last half of the 1990s on the national aggregate level. From 1995 to 2001, transit ridership increased 23 percent, faster than the population (8.4 percent), highway use (14.7 percent), and domestic air travel (12.5 percent) (*2*).

The results of this assessment are intended to further assist the FTA, the transit industry, and others in attracting and sustaining increased transit use. The results are also intended to assist TCRP in disseminating information about transit ridership trends and successful initiatives.

OVERVIEW

Background and Approach

The current study follows the two earlier transit ridership assessment studies carried out for the pe-

riod 1991 through 1993 (*TCRP Research Results Digest 4*, February 1995) and for the period 1994 through 1996 (*TCRP Research Results Digest 29*, August 1998).

In the initial assessment, data from more than 40 systems were collected and interviews were conducted with senior managers at 36 transit systems. Of those 36, results from 27 systems provided the basis for the series of findings reported in 1995.

The second assessment was carried out for the period 1994 through 1996. It reviewed the 1994 to 1996 ridership experiences of systems that reported the greatest increases in the earlier period and reviewed the experiences of 20 systems with significant ridership increases in the 1994 to 1996 period that were not part of the 1991 to 1993 assessment.

The current study was carried out following the same general design:

- Of systems showing significant ridership increases in the 1994 to 1996 period, 15 showed continued ridership increases between 2000 and 2002.
- In addition, 16 systems not part of the 1994 to 1996 assessment demonstrated significant ridership gains—17.0 to 57.6 percent—between 2000 and 2002.

Complete assessments, including interviews, were conducted for 28 of these 31 systems. The result of each is summarized in the Appendix.

Data Sources and Systems Selected

Data on ridership and performance came from several sources, including statistics available from American Public Transportation Association (APTA); reports of ridership experiences that appeared in APTA's weekly newspaper, *Passenger Transport*; and other trade press. Financial and operating performance data were taken from FTA's National Transit Database (NTD). The major statistical source of ridership data was the APTA *Quarterly Transit Ridership Reports* for 2000, 2001, and 2002, which were used to identify the 31 systems assessed.

Table 1 identifies the transit systems that have been the subject of the current assessment. The first column lists systems in which ridership increased markedly and were included in the 1994 to 1996 assessment along with their ridership increases for the 2000 to 2002 period. Column two lists the systems in which ridership increased most significantly from 2000 to 2002, but that did not have the same experience in prior periods.

Transit System Interviews

Interviews were conducted with senior managers at 28 of the systems identified in Table 1. In some instances, interviews were conducted with more than one senior manager from a system. A loosely structured set of questions was used to solicit information about the specific actions and factors that were considered important in generating the ridership increases noted. The Appendix captures the most significant points from these interviews. The interview summaries, however, are by no means comprehensive, and no attempts were made to confirm or validate the summaries after the fact with interviewees.

STILL RELEVANT OBSERVATIONS

The following observations were included in the prior two ridership assessments. They are restated here because they remain important and valid concerns and describe conditions and perspectives that continue to have considerable relevance for any analysis of changing transit system performance, including trends in ridership.

External Forces Remain Critical; Collaboration Pays Dividends

Prior reports have noted that external forces, factors, and conditions over which transit managers and public policy-makers have little or no control can have far greater effects on transit ridership than transit agency initiatives and aspects of service planning and delivery over which they do have control. The 1991 to 1993 ridership assessment stated, "This notion calls into question the balance of effort and energy devoted internally to system and service improvement strategies compared to the efforts and abilities of transit managers and policy-makers to impact and influence forces, conditions and policies outside the immediate operating environment that have substantial impacts on transit use." (*TCRP Research Results Digest 4*, p. 5)

It is clear from the recent inquiry that the substantial expansion that is taking place in collaborative arrangements between transit agencies and outside organizations and institutions has begun to pay

Table 1 Transit Ridership Increases, 2000 to 2002

Transit Systems with Prior Increases, 1994 to 1996		Transit Systems with Significant Increases, 2000 to 2002	
Transit System and City *(1994 to 1996 percentages)*	**% Increase**	**Transit System and City**	**% Increase**
Ames Transit Agency Ames, IA *(17.7%)*	29.8	Sound Transit Seattle, WA	57.6
Santa Clarita Transit Los Angeles, CA *(41.7%)*	17.0	Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission—OmniRide Woodbridge, VA	55.8
Orange County Transportation Authority Orange, CA *(11.1%)*	14.8	Manatee County Area Transit Bradenton, FL	45.9
Utah Transit Authority Salt Lake City, UT *(5.9%)*	13.9	Bloomington Public Transit Corporation Bloomington, IN	42.6
Denver Regional Transportation District Denver, CO *(9.0%)*	12.2	Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission—Virginia Railway Express Woodbridge, VA	37.2
C-TRAN Vancouver, WA *(48.0%)*	12.0	Gainesville Regional Transit System Gainesville, FL	37.0
Omnitrans* San Bernardino, CA *(29.6%)*	9.8	City of Phoenix Public Transit Department Phoenix, AZ	26.5
Center Area Transportation Authority State College, PA *(16.8%)*	9.3	Greensboro Transit Authority Greensboro, NC	26.4
TALTRAN Tallahassee, FL *(11.7%)*	8.4	Space Coast Area Transit Cocoa, FL	26.0
Community Transit Snohomish County, WA *(35.5%)*	7.4	Grand Rapids Interurban Transit Partnership Grand Rapids, MI	25.6
Whatcom Transportation Authority Bellingham, WA *(10.3%)*	3.4	CityBus of Greater Lafayette Lafayette, IN	24.7
LAKETRAN Grand River, OH *(18.3%)*	3.3	Ventura County Transit Ventura, CA	24.6
Sacramento Regional Transit District* Sacramento, CA *(10.2%)*	2.0	Capital Area Transportation Authority Lansing, MI	24.1
Sarasota County Area Transit Sarasota, FL *(37.8%)*	1.8	Kalamazoo Metro Transit System Kalamazoo, MI	23.0
LYNX* Orlando, FL *(44.5%)*	0.6	Norwalk Transit System Norwalk, CA	18.5
		Knoxville Area Transit Knoxville, TN	17.0

* Interviews were not conducted.

significant dividends in terms of ridership as well as performance.

Performance and What Constitutes Success

The initial ridership assessment included a discussion of conflicting or competing goals that frequently arise in the planning and delivery of transit services. Among the most obvious competing goals are those related to service coverage (area and hours) versus ridership versus utilization versus budget adherence versus subsidy reduction. In other words, there are many ways to define success in the delivery of transit services, and achievement in one of these dimensions may coincide with a decline in others.

In the current assessment, we have been able to document coincident increases in ridership and enhanced operational and financial performance (measured in passengers per mile, passengers per hour, and cost per passenger) in almost all cases where there have been substantial ridership increases. For the 16 systems with the largest ridership increases 2000 through 2002, performance trends for the period (summarized in the Appendix descriptions) show:

- Six systems improved in all three performance measures as ridership increased;
- Five systems showed improved performance in two of the three measures;
- Four systems showed improved performance in at least one of the three measures; and
- Only one system registered declines in all three performance measures as ridership increased.

As noted in the prior ridership assessments, there is often a lag between (1) the introduction of new initiatives and attendant cost increases and (2) their effects on ridership and performance measured in traditional ways. Similarly, there is often a lag between new initiatives and market response. Given this dynamic, it seems noteworthy that there is such strong evidence of enhanced performance concurrent with ridership increases.

Finally, the relevance and role of transit in the community generally has continued to emerge as another, somewhat intangible, measure of success for the transit industry. In virtually all cases where major increases in ridership have occurred, there is a sense that the role and relevance of the service in the public's mind has risen as well, an important dimension in formulating strategies for sustaining critical financial support for transit.

The Importance of Disaggregating the Ridership Data

As noted in earlier assessments, aggregate, system-level data probably disguise important relationships and dynamics. The large ridership increases reported and examined in this digest tell only part of the story. Likely, there are valuable stories to be told at the subsystem or subregional level among those systems in which recent ridership trends are not as dramatic. These stories, and the actions that may have led to ridership successes at a more disaggregate (e.g., corridor or subarea) level, are increasingly important because breakdowns in our street and highway systems occur at particular times and in particular locations, not systemwide on a continuous basis. The role of transit in mitigating or avoiding these occurrences may be best told at the disaggregate level by many more systems than have reported the greatest ridership increases. The experiences of systems serving university communities provide a case in point: innovative, collaborative accommodation of a particular travel market and related institutions may be critically important to a community, although the aggregate, systemwide statistics may not show it.

FINDINGS FROM RECENT TRANSIT RIDERSHIP INCREASES

Factors Influencing Ridership Trends

Table 2 summarizes the positive (+) and negative (–) factors thought to have most influenced the 2000 to 2002 ridership trends in the 28 transit systems assessed as part of this study.

The Role of Transit Agency Initiatives

Senior transit managers have attributed recent ridership increases to combinations of various transit agency initiatives. The five broad categories of initiatives that emerged from the earlier assessments continue to represent a useful framework for analyzing ridership increases. Table 3 highlights which categories of initiatives along with market segments have been noted by interviewees as being responsible for the most significant ridership increases from 2000 to 2002. The Appendix provides greater detail on each of the experiences noted in the table.

The 18 systems noted in the material that follows include the 16 systems that experienced ridership

(*text continues on page 9*)

Table 2 Recent Ridership Experiences and Contributing Factors

Transit System and City	1994–1996 % Increase	2000–2002 % Increase	Key Factors Influencing 2000–2002 Transit Ridership Trends
Sound Transit Seattle, WA	*	57.6	• Regional institutional reorganization with revised/rationalized roles, responsibilities, functions (+) • Service expansion (commuter rail, regional bus, light rail transit) (+) • Regional pass program (+) • Vehicle amenities (+) • Slow economic growth (–)
Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)—OmniRide Woodbridge, VA	*	55.8	• Service reconfiguration in response to market shifts/demands (+) • Expanded use of employer-based fare media *(MetroChek)* (+) • Elimination of parking charges (+) • Aggressive, sustained program in service quality/customer satisfaction (+) • Strong regional economic growth, population growth/dispersion (+)
Manatee County Area Transit Bradenton, FL	*	45.9	• Introduction of free localized service (beach/resort community) (+) • Periodic free-ride days (+) • New community outreach program (+) • Strong population, job growth (+)
Bloomington Public Transit Corporation Bloomington, IN	*	42.6	• Takeover of off-campus Indiana University (IU) route (+) • Introduction of free IU student use through IU fees program (+) • Student-based marketing/orientation, including "Free Week" every September (+) • Coordination with IU on-campus circulation routes/service (+) • Significant enrollment increases at IU (+)
Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission—Virginia Railway Express Woodbridge, VA	*	37.2	• (See PRTC description above)
Gainesville Regional Transit System Gainesville, FL	*	37.0	• Service expansion to serve University of Florida (U of F)–oriented housing and overall student travel demands (+) • Unlimited access agreement for U of F students (+) • Downtown area land use policy directing developer support for pedestrians, transit (+)
City of Phoenix Public Transit Department Phoenix, AZ	*	26.5	• Service expansion and amenity programs through 2000 sales tax referendum (+) • Introduction of "Rapid Bus" service (+) • Phoenix transit department staff-in-the-field policy (+) • Community-based planning initiatives for neighborhood services (+) • Fully contracted service provision (+)

Table 2 (Continued)

Transit System and City	1994–1996 % Increase	2000–2002 % Increase	Key Factors Influencing 2000–2002 Transit Ridership Trends
Greensboro Transit Authority Greensboro, NC	*	26.4	• New vehicles (+) • New depot (+) • Expanded customer service staff (+)
Space Coast Area Transit Cocoa, FL	*	26.0	• Service expansion and increased frequency to under-served market(s) (+) • Major route restructuring (+) • Free student ride program (+) • Increased emphasis on reliability, performance (+) • Increased coordination with health and human service agencies (+)
Grand Rapids Interurban Transit Partnership Grand Rapids, MI	*	25.6	• Bus service expansion through regional service structure/focus and added millage (+) • Bridge reconstruction and transit alternatives (+) • Partnering with Grand Valley State University (+) • Embraced the "mobility management" role/ responsibility to facilitate innovation (+)
CityBus of Greater Lafayette Lafayette, IN	*	24.7	• Service expansion as part of Purdue University shift away from parking lot construction (+) • University fee-based, unlimited free-ride program for Purdue students and faculty (+) • Introduction of childcare facilities in proximity to main transfer site (+) • Collaboration with private childcare providers for use of City Bus space (+)
Ventura County Transit Ventura, CA	*	24.6	• Minor service additions (+) • Technology deployments—Smartcard, real-time online vehicle status for customers (+) • Strong commitment to customer input (+) • Strong economic growth (+)
Capital Area Transportation Authority Lansing, MI	*	24.1	• Takeover of Michigan State University (MSU) bus service (+) • Restructuring and expansion of service to MSU (+) • Incentive-based performance and funding arrangement with MSU (+) • Semester-long pass program (+) • City requirement that off-campus student housing developers build the cost of transit service into rental rates (+) • Purchase-of-service arrangements with state departments for shuttle services (+) • Long-term purchase-of-service arrangements with townships for demand-responsive services (+)

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (Continued)

Transit System and City	1994–1996 % Increase	2000–2002 % Increase	Key Factors Influencing 2000–2002 Transit Ridership Trends
Kalamazoo Metro Transit System Kalamazoo, MI	*	23.0	• Permanent service expansion from a demonstration designed from a market research study (+) • Takeover of Western Michigan University (WMU) service and unlimited student access through WMU fees (+)
Norwalk Transit System Norwalk, CA	*	18.5	• Expanded paratransit services (+) • Takeover of an LACMTA route (+) • Shuttle connection to MetroLink commuter rail (+)
Knoxville Area Transit Knoxville, TN	*	17.0	• Reconfiguration, improvements, and customer service training on downtown trolley services (+) • Introduction of Job Access reverse commute services (+) • Collaboration with housing managers to expand service to University of Tennessee (+)
Ames Transit Agency Ames, IA	17.7	29.8	• Partnership with Iowa State University: reduced headways (+)
Santa Clarita Transit Los Angeles, CA	41.7	17.0	• High population growth (+) • Increased provision of rides to children for transport to school (+) • Route restructuring as transit hub moved to better location (+) • Service expansion (+) • Service expansion restricted by insufficient maintenance facility space (−)
Orange County Transportation Authority Orange, CA	11.1	14.8	• Strong economy (+) • Discounted passes, university passes (+) • Major route restructuring (+) • Service expansion on new route network (+)
Utah Transit Authority Salt Lake City, UT	5.9	13.9	• Introduction of light rail service (+) • Promotional free-pass offer (+) • Increased emphasis on quality of service (+) • Development of regionwide Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program (+) • Reorganization of Utah Transit Authority (+)
Denver Regional Transportation District Denver, CO	9.0	12.2	• Strong economy (+) • Introduction of light rail service (+) • Expansion of innovative service strategies: ◦ “Theme routes” in Boulder (+) ◦ Call-and-ride services instead of fixed-route service in outlying areas (+) ◦ Vanpools instead of fixed-route service in some areas (+) • Gradual fare increases

Table 2 (Continued)

Transit System and City	1994–1996 % Increase	2000–2002 % Increase	Key Factors Influencing 2000–2002 Transit Ridership Trends
C-TRAN Vancouver, WA	48.0	12.0	• Recapturing riders lost after service cuts due to elimination of motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) (+)
Center Area Transportation Authority State College, PA	16.8	9.3	• Increased off-campus student housing, with owners providing transit passes to tenants (+) • Service expansion on-campus, including park-and-ride services (+) • Service cuts off-campus (–) • Fare increase from $1.00 to $1.25 (–)
TALTRAN Tallahassee, FL	11.7	8.4	• Minor service expansion (+) • Urban infilling from student housing (+) • Improvement in on-time performance (+) • Web site with online schedule information (+)
Community Transit Snohomish County, WA	35.5	7.4	• Recapturing riders lost after service cuts due to elimination of MVET; sales tax increase allowed services to be restored
Whatcom Transportation Authority Bellingham, WA	10.3	3.4	• Partnership with University of Washington: ◦ Discounted student pass (+) ◦ Expansion of service (+)
LAKETRAN Grand River, OH	18.3	3.3	• Service expansion: Additional park-and-ride lots (+) • New student pass program with community college (+) • Employer pass subsidy program for Christmas season mall workers (+)
Sarasota County Area Transit Sarasota, FL	37.8	1.8	• High population growth (+) • Policies to switch paratransit riders to fixed-route buses (+) • Lack of funds prevented recommended service expansions (–)

* Ridership for 1994 to 1996 was not evaluated for systems exhibiting the largest increases for 2000 to 2002.

increases between 17 and 57.6 percent from 2000 to 2002 and the two systems from the prior analysis period (1994 to 1996) that also had increases in this range between 2000 and 2002 (Ames Transit Agency and Santa Clarita Transit).

The following sections discuss the initiative categories that appear as columns in Table 3.

Service Adjustments

This category includes service reconfiguration, service expansion, and new service models. Nearly three-quarters (13 of 18) of the systems indicated that service expansion was a major reason behind ridership increases. Nearly half (8 of 18 systems) described major efforts to reconfigure service and/or expand the types of services offered as a major factor leading to increased ridership.

The most noteworthy of these experiences include outgrowths of the reorganization of transit services in the Seattle (Washington) region. The outgrowths involved rationalization of local and regional roles in service planning and delivery, service expansion, and

(*text continues on page 16*)

Table 3 Selected Ridership Experiences and Key Initiatives

Transit System and City	% Ridership Increase 2000–2002	Service	Fares/Pricing	Marketing	Planning	Partnering	Market Segments
Sound Transit Seattle, WA	57.6	Introduced 13 new regional bus routes, commuter rail service	Integrated regionwide fare structure with regional transit pass			Contracts operation of bus systems to local county systems	Regional commuters
Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission—OmniRide and Virginia Railway Express Woodbridge, VA	55.8 37.2	Modernized bus fleet Extended operating hours	Expanded transit pass benefit program for federal workers		Focuses on customer feedback (rider surveys, web-based notifications, "Meet-the-Management" program)		Regional commuters
Manatee County Area Transit Bradenton, FL	45.9	Introduced free trolleybus service Made minor route improvements	Offers free-ride days periodically	Ads in newspapers, on television	Holds public meetings to solicit community feedback	Connects transit to neighboring transit agency	
Bloomington Public Transit Corporation Bloomington, IN	42.6	Acquired route previously operated by university Significantly expanded fleet	Introduced free university pass Offers free rides for public for one week in September each year	Information at student orientation and ads in student newspapers and on cable television	Works with developers of off-campus housing to ensure good transit access	Closely coordinates with university transit system	University riders
Gainesville Regional Transit System Gainesville, FL	37.0	Added routes, increased frequency of service (especially on university routes) Expanded fleet	Introduced free university pass program in 1997	Flyers at student orientation Effort to promote service enhancements to a non-university route	Solicits customer input through public forums, meetings, and citizen advisory board Works with developers of off-campus housing to ensure good transit access		University riders

Table 3 (Continued)

Transit System and City	% Ridership Increase 2000–2002	Service	Fares/Pricing	Marketing	Planning	Partnering	Market Segments
City of Phoenix Public Transit Department Phoenix, AZ	26.5	Expanded system, expanded commuter bus Increased frequency of service, introduced Sunday service Expanded fleet		Community newspapers and local cable Representatives in the field to answer rider questions whenever service changes are made		Used community-based planning initiative for circulator service in Ahwatukee area	
Greensboro Transit Authority Greensboro, NC	26.4	Maintained schedule reliability by using support vehicles Added new equipment and new depot			Solicits customer input through open meetings and rider advisory committee		
Space Coast Area Transit Cocoa, FL	26.0	Restructured routes (major) and increased frequency Expanded fleet Improved on-time performance	Introduced summertime free rides for schoolchildren		Maintains close customer contact, including employee who solicits rider input on buses	Coordinates with senior homes and health and human services agencies	
Grand Rapids Interurban Transit Partnership Grand Rapids, MI	25.6	Expanded service and increased frequency to mitigate a highway bridge reconstruction			Acts as mobility manager as well as service provider	Partnered with university to provide shuttle services Enjoys strong political support	
CityBus of Greater Lafayette Lafayette, IN	24.7	Added routes, extended hours, added park-and-ride lots to compensate for decreased parking on campus	Introduced free university pass for students and faculty			Owns two childcare facilities near CityBus service and leases them to childcare provider	University riders

(*continued on next page*)

Table 3 (Continued)

Transit System and City	% Ridership Increase 2000–2002	Service	Fares/Pricing	Marketing	Planning	Partnering	Market Segments
Ventura County Transit Ventura, CA	24.6	Expanded service (minor)	Introduced SmartCard technology Provides free university pass for students	Radio ads Community outreach	Emphasizes making service simple to use: NextBus, electronic arrival signs in terminals, online router Solicits passenger input through annual rider survey	Partnered with local university to serve campus	
Capital Area Transportation Authority Lansing, MI	24.1	Acquired operation of university bus system Restructured university service, increased frequency				Student housing developers provide free transit passes to tenants Collaborated with state government to provide park-and-ride service to state offices Partnered with townships to provide demand-response service for outlying areas	University riders
Kalamazoo Metro Transit System Kalamazoo, MI	23.0	Acquired six routes previously operated by university Expanded evening service			Conducts regular market research program to determine desired services	Partnered with university	University riders

Table 3 (Continued)

Transit System and City	% Ridership Increase 2000–2002	Service	Fares/Pricing	Marketing	Planning	Partnering	Market Segments
Norwalk Transit System Norwalk, CA	18.5	Acquired route previously operated by LACMTA Expanded paratransit service Changed routes (minor)	Introduced SmartCard technology in 1998			Provides park-and-ride shuttle for a regional commuter rail station	
Knoxville Area Transit Knoxville, TN	17.0	Overhauled downtown trolleybus (reduced headways, restructured routes, updated equipment) Introduced night and Sunday service		Award-winning television and print ads Free semester bus passes sent to all university students	Hired first customer service manager Used passenger surveys in strategic planning initiative to make changes to service	Partnered with student housing to provide service to campus Partnerships to provide shuttles to sporting events	University riders Residents
Ames Transit Agency Ames, IA	29.8	Reduced headways	Provides students with free use of system through university buyout			Partnered with university	University riders
Santa Clarita Transit Los Angeles, CA	17.0	Moved transfer station to more efficient location Added commuter service	Implemented online pass sales	Ambassadors Program with customers			School children Commuters
Orange County Transportation Authority Orange, CA	14.8	Converted from hub/spoke to grid Increased service hours Increased frequency	Introduced day pass Introduced university pass programs	Hub to grid marketing program	Used time savings in origin/destination-based planning Introduced new customer-based advisory committee	Partnered with universities Obtains advice from citizen advocacy program	Entire market University students

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Table 3 (Continued)

Transit System and City	% Ridership Increase 2000–2002	Service	Fares/pricing	Marketing	Planning	Partnering	Market Segments
Utah Transit Authority Salt Lake City, UT	13.9	Introduced light rail service Increased emphasis on quality	Offered promotional free pass	Recognition and approval rating-based campaigns	Reorganized to manage mobility Introduced regionwide TDM program	Engages in sustained local coalition building	Residents
Denver Regional Transportation District Denver, CO	12.2	Opened Southwest Corridor light rail service Further developed Boulder "theme" routes Substituted call-and-ride service Introduced light rail service Increased emphasis on quality service Expanded vanpool	Reduced off-peak fares; increased peak fares			Collaborates with local communities Collaborates with contract providers	Subregional markets
C-TRAN Vancouver, WA	12.0	Reduced service caused by loss of MVET Expanded park-and-ride services					Commuters Riders lost with MVET funding loss (1999)
Center Area Transportation Authority State College, PA	9.3	Increased campus service to university	Offers university subsidized pass programs for faculty and students		Actively involved in City's site review process	Collaborates with Fannie Mae on "Smart Commute" mortgage program	University students
TALTRAN Tallahassee, FL	8.4	Increased use of reserve fleet Lengthened routes	Continued university pass programs	Introduction of a heavily used web site	Analyzed operations to improve performance	Collaborates with university on service and fare programs	University students

Table 3 (Continued)

Transit System and City	% Ridership Increase 2000–2002	Service	Fares/Pricing	Marketing	Planning	Partnering	Market Segments
Community Transit Snohomish County, WA	7.4					Collaborates with Sound Transit on regional service	Riders lost with MVET funding loss (1999)
Whatcom Transportation Authority Bellingham, WA	3.4	Added morning peak service Added rural route deviation services	Introduced a direct sale discounted student pass for university students			Collaborates with university	University students Riders lost with MVET funding loss (1999)
LAKETRAN Grand River, OH	3.3	Added park-and-ride lots and commuter service Combined transit center and minor league baseball stadium parking Installed bike racks on all local buses	Continued summertime $0.10 youth fare Offers various low-fare special events Introduced community college student pass program Introduced monthly commuter pass program	Focused demographic research and use Newspaper coupon program for targeted routes Extensive community involvement programs Senior marketing program		Collaborates with Cleveland RTA and local communities	Commuters Students
Sarasota County Area Transit Sarasota, FL	1.8	Adjusted service to capture paratransit riders			Considering a shift to a regional authority with taxing power	Collaborates with developers on transit-friendly design	

the addition of new modes as part of the long-term development of a fully integrated regional system.

A number of the other most significant increases in ridership from 2000 to 2002 involved expanding service to universities across the country, including:

- Bloomington, Indiana (Indiana University);
- Gainesville, Florida (University of Florida);
- Grand Rapids, Michigan (Grand Valley State University);
- Lafayette, Indiana (Purdue University);
- Lansing, Michigan (Michigan State University);
- Kalamazoo, Michigan (Western Michigan University);
- Knoxville, Tennessee (University of Tennessee); and
- Ames, Iowa (Iowa State University).

Other significant increases are tied in part to service adjustments focused on specific markets and/or driven by heightened attention given to customer-based service quality, including Phoenix (Arizona) and OmniRide and the Virginia Railway Express of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) in Woodbridge (Virginia). (Denver [Colorado] also made noteworthy service adjustments, although the overall change in ridership was not as significant.)

Fare and Pricing Adaptation

This category includes the introduction of new fare media and technologies. Half (9 of 18 systems) suggested that fare and pricing initiatives had played a major role in increasing ridership in the period. Pass programs for university students as well as introduction of new pass programs and electronic fare media were also cited.

Among the other pricing initiatives that have had positive impacts on ridership were the elimination of parking charges for the PRTC OmniRide commuter bus service (Virginia), the reduced off-peak fares instituted in Denver (Colorado), and new unlimited access for university students and faculty through arrangements at a number of the universities mentioned previously.

Marketing and Information Initiatives

This category includes initiatives that apply emerging electronic information technologies to increase ridership. Surprisingly, few systems indicated that stand-alone marketing campaigns or initiatives were significant factors in ridership increases. However, each system has supported other ridership initiatives, particularly service expansion, with aggressive marketing, public information, and advertising activities of various kinds.

Shifts in Planning Orientation

This category includes initiatives that increase emphasis on strategic planning and customer-oriented planning. Nearly half (8 of 18 systems) indicated that changes in planning orientation were a major factor in ridership increases. Many cited new efforts to understand and monitor customer needs more effectively as an important factor. These efforts include a "Meet the Management" program at Woodbridge (Virginia), staff field presence to assist riders through service changes and expansion in Phoenix (Arizona), and broadened involvement of transit agencies and leadership in various community development activities in Gainesville (Florida), Lafayette (Indiana), and Lansing (Michigan). (State College, Pennsylvania, also shifted its orientation toward the university community, although ridership increases were not as significant.)

Service Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering

More than half (10 of 18 systems) credited collaborative relationships for ridership increases. The most frequently cited of these were relationships with local universities. Nine of 18 systems were in university communities and cited service in and through campuses as well as to and from the neighboring community as a major reason for ridership increases. Also noted were collaborative arrangements with:

- Other operating agencies in the Seattle (Washington) region and Norwalk (California);
- Adjacent jurisdictions in Bradenton (Florida);
- Health and human service agencies, providers, and organizations in Cocoa (Florida) and Lafayette (Indiana); and
- Developers in Bloomington (Indiana), Gainesville (Florida), and Lansing (Michigan).

Other systems with smaller 2000 to 2002 ridership increases also engaged in noteworthy collabo-

rative activities as described in the Appendix, including Grand River (Ohio), Denver (Colorado), State College (Pennsylvania), and Sarasota (Florida).

These experiences, whether viewed individually or together, continue to suggest that there are innovative and continuously evolving means to pursue significant increases in transit ridership.

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APPENDIX—SUMMARY REPORTS

Sound Transit

Seattle, Washington

Contact: Mike Bergman, Policy and Planning

Summary

For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate a 58 percent increase in ridership for Sound Transit. The circumstances surrounding this extraordinary increase are somewhat unique however, involving significant reorganization and expansion of service in the Seattle metropolitan region following approval of an ambitious *Sound Moves* regional plan in 1996.

Within the region, Sound Transit is responsible for regional scale transit services that will eventually involve integrated regional bus services, commuter rail service (the "Sounder"), and light rail services. In designing and delivering planned regional services on a relatively limited network, Sound Transit works in close cooperation with the region's three counties, King County, Pierce County, and Snohomish County, which retain responsibility for local transit services.

The substantial increase in Sound Transit ridership for 2000 to 2002 results largely from the fact that 2000 was the first full year that Sound Transit services were phased into operation, when 13 of 20 planned regional bus routes began operation. In 2004, six more routes have been added; service on one remaining route is yet to be started. Annual ridership on the regional bus system for 2002 was approximately 6.4 million trips, representing 86 percent of Sound Transit's total ridership for the year.

Sounder commuter rail service also began in 2000 with two round trips daily between Seattle and Tacoma and was expanded in 2003 to three round trips daily. Sound Transit's light rail service began over a 1.5-mile segment serving a Sounder rail station in August 2003. Construction is scheduled to begin on the Central Link from downtown to the SEATAC Airport in November 2004, with operation scheduled to begin in 2009.

Despite the obvious relationship between increased ridership and major service expansion, there are several unique aspects to the very successful planning and operation of Sound Transit services in the 2000 to 2002 period.

System Performance

The substantial ridership increases over the 2000 to 2002 period have occurred during a time when economic activity in the region was slow. Even so, boardings per hour on the Sound Transit regional bus system grew from 15 in 2000 to more than 21 in 2002, and boardings per trip have remain constant as the system has been expanded. Cost recovery on the Sound Transit bus system paralleled that of the local county services.

The focus of performance measurement on the regional system is somewhat unique because of principles adopted as part of the *Sound Moves* plan. Cost recovery plays a large role in the formula by which local jurisdictions support Sound Transit services. Secondly, there is requirement for "subarea equity" in service planning and operation so that benefits received in each of five defined subareas equal expenditures required. Service planning is, therefore, guided and performance measured first as a function of fiscal balance not strictly driven by "transit demand."

Service Adjustments and Planning Orientation

More than Commuter Service. The goal of the regional bus system was to enhance service in selected corridors in the region that could support two-way, all-day express service. The system envisioned, therefore, has been limited in scope and focused on 20 corridors. Planning and introduction of increased service was carried out in three phases:

1. Service enhancements on routes served by the three county systems that could support two-way, all-day express service; i.e., existing markets. Operation of enhanced services on these routes was taken over by Sound Transit.

2. Service enhancements by Sound Transit in corridors that represented developing markets and could be built up from the strongest peak-hour/peak-direction travel patterns.

3. Service enhancements that represent new links and new corridors.

All Sound Transit regional bus services also use the region's HOV network, which involves 100 miles of HOV facilities in King County alone.

In addition, a new program is now underway involving expanded park-and-ride facilities, transit centers, and freeway access ramps to further enhance speed and reliability of both the Sound Transit services as well as county transit services over the entire regional network.

Fare and Pricing Policy

The adoption of the 1996 *Sound Moves* plan and the formation of Sound Transit also included a commitment to an integrated regionwide fare structure and system built around a regional transit pass program, "Puget Pass," managed by Sound Transit. The pass is denominated in zones values and includes a universal transfer provision whereby transfers from local bus systems cover the base fare cost of Sound Transit bus service. Plans are underway to advance to a "smartcard"-based system in the future.

Marketing and Information Initiatives

Sound Transit itself does little in the way of pure promotion and advertising. Because Sound Transit's regional bus system is a relatively small part of the overall regional transit network, Sound Transit relies on the marketing and outreach programs already established in the three county transit systems to market its services, including specifically designed joint promotional programs.

Equipment and Amenities

In addition to the speed and reliability initiatives noted earlier, Sound Transit is also attempting to cater to customers' interest in comfort and amenities by operating buses that have high seat backs, luggage racks, reading lights, and air conditioning, a relatively new step for the region.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Sound Transit is also unique in that it does not directly operate the bus system. The local county systems operate and maintain the Sound Transit equipment through a partnership. The Sound Transit equipment maintains its own identity and Sound Transit's role is management of the system to assure the quality of the customer's experience and efficiency and effectiveness of the operation.

Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)—OmniRide and Virginia Railway Express (VRE)

Woodbridge, Virginia

Contact: Alfred H. Harf, Executive Director

Summary

PRTC purchases and directs service delivery in the Northern Virginia area of Washington, D.C. PRTC services include commuter bus (OmniRide), local bus (OmniLink), commuter rail (VRE), and ridesharing services, both car and vanpools.

Over the 2000 to 2002 period, ridership on the OmniRide bus services increased 56 percent and ridership on VRE increased 37 percent. These substantial increases were the result of major fleet enhancements, expanded use of Metrochek fare options, reconfiguration of services to meet market demands, and a sustained focus on service quality. In addition, ridership growth has been spurred by a strong regional economy and continuing population growth and dispersion in northern Virginia.

Performance

Over the two-year period, National Transit Database (NTD) data indicate that performance on both the OmniRide system and VRE has improved as ridership has increased. As ridership grew 56 percent on PRTC bus services, passengers per hour increased 14 percent, passengers per mile grew 37 percent, and cost per passenger declined 22 percent.

The same pattern has held true for VRE. The 37 percent increase in ridership was accompanied by a 26 percent increase in passengers per hour, a 29 percent increase in passengers per mile, and a reduction of 10 percent in cost per passenger based on NTD data.

Service Adjustments

Modernization of the PRTC bus fleet has been an important factor in recent ridership increases. Three-quarters of the OmniRide fleet is now less than three years old. As vehicles have been purchased, they have been outfitted with more customer amenities including courtesy lighting, reclining seats, and more comfortable upholstery. Recent purchases have included 57 passenger vehicles, the largest available. The same attention to fleet enhancements has been applied on the OmniLink local bus service.

Increases in OmniLink local bus services have also resulted from adjustments in service configuration. Following the elimination of VRE parking charges as part of an effort to recapture riders following a rail accident, ridership on feeder services fell. Services and resources were switched to expand other services in response to rider demand. Regular route hours were extended from 6:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. The extended evening hours appealed to a large regional retail job market with evening work schedules, contributing substantially to the ridership increases.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Another major factor in the PRTC ridership increases was the Presidential Executive Order 13150 signed by then-President Clinton in April 2000 to provide a transit pass transportation fringe benefit program in the capital region. Prior to the Executive Order, Federal agencies had a variety of programs in place and less than 20 percent of PRTC riders were enrolled. Following the Executive Order, Federal employees using the "Metrochek" fringe benefit has risen to 50 percent of riders.

Planning Orientation

PRTC maintains a rigorous focus on customer satisfaction and feedback. Rider customer satisfaction surveys are carried out quarterly and PRTC has been able to assemble and maintain a larger customer comment database. PRTC also manages web-based customer communications systems that allow real-time notice to customers about service disruptions or schedule changes. Of approximately 5,000 to 6,000 daily riders, it is estimated that 4,000 are web subscribers.

The strong customer orientation and commitment to customer service excellence has become an ingrained philosophy at VRE as well. Part of this commitment is born out through a "Meet-the Management" program that allows customers to interact freely with management. Two or three times a year, management staff visit stations offering riders coffee and donuts and question-and-answer opportunities.

Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT)

Bradenton, Florida

Contact: Ralph Heseler, Transit Manager

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 46 percent on the MCAT. Much of the growth is because of the introduction of the free Manatee Trolley service on Anna Maria Island. In addition, MCAT made minor route changes to improve performance.

External factors included significant population growth during the period and job growth in the service sector. Relatively little infill occurred in the area; most development has sprawled farther into the northern and eastern parts of the County. Traffic has been steadily worsening in the area; congestion is increasingly present year-round, rather than just in wintertime.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, passengers per hour rose 28 percent; passengers per mile rose 20 percent; and the cost per passenger declined 18 percent. In large part, these numbers reflect the success of the newly introduced Manatee Trolley.

Service Adjustments

The largest service adjustment, and a major contributor to ridership growth, was the addition of the free Manatee Trolley in 2002. This trolley serves Anna Maria Island, a beach and resort community. Trolleys run seven days per week from 6:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Bus service from the mainland connects six days per week and, on Sundays and holidays, a park-and-ride shuttle from the mainland provides access. The trolley buses now account for up to 40 percent of total MCAT ridership in peak season (wintertime).

This service was meant to help alleviate the heavy traffic congestion on the island, which has only one main road running its length. Rider surveys indicate that the majority of the passengers would have driven in the absence of trolley service, and MCAT calculates it is keeping 800 cars per day off the road. The service is funded by grant funding and county money; MCAT hopes to obtain sufficient funding to keep the service free after the grant expires.

In addition, MCAT made several minor route changes in 1999 that helped improve its ontime performance by streamlining the route structures. It has recently begun a new program of increasing the efficiency of all its routes (see below).

Fare and Pricing Policy

MCAT continued to offer occasional free ride days every two or three months during the period. These boost ridership numbers, but more importantly encourages people to try the transit system and see how easy it is to use. MCAT also continued to offer a three-month summer discount pass for schoolchildren; however, this is not a major contributor to ridership.

Fares remained unchanged during the period, with the exception of the free trolley service introduced in 2002 (see below).

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

MCAT increased its advertising in local newspapers over the period. It also continued to advertise on the local government access cable channel and, for several months, placed ads on regular television. It is now embarking on a community outreach program, described below.

Planning Orientation

As well as annual transit development plans (TDPs), MCAT formed a blue-ribbon task force to hold public meetings throughout the County, in which the community expressed strong interest in more service. MCAT also conducted a public transportation system analysis (PTSA) examining bicounty ridership.

MCAT is starting a new community outreach program to educate people on how the system works, especially for those in outlying areas. It plans to convert a bus to a mobile information center that will be parked in different communities. As well as generating interest in MCAT services, this will help the transit agency identify the level of interest in different communities.

MCAT is now systematically examining its routes one by one to find ways to increase efficiency, improve ontime performance, and eliminate unproductive route segments. This is particularly needed as worsening traffic congestion has made it harder to keep buses on time, and MCAT is focused on ways to minimize unnecessary legs that leave its buses stuck in traffic.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

MCAT coordinates with the neighboring Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) on transit connections at two locations. During the period, MCAT expanded to all-day service to one of those connections.

Bloomington Public Transit Corporation (BT)

Bloomington, Indiana

Contact: Lewis May, General Manager

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 43 percent on the BT system. Two events in August 2000 accounted for most of this growth: the introduction of free rides for Indiana University students; and the acquisition of a route previously operated by the university. Most of the ridership increase occurred in that first year, though BT reports that ridership continues to grow several percentage points each year.

University enrollment has slowly increased over the years as well, and two-thirds of BT's riders are students. However, it does not operate the university oncampus circulator routes.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, passengers per hour declined two percent but passengers per mile rose 22 percent. Overall, the cost per passenger declined 14 percent. These numbers reflect the greatly increased student ridership on the system.

Service Adjustments

BT took over a route previously operated by the university in August 2000, adding 200 to 300,000 riders per year to its system. The route had been the only off-campus route still operated by the university.

In preparation for the start of the UPass, BT increased its fleet by 50 percent. Because of the short lead time when the university signed the contract, BT chose to buy used buses, which it plans to finish replacing within the next few years. It also made minor changes to its routes in preparation for the UPass.

In general, BT continually tweaks its routes to further improve service. It has also steadily expanded service for the general public.

Fare and Pricing Policy

By far the most important factor in BT's ridership increase was the introduction of the "U-Pass Partnership" in August 2000. Students pay a mandatory transportation fee as part of tuition, part of which is then passed on to BT. In return, students ride the buses for free with a valid university identification card. Interestingly, some of the campus routes operated by the university still charge a fee, although the university hopes to eventually offer those at no cost.

This action was actually initiated by students who wanted to find ways to address traffic and parking issues. They worked with the transit agency and the university administration to assemble a proposal. BT considers it a win-win situation: it boosted ridership, provided an important revenue source, and improves access for students. The student fees are sufficient to cover the cost of providing the additional service.

Base fares remained otherwise unchanged during the period. Base fares are $0.75 per ride, with monthly passes sold for $25.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

BT initiated a large marketing effort to introduce the UPass program. It continues to provide information at freshman orientation. In addition, it targets students through student newspapers and cable television. Because of the relatively small size of Bloomington, BT is able to buy cable advertising at a cost of only $7.00 for a 30-second spot on major cable channels.

Every September, in conjunction with the university transit system and the area's rural transit system, BT sponsors "Free Week," in which all buses are free for all riders for seven days. As well as generating a large spike in ridership, it introduces the transit system to new riders.

Planning Orientation

BT is part of the City's design/review process and, as such, provides recommendations to make development more transit friendly and to prompt the addition of transit amenities. The past decade has seen an explosion of off-campus housing that provided a ready-made market for BT's services, and the system has worked particularly closely with these residential developers to ensure good transit access.

As well as infill by student housing, development has also occurred on the perimeters of town, creating a challenge for BT to effectively serve these areas.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Though it does not operate the university oncampus circulator routes, BT closely coordinates with the university transit system. Both systems share one operating facility, making such coordination easier.

Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS)

Gainesville, Florida

Contact: Shenley Neely, Chief Transit Planner

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 37 percent on the RTS. In large part, this is because of the continuing success of its partnership with the University of Florida to provide unlimited access for students on both on- and off-campus routes. This program was instituted in 1997, and RTS continually expanded service through the study period to meet demand. RTS reports that only recently has the ridership growth leveled off as the program matures. The potential for future growth is limited by the need for capital to further expand the bus fleet.

In addition, the university grew slowly over the period. Like many university campuses, students increasingly live off campus and parking is scarce at the University, fueling demand for transit. Students account for 70 to 80 percent of ridership on the RTS.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, passengers per hour rose eight percent; passengers per mile rose 28 percent; while the cost per passenger remained steady. The difference in increases between passengers per hour and passengers per mile may be because of the reduction in average speed resulting from increased crowding.

Service Adjustments

In response to the increasing demand from students, RTS has steadily added routes, increased frequency of service, and put additional buses into service during the period. Some changes were made on non-university routes as well. In particular, RTS increased the frequency of service and restructured routes in the less affluent east side of Gainesville. In general, RTS takes advantage of breaks in the academic year to make schedule changes.

When the university agreement was instituted in 1997, RTS purchased an additional 20 buses with an SIB (State Infrastructure Bank) loan and STP money. To add new university routes, RTS received funding for operating expenses from state DOT grants and university funding. The university pays RTS by the number of revenue and service hours incurred. The growth in student ridership has helped RTS gain more formula-based money. Future growth for RTS is constrained by the need to acquire more equipment; however, the 50-50 Federal match is difficult for RTS to meet. It receives little funding from the City, and its university contracts are only meant to cover operating expenses.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Fares remained unchanged during the period. However, the university did increase the transportation fee per credit hour that it charges to students.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

RTS actively promoted its services to students through flyers and information during orientation. It also launched a marketing effort to promote the increased service offered to the east side of Gainesville during the period (see above).

Planning Orientation

RTS actively seeks input from its customers through public forums, meetings, and its citizen advisory board. It revised its TDP annually, with major updates every five years. RTS often makes use of the university's transportation research center to assist in planning new strategies.

RTS benefits from city policy that exempts developers from meeting roadway level of service requirements in the downtown area (known as the "Transportation Concurrency Exemption Area"), in return for meeting requirements for pedestrian connectivity and transit access.

RTS is closely involved in a new city planning effort, called "Plan East Gainesville," that hopes to revitalize East Gainesville by using bus rapid transit and other transit improvements to spur economic growth.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

RTS is involved in supplying transit to new residential developments. Though new student housing in the area tends towards isolated gated-style residential communities, developers compete to be on transit routes. In one recent development, RTS agreed to provide bus service running through the streets of a development to better serve its residents; generally, the system avoids entering developments because of the extra time it adds.

City of Phoenix Public Transit Department

Phoenix, Arizona

Contacts: Steven P. Brown, Deputy Director, Operations and Planning
Dale Hardy
Sandi Harrison

Summary

City of Phoenix public transit services represent approximately 60 percent of the transit service available in the region and carries approximately 70 percent of the ridership in the region. All services in Phoenix are contracted through two fixed-route providers, one demand-responsive provider, and two providers running local circulator services. Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate that ridership on the City of Phoenix system increased 27 percent. The increase was largely the result of service improvements and system expansion following a 2000 referendum that dedicated an additional four-tenths of a percent of sales tax revenue for bus, rail, and transit operations.

Performance

During the period following the 2000 referendum, service was extended and added as a matter of policy to establish a new service base for Phoenix. As a result, as service was expanded, passengers per mile and per hour suffered very small declines and cost per passenger rose slightly according to data from the NTD. Today, performance in terms of passengers per mile is improving slightly month to month.

Service Adjustments

Initial service expansion following the 2000 referendum was carried out without putting additional vehicles in service. Sunday service, which had not been provided for 30 years, was reinstituted and Saturday services increased. In 2001, 96 new vehicles were placed in service allowing frequencies to be increased on the most heavily used routes.

During the period, miles of service increased approximately 20 percent each year. Today there is 50 percent more service in place than there was in 2000.

The funding referendum also included support for shelters and other amenities that are felt to have had a positive impact on ridership. In addition, new "Rapid" bus service is being provided in four commuting corridors and expansion of the service is planned for a fifth corridor, all supported by a system of park-and-ride lots. The Rapid service is provided with 56 new 45-foot composite buses with commuter configuration and amenities.

Another funding initiative is scheduled for November 2004. Approximately two-thirds of the revenue from the proposed ½-cent sales tax extension would go to highways and one-third to transit in its various forms. If passed, the revenue measure is expected to provide for a doubling of current services levels in the next 20 years. The current ½-cent sales tax is predominately for highway construction, with more than 98 percent of the revenues being used for that purpose.

Fare and Pricing Policy

No significant changes were made is fares or fare policy during the period.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

Transit marketing is conceived and carried out with a regional perspective and focus. The largest interest has come from "community" newspapers, reflecting their desires to cater to very localized market needs. Also, a "Transit Now" local cable program is produced every two months.

The most significant and successful marketing initiative, however, has been Phoenix Transit Department's commitment to be in the field personally to meet with and assist individual riders at critical locations as service changes are made. The effort is an attempt to "make people feel comfortable" in seeking out and using transit. Typically, this field support is initiated one to two weeks ahead of the planned changes and through implementation. The one-on-one encounters are thought to be highly successful creating and maintaining a positive image for transit as well as helping to insure successful transitions in services.

Planning Orientation

The entire set of Phoenix Transit Department services is provided through private contractors. A very successful community-based planning initiative was used for the planning of circulator services in the Ahwatukee area of Phoenix. This area of approximately 75,000 residents within the City of Phoenix has been underserved by transit service in the past. The curvilinear street network and a mountain park that limited access to the rest of the City of Phoenix provided challenges to the provision of transit service by standard 40-foot buses. Utilizing a planning group of nearly 40 area residents, staff assisted them in developing new circulator service that served destinations they deemed important, traveling on neighborhood streets, using 23-foot 16-passenger "cutaway" style vehicles. The service has been very successful, establishing the standard planning process that will be used as future neighborhood circulator services are planned.

Greensboro Transit Authority (GTA)

Greensboro, North Carolina

Contact: Nancy Nichols, General Manager

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 26 percent on the GTA system. The agency could not point to any particular reason for its growth in ridership over that period.

GTA offers hourly service on most of its routes. Although it has not added service, it has improved the quality of the service it offers. This has included the acquisition of new equipment and construction of a new depot, complete with customer service representative to answer questions about the transit system.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, though passengers per hour remained the same and passengers per mile declined four percent, the overall cost per passenger declined 18 percent.

Service Adjustments

Ridership has increased so much that the system began using support vehicles to improve reliability, though frequency of service was not increased. Instead, GTA staged extra buses along the route that come into service when a driver reports running 10 minutes late or having 10 standees.

GTA plans to soon expand its paratransit service to cover the whole city.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Fares remained unchanged during the period. A university pass will be offered in fall of 2004 for the first time. However, the hourly service may serve as a barrier to student interest.

Planning Orientation

GTA prides itself on its responsiveness to customer input. It holds many open meetings and encourages citizens to attend its board meetings. Transit representatives attend community meetings to answer questions on transit. GTA also has a rider advisory committee, whose members get input from other passengers and receive free bus passes in return. A driver advisory committee is composed of bus drivers who provide their insights into ways to improve service.

GTA has ambitious plans. As the result of a recent study and recommendations, it hopes to double its ridership within five years.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

GTA often works with developers to ensure that developments are transit accessible, and is working to improve that process.

Space Coast Area Transit (SCAT)

Cocoa, Florida

Contact: Jim Liesenfelt, Transit Director

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 26 percent on the SCAT system. Ridership initiatives that helped spur the growth include an expansion of service that tapped into the area's latent demand for transit; a major restructuring of routes and schedules that better served the area and made transfers more practical and more convenient; and an increased emphasis on reliability and ontime performance. In addition, population grew significantly throughout the period. However, the major ridership gains were made in areas that were already fully developed.

SCAT has served the area since 1974. However, fixed-route service did not begin until 1991. Its routes cover both the mainland and a barrier island.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, passengers per hour rose nine percent; passengers per mile declined 22 percent; and the cost per passenger declined four percent.

Service Adjustments

In October 2001, SCAT began a series of major changes that greatly expanded and improved its service in the northern part of the County. The changes were made partly in response to an increased focus by the Board of County Commissioners on riders other than the elderly and disabled, who were SCAT's traditional customers. SCAT was also able to take advantage of the increasing number of vanpool services offered by elderly and disabled service centers to shift its own resources into fixed-route service.

As part of the service expansion, SCAT restructured its routes to simplify the routing and make transfers easier. It significantly increased frequency of service, so that many routes had half-hour headways and none longer than one hour, which also served to make transfers more convenient. It added a beach trolley route and lengthened the hours of operation of its buses. SCAT expanded its fleet in order to provide the new service, though it has generally decreased the size of its buses as they were replaced. This was done both to make the buses fuller and for better maneuverability in shopping centers.

Part of the restructuring was also geared towards improving ontime performance and reliability; in particular, much greater emphasis was put on making schedules more realistic. In addition, to make its service more visible and easier to use, SCAT began to prominently post bus stop signs showing the route number, hours, and schedule.

SCAT noted that the service expansions seemed to tap into a latent demand for transit services. Prior to this, SCAT was perceived as a service mostly for the elderly and disabled. The addition of the new service and a newer fleet of buses changed its public image. At the same time, SCAT continued to expand its paratransit fleet and noted that demand easily kept pace with the additional capacity provided.

Fare and Pricing Policy

In the summer of 2001, SCAT introduced a special program for schoolchildren, who could ride free by showing a library card. The program continues today, and generates a spike of several percentage points in ridership. As well as increasing ridership in the summer, the program introduces schoolchildren to SCAT's services. SCAT has seen an increasing number of schoolchildren using its buses to get to school during the academic year.

Base fares remained unchanged during the period, at $1.00.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

A special marketing effort was introduced for the free schoolchild program in 2002, in which SCAT distributed brochures to every eligible child in the local schools. Previously, in 2001, SCAT had left marketing up to the local library system, which did not have the resources to launch such an effort.

SCAT has now hired a consultant to do a marketing study and determine which parts are most effective. As part of that study, focus groups are being formed of frequent, infrequent, and potential riders to learn what marketing will appeal to them. As well as maintaining an Internet site, SCAT currently buys radio and television advertising, and has won numerous awards for its ads.

Planning Orientation

SCAT credits some of its success to its ability to have close contact with the passengers because of its small size. Bus drivers pass on input from customers, and even the administrative staff talks to passengers who come to the office to buy passes. In addition, SCAT has one employee gather input by riding buses three days per week and talking to passengers and drivers about what can be improved. SCAT is now preparing to do a ridership survey of its full system to gather quantitative data on its riders.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

SCAT coordinates with health and human services agencies to provide service for the elderly and disabled, and works closely with senior homes.

Development in the area has continued to be relatively low density, and SCAT does not work closely with residential developers. However, it often works with shopping centers to locate bus stops, as its buses often enter the shopping centers to directly serve the storefronts.

Grand Rapids Interurban Transit Partnership (The Rapid)

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Contact: Peter Varga, Executive Director/CEO
Conrad Venema, Long Range Planner

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership on The Rapid of 26 percent. The increase was largely the result of a renewed and expanded commitment to public transportation on the part of the six surrounding jurisdictions, a commitment that revised The Rapid's governance and institutional structure on a regional scale and provided increased funding through a successful mileage referendum at the time of the reorganization.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, passengers per hour rose more than 15 percent, passengers per mile rose nearly 13 percent, and cost per passenger declined nearly five percent. Improved performance in the midst of service expansion was made possible by aggressive service monitoring on a monthly basis that continues through to today.

Service Adjustments

In early 2000, a highway bridge rebuilding project began that essentially shut a major highway to and through Grand Rapids. To mitigate the anticipated traffic problems, the State supported bus service expansion and frequency improvements and HOV-based services in major corridors. A predictable spike in transit ridership occurred over the succeeding nine months. Following the construction period, ridership dipped a little but is coming back up again since the millage passed as part of the creation of the Interurban Transit Partnership provided funds to retain most of the service improvements originally supported by state funds.

In late 2003, another millage was passed by a 65 percent vote in all six cities, allowing The Rapid to again plan for expansion of service.

Planning Orientation

The Interurban Transit Partnership has been operating since its inception as mobility manager in the region as well as a service provider. One arm of its Development Division has taken on the role of "mobility solutions, inc.," to facilitate solutions and partnerships to the entire of range of mobility problems.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

The success of The Rapid is partly because of the broad and deep support transit enjoys in the region and that led up to the creation of Partnership. In addition to garnering the support of a large majority of citizens who enacted two millage increases, political leaders in all six member jurisdictions have also been supportive of the Partnership. The Partnership has also aggressively partnered with Grand Valley State University to develop shuttle services that link its two 10,000-student campuses. Service has been so successful that headways have been dropped 30 minutes to 20 minutes and now to 15 minutes, with plans to go to 10 minutes.

Finally, the Partnership has engaged with the City of Grand Rapids in development of a downtown shuttle service.

CityBus of Greater Lafayette

Lafayette, Indiana

Contact: Martin B. Sennett, General Manager

Summary

CityBus ridership increased 25 percent from 2000 to 2002. The major impetus for the increase came from a decision by Purdue University, with persistent encouragement by CityBus, to provide Purdue students and faculty with unlimited access to CityBus services.

Performance

Over the two-year period, NTD data indicate that performance on the CityBus system improved as ridership increased. As ridership grew 25 percent, passengers per hour increased 14 percent, passengers per mile grew 18 percent, and cost per passenger declined eight percent.

Service Adjustments

Growth on the campus of 38,000 students has necessitated a building program that replaced surface parking lots with university buildings. The resulting circulation and access needs provided the impetus for the unlimited pass program. As a result of the additional demand from Purdue students and faculty, new routes were added to the system, weekend hours were extended, and a partnership formed with the University to develop necessary park-and-ride lots.

Fare and Pricing Policy

The unlimited access program for Purdue University students and faculty relies on a university identification card for boarding and is supported through tuition payments, approximately $1.0 million of which is paid to CityBus annually to offset related service costs. Prior to the introduction of the unlimited access program, individual passes were marketed and sold to university students and faculty with only minimal impact of CityBus ridership.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Ridership increases at CityBus were also a result of initiatives to provide childcare facilities and services in proximity to CityBus service. The first childcare facility opened in 1998 a half block from the main CityBus transfer site. A second was opened in September 2002 as part of a $57 million joint development project. The impetus for the childcare initiatives came, in part, from opportunities made available through the Federal Livable Communities and Welfare-to-Work initiatives.

The childcare services are provided in facilities owned by CityBus and leased to a non-profit childcare provider. They handle more than 70 children daily with all ages under one roof to ease parent travel. CityBus estimates that 40 to 50 percent of the children served arrive by bus and are drawn from a combination of graduate student and worker households.

Ventura County Transit (VISTA)

Ventura, California

Contact: Ginger Gherardi, Executive Director

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 25 percent on the VISTA system. The system began service in 1994 and has been steadily expanding since then. It credits its continued ridership increases to increasing awareness of its services as the system matures, increasing efforts to make its service more user friendly through information services, and its offering of high-quality, courteous service. In addition, the region enjoyed a strong economy during the period, though population growth has not been a significant factor in the area.

VISTA is not an urban system. It serves primarily to connect local transit systems throughout the County. Its buses are long-distance commuter coaches running routes up to 70 miles long, with stops typically eight to 15 miles apart. Many of its riders are discretionary riders; i.e., passengers who also own cars.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance improved as well. According to NTD data, passengers per hour rose 40 percent; passengers per mile stayed steady; and the cost per passenger declined 36 percent. In large part, these numbers reflect increased ridership on a system with steady service levels.

Service Adjustments

Relatively few service adjustments were made. During the period, Sunday service was added on several routes. Service was also added to serve Cal State Channel Islands, a new university campus. Minor route changes were made as well, primarily lengthening some of the routes.

As a result of increasing crowding on the buses, VISTA began running “tripper” buses behind the regular buses on some routes to pick up the overflow. The system is now acquiring larger buses to eliminate this problem.

Fare and Pricing Policy

In 2002, VISTA introduced SmartCard technology to its buses, enabling passengers to use one pass to ride anywhere in the County.

No fare changes were made during the period. Fares range between $1.00 and $1.50.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

VISTA continues a marketing effort that includes radio advertising and community outreach through activities such as annual elementary school contests.

Planning Orientation

VISTA has continually focused on making its service simple to understand and use. In the past few years (in large part beginning in 2002), the system has introduced a number of technological innovations to this end. As well as the SmartCard discussed above, it offers the NextBus service to allow passengers to check on the Internet for the real-time status of buses in the system; it also installed electronic signs in terminals displaying arrival times of the next bus. It also offers an online router service and a dialup center that customers can call for information. According to VISTA, 90 percent of residents in its service areas have household computers, and can use the system’s online services.

The transit system is also very focused on getting customer input. It conducts passenger surveys on its buses every year, and has made changes based on input received.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

VISTA collaborates with Cal State Channel Islands to serve its campus. The university subsidizes VISTA’s service.

Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA)

Lansing, Michigan

Contacts: Sandy Draggoo, Executive Director
Debbie Alexander, Assistant Executive Director

Summary

Over the 2000 to 2002 period, CATA ridership increased 25 percent, mostly because of arrangements made to serve the 45,000 student Michigan State University campus (MSU). In addition to fully integrating into the CATA system what previously had been independently run university bus service, CATA benefited from a unique arrangement involving the City of East Lansing, MSU, and CATA in successful efforts to serve several large, new private housing developments catering to the university community.

Performance

With the substantial growth in ridership, performance of the CATA system improved as well. NTD data indicate that passengers per hour increased seven percent, passengers per mile increased 14 percent, and cost per passenger declined eight percent in the period.

Service Adjustments

During the period in question, CATA took over full operation of an independently run MSU bus system. For the first year, no new service was added while CATA gauged the market and trip patterns. Subsequently, however, the MSU service was totally restructured, including increased frequencies and consistent hours and schedules. In addition, an additional route was added to provide circulator service between academic buildings. As a result, ridership on the MSU services grew from 950,000 annually to nearly 2.7 million in 2002. Demand has been such that articulated vehicles are in use on the system.

As part of the arrangement, CATA retains the right to add service unilaterally as demand increases in order to maintain an effective and efficient overall operation on behalf of users. When added services are needed, a 30-day "demand" test is conducted where new services are operated at CATA's expense. If the additional services meet pre-set passenger per hour standards, MSU automatically takes responsibility for funding the additional service. As service is added, the cost is charged back to the university under this arrangement.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Prior to taking over the university service, fares were paid by students through the purchase of individual ride tickets sold from a limited number of outlets. The transition to CATA service did not involve pre-payment for service by the university, however. Instead, students independently purchase semester-long passes or pay cash to ride.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

During the 2000 to 2002 period, CATA initiated a number of new, innovative arrangements that brought new riders to the system as well as enlarging the image, role, and appreciation of transit in the community.

The Housing/Land Use/Transit Initiative. Approximately 17,000 students are housed on the MSU campus, leaving a huge student population housed throughout the community. As a result of this demand, private developers have built outlying residential developments marketed and managed exclusively for students. Four major housing developments have been built for this purpose beginning in 1999. They generally lie within five to six miles of the campus within a $^{3}/_{4}$-square-mile area and provide nearly 3,000 beds. Residents lease individual beds regardless of size of the unit, providing a more attractive arrangement for students.

As part of the agreement to bring the development into conformity with zoning requirements, developers were required to work with CATA to make a high level of public transportation available. As a result, the developers purchase passes from CATA for residents—one pass per bed in a unit is required—with the cost of the pass built into the rental price to cover the cost of CATA service. The result is high levels of usage and greatly improved safety, particularly as residents move onto the CATA service during hours when walking the local roads has proven a danger. Service levels are managed much like the arrangement with the university; i.e., a base level of service was defined as that which was in operation prior to this new arrangement. Service is added (or reduced) as demand requires through the same type of "demand" test described above, although the test runs for a period of 15 rather than 30 days. The cost of added service is split with the developers and worked back into the lease cost of each bed.

The State Department of Management and Budget Initiative. Land previously used for surface parking by state employees was converted for state building construction, causing parking shortages and congestion in downtown Lansing. CATA and the State of Michigan Department of Management and Budget collaborated in development of a shuttle service from a remote leased parking lot, connecting with other lots. Service ran on five-minute intervals in the peak periods and 15-minute intervals in the off peak. The cost of the service was paid from the budget of the Department of Management and Budget and fares from customers, thereby enlarging the resource base for transit in the region. At its peak, the shuttle carried nearly 13,000 riders per month.

ReadiRide. As in most outlying suburban areas, it is often difficult to operate economically with large buses on fixed-route services. Realizing this, CATA and two townships in the region have worked out an arrangement to provide publicly available four-hour demand-responsive service rather than standard fixed-route service offered from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Monday through Saturday. The townships pay for a negotiated level of services from their own funds and riders are charged a flat $1.00 fare (or half fare for qualifying riders). One of the two townships passed a special mill levy to fund the service for 10 years.

Kalamazoo Metro Transit System (Metro Transit)

Kalamazoo, Michigan

Contact: William J. Schomisch, Transportation Director

Summary

Metro Transit is a city system that operates 21 routes but provides service to six adjacent jurisdictions. For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate a ridership increase of 23 percent on the Kalamazoo system. The increase occurred through a combination of initiatives, including a permanent service expansion following a demonstration and funding referendum and a new arrangement to provide service to Western Michigan University.

Performance

As ridership was increasing, performance on the system was also improving. Over the two-year period, NTD data indicate that passengers per hour increased 16 percent and passengers per mile increased 23 percent while cost per passenger stayed the same. Today the system operates with an average of 26 passengers per hour, reflecting the impact of increasingly high use by university students.

Service Adjustments

The ridership increases from 2000 to 2002 began as a result of a service expansion demonstration that was planned in response to market research conducted regularly by Metro Transit. The expansion involved a four-month expansion of evening service from 7:15 p.m. to 10:15 p.m. The demonstration was made possible by special support from the State. The success of the expansion led to doubling the existing ½-mil levy for transit to 1.0 mil, a measure that is renewed by referendum every three years.

Metro Transit service configuration is radial and a new downtown transfer center combining local bus, Amtrak, and regional commuter rail services is in advanced stages of planning.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

To support the three-year cycle of millage renewal referenda, Metro Transit conducts a regular market research program to determine what improvements or shift in service orientation is desired in the community. Prior to the 2000 to 2002 period, surveys revealed that the highest priority service change was to add evening service and secondly to add Saturday service. In response, Saturday service was increased to provide consistent service six days a week following the expansion of evening service.

The most recent survey, completed in fall 2003, indicates the next priority is to further expand evening service to midnight, making it possible to better serve evening shift workers. Metro Transit expects another boost in ridership from this improvement although no firm estimates have been made yet from the detailed survey data.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Perhaps the more important impetus for the 2000 to 2002 ridership increases came from an agreement with Western Michigan University to take over service the university had previously operated with vehicles and drivers leased from Metro Transit. The decision was driven by university concern over parking and congestion on campus as enrollment has grown to more than 29,000 students. As a result, Metro Transit took over direct operation of two routes on campus and four routes that directly serve the campus.

The services are operated on a full schedule for only the fall and winter semesters. The university pays Metro Transit $1.9 million annually, up from $400,000 when the switch was made. Funding comes from university parking fees and all students are provided unlimited access to the Metro Transit system year-round. More than one million riders per year use the university services.

Publicity from the success of the university partnership has also drawn positive attention to the entire Metro Transit system, with a presumably positive impact on ridership as well.

Norwalk Transit System (NTS)

Norwalk, California

Contact: Rita Peralta, Transit Grants Analyst

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 19 percent on NTS. The system expanded its paratransit offerings in 2002 and took over operation of an LACMTA bus route, which added significantly to ridership.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance remained largely unchanged. According to NTD data, passengers per hour rose two percent; passengers per mile rose five percent; and the cost per passenger remained unchanged.

Service Adjustments

In 2002, NTS took over operation of the eastern segment of an MTA bus line. Earlier in the year, it expanded its paratransit offerings by lowering the eligible age for dial-a-ride service and expanding its "Get-Around" route deviation service. In addition, some minor adjustments fixed routes were made in 2000 to improve service.

Fare and Pricing Policy

No fare policies were changed during the period. However, the system did introduce a Smart-Card system in 1998.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

No major changes were made in marketing in the period. NTS continued community charity drives such as its "Wrap-A-Bus" and "Stuff-A-Bus" programs. In general, it buys relatively little advertising.

It also performs travel training at senior centers to provide more information about how to use its services.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

To enhance MetroLink commuter rail service that runs through NTS' service area, it provides a shuttle bus to off-site parking to alleviate parking problems at the train station.

Knoxville Area Transit (KAT)

Knoxville, Tennessee

Contact: Robert Schneider, Director of Program Administration

Summary

Between 2000 and 2002, data indicate an increase in ridership of 17 percent on the KAT system. Much of the growth is because of the complete revamping of the downtown trolley,

introduction of a job-access reverse commute program, better marketing, and a stronger emphasis on customer service.

In addition, Knoxville's downtown is undergoing a surge in downtown redevelopment that has brought residents and business downtown. Knoxville is the recipient of a Federal "Empowerment Zone" grant, which supplies $100 million over 10 years for redevelopment. A new, $100 million convention center opened during the period and the downtown historical center is being rebuilt. Plans are being developed for a new transit center downtown as well.

KAT has been able to fund many of the service expansions through public-private partnerships, the Federal Jobs Access grant, or other grants such as CMAQ.

Performance

Through the two-year period of ridership growth, system performance was maintained. According to NTD data, passengers per hour declined six percent; passengers per mile rose five percent; and the cost per passenger declined one percent.

Service Adjustments

The largest service adjustment, and a major contributor to ridership growth, was a complete overhaul of KAT's downtown circulator trolley service. Although the service had been in place since 1986, it had suffered budget cuts, used aging equipment, and was experiencing declining ridership. To combat this, a trolley service strategic plan was developed and implemented in the summer of 1999. The routes were restructured, headways reduced, more and better signage was installed, and a visitor-oriented trolley map was developed. The drivers were given new uniforms and the look of the trolley equipment was completely changed to give it a cleaner and more antique look, with more brass, classic maroon colors, and fewer advertisements. An "ambassador" training program was also instituted for trolley bus drivers, in which the employees were given free passes to try downtown attractions and restaurants in order to be able to make recommendations to riders.

As a result, the new trolley service quickly doubled its ridership, and accounts for 40 to 50 percent of total system ridership. The service is free to the public, and its use continues to expand. KAT rerouted the trolleys to directly serve the new convention center and has experienced significant ridership from that. In addition, with construction making downtown parking less convenient, KAT has noted riders beginning to use it as a shuttle to access parking lots farther away. KAT is now in the process of acquiring hybrid-electric trolleys for its fleet.

As part of a Job Access Reverse Commute program, KAT also instituted a night bus and Sunday service in the summer of 2000, open to any member of the public. The service combines four fixed routes (less than the daytime route system) with a demand-response feeder bus, and free transfers. Ridership on this service adds four or five percent to KAT's total. Initial growth in ridership on this service was very large, as people learned about the service, and has since leveled off. Nonetheless, it accounts for four or five percent of KAT's total ridership.

In a partnership with private student housing developers, KAT introduced two lines providing direct service to the University of Tennessee campus from housing developments. Although not in the study period, it also greatly expanded its service at the university in January 2003, introducing fixed routes with short (five-minute) headways, ADA service, and late night shuttles to the residence halls. It has seen significant ridership gains from this new service.

In addition, KAT has replaced much of its fleet in the past few years. As well as getting newer equipment on the streets, it has used the opportunity to buy buses better suited to its customer's desires. For instance, customers have expressed interest in smaller buses in residential communities (see below).

Fare and Pricing Policy

KAT did not make any changes to its basic fare structure in this period. It continued to offer discount passes to university students, but more intense marketing of them led to a significant increase in their use (see below). In addition, the new night and Sunday service was instituted with free transfers (unlike the rest of the KAT system).

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

KAT improved its marketing and image over the period. Its television and print ads have won several APTA awards. As well as acquiring new equipment, it also improved its schedules and maps, making them easier to read and more modern looking. Though it does not do this any more, it had several eye-catching bus wraps during the period, and tied some marketing programs to the wraps. For instance, the bus wrapped with an ad for a local television station would be free on certain days.

KAT increased the effectiveness of its university marketing starting in August 1999 by mailing free bus passes to students, valid for one semester. Students can qualify for discount passes, but many were not aware of the program or of how transit could be useful to them. KAT received no university funding for this and meant it as a marketing effort to introduce students to its service and encourage some to buy passes the following semester.

Planning Orientation

KAT increased its emphasis on customer input during the study period. In 2001, it hired its first customer service manager. It also in 2001 created the "2010 Action Plan," a strategic planning initiative that put a strong focus on finding out what its customers really wanted. An outside consultant was brought in, and passenger profile surveys were conducted that showed interest in more frequent, direct, and convenient service, more flexible services, and smaller vehicles for neighborhood service. KAT began implementing changes in the summer of 2002 in direct response to these suggestions, focusing on improving on the services at which it was best.

As well as getting customer input, KAT credits these activities with marketing its services. Related activities include customer appreciation days held at its transfer points and attendance at community meetings.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

During the period, two separate student apartment complexes approached KAT to institute direct service to campus. These services have been very popular, even though students still need to buy bus passes. The convenience of the service and the low cost of the pass in comparison to parking make it an attractive option for the students. The housing complexes consider it highly successful as well; in fact, the second complex did not approach KAT until it has seen how successful the service was, and even subsidized the service. Moreover, KAT has found that once they have bought the bus pass, the students use transit for more than just the trip to campus.

KAT worked closely with the Central Business Improvement District to revamp the downtown trolley service (see above). It paid special attention to what the businesses looked for in the trolley service through numerous consultations with them. It serves numerous groups in Knoxville's downtown.

It also has partnerships with both the minor league hockey and baseball teams to provide game-day shuttle service, subsidized by the teams. KAT regularly provides shuttle services for University of Tennessee sporting and concert events, and its relationship with the university has become even more important with the new campus service offered starting in 2003 (see above).

Ames Transit Agency (CyRide)

Ames, Iowa

Contact: Bob Bourne, Executive Director

Summary

For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate a ridership increase of nearly 30 percent on the Ames systems. The circumstances surrounding the increase parallel those that led to significant ridership increases in each of the two prior study periods (1991–1993 and 1994–1996). In each period, the main driver behind substantial ridership increases has been the maturing relationship with and service design catering to the 27,000-member student body of Iowa State University.

System Performance

Over the 2000–2002 period, as ridership rose nearly 30 percent, productivity on the system improved as well with 49 passengers per hour in the peak.

Service Adjustments

Significant service adjustments were made in the period as part of a multi-year agreement with Iowa State students to "buy out" full use of the system (i.e., student fees through the University support free use of the system for students using student identification). As part of this arrangement, significant improvements were made in the frequency of service:

- Most 20-minute headways were reduced to 10 minutes, which had the effective drawing out increases in discretionary trip-making;
- Saturday and Sunday headways were reduced from 70 minutes to 35 minutes; and
- Late Friday and Saturday headways were reduced to 15 minutes.

Fare and Pricing Policy

The student fee developed as part of the "buy out" package was set to both: 1) offset the lost revenue from free travel by students; and 2) pay for the operating costs growing out of the service adjustments described.

Service Coordination and Collaboration

The CyRide story is clearly one of an evolving, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationship with the most important institution and largest trip generator in the Ames area. While the transit market is expected to remain stable, the actions taken to produce this remarkable pattern of ridership increases may have pushed market share to its limit. CyRide staff is uncertain whether ridership increases of the scale experienced most recently can continue, or where the market may lie that would produce them.

Santa Clarita Transit

Los Angeles, California

Contact: Bob Murphy, Transportation Manager

Summary

Ridership on the Santa Clarita Transit system grew 17 percent from 2000 to 2002. The area experienced large population growth during the period, and continues to do so. Overall, transit managers feel that the new fleet of buses the agency is putting on the streets and its reliable, high-quality service are their most effective marketing tools, and have helped encourage the use of transit even among non-traditional markets.

Service Adjustments

Santa Clarita Transit made several service improvements over the period. In January 2001, it moved the hub of its hub-and-spoke system to a new, better-located transfer station that cut travel times by 15 minutes for many passengers. It added a new commuter route in 1999 to serve UCLA and Century City. It also changed a local route to serve a new neighborhood, which required it to increase headways. It plans to expand that service upon delivery of new vehicles next year.

Over the period, Santa Clarita Transit embarked on a program of vehicle replacement designed to turn over the entire fleet but has been restricted in its growth potential because of maintenance facility constraints over this period. Its 80 vehicles shared a facility with the public works department. Santa Clarita Transit is currently building a 12-acre site that is scheduled to open in March 2005.

Santa Clarita Transit plans to begin a new local fixed route to the San Fernando Valley next year, and expects to have good ridership numbers on it from reverse commuters coming into the Santa Clarita Valley for work. Even now, some of its commuter buses to Los Angeles return to the Santa Clarita Valley in revenue service in the mornings with workers making the reverse commute.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Santa Clarita Transit implemented a two-phase fare increase in 2001 and 2002, raising fares on local routes from $0.75 to $1.00 and passes from $20 to $25 per month. Commuter bus fares also increased about 15 percent.

A discounted monthly pass program for junior high and high school students was ended in 2002, with no reduction in ridership. The local school district has become more dependent on Santa Clarita Transit services to get students to school during this period, as discussed below.

Santa Clarita Transit implemented online pass sales near the end of the study period, becoming the first system in the Los Angeles area to do so. These sales have shown good growth for both commuter express and local services. The agency also is in development of a frequent rider program, in which riders who buy 11 passes would get the 12th for free.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

Santa Clarita Transit reduced its media buy over the period, in part because it suffered operational problems and abuses from the use of clip-out coupons in local papers. It did continue to participate in Los Angeles county-coordinated efforts to promote transit as part of APTA's "PT2" campaign. It also continues to provide free-ride tickets for transportation management organizations (TMOs) in corporate developments.

Planning Orientation

Santa Clarita Transit continued to actively solicit feedback from its users during the period. The "Ambassador Program" is a focus group of 15 users of its premium routes and commuter bus services. The group meets monthly to discuss issues with the transit service, and receives free monthly passes in return. A similar advisory group exists for its local routes. A more formal committee for the city manager provides advice on paratransit; this committee is composed of both riders (seniors and disabled) and their service providers.

In addition, Santa Clarita Transit is required to hold an annual "unmet needs" hearing to get community feedback. The agency specifically notifies citizens who have sent in suggestions over the year of the meeting to allow them the opportunity to comment. As Santa Clarita Transit has expanded its bus service, comments received have shifted focus from service levels to the provision of amenities. In response, the agency is planning to upgrade and replace all its old shelters. Santa Clarita Transit is also now part of the City's "Big Picture" program, which is a major citywide effort to solicit community input on urban planning.

In terms of community planning, Santa Clarita Transit works to improve bus and pedestrian access in new developments. Over time, the City and transit agency have developed a close working relationship with the primary developer in the area. However, the low transit development fee charged to residential developments prevents Santa Clarita Transit from raising significant funds through this mechanism to meet the new transit needs created.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Santa Clarita Transit's responsibility for transporting schoolchildren increased over the period as the number of pupils and schools rapidly grew even while the school district decreased its own yellow bus service. Santa Clarita Transit tries, not always successfully, to serve the school campuses with bus routes that are also useful to other transit riders. Unfortunately, not all of the school district's new campuses are well located for transit access, creating service and budget issues for Santa Clarita Transit. With new vehicle purchases, the agency plans to be able to provide service to all the new campuses by August 2005.

Santa Clarita Transit continues to participate in the Los Angeles County Municipal Operators Association, and is cooperating with the Los Angeles MTA in implementing integrated Smart Card technology. It also coordinates with Los Angeles County to promote Santa Clarita Transit's goals and standards in the nearby unincorporated areas, which are outside City of Santa Clarita's control. The County pays a share of the costs of providing service to these areas.

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA)

Orange, California

Contact: Rick Teichert, Director of Operations, Scott Holmes, Jorge Duran

Summary

Ridership on OCTA services increased more than 12 percent in the 2000 to 2002 period largely as a result of OCTA initiatives that capitalized on continuing local economic strength and a strong local job market. It became evident leading up to this period, however, that the OCTA's route structure made it increasingly difficult to add effective service quickly enough to meet growing needs. In response, a full-scale route restructuring program called the "Straight-Lining Project" was undertaken along with supporting marketing and pricing initiatives, as described below. The resulting grid system has attracted more riders, made it easier to grow the system more quickly, and has made partnering easier across a number of activities including marketing, employer programs, and pas programs.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Chronologically, the base for the 2000 to 2002 ridership increases was established, in part, through fare and pricing adjustments and strategies implemented in July 1999 that grew out of a two-year study. Prior to 1999, fares had not been changed since 1991. Part of the initiative involved introduction of a "Day Pass" that was introduced at a discounted $2.00 rate for six months, and the elimination of transfers. The Day Pass fare today is $2.50. In January 2000, and the pass began using magnetic swipe technology to increases the convenience for users.

During the period, university pass programs were also introduced for two of the major colleges in the County, Cal State Fullerton and UC Irvine. The university pass program is now being expanded to serve other higher education institutions in the County.

Service Adjustments

The route restructuring program involved converting the OCTA system from a transit center/hub-oriented route structure to a grid network. While the initial conversion maintained roughly the same number of service hours as had been provided previously, service hours eventually were increased approximately 10 percent in 2001. Approximately one-third of the increase went to frequency increases on selected lines; the remainder went to schedule maintenance and the addition of a major new route and multiple route extensions. In addition, four routes went to 24-hour service.

Initially, ridership declined a little as riders reacclimated themselves to the new network. Despite the small dip, ridership over the 2000 to 2002 period eventually increased significantly in response to restructuring.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

A major marketing campaign, "Point-to-Point," was carried out to support the route restructuring program, with the assistance of contractors and a budget of several hundred thousand dollars. The program involved onboard advertising and announcements, "wraps" on bus exteriors, and mailers to homes and businesses. In addition, route-specific actions, including distribution of free-ride coupons, were carried out.

Planning Orientation

The restructuring effort was supported through origin and destination-based planning, modeling, and analysis focused, in part, on estimated time savings and travel time increases under various scenarios. The planning effort allowed changes and improvements to the new system as plan implementation proceeded. In addition, a major public outreach effort was undertaken and the involvement of early skeptics of the restructuring program has continued, as described below.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Part of the success of the OCTA restructuring initiative came from the introduction and continued expansion of the university pass program; i.e., sustained involvement and partnering with the university community in Orange County.

In addition, early skeptics of the restructuring program were brought into a citizen's advisory committee to review the changes from a customer perspective. This effort resulted in the development of a set of more than 95 recommendations for consideration by the Authority and the original group eventually evolved into the "Transit Advocates of Orange County" that has been involved in advising the Authority on follow-up to the restructuring program.

Utah Transit Authority (UTA)

Salt Lake City, Utah

Contact: Carole Verschoor, Chief Communications Officer

Summary

For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate a ridership increase of nearly 15 percent on the UTA system. Although UTA had undertaken effective programs that resulted in ridership increases in each of the prior two study periods, the circumstances surrounding the 2000–2002 increase are unique. This is the period during which transit as well as highways in the Salt Lake City region were being expanded and enhanced dramatically in anticipation of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games.

While ridership in the post-Olympic period declined as expected, it has since begun to increase again as continued improvement and expansion takes place on the multimodal UTA system.

Service Adjustments

System expansion played a large part in the 2002 ridership increases:

- The first 15 miles of UTA's light rail system, TRAX, opened in December of 1999;
- Three counties—Salt Lake, Davis, and Weber—passed a 1/4 cent sales tax in November 2000 to support UTA expansion;
- A second light rail project, the 2.5-mile TRAX University line, was opened in December 2001;
- Acquisition of Union Pacific rights-of-way began, ultimately providing UTA with 175 miles of rail corridors for commuter rail service; and

- Preliminary discussions of fundamental reorganization at UTA began, reflecting the agency's evolution from a bus company to a multimodal mobility provider and manager for the region.

In addition to the service expansion taking place, UTA conducted a market-based study of trip-making and services in the Provo-Orem part of the region. The result was a significant bus route redesign that reduced service on non-productive routes and expanded service to key destinations and along primary travel corridors. Much of this effort enhanced services to the areas two universities, BYU and Utah Valley State College.

Fare and Pricing Policy

In April 2001, concurrent with the addition of light rail and as part of the run-up to the Olympics, UTA launched a ridership campaign around a special pass offer. Residents who contacted UTA during the promotion received five day passes and customized route information. The program resulted in more than 6.8 percent of households responding and 200,000 passes being redeemed. Bus ridership alone increased 2.6 percent. Analysis of the promotion revealed that two-thirds of the residents contacted UTA via the agency's web site, demonstrating that value of state-of-the-art communications technologies in the design and delivery of transit service. Perhaps more importantly, the promotion allowed UTA to develop a database of individual UTA users that has proven helpful in continued service planning and analysis.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

UTA has carried out innovative and effective marketing programs for a number of years. A television and newspaper campaign in September 2001 encouraged bus ridership by demonstrating that UTA service could be faster than the car. Another campaign in November 2001, prior to the opening of the TRAX University light rail line, concentrated on "branding" the new line and noted that it had been opened early and within budget. Throughout these and other marketing campaigns, UTA's public approval rating rose to 73 percent and now stands at 85 percent.

Planning Orientation

Somewhat before the 2000–2001 period, UTA leadership began exploring the notion that the nature of the organization was changing dramatically from a bus operator to a manager of mobility across the region on an increasingly multimodal network. Following the successful service to residents and visitors during the Olympics, the scope and direction of this change was examined in detail with participation by a wide range of internal and external stakeholders both inside and outside the UTA organization. The result was a fundamental reorganization that has taken place successfully over the past two years. TCRP Report 97, *"Emerging New Paradigms: A Guide to Fundamental Change in Local Public Transportation Organizations,"* describes this change in greater detail.

The reorganization was based in large part on shifting the strategic mission and role of UTA to from operation of its assets to a preeminent concern for the quality of the travel experience regardless of what assets were being used. Enhanced market research, improved monitoring of service quality, and enhanced communications to benefit customers are at the core of this new mission and organization. In addition, day-to-day service design and management is now the responsibility of several new "business units" implemented according to a combination of geography and service modes.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Overall mobility throughout the Salt Lake City region was enhanced and UTA ridership increased dramatically through the development of a regionwide transportation demand management (TDM) program. The joint program was based on the goal of reducing local "background traffic" during the Olympic Games by 20 percent. With UTA services as the backbone of the TDM plan, background traffic was actually reduced 30 percent.

In addition to the collaboration that has taken place in the reorganization of the UTA, support for expansion and improvement of public transportation services has been sustained through a number of coalitions that have been formed throughout the region and primarily composed of elected local officials. These coalitions have been extremely important in a 1,400-square-mile service area covering six counties, two metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and a future commuter rail system that will run through some 38 municipalities. The collaboration has come about through a combination of visionary leadership by senior managers at UTA and a new organizational structure that allows senior leadership to direct more attention to building an understanding of and support for the long-term transit vision.

Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD)

Denver, Colorado

Contacts: Cal Marsella, General Manager
Tony McCaulay, Director, Customer Services
Joe Smith

Summary

For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate that ridership on the RTD system increased more than 12 percent. Much of the increase was driven by riders on the new Southwest Corridor light rail line that began service in July 2000, as well as new, innovative service arrangements instituted in and around the City of Boulder. Increased ridership was also influenced by the strong, full-employment economy in the Denver region during the two-year period.

Service Adjustments

Significant increases in ridership took place on the RTD system during the 2000 to 2002 period as a result of service expansion and a series of innovative service adjustments and initiatives. Perhaps the most significant step was the opening of the eventual 14-mile Southwest Corridor light rail line running between downtown Denver and Littleton, Colorado, to the south. Analysis of the ridership on this, the first of several planned LRT lines in the region, indicated that 35 percent of the Southwest LRT riders were new to transit.

In addition to the introduction of light rail to the Denver region, ridership increases occurred over the period in response to a continuing series of initiatives that have resulted in unique service strategies and partnerships. These have allowed RTD to substitute effective, innovative services while eliminating costly traditional services:

- *Boulder "theme routes."* In the Boulder, Colorado area, home of the University of Colorado, a series of "theme routes" has been developed over recent years, each with a separate identity and market focus. They include the *HOP, SKIP, JUMP, LEAP, BOUND, STAMPEDE, DASH,* and *DART* services. The services are operated by RTD under a variety of specific joint funding arrangements with the City of Boulder and surrounding jurisdictions. As an example, the Boulder *SKIP* service along Broadway was shifted from traditional RTD service with 40-foot buses to a higher frequency service (reduced to six minutes from 12 minutes) using smaller vehicles. Boulder citizens participated in establishing vehicle specifications and each theme service has its own brand identity and exterior vehicle design scheme created by local artists. The funding arrangement has as its base the cost of RTD's former traditional bus service with added costs being shared with the City of Boulder. In the first year, ridership went from 21,000 on RTD's traditional service to more than 61,000 on the new service. A 60 percent increase in cost has produced a 110 percent increase in ridership.

- *TMAs and direct service operation.* At least one Transportation Management Association (TMA) in the region, SETA in the Tech Center area, is directly operating a circulator service called "Link" that is underwritten by RTD under an intergovernmental agreement.

- *"Call and Ride" services.* Begun in 2000, RTD's "Call and Ride" services are provided in smaller, outlying suburbs where traditional fixed-route services cannot be cost effective. Typically, one or two vehicles are operated under private contract and given a localized identity and a defined service area in which to operate. Service hours typically range from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. RTD provides the vehicles, which are available through both advanced reservation and real-time, on-the-fly call-in. A basic service standard—three to five passengers per hour—is monitored and many of the eight "Call and Ride" services are operating at near double the standard. Local communities do the marketing and the substitution of these services for traditional fixed-route service saves RTD considerable money while maintaining effective basic service in the community.

- *Vanpools.* RTD began subsidizing vanpools in 2002 and now has 40 vans in operation carrying more than 800 people daily. The program is run through the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), the region's MPO, with RTD funding. In the case of both Fort Collins and Colorado Springs, Colorado, the vanpool program has allowed RTD to eliminate costly and under-utilized fixed-route services into Denver.

Currently efforts are underway by RTD to further expand and innovate in service delivery through: potential arrangements with taxi operators to provide access to the new TREX light rail line; examination of car-sharing services; and through ongoing demonstration of real-time bus arrival information systems at 16 locations.

Fare and Pricing Policy

RTD was one of the initial innovators in fare policy with the introduction of its annual Eco Pass for employees and organization members in the region. Recent efforts to evaluate the pricing of Eco Pass have led to increases that are intended to more closely relate price and the value of services based on pass use. RTD also has introduced a monthly "Teen Pass" in cooperation with local schools districts that sell passes at a discount to students at participating schools.

Unlike many transit systems, RTD has adopted a strategy of regular fare increases through a program that has reduced off-peak fares, but instituted a series of annual peak fare increases in nickel increments to go from $1.00 to $1.25. RTD is moving toward a stored-value fare system in the future.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

RTD marketing resources are generally focused on new routes and services together with a shift toward more successful routes in an effort to spur increases in off-peak use. In addition, marketing initiatives are undertaken by TMAs and by local communities for "Call and Ride" services.

Planning Orientation

By state law, RTD must contract out half of its services and meets its requirement with two fixed-route and five demand-responsive providers. RTD estimates that there is a $22 per hour avoidable cost differential between RTD services and its contracted services (which could be greater if RTD had to pay taxes that private operators pay). The reliance on contract services has heightened the strategic and operational importance of Quality Assurance/Quality Control in managing contracts within RTD. QA/QC, therefore, is an area where RTD is focusing its capacity-building efforts.

As suggested in the discussion above, the RTD is very aggressive about instituting a "family of services" concept that can effectively serve varied needs in the regional and do so in the most cost-effective way possible. The result of the programs described above has, in the eyes of RTD managers and staff, created a more responsive agency with happier clients—both riders and supporting jurisdictions.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

RTD's family-of-services strategy is built in large part on wide-ranging coordination and sustained relationships with local jurisdictions in designing and tailoring a wide range of services. In addition:

- RTD actively encourages and supports the formation and operation of TMAs in the Denver region as an important way to reach communities and individual riders. More than a half dozen TMAs perform a variety of roles from pass sales to direct operation of services, as noted above.
- Denver Public Schools, in cooperation with RTD, is planning to terminate yellow school bus service and provide transportation through the use of RTD passes. RTD, in turn, will add service as necessary and the school district will shift its hours to avoid adversely impacting peak-period service.
- Discussions are underway with the regional taxi providers to fashion arrangements that will make more formal use of taxis as a feeder to the new T-REX light rail line.

Clark County Public Transportation Benefit Area Authority (C-TRAN)

Vancouver, Washington

Contact: Scott Patterson, Director, Community Services and Planning

Summary

After significant ridership increases in the 1990s, including a 48 percent gain from 1994 to 1996, ridership rose just four percent 2000 to 2002 at C-TRAN. Like the experience in other Washington state transit systems, however, the increases were largely the result of recapturing riders that were lost during the State's 1999 Initiative 695 tax revolt that included elimination of the motor vehicle excise tax (MVET), a major source of funding for transit across the State.

Loss of the MVET caused a 40 percent decrease in operating revenue and necessitated a 20 percent reduction in service. The cuts resulted in a significant dip in ridership. Today C-TRAN ridership has risen to 6.7 million annual passengers in comparison to a pre-Initiative 695 high of 8.0 million.

Since Initiative 695, C-TRAN has been able to stabilize service levels through support from reserves and refocus its marketing programs more effectively on specific markets to generate continued ridership increases again being experienced. Consideration is being given to a future initiative that would potentially add additional sales tax revenue in an amount that would largely make up for the loss of the MVET funds.

The C-TRAN experience dramatizes the critical importance of adequate, stable, and reliable funding in the pursuit of increased ridership. It also demonstrates the latent potential for increased transit use when services are increased or restored. As an example, despite the severe loss of funding and reductions in service, the role of C-TRAN in serving the greater Portland, Oregon, region has continued to expand. Park-and-ride lots serving C-TRAN commuters along the I5 corridor are now full at 6:45 a.m. and new lots are being constructed to maintain a high level of service in the face of growing demand.

Center Area Transportation Authority (CATA)

State College, Pennsylvania

Contact: Hugh Mose, General Manager

Summary

For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate a ridership increase of more than nine percent on the CATA system. CATA serves a market dominated by the presence of Penn State University, near the downtown area. The circumstances surrounding the increase parallel those that led to significant ridership increases in the prior study period (1994–1996). In each period, the main driver has been working closely with the university and its community to put in place mutually beneficial services. Remarkably, CATA attained this ridership increase in a period in which it actually reduced total service levels.

CATA reports that it has lost community ridership in recent years, but has compensated with increased campus ridership. In part, this is because of university policies meant to reduce campus congestion by encouraging the use of free shuttles from park-and-ride lots at the edge of campus. Many riders who previously used transit for commutes from off-campus origins find it more convenient to drive to the park-and-ride lots; this is especially pronounced for those who had to pay for bus passes. The popularity of this option grew significantly over the study period.

Another important factor increasing ridership has been the suburbanization of student housing. More students are choosing to live farther from campus, and there has been an explosion of student housing beyond walking range of the campus. Though many have cars, CATA has

been successful in attracting riders by getting apartment complexes to provide free transit passes to tenants.

CATA has no dedicated sales tax, instead relying largely on Federal and state funds, with a relatively small proportion received from local municipalities. State funds have not grown proportionate to growth in the CATA community, forcing service adjustments over the past few years.

Service Adjustments

Numerous service adjustments were made in the period in response to expanding park-and-ride facilities on campus and funding constraints. CATA was forced to cut almost one-fifth of its service over the period, discontinuing several routes. However, although service off-campus was reduced, CATA actually grew service on campus during the same period.

Fare and Pricing Policy

Because of budgetary constraints, CATA raised its base fare from $1.00 to $1.25 in July 2002, with corresponding increases in bus passes and tokens. Mr. Mose felt this had a strong negative effect on ridership because of both price and the relative inconvenience of the new fare. He also feels this fare is at the upper limit of what riders are willing to pay because most trips are so short and parking is cheap and plentiful in the area.

Marketing Programs/Initiatives

CATA does relatively little direct marketing to students, focusing more on non-students and senior citizens.

CATA teamed up with Fannie Mae in a "Smart Commute" program, in which homebuyers in transit corridors could qualify for larger mortgages in recognition of the costs savings the buyers would theoretically gain from transit access. However, the initiative did not generate much involvement.

Planning Orientation

CATA is actively involved in site plan review and works closely with local planning officials to ensure that new developments have adequate transit amenities, including sidewalks providing accessibility to the street and bus stops, bus pull-offs, and bus shelters. In addition, CATA has succeeded in getting transit requirements placed on developers in order to get site approval. For instance, a new complex might be required to invest in a new traffic signal or find ways to get its tenants to take transit, in order to reduce the traffic impacts caused by its development. Developers have taken notice of CATA's involvement, and some have made commitments to ongoing transit support. In part, developers see provision of transit amenities as an attraction to potential residents, who often have disposable income but are still interested in transit.

As student housing has moved farther from campus, CATA has actively promoted the use of transit for these commuters. In particular, CATA has been successful in negotiating contracts with apartment complex owners to provide free transit passes for tenants. In this program, the owners pre-pay for the service. Ten apartment complexes are part of this program, and account for about half the ridership generated off-campus.

Service Coordination and Collaboration

CATA continues to work closely to support university transportation needs. In the "Ride for Five" program, the university provides full-time faculty and staff with a choice between a $5.00 monthly bus pass or $5.00 monthly remote parking, connected to the campus by free shuttles. The monthly bus passes in this program are heavily subsidized by the university; CATA wholesales them at $40 each.

A free-fare zone for regular CATA buses supplements the free campus loop buses. Though improving service on-campus, riders continuing to destinations off-campus can get crowded out by loop riders. In addition, a potential for abuse is created by riders who board for free in the zone but continue outside it. A route to a suburban shopping mall was discontinued because of this abuse; in general, it is not a problem on most routes.

However, the university has not been willing to consider unlimited access for its students, nor to provide support for buses that leave the campus, even to the nearby downtown.

TALTRAN

Tallahassee, Florida

Contact: Dewayne Carver (AICP), Interim Transit Planning Administrator

Summary

Ridership on TALTRAN services increased more than eight percent in the 2000 to 2002 period. Much of the increase resulted from urban infilling, particularly from student housing, that increased demand along TALTRAN routes. This infilling is expected to continue; a large student housing complex is slated to open downtown in 2005. Unlike many urban markets, TALTRAN's ridership levels benefited from the presence of the state capitol and growing universities that softened the effects of the economic slow down.

TALTRAN has no dedicated taxing source and relies on city, state, and Federal dollars. In recent years, its budget has grown only with inflation. Nonetheless, it succeeded in increasing service along key routes while still maintaining ontime service.

Service Adjustments

Though TALTRAN's budget has essentially only kept pace with inflation, it stretched its resources to increase service levels during the period. To increase frequency of service on heavily traveled routes, it began running its reserve buses as "wildcat" buses between the regularly scheduled buses to pick up extra passengers. It also lengthened several routes to reach new locations. However, as ridership continues to increase, it is becoming more difficult to sustain the expanded service levels without excessively increasing overtime costs. Its budget has increased to keep pace with fuel and wage increases, but not with increased service levels.

Fare and Pricing Policy

No fare changes were made during the period. TALTRAN continued its student pass program with Tallahassee Community College, Florida A & M, and Florida State University. A state employee pass program started in 1996 is now being phased out. In addition, TALTRAN briefly piloted a fare-free program with local high schools.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

TALTRAN does not put a strong emphasis on marketing campaigns. However, as noted above, it operates several fare-free programs with local universities.

Planning Orientation

In 2000, TALTRAN completed a transit development plan. Thirty of the 55 recommendations have been implemented already; the remainder requires additional funding. Two of the key actions implemented in the period were a comprehensive operations analysis to improve ontime performance and other operational characteristics, and the creation of a now heavily used web site that enables its riders to access bus schedules online.

The new city commission is interested in exploring other possible changes and ways to reduce costs. One option being considered is a major overhaul of the route structure, including shifting away from the current hub-and-spoke system.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

TALTRAN's association with local universities continues to be among its most important collaborations. In addition to the fare-free programs, it operates oncampus bus systems. Since the study period, it has further increased these service contracts. TALTRAN and the universities are looking at ways to reduce costs in the future for these contracts.

Snohomish County PTBA (Community Transit)

Snohomish County, Washington

Contact: Tim Brakke, Manager of Services and Facilities Development

Summary

After double-digit annual ridership increases in the late 1990s, ridership increased more than seven percent from 2000 to 2002 at the Snohomish County Public Transportation Benefit Area Corporation in suburban Seattle. The increases, however, are largely the result of recapturing riders that were lost during the State's 1999 tax revolt that included elimination of the motor vehicle excise tax, a major source of funding for transit. Loss of the MVET caused Community Transit to substantially cut service in 2000, including all Saturday and Sunday services and service on low productivity weekday routes.

Later in November 2000, a sales tax increase was passed to replace the lost MVET funding and services cut earlier were restored with attendant increases in ridership. The increases over the 2000 to 2002 period occurred largely in 2001. The experience dramatizes the critical importance of adequate, stable, and reliable funding in the pursuit of increased ridership. It also demonstrates the latent potential for increased transit use when services are increased or restored.

Planning Orientation

Although not a factor in the 2000–2002 ridership increases, leaders in the three-county region have formed the "Regional Transportation Improvement District" to fund multimodal improvements through enactment of new revenue sources. To date, no definitive proposal has been developed nor scheduled for ballot consideration.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Community Transit is one of three county systems working in collaboration with Sound Transit in the Seattle region to fully integrate local services with expanding multimodal regional transit services (see Sound Transit profile).

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)

Bellingham, Washington

Contact: Rick Nicholson, Transportation Services Specialist

Summary

Between 1994 and 1996, ridership on the Whatcom system increases more than 10 percent. Over the more recent period, 2000 to 2002, however, data indicate that ridership growth has slowed to around 3.5 percent. Though more recent increases are smaller, ridership increases on the Whatcom system are, in large part, related to the needs of and agency response to the University of Washington student population.

Service Adjustments

Morning peak services have been increased as a result of increasing demand stemming from the university pass program described below. Consideration is being given to introducing articulated buses to accommodate a.m. peak demand.

New route deviation services have also been added to rural portions of the area but these have had a relatively minor impact on ridership.

Fare and Pricing Policy

The vast majority of the ridership increase between 2000 and 2002 was spurred by a student initiative in 2000 that resulted in development and marketing of a $15 per quarter discounted student pass. Fully half of the university students purchase the pass and the sales have grown from approximately 3,000 passes per academic quarter to more than 5,500 per quarter.

The passes are sold directly through the university's parking office and are not part of the university's fee structure. Increased pass sales and use are responsible for ridership increases throughout the system.

Consideration is now being given to an Eco pass program.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

Marketing of the university pass is directed through the university's parking office.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

Concern on behalf of the university about campus access and parking combined with the nonbinding student referendum supporting improvement of all transportation signaled the beginning of the current partnership.

LAKETRAN

Grand River, Ohio

Contacts: Dale Madison, Director of Development
Jesse Baginski, Director of Public Relations and Marketing

Summary

For the two-year period 2000 to 2002, data indicate a ridership increase of 3.3 percent on the LAKETRAN system. LAKETRAN primarily serves a suburban environment and includes commuter routes to downtown Cleveland. Dial-A-Ride (paratransit) is one of its most important services, accounting for one-third of its budget and two-thirds of its ridership; LAKETRAN is the seventh largest directly operated paratransit system in the United States. Moreover, the senior population is expected to grow significantly in coming years.

The suburban orientation of LAKETRAN cushioned the blow of the recession and helped keep its ridership steady in comparison to urban ridership in nearby Cleveland. In particular, LAKETRAN saw its commuter ridership grow significantly, as the addition of new facilities made commuting by bus easier.

LAKETRAN focuses on providing a high quality of service, particularly on its commuter bus lines. The local route system is more spartan, with most lines being served about once an hour by low-floor buses.

Service Adjustments

Service expansion played a large part in ridership increases for LAKETRAN's commuter buses. LAKETRAN opened three new park-and-ride lots in 2001 and 2002 and added service to accommodate the ridership. It has added two more lots since then, one of which filled an additional 70 spaces within one week. The other lot is an indoor transit center built in partnership with a minor league baseball stadium. The transit center and the stadium share parking (with an understanding that commuters will be gone by game time), and the agency is allowed free use of the minor league team's logo. In addition, the agency promotes express service to the games.

Bike racks were installed on all local buses by 2003 (after the study period), and are cited for boosting ridership. An average of 331 users per month uses the racks.

Fare and Pricing Policy

LAKETRAN fares have remained unchanged since 1985. LAKETRAN continues to implement a summertime youth fare of just 10 cents, which it has done for more than a decade. The program is very popular, particularly for trips to malls.

In the fall of 2001, LAKETRAN implemented $0.25 "Liberty Fares" on local routes for a two-month period. The initiative gained 10,000 riders for that period. LAKETRAN also has a policy of letting veterans ride free during the week of Veterans Day.

Near the beginning of the study period, LAKETRAN implemented a student pass program with the local community college that has been steadily growing in popularity. Its growth is because of a combination of increasing awareness of the program, growth in enrollment at the community college, and decreased parking availability in the area. To further increase awareness, LAKETRAN has been asked by the college to visit the campus with bus information.

During the study period, LAKETRAN implemented a program to provide temporary mall employees with bus passes during the Christmas shopping season. Employees bought the passes and were reimbursed by their employers. Although moderately successful, employers lost interest in the program as the recession loosened the labor market.

In 2003, LAKETRAN implemented monthly commuter passes for the first time.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

LAKETRAN uses research and demographic information to formulate its marketing plans each year (in fact, the agency plans to present its marketing development process at the 2004 APTA conference). Although its marketing budget has been steadily reduced since 2001 (by about 15 percent each year), the agency continues actively promoting a number of marketing efforts. Good relations with the local newspaper allow it to advertise cost effectively. LAKETRAN often uses coupon offers to increase ridership on targeted routes; the agency closely tracks the origin and use of the coupons for data gathering purposes. The agency's new "Where You Want To Go" highlights destinations that can be reached by bus.

LAKETRAN has increased its visibility in the community over the years through its support of community causes. It instituted a canned-food drive in which patrons could pay their fares with canned goods for two days, and another in which citizens were challenged to fill a bus with food. It runs a one-day event at a bus facility for fourth graders to teach the principles of labor and capital economics, which reaches out to families that are otherwise unaware of LAKETRAN's activities. These efforts have enhanced public perception of the agency.

The agency is now beginning a new marketing plan for seniors that involves weekly trips to senior centers to do trip planning with both seniors and their caregivers (such as family). In addition, LAKETRAN has a new initiative to work more closely with the local Hispanic community to better meet their needs.

Planning Orientation

Though emphasis in the study period was on preserving the status quo, since the renewal of its 0.25 percent sales tax levy in 2004, the LAKETRAN leadership has begun to shifting its focus to service enhancements. Potential changes might include decreasing headways and implementing Sunday service. LAKETRAN is currently experimenting with an Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) system both for customer service and to increase the efficiency of its system through real-time dispatching and the ability to have greater flexibility in scheduling; the program may be eligible for CMAQ funding. Similarly, the agency is upgrading its paratransit scheduling software. However, the agency notes that it will be difficult to add more service at present levels of funding.

LAKETRAN does not currently plan to outsource its paratransit operations, as the agency cost structure is competitive with that of outside providers.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

LAKETRAN has joined the Cleveland RTA is promoting employer pass subsidy programs. In particular, they run promotions monthly in the Federal office building in Cleveland.

In communities redeveloping streetscapes, LAKETRAN has worked with merchants to put bus shelters in front of their stores in exchange for free bus advertising, in an effort to highlight the benefits of partnering with public transit to increase foot traffic and employee access.

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT)

Sarasota, Florida

Contact: Philip A. Lieberman, Transit Planner

Summary

Ridership on SCAT services increased almost two percent in the 2000 to 2002 period. According to the agency, in subsequent years, ridership has grown more quickly, averaging about seven percent per year. This is occurring in an area with very high population growth (population is growing even faster than increases in ridership). Although many of the new residents of the area are relatively affluent, move into fringe areas, and may not make use of transit, they help support service industries whose workers are heavy transit users.

The agency is currently focused on maintaining service levels in the face of flat budget projections for the near future, rather than expansion of service and budgets. Plans are underway to form a regional transit authority that will exercise more taxing authority.

Fare and Pricing Policy

No fare changes were made during the period. SCAT continues to offer free transfers to the neighboring Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) at the juncture of their systems. Use of these transfers increased as a result of increases in service levels offered by MCAT on those routes.

Service Adjustments

During the period, SCAT began aggressively implementing policies to encourage paratransit riders to switch to fixed-route buses, including stricter enforcement of eligibility requirements and implementing a system of trunk lines for long-haul paratransit riders. These changes were implemented as a cost-cutting measure. As the elderly population grew in Sarasota, use of paratransit increased at a rate that was not financially sustainable. Paratransit ridership continues to increase, but the agency has saved hundreds of thousands of dollars with these measures.

In addition, the agency extended one of its routes to a new industrial area.

Marketing Programs and Initiatives

SCAT's marketing program and budget shrank over the period, reducing the quantity of advertisements and free-ride coupons offered. SCAT no longer has a full-time marketing coordinator, as this position now focuses on a two-county commuter assistance program.

Planning Orientation

SCAT experienced a major shift in planning focus over the study period. Its 1999 Transit Development Plan (TDP) was very ambitious and recommended major service expansions. However, because of a lack of local financial support, these plans were shelved until more funding becomes available. Instead, the focus has changed to reducing costs by tightening the route structure and eliminating service if necessary, while planning to form a regional authority with more ability to levy taxes and support expansion. The TDP adopted in fiscal year 2002 reflects these new priorities.

SCAT is now hiring consultants to lay out options for this regional authority, using other examples of regional authorities in Florida to clarify the legal and financial alternatives. Options being considered include the integration of SCAT and neighboring MCAT into one agency. Though the planning process is in the initial stages, managers hope to achieve the restructuring within about three years.

In terms of community planning, during the period, leadership changes at SCAT that brought it closer to the transportation planning section of the county government have allowed it to become more aggressive in working with developers for transit amenities and support. It has also implemented revisions to the roadway design manual requiring better design of transit amenities in new developments. However, SCAT has not been able to resolve "concurrency" issues—i.e., receiving funding from large developments to support increases in transit service needed to serve that development.

Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnering Initiatives

In addition to coordination with neighboring transit agencies as noted above, the City of Venice provides funding to SCAT to help fund a route serving its community.