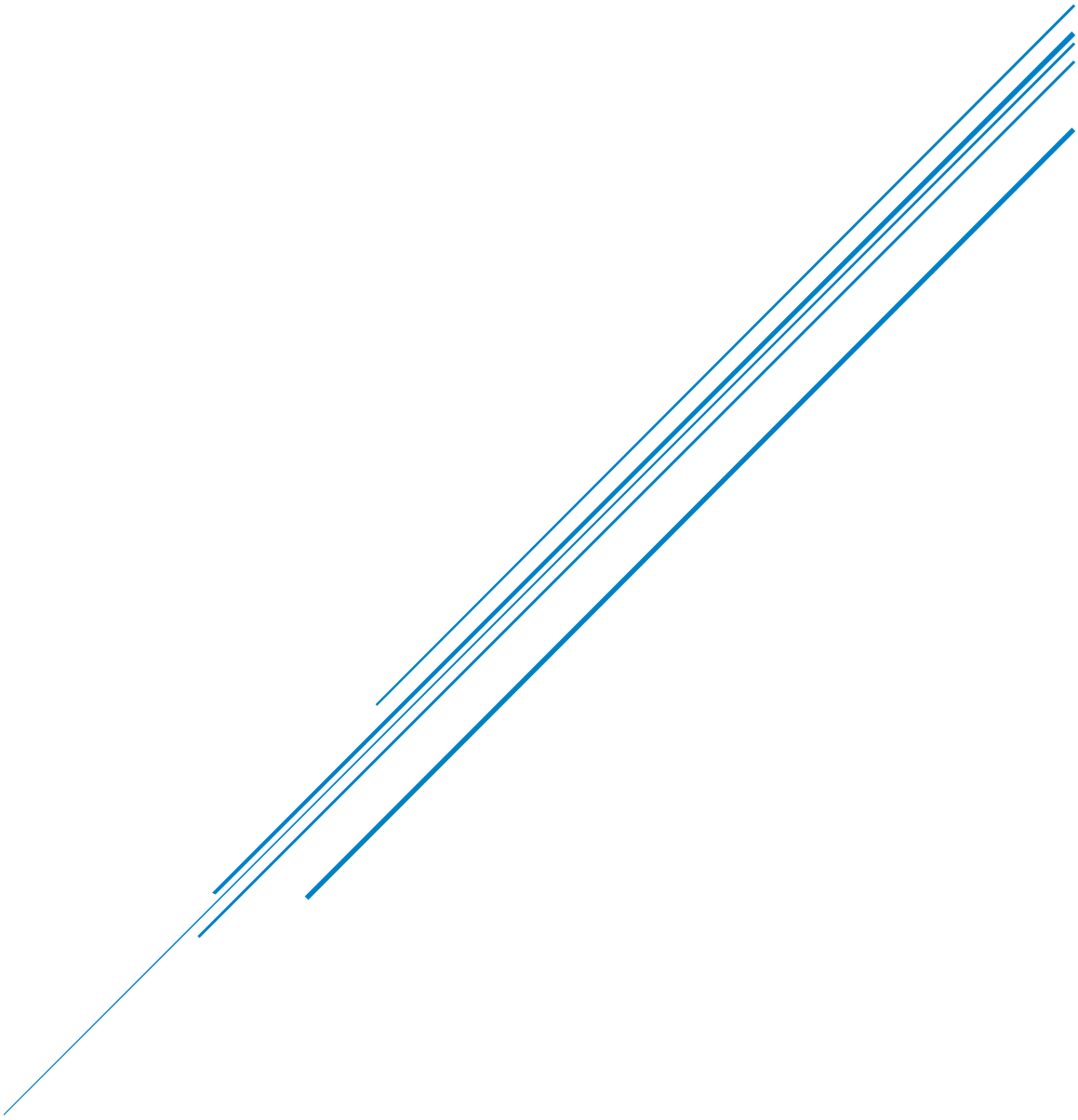
Lane Transit District

Mobility for All Grant Report



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lane Transit District (LTD) has been serving our community since November, 1970. Over the years, our community has evolved. How we serve our community has evolved. The tools we use to serve our community has evolved.

This includes the technology we use that enables us to operate our one-call center, serving many programs through a single platform. It's an innovative solution, and it is very complicated and costly than less integrated options. LTD has committed to this solution to best serve the needs of our community and enable us to provide mobility management for multiple human service programs efficiently and effectively.

While we utilize an advanced technology to coordinate transportation across programs, LTD also was aware we were relying on outdated technology to interact with those using or coordinating transportation … our clients, caregivers, and medical professionals. For this, we have relied on old-fashioned phone calls to schedule eligibility assessments, schedule or change trips, and confirm details of a trip.

In addition, while we maintain an internal fleet of fifty vehicles to serve our community, we rely on private providers to supplement our capacity and deliver reliable service. While our internal fleet uses technology that allows us to accurately track their trip including pick-up and drop-off times, for our external fleet we had to rely on self-reporting.

Customer Convenience

The goal of this project was two pronged. First, we wanted to provide enhanced access, independence, and customer convenience by providing alternatives to scheduling and managing their trips. Also, having the ability to confirm and manage accurate pick-up and drop-off times would provide an opportunity to improve service and customer satisfaction.

Operational Efficiencies and Performance Management

Second, LTD was looking to accomplish operational efficiencies. This includes alleviating the strain on our call-takers by implementing and encouraging use of a cloud-based self-serve portal. In addition to reducing the quantities of incoming calls, our intent was to reduce costly no-shows by making it easier to cancel or reschedule a trip. No-show rides are both financially costly, and also opportunity costs of what those vehicles could have been done to serve our riders.

For performance management, LTD was interested in having a more objective automated method to capture real-time pick-up and drop-off time from our external providers. In addition to compliance requirement, we were experiencing customer complaints about when our operators arrived that was inconsistent with when operators self-reported arriving.

The planned deliverables of this project included implementation of three Trapeze Portals:

- Passenger Portal – Schedule, change, cancel trip
- Notifications Module – Reminders of upcoming trips, eligibility needs, etc.
- Provider Portal – Gather data of real-time arrival/departure times of external fleet

LTD successfully implemented both the Passenger Portal and Notifications Module. This included significant collaboration with our partners, and outreach and training for our customers. At the same time of this implementation, we were also experiencing ridership increases.

As with many technology projects, what appears to be an easy implementation is not. This is the case with our Provider Portal. After exhaustive conversations and attempts to get our external providers to adopt and use the Portal, we were creating significant efficiency losses and potentially impacting quality of service through the implementation. In the end, LTD conferred with FTA who provided an exception allowing LTD to not move forward with that component of the project.

This report provides details on the implementation, performance, outcomes, lessons-learned, and sustainability of the project.

About LTD

In November, 1970, Lane Transit District (LTD) was established following the 1969 Oregon Legislature authorization of the creation of public transit districts in Oregon. LTD began operating with 18 buses and two vans. Dial-A-Bus service began in 1976 to serve the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities.

Since our earliest days of operation, LTD has been, and continues to be, committed to providing service that is accessible, provides independence, and reflects universal design in the provision of services, including our vehicles, facilities, and programs. One example is that by 1985, all LTD buses became wheelchair accessible - the first transit system in the country to do so and five years before required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This commitment continues to be reflected today, interwoven into how we collaborate with, innovate and serve our community.

Today, LTD serves the Eugene/Springfield metro area, including the outlying communities of Cottage Grove, Creswell, Veneta, Junction City, Coburg, and the many communities along the McKenzie River. Public transportation services provided include fixed route bus, bus rapid transit, complementary paratransit service and microtransit services.

In addition, LTD partners to provide transit services that serve rural Lane County. Examples include the Non-emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) to Oregon Health Plan eligible residents of Lane County to access health services within and outside of our county. LTD also operates open general public services outside our metro area, including Diamond Express, connecting the City of Oakridge to the metro area to access shopping, services, work, education and connections beyond; and the Florence Rhody Express, providing transit service within the coastal town of Florence.

LTD operates the RideSource Call Center, our coordinated transportation one-call center for a variety of programs include non-emergent medical transportation for Lane County, ADA paratransit, and a variety of other community-based programs. These programs provide include partnerships with agency, non-profit, and other partners to provide critical connections to help people live healthy, independent, and meaningful lives. Eligibility and transportation are coordinated to remove barriers and increase access.

INTRODUCTION

Lane Transit District was established in 1970 with a fleet of eighteen secondhand buses, affectionately called the “green meanies” for their distinctive emerald color. Before LTD’s incorporation as a public agency, the region’s transportation was served by a series of private bus companies, an early 20th-century electric streetcar system, and even a mule-drawn streetcar. LTD’s mission has long been to enhance community mobility, a purpose that has fueled numerous groundbreaking achievements over the decades.

LTD resides in Lane County, a 4,700 square mile county that stretches through the valley, from the mountains all the way to the ocean. Within Lane County is the Eugene/Springfield metropolitan area (125 square miles), home to TrackTown USA and the University of Oregon.

In 1985, LTD became the first transit system in the United States to achieve full wheelchair accessibility. Further advancing its leadership in public transportation, LTD launched the nation's first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system in 2007, named the EmX, which continues to serve the Eugene and Springfield areas.

Today, LTD operates 30 fixed bus routes and three EmX lines, delivering over 6 million passenger boardings annually. The equitable access service, RideSource, provides more than 360,000 trips each year.

What will the future of transportation look like for Lane County residents in the next ten, twenty, fifty years? How can LTD's effective mobility system contribute to a brighter future for all who call our region "home." Today, 75,317 (or forty-seven percent) of households in Lane County are struggling financially. Many people in our community are currently facing barriers to affordable housing and well-paying jobs, or may be struggling to access the resources they need to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

Investing in mobility and connection can have a positive impact on increasing access, ensuring that all people in Lane County can get where they need to go.

Background

One of LTD's many programs is the RideSource Call Center. This one-call service supports multiple community-based and agency sponsored programs. While many of these are LTD programs, we also provide services through various partnerships with county and state programs. Thanks to the accessibility and resources of a one-call center, community members are able to access any of the following programs with just one call:

- ADA paratransit services - Eugene/Springfield metropolitan area, city of Florence
- Non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT) - County-wide
- Waivered trips (limited, free non-medical trips)
- DHS Work trips for eligible individuals
- Shopper Shuttle (grocery trips)
- Volunteer Mileage Reimbursement
- Behavioral Health Transportation
- Crucial Connections (limited trips for unexpected and urgent needs)
- Veterans Transportation (connect veterans to services at VA hospitals)
- Transportation Eligibility Assessments (in-person, functional and programmatic assessments)

After every successful eligibility assessment, any functional needs and eligible programs are entered into a member-specific profile within the call center's database. If someone calls to schedule a trip but are unsure which programs they may be eligible for, they don't need to worry. RideSource staff are well-equipped to determine the right programs for each individual and will get them scheduled appropriately.

Housing multiple programs under a one-call center provides many convenient transportation options for our riders, however it does come with significant complexities for transit agency operations. While it is both beneficial to our community and the right thing to do, LTD has experienced some complications providing this level of service.

Report Purposes

This Performance Evaluation report serves to fulfill LTD's commitment to evaluation and reporting as an FTA Mobility for All grant recipient. This report also serves as a self-assessment of what LTD has accomplished during this timeframe. FTA's Mobility for All Pilot Program seeks to improve mobility options through employment of innovative solutions and improvement upon local coordination (or access) to coordinated transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and people of low income.

This report documents the performance measures and outcomes related to improving mobility options in our region, building partnerships to enhance services, and the overall breaking down of barriers.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Overview of the Project

The Mobility for All grant funds were used to procure additional features for LTD's scheduling software, Novus, called modules. Three specific modules were implemented by LTD with the help of our vendors (Momentm Technologies):

1. **Notification Module –** Push notifications/reminders to reduce "no shows" and enhance service efficiencies
2. **Passenger Portal Module –** Facilitates members' ability to schedule or change a trip online
3. **Provider Mobile Module –** Facilitates LTD's ability to monitor on-time performance*
   **LTD determined that this module was not feasible due to technology constraints*

Lane Transit District utilizes a single telephone number for all of our services operated through the RideSource Call Center. Prior to implementation of the Passenger Portal and Notifications modules, all communication to and from our riders (or those interacting on the riders' behalf) required them to speak to a person. This included activities such as: scheduling a trip, changing a scheduled trip, confirming a scheduled trip, checking on eligibility, checking on trip status, etc.

While LTD maintains a call center that is well-staffed to ensure that time spent waiting to speak to a person is kept to a minimum, there still exists barriers to meeting rider needs by telephone.

- **Peak times.** A higher number of calls during certain times of the day, week, and/or month lead to longer wait times.
- **Call Center hours.** The hours the Call Center is staffed may not be convenient for riders' schedules due to conflicts such as work, school, etc.
- **Business Priorities.** Businesses who request transportation on behalf of a client (such as medical providers, care facilities, etc.) must pause their work to make a phone call.

Providing access to online scheduling and trip details through a web portal provides many benefits to our riders, to our operations, and to our community.

- **Convenience Requesting/Confirming/Changing a Trip.** Trips can be viewed, requested, changed, or even cancelled through the online portal. This can be done at the individuals' convenience and as often as necessary.
- **Eligibility Status.** Riders can view their current eligibility status through the portal. This helps the rider to anticipate when updates or renewals to their functional assessment is needed. This also helps to inform the rider about which programs they are eligible to utilize.
- **Update information.** Riders can update their profile on the portal to inform RideSource of any changes to their eligibility status - for example if they've moved to a new area or their functional needs have changed.
- **Trip Status.** The Notification Module has made it easy for riders to know the status of their trip in real-time. If a rider has opted in to receiving notifications, they will receive helpful reminders and updates via their preferred method of communication (text, call, email, etc.). This provides opportunities for the rider to easily make changes to their trip prior to their trip date/time.

As a direct result of the M4A grant funds, LTD was able to implement the aforementioned modules that helped us address many of these issues. The modules allowed us to gain operational efficiencies by reducing/slowing the increasing demand on our call center; to reduce costly no-shows; and to provide a high level of service to our community.

IMPLEMENTATION

Coordination and Planning

Providing quality public transportation has been linked to improved community health overall. Quality transportation reduces pollution and congestion (stress), and leads to other beneficial health outcomes such as increased physical movement. It also provides access to many goods and services that are necessary for maintaining good health and quality of life. This includes access to things like: fresh food and grocery stores; places of work; physical and mental health services; connections and relationships with friends, family and community to support good mental health; recreational sites such as movie theaters, restaurants, etc.

Quality transportation can be measured by many characteristics, including:

- Is it available when and where I need it?
- Is it reliable?
- Is it affordable?
- Is it easy to use?

For this project, our focus is on reliability and ease of use.

Implementation Timeline

November 2, 2023 – FTA Region 10 confirmed an extension to the 18-month timeframe, as LTD continued to operate within the parameters of the grant and was making good-faith efforts to stay on schedule while addressing technical issues that sometimes arise with this type of pilot.

January 2023 – Acceptance and full implementation of Novus Notification Module

June 2023 – Acceptance and full implementation of Novus Passenger Portal

January 2024 – Removal of external Provider Module adoption from project as it was determined that there were insoluble technical difficulties involved in implementation

Key Partnerships

LTD strives to provide great public transportation services through innovation and leveraging our strengths. Additionally, we choose to work with partners whose expertise and capacity are able to complement our services and create a high-quality customer service experience for our riders.

For this project, LTD partnered with:

- National Aging & Disability Transportation Center – Partner for success through regular check-ins, guidance, tracking, trouble-shooting

- Momentm Technologies – Software providers
- Trillium Community Health Plan – Coordinated Care Organization partner for NEMT services
- PacificSource Community Solutions – Coordinated Care Organization partner for NEMT services
- Medical Transportation Management Inc. (MTM) – Our contractor providing administration and daily operations of our RideSource Call Center
- Riders, Caregivers, and Medical Providers

Marketing

Proper marketing and promotion were seen as crucial to the success of the public rollout for the Notification and Passenger Portal modules. LTD took many measures to inform the public of their new options at RideSource.

- Passenger Portal Module:
  - LTD created a webpage on our official website to promote utilization of the Passenger Portal Module (Passenger Portal Webpage). This includes an instruction video (as well as a multi-page PDF) with detailed, step-by-step guidance on how to navigate the Passenger Portal website.
  - Upon the initial launch of the Passenger Portal, call takers were encouraged to promote and inform callers of the new online scheduling option while scheduling the trip.
  - RideSource staff were trained to assist in registering and providing minor troubleshooting assistance for riders signing up for the service. If more involved troubleshooting is needed, staff will set up a separate call time to connect with the rider.
  - RideSource has reached out to healthcare facilities to train staff who may schedule multiple trips in a day on behalf of riders.
  - LTD promoted the Passenger Portal to local transit-based committees.
  - In 2023, RideSource users were sent a comprehensive member satisfaction survey in the mail which included promotion and was partially intended to gauge interest in Passenger Portal.

- Notifications Module:
  - LTD added language to our Call Script (a document meant to serve as a guide for call takers while scheduling a trip) which prompted RideSource call agents to ask during every phone call if the rider has a preferred method of notification, or if they would prefer to opt out of notifications altogether.

- Our vendors, Momentm Technologies, held a comprehensive training on the basics of both modules that was attended by both LTD and MTM (on behalf of RideSource) staff. The training occurred in 2022, prior to full implementation of either module. This training was recorded to be available to staff for later training use.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND OUTCOMES

Performance Measures

Back in 2020 when LTD considered the performance goals of implementing the three Novus Modules, we envisioned these Major Activity Output Measures:

1. Notifications Module
The goal for this software module is to decrease the number of no shows and cancellations for transportation providers, particularly for out of town customers.
During FY18, there were almost 14,000 trips classified as either No Show or cancelled at the door by paratransit customers.

A. Goal – decrease no show trips to less than 10,000 (nearly 30% decrease) per year.
    a. RESOLUTION SUMMARY: Unable to meet goal. Without implementation of the Provider Mobile module, we are currently unable to track No Show trips. More information is provided in the next section.

2. Passenger Portal Module – Individual and Delegate Modules
Currently ALL customers must make a telephone call to RideSource to request transportation services. The Passenger Portal Module will decrease this need, offering customers new options to request services. The goal is to transition customers from using the telephone to requesting service online.

A. Goal – decrease incoming phone calls by 20%.
    a. RESOLUTION SUMMARY: Unable to meet goal. We have observed that many trips are being scheduled through the Passenger Portal website (~800 trips per month on average in 2024), and though we have seen some decrease in overall call volume from month-to-month, we have not seen a large enough increase to decrease call volume by 20%.

Nearly half of customer service complaints are about Call Center staff making mistakes entering ride data into the software system. This software module will allow customers to review the information without relying on verbal confirmation from Call Center staff.

B. Goal – decrease customer service complaints by 25%.
    a. RESOLUTION SUMMARY: Goal not met. LTD did see the total number of complaints per year drop markedly from 1,852 in 2023 to 1,457 in 2024. This accounts for a decrease of 21.33%, just 3.67% shy of our target goal.

3. Provider Mobile Module
LTD monitors on time performance for transportation providers serving various paratransit members. At this time, unless the customer is riding on an internal fleet vehicle, actual arrival and departure times could be enhanced showing a provider as arriving on time for an appointment when the arrival may have actually been five minutes late. The Provider Mobile Module will allow LTD to review actual provider arrival and departure data as it moves directly from the application on a provider vehicle back to the call center system. Currently, this information requires human intervention to manually enter the data into the existing system.

A. Goal – increase actual arrival and departure data from external providers by 50%
    a. RESOLUTION SUMMARY: Unable to meet goal. Without implementation of the Provider Mobile module, we are unable to track live data. More information is provided in the next section.

Unfortunately, LTD encountered technical issues with this final module that could not be resolved, and we ultimately eliminated the Provider Mobile module from consideration.

We initially believed that the Provider Mobile Module would be very helpful in tracking No Shows (particularly provider no shows). It was intended to make this work easier for our call center staff and the external providers that we partner with. When it came time to have realistic conversations with RideSource staff and the external providers about the changes needed to make the Provider Mobile Module work, it was expressed that the module would actually create more work for all the parties involved rather than less. Our external providers also noted that they would be an increased cost for them to purchase new scheduling software that would be able to communicate with Provider Mobile. Ultimately, this ended up creating an unreasonable amount of additional work for staff and was determined to be not a good match for RideSource.

Outcomes

Lane Transit District implemented the Notifications module and the Passenger Portal module in 2024:

1. Notifications Module

The Notifications Module has been well-utilized since implementation:

2024	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Notifications Sent	46,189	51,359	53,091	47,669	51,996	48,780	51,008	50,667	47,597	53,107

RideSource's No Shows over time:

2024	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
No Shows	119	124	153	131	158	144	197	145	130	165	164

LTD has received notable positive feedback from staff and riders alike regarding the Notifications Module. Riders appreciate the additional information and staff like the automated nature of the service. Overall, this has been a successful implementation. Unfortunately, we cannot measure our outcomes in the way that we originally intended due to our inability to accurately measure No Show Data. We have been unable to measure this metric without implementing the Provider Mobile module.

2. Passenger Portal Module

RideSource Trips Served over time:

2023	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Trips Served	26,446	24,841	28,969	27,215	29,931	27,856	27,661	31,369	28,210	35,064	32,843	29,776

2024	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Trips Served	29,767	33,298	32,497	35,137	33,774	30,059	32,070	32,280	29,626	35,194

***** *This data reflects count of all trips scheduled through the Call Center (not limited to trips scheduled through the Passenger Portal)*

As shown above, LTD has observed an increase in the number of trips scheduled over time (using the data available to us at time of reporting). This could indicate a positive impact from the module implementation.

RideSource Inbound Calls over time:

2023	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Inbound Calls	21,322	20,099	21,022	19,223	21,143	20,777	18,573	21,125	18,386	20,216	18,274	17,962

2024	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
Inbound Calls	18,762	20,897	20,592	20,657	20,004	18,085	19,715	20,163	18,546	20,707	19,379

As shown above, LTD has not observed a significant decrease in call volume to meet the performance measure of a 20% decrease in incoming calls since implementation of the Passenger Portal. Current utilization of the Passenger Portal is not impactful enough to reflect a change in the overall call numbers. This could be due to a number of factors, including but not limited to: our user base is either unable to, or unsure how to, access the technology needed for online scheduling; a need for more promotion and explanation to members on the features available through Passenger Portal; members currently cannot make same-day requests through the Passenger Portal; etc. LTD continues to invest time and energy into recruiting new users for Passenger Portal.

3. Provider Mobile Module

The data we currently have to track No Shows (as the Provider Mobile Module was meant to address) is still a work in progress and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of No Shows across all of our RideSource services.

LTD intended to utilize the Provider Mobile module to track live data from our external providers, showing in real-time whether rides are arriving on time, late or not at all. The ability to track data in this way would have provided much more detail and verifiable information, regarding external provider trips in particular.

The complete cooperation of each of our external providers would have been necessary for this module to work as intended, which also would have meant that a number of providers would have needed to purchase and install new scheduling software. After discussion, it was discovered that even with new software, both

RideSource staff and external provider staff would need to double their current workload to accommodate utilization of the Provider Mobile module. This would have had negative impacts on both the Call Center and the external providers. Therefore, it was determined that the Provider Mobile module was not a suitable solution for RideSource's specific needs.

LTD is currently working internally with RideSource staff to establish processes for collecting No Show data.

We have observed a slight uptick in the number of No Shows recorded in 2024. LTD will report more data on No Show rates as it becomes available.

MOVING FORWARD

Sustainability

LTD will continue to employ the Notifications and Passenger Portal modules to provide a convenient option for riders, caregivers, and businesses to interact with the Call Center to schedule and manage their trips.

Next Steps

LTD will continue to actively communicate the value of, and encourage use of, the two modules. We understand that some of the customers using our services may take a bit longer to adopt the use of technology.

We will look for opportunities to further communicate and educate riders on the benefits of these modules, while ensuring they continue to add value to the customer experience.

We will also incorporate questions in our customer survey to understand the value of the features, and why/why not people are using them. This will help guide how we can best assist our riders to utilize them.

Lastly, we will continue to track the operational benefits/goals of the modules to see if they are having the desired operational impact.

IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Impacts on LTD's Services

During the COVID-19 pandemic and national emergency, many of LTD's services were severely affected. This included our RideSource services.

Ridership decreased drastically during the pandemic, as did the number of available operators, due to a higher level of precaution and federal mandates encouraging people to stay at home. Additionally, there were more absences on RideSource's customer service team due to illness and quarantine requirements.

After the national health emergency officially ended on May 11, 2023, LTD observed that our ridership began to slowly build up again. It was notably more difficult to restore the driver pool for our internal and external RideSource services to pre-pandemic levels, which lead to some capacity issues related to trip volume. This, in turn, lead to more late trips and longer wait times for riders.

Impacts on the Grant

LTD's reporting for this grant was impacted by the aforementioned delays, causing us to miss scheduled reporting milestones and reimbursements. Special attention was paid to the timely completion of these updates, and regular conversation occurred between LTD and our vendors (Momentm) to move the project along as quickly (and as carefully) as possible.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons Learned Through Projects

Many delays occurred during implementation, and the projected date of completion was pushed further and further out as time went on. This can be partially accounted for due to the nature of technology and working with a third-party vendor. LTD recognizes that the very specific technological needs of the RideSource Call Center will always make it more difficult to implement these kinds of changes. This technology is also relatively new and is being updated all the time. Regular troubleshooting and weekly meetings between LTD and Momentm were needed to keep the schedule on track.

Once implemented, we found the Notifications and Passenger Portal modules to be mostly user-friendly and helpful for riders and staff. During rollout we noted that there are a number of community members who use RideSource services that are not accustomed to working with computers. To try to mitigate this, and encourage riders to utilize the Passenger Portal module, we created a detailed instruction video that walks a new user through each step of the process. We also created a PDF version of these instructions.

As noted previously, LTD chose to terminate the implementation of the last module, the Provider Mobile Module. This module did not end up being compatible with LTD's needs for the RideSource Call Center.

Rider Feedback

Feedback submitted anonymously through our 2023 Customer Satisfaction Survey, Complaint Module:

- "It is an added knowledge for the R-S driver to inform the rider that another client will be picked up before my destination is completed. Nice to know-right? Cool beans. R-S is a very good senior program!!"
- "Knowing pickup and return services would be greatly appreciated."
- "Member's mother has called in wanting to add the destination and times to one-way trips that are created in the passenger portal because when it is submitted online it does not keep the information, and she has to call in to fix it."
- "Member very upset about the website. The member says when he gets on there, he sees nothing saying 'make an appointment', very unclear how to make an appointment. Member cannot understand the username, I asked him and he said the username was never discussed. He is frustrated the information is wrong. I made sure to change the password and tell him the correct ID information…He feels like with the combination of the difficulty navigating the passenger portal…is enough for him to want to file a complaint."

Observable trends based on this feedback:

- More communication and information from RideSource will always be helpful
    - Notification Module – are we able to add functionality in Novus to update provider details if trip changes are made? (Dependent upon tech capabilities.)
    - Passenger Portal – encourage the use of Passenger Portal as all trip details are available, and even able to be changed, online in minutes rather than a lengthy phone call.
- Additional and continuous education on how to navigate the Passenger Portal is still needed for some riders
    - We recently set aside an hour of time during the day where trained staff can reach out to riders to help with any complicated troubleshooting needs. This would occur outside of peak call times so the staff can dedicate time and energy to the rider's needs.