

2009 FTA Ridership Award Winners

Under 50,000 in population

Finney County Transit, Garden City, Kansas

50,000 to 200,000 in population

Coeur d'Alene Tribe and Citylink, Worley, Idaho

Intercity transit, Olympia, Washington

Ozark Regional Transit, Springdale, Arkansas

River Valley Metro Mass Transit, Bourbonnais, Illinois

Whatcom Transportation Authority, Bellingham, Washington

200,000 to 1 million in population

Capital District Transportation Authority, Albany, New York

Coast Transit Authority, Gulfport, Mississippi

Community Transit, Everett, Washington

Over 1 million in population

MTA Bus Company, New York City, New York



Finney County Transit, Garden City, KS

Finney County Transit operates under the authority of Finney County Committee on Aging, which is the public transportation provider for this county in southwestern Kansas. The targeted population for Finney County Transit service is residents without cars, senior citizens, residents with disabilities, and low-income individuals.

During the fall of 2006, Garden City's capital improvement planning process indicated the residents would like expanded transportation services. The city then approached Finney County Transit requesting a service expansion to include a new fixed route bus service funded by the city to compliment the existing door to door service. A steering committee of 30 community members from various social service agencies, school districts and local non-profits was formed in January 2007. This group helped develop policies and guidelines, fare rates and time schedules, guidelines and a logo for the new transit system.

Finney County Transit's new fixed route bus service debuted in September 2007. Customer comments about the new service were collected at community meetings on a monthly basis to continually evaluate and improve service. Finney County Transit was involved in the planning of a new housing complex for low income and disabled individuals, and planned to change the service to meet the neighborhood's demand.

Marketing for the new service included new uniforms for bus operators and free marketing materials that were distributed to the public with the agency's logo and phone number on them. Creative outreach techniques included speaking at community meetings to promote the new service and distributing bilingual brochures and maps, along with free one-day ride passes. Advertising also took place in the form of articles in local newspaper segments, ads on television, and updated information on the transit agency's web page. Finney County Transit's ridership improved over 16 percent between 2006 and 2007.

50,000 to 200,000 in population



Coeur d'Alene Tribe and Citylink, Worley, ID

Coeur d'Alene Tribe and Citylink operate a rural transit service in Coeur d'Alene, which is the county seat and the largest city of Kootenai County, Idaho. The city is located about 30 miles east of Spokane, Washington, which combined with Coeur d'Alene and northern Idaho has population of half a million people. Coeur d'Alene is also the largest city in the northern Idaho Panhandle. The Coeur d'Alene Tribe is a 2,000 member Native American Tribe whose homelands are in Northern Idaho. Citylink represents the first time in the United States that a tribal government and a local government have collaborated to create free public transportation. Citylink operates free bus service along five routes and runs service seven days a week, including all holidays.

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe developed a new urban, fixed route service in 2006, which has become Citylink's fastest growing route. The new route's schedule was adjusted to meet rider demand, and new route schedules and maps were distributed. The Citylink 800 number and website were updated, and radio, television and billboard advertising were coordinated to inform the public about the new route. After 10 months of planning and coordination, the route service was started and Citylink's ridership increased 27 percent from the previous year.

In 2007, the Tribe and Citylink started the development of a new bus maintenance garage, which improved service reliability and quality. The maintenance garage was necessary because Citylink operates buses on a tight, non-stop schedule and only has seven buses.

The Tribe and Citylink also started planning the development of a rural demand-response route in 2007. This new service gave a greater number of people in the county access to fixed route stops. Destinations on the tribal reservation route also experienced much higher ridership.

50,000 to 200,000 in population



Intercity Transit, Olympia, WA

Intercity Transit is a public transportation service organized as a municipal corporation that services Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and Yelm, Washington, an area of approximately 94 square miles. They operate 25 bus routes, a door-to-door service for people with disabilities, a vanpool program, specialized van programs, and are active in many community partnerships.

Intercity Transit developed a comprehensive strategic plan in 2002 that was tied to the agency's budget, needs, market research and long-term vision. Over the next eight years, Intercity Transit operated a range of services, tailored to meet the needs of all locations they served, improve operation in major corridors, reduce customer travel times, be coordinated with all local development, expand regional express routes, support the region's infrastructure and support a range of transportation alternatives.

To increase the number of school-age children riding Intercity Transit, a youth marketing campaign began in February 2006. Improved passenger information, new bus shelters, targeted marketing and discounted monthly youth passes resulted in a significant increase in ridership for this demographic.

Intercity Transit's market research found the public wanted more service in the major corridors of the region and higher quality transit. Decreasing headways to 15 minutes and expanding weekend service resulted in major ridership increases. In 2007, Intercity Transit formed a partnership with Evergreen State College to implement late night weekend service between the college and the Olympia Transit Center. This route's ridership grew far beyond Intercity Transit's expectations and has become a huge success. The agency also formed a partnership with the City of Olympia to create a Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center in downtown Olympia. This Center provided another outlet for marketing Intercity Transit, a convenient location for people to learn more information about transit options, and a location to purchase discounted transit passes.

Between 2006 and 2007, Intercity Transit's ridership increased over 18 percent and since they implemented the new strategic plan in 2002, ridership has increased 50 percent.

50,000 to 200,000 in population



Ozark Regional Transit, Springdale, AR

Ozark Regional Transit was created in 1977 as a rural transportation demonstration project funded by the Urban Mass Transportation Association, which later became the Federal Transit Administration. Ozark Regional Transit runs service in a four county area of Northwestern Arkansas, providing service to cities, rural areas, employment centers and the University of Arkansas.

The transit agency did some internal analysis and realized school-age children made up less than one percent of their total ridership. The majority of the population in this demographic had never ridden a bus, so the "Try It, You'll Like It" marketing campaign was developed. As a special promotion, teens and preteens were offered free access to the transit system over summer vacation. To tailor services to this market, Ozark Regional Transit revised routes for the new passengers, adding stops at the library, pools, summer camp sites and local Boys and Girls Clubs. Due to this pilot program, school-aged children became one of the largest passenger demographics. The teen and pre-teen demographic group became 20 percent of all trips taken in the calendar year. Ridership among young adults rose 91 percent, totaling approximately 42,000 passenger trips. Systemwide trips on Ozark Regional Transit increased by 24 percent.

50,000 to 200,000 in population



River Valley Metro Mass Transit, Bourbonnais, IL

River Valley Metro Mass Transit serves most of Kankakee County in the state of Illinois. Founded in 1998, the River Valley Metro Mass Transit district took over the Kankakee Area Transit System and became a vital means of transportation in the region. River Valley Metro operates 10 fixed routes, one commuter route to University Park linking with the Metra Train to downtown Chicago, and Metro PLUS, which is their demand-response transportation service.

In February 2006, River Valley Metro introduced a new commuter route that linked the service area to the train system that travels to downtown Chicago, along with a new fixed route in Bourbonnais that replaced a demand service. To make the people in the service area aware of the new routes, new bus schedules were designed and printed by the local newspaper. These schedules were used to wrap the local Sunday newspaper, which was delivered to every household in the service area, even if the households did not subscribe to the paper. Additional schedules were printed and distributed in more traditional ways as well. Between 2006 and 2007, ridership increased 14.4 percent, system-wide.

In the fall of 2006, River Valley Metro partnered with the local newspaper to host tailgate parties at local football games. River Valley Metro would bring a bus wrapped with an advertisement for the newspaper to the football fields and the newspaper would purchase all the food for sale at the concession stands. They would then give away all the food at the bus, which was available for people who may have never used public transportation to tour the bus. This promotion cost River Valley Metro nothing but staff time and allowed them to access non-riders.

In the summer of 2007, River Valley Metro implemented a new customer service program, with full-time Customer Care Supervisors. The role of the Supervisors was to assist the drivers in providing the best service possible. The Supervisors lead two new initiatives, including a "No Customer Left Behind" policy, which provided customers who missed the bus with a free ride to their destination, and the "Stranded Motorist" program. Customer Care Supervisors assist stranded motorists, unless an emergency situation is occurring. The Customer Care Supervisors assist the motorist in getting the help they need and assist in traffic control until the local authorities arrive.

50,000 to 200,000 in population



Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), Bellingham, WA

Whatcom Transportation Authority is the public transit provider for Whatcom County, Washington, in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. It operates buses, paratransit, vanpools, and several Park & Rides. Whatcom Transit operates 33 fixed route buses in Whatcom County. It also provides paratransit buses for disabled riders within 0.75 miles of a bus line.

WTA's 12 percent systemwide ridership increase is attributed to 2 marketing initiatives the agency undertook between 2006 and 2007. WTA introduced the red line in June 2006. It provides service every 15 minutes between downtown Bellingham and the Fairhaven Historic District. In addition to increasing service, WTA created a distinct brand identity for the red line, including a logo and colorful graphics. These were featured in the overall design of the bus stops, shelters and benches along the route. Print and radio ads, direct mailings to people living on the bus route, and informational tables at local farmers' markets were used to market the red line, along with press releases and media interviews. Ridership on the red line increased 75 percent over a one-year period.

In July 2006, WTA formed a partnership with other local agencies to launch Whatcom Smart Trips, a countywide program created to increase the use of alternative transportation. Whatcom Smart Trips is a partnership between WTA, the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County and Whatcom Council of Governments. Smart Trips participants create an online trip diary where they can log their bus, walking and biking trips. As they achieve personal milestones, they receive rewards, incentives and recognition. The promotional campaign included a limited number of free monthly bus passes to new participants, discounts at local merchants, periodic incentive gifts and chances to win cash prizes. According to the online trip diaries of Smart Trips participants, the program increased participants' bus trips by 45 percent.

200,000 to 1 million in population



Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), Albany, New York

Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) provides regular route bus service, shuttle systems and paratransit services in Albany. CDTA subsidiaries own and operate the Rensselaer Rail and Saratoga Springs Train Stations. CDTA also operates the Northway Xpress Commuter Service between Saratoga County and downtown Albany. Over 650 people work at CDTA to deliver a transit system that serves more than 800,000 people who live and work in the region, transporting more than 45,000 customers each weekday.

Five years ago, the CDTA board and senior managers joined together with elected officials, stakeholders and the public to create a strategic vision for transit in the region. Because of these initiatives, ridership and revenue have increased, safety and maintenance records are improved, the workforce is stable and CDTA has taken a place at the region's planning table, positioned to meet the transportation challenges that will shape regional growth and economic development.

Like most mid-size transit properties in the northeast, ridership was stable. Resources were adequate to maintain the status quo and employees were dedicated to providing the best service possible with what they had available to them. The CDTA realized the vital role the organization could play in shaping the direction of transportation initiative and the economic growth and quality of the region. Over a five-year period culminating in 2006 and 2007, CDTA created a new long-term vision, strategic plan, communications plan, and updated labor contract. CDTA introduced a first-of-its-kind labor-management partnership in New York State, designed to enhance training and skill building in public transportation.

There was change in existing services, and clarity about the new service delivery. A plan for Bus Rapid Transit came into focus, and new hybrid buses, accompanied by an organization-wide commitment to the environment, rolled into town. As service launched in new areas and new commuter lines opened, CDTA became a respected voice in regional mobility. CDTA achieved its lowest number of accidents since 1995 and maintenance performance soared. Simplefare, CDTA's fare simplification initiative, had nearly universal acceptance by customers and produced a 20.3 percent increase in ridership over two years, a nine percent increase in revenue and a 24 percent increase in sales of discount cards. CDTA has accomplished this with only three percent increases in operating budget over the same time period.

200,000 to 1 million in population



Coast Transit Authority, Gulfport, Mississippi

Coast Transit Authority (CTA) is the non-profit provider of public transportation for three coastal counties in Mississippi. It is an independently managed public utility that is governed by a Board of Commissioners. Funding for CTA's operations and capital projects are currently provided by self-generated revenue, the Federal Transit Administration, Harrison County, the City of Biloxi, the City of Gulfport, the City of Ocean Springs and the State of Mississippi.

CTA has a bus line that travels to the various casinos in the area that was similar to regular fixed route buses except that the name "Lucky 21" appeared in the marquee. No other CTA promotion was being utilized for the bus route. All the casinos were also operating their own buses and ridership was poor. Coast Transit Authority sought to create a unique and distinctive brand for the CTA bus service to the casinos and developed a marketing campaign to promote it.

CTA named the bus line the Casino Hopper and wrapped the buses in distinctive supergraphics featuring a green frog leaping. A noted New Orleans Musician, Clarence Frogman Henry, whose signature song, "I'm a Lonely Frog" had been famous for 50 years, was hired as a celebrity representative. "The Frogman," as he insists on being called, appeared on all print materials, newspaper advertisements, and television and radio commercials, combining our message with his highly memorable song. "The Frogman was selected for this role because of his high public profile, his demonstrated ability to attract attention in a very positive and entertaining way, and the fact that he was demographically perfect to appeal to the average casino patron who is 55-65 years old and remembered him vividly. Advertising materials were placed in media, which directly targeted casino patrons and employees, enabling the campaign to achieve high efficiency. CTA also replaced the existing bus with a brand new one and added two more buses to the new route structure, which reduced the headway from 45 minutes to 15 minutes.

Ridership on Lucky 21, which had averaged 1,839 a month the last three months of its operation, increased to an average of 13,200 a month on the new Casino Hopper route during the last three months of 2007. This is an increase of 618% on this route. The new service enabled casinos to discontinue their own private sector bus service and they are now relying on the new CTA Casino Hopper service. The marketing strategy was extremely successful in creating brand awareness on this route and increasing ridership on the route, as well as for the entire system. The 2007 ridership was 142,956 or 17.3% higher than 2006.



Community Transit, Everett, Washington

Community Transit has grown from a small local bus service into a leader in local and regional transportation over the past three decades. In 2007, Community Transit provided more than 10 million passenger rides, a record for the agency. Community Transit's ridership growth was due to a number of initiatives to increase ridership, including service adjustments, promotions and partnerships with employers, as well as the high quality maintenance the vehicles receive. These initiatives included outreach to new residents, local schools and employers, increasing vanpool services and adjusting service to make riding Community Transit even more convenient.

Community Transit increased bus service later into the evening on several routes and added weekend service on others. While systemwide ridership increased, larger increases were seen on routes that expanded service. One route increased trips by 19 percent each year, another saw a 28 percent increase in the first year of additional service. All of this effort contributed to the overall system increases of over 18 percent during the two-year period of 2006 and 2007.

Promotions included the New Resident Campaign and the EdPass Project. Almost 10,000 people moved to or within Snohomish County in 2007. Community Transit purchased data identifying these people and mailed packets promoting Community Transit services, including free ride tickets, vanpool information and transit instruction program information. The EdPass project was part of Community Transit's partnership with Edmonds Community College. Community Transit and the college promote the EdPass, a fare medium for college students and staff. Working with the college, promotional materials were placed at popular campus locations and on the school's website. Following the promotions, student and staff pass purchases increased more than 17 percent, reversing a three-year trend of stagnation in the program.

Community Transit's Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program, which works with major employers throughout Snohomish County, also experienced strong growth. In 2007, the program expanded to 73 businesses with more than 35,000 employees, an 8 percent increase in businesses served from 2006. The agency invested \$60,000 in programs to promote transportation alternatives in 2007, encouraging people to use buses, vanpools, carpools, bikes or walk to work. One of the most striking increases as a result of the CTR program came in commuter bus service to Boeing's Everett facility. In 2006 and 2007, ridership on Boeing-Everett routes increased 17.6 percent.

An often overlooked aspect of the efforts to increase ridership is the work of the agency's vehicle maintenance department. Buses are serviced regularly and scheduled preventive maintenance helps keep buses operating properly. Many new passengers also comment on how clean and well maintained Community Transit buses are, which helps create a positive impression of the service. This makes people feel comfortable about continuing to use the service. Once people try Community Transit, they tend to continue to use it, which contributed to the nearly 20 percent increase over the past two years.

Over 1,000,000 in population



MTA Bus Company – New York City, New York

MTA Bus Company was created in September 2004 to assume the operations of seven bus companies that operated under franchises granted by the New York City Department of Transportation. The merging of the companies into the MTA Bus began in January 2005 and was completed in February 2006.

The transition to MTA Bus Company (MTABC) service from the seven former private bus franchises was the result of the mutual desire of the City of New York and the MTA to improve the quality and efficiency of bus service. MTA Bus is responsible for both the local and express bus operations of the seven companies, consolidating their operations, maintaining current buses, purchasing new buses to replace the aging fleet currently in service and adjusting schedules and route paths to better match travel demand. MTA Bus operates 46 local bus routes in Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens, and 35 express bus routes between Manhattan and the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. It has a fleet of 1,336 buses, which makes MTA Bus the 10th largest bus fleet in the United States and Canada, serving 368,000 riders daily.

MTABC committed to aggressively upgrading the overall service delivery of its bus operations through replacement of an aged bus fleet, the expansion of new maintenance practices, facility upgrades and the establishment of a routine service monitoring and adjustment program to facilitate service enhancements in response to customer demand. These efforts included schedule revisions to deal with overloaded conditions, unmarketable and non-uniform service intervals and service hours and inadequate running times that did not accommodate current traffic conditions. MTABC improved span of service with more efficient headways to accommodate passenger growth.

In 2006, the fleet inherited by MTABC had an average age of about 13.5 years. The average age has been lowered to less than five years. The "Mean Distance Between Failures" level of buses was raised to over 3,700 miles from just over 2,300 miles. Additionally, the MTABC bus fleet is now 100% wheelchair accessible.

The facilities inherited by MTABC did not meet MTA service standards and were incompatible with new buses. To improve maintenance practices, major facility improvements were initiated including installation of environmentally friendly portable bus lifts, installation and updating depot tailpipe exhaust systems, updating battery rooms, and asbestos abatement. To provide improved operational service, employee training initiatives have been implemented and over 500 employees (bus operators, mechanics and maintenance supervisors) were hired to fill vacancies and address service improvements. MTABC also entered several service agreements with sister MTA agencies to provide technical expertise in various areas and to facilitate facility upgrades.

Due to all these coordinated initiatives, ridership was increased by 18.3 percent.