



MOBILITY ON DEMAND (MOD) SANDBOX DEMONSTRATION: LA METRO FIRST/LAST MILE PARTNERSHIP WITH VIA

FINAL REPORT

Background

The FTA MOD Sandbox Demonstration Program provides a venue through which integrated MOD concepts and solutions supported through local partnerships are demonstrated in real-world settings. This project tested the viability of a public-private partnership with a Transportation Network Company (TNC), Via Transportation, in two markets, LA County and the Puget Sound region. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro, or Metro) and Via partnered to improve rider options for first/last mile access to Metro stations in three service zones—Artesia, El Monte, and North Hollywood—and offered on-demand rides to and from major bus and rail stations within the zones. Following almost two years of development, Metro's partnership with Via launched in January 2019. This report represents the results of the LA County MOD Sandbox Demonstration.

Objectives

Metro is committed to providing equitable first and last mile access. New mobility services, such as Mobility on Demand, promise to improve transit options and availability for the most vulnerable communities and riders. As such, Metro sought to design and implement a first/last mile (FMLM) pilot project guided by three core principles that demonstrate how 1) TNC services can be aligned with existing and planned transit service to serve as an effective FMLM mile solution and identify other niche markets relevant to improving overall system mobility, 2) key partners can cost-effectively ensure that equal access is provided for individuals with disabilities and low incomes on the TNC platform, and 3) methods of payment can be integrated across transit operator and TNC platforms, specifically to enable service to lower-income and unbanked populations.

From the guiding principles, six project goals were established:

- Improve mobility by increasing ridership for LA Metro through pilot service.
- Provide a reliable, high-quality FMLM customer experience.
- Increase utilization of FMLM mile vehicles by aggregating multiple riders into single vehicles when possible.
- Ensure access for disadvantaged populations through ensuring the availability of a Limited English Proficiency-enabled call center and ensuring the affordability of the service.
- Ensure the availability and usability of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant accessible vehicle service.
- Ensure cost efficiency to LA Metro and the contractor, Via.

Findings and Conclusions

Metro's MOD Partnership with Via pilot proved that transportation agencies can align mobility solution providers with planned and existing transit service to serve as an effective first/last mile solution while ensuring equal access for individuals with disabilities, low-income populations, and those without smartphones or who are unbanked.

At the completion of the first year of service, Metro's partnership with Via resulted in almost 80,000 rides to and from transit stations. The partnership was always meant to be iterative and evolved significantly over time—service zones expanded and fare structures were adjusted in response to rider feedback and ridership trends. By the end of the period of performance, the project had exceeded all key performance indicators, including more than 1,000 weekly trips, wait times of 10 minutes or less for both standard and wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs), an average ride rating of 4.5 of 5 stars, and a utilization factor of more than 2.5 completed riders per driver hour.

The pilot project also resulted in the following lessons learned:

- There is no such thing as overcommunicating.
- Low-income riders and riders with accessibility needs require greater effort to reach.
- Insurance markets and transit operator risk assessors are still catching up to this new service.
- Robust data-sharing is crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of the service.
- Inadequate data inhibit the ability to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the service.
- New services that lack an existing constituency require strong leadership and persistence to come to life and survive.

Benefits

As a part of its MOD Sandbox demonstration project, LA Metro evaluated where the FMLM TNC service could provide the most value. Indicators included high daily rider activity, high employment density, high population density, and limited access to other public transit connections. The MOD Sandbox demonstration was a success, and Metro's Board of Directors approved continuation of the pilot for an additional year, which was locally funded. The partnership reached new levels of success during its second year of operation as service hours were increased and weekend service was added, despite the COVID-19 public health emergency. Although Metro's Partnership with Via ended in January 2021, its service zones transitioned to Micro, Metro's new on-demand rideshare service, further indicating project success and proving that on-demand rides as a public transportation service are here to stay.

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