



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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Marketing Integrated Transit Services

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Fixed-route + paratransit = More benefits for everyone



Call-n-Ride transfer point in the Denver, CO Metro area.

As the cost of paratransit service continues to grow, many transit agencies are considering integrating their demand-response service with traditional fixed-route service to encourage, to the extent possible, greater utilization of fixed route services. This integration allows the paratransit service to connect passengers from their origin to the fixed-route service and/or from the fixed-route service to their final destination.

In many cases, this type of transit integration is advantageous to both the transit agency and the passenger in terms of cost, level of service, and route expansion, and complies with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

To successfully deviate from the traditional model of separate services, a high level of transit agency coordination, community participation, and marketing techniques are required. This article summarizes work done in a Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Synthesis Report (#76) titled "Integration of Paratransit and Fixed-Route Transit Services." It defines integrated services, provides some notable examples of such services, and describe the marketing techniques used to promote these services by agencies that offer operate both demand-response and fixed-route service.

The goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is to promote the independence, integration, and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities. It requires that complementary paratransit services be provided to eligible elderly and disabled riders who are not able to fully utilize fixed-route transit service because of a disability.

Integrating fixed-route and paratransit services is congruent with the principles of the ADA. Many localities have made this conversion to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

What are "integrated services?"

An agency that offers "integrated services" refers to one that has departed from the traditional model of separate fixed-route and complementary paratransit services by seeking a variety of ways to integrate services, including the provision of paratransit feeder services, community buses or circulators, connectors, fixed-route fare incentives, and route deviation.

The most common form of integrated service is the traditional ADA paratransit feeder service. For riders able to ride fixed-route service for at least some of their trips, the ADA allows transit agencies to limit trip offerings to a feeder service where individuals are transported from their origins to the fixed-route service and/or from the fixed-route service to their final destinations.

In many cases, this level of transit integration is advantageous to both the transit agency and the passenger. A survey conducted as part of the TCRP Synthesis 76 revealed that transit agencies are motivated to explore integrated services by cost savings accrued from shorter trips in addition

to promoting the independence of their paratransit registrants.

Typically, most the infrastructure required for the conversion to integrated services already exists and no significant equipment purchases are necessary. Low up-front costs allow transit agencies to extend demand-response service into low-density markets or substitute a portion of demand-response service for fixed-route service. This typically reduces operating costs and increases the level of service by improving the capacity to accommodate trip requests and expanding the mobility options for riders who typically might use only complementary paratransit services.

Getting over the hump

Problem: One of the biggest challenges to implementing an integrated system is support from current paratransit riders. According to Steve Fittante, director of the Middlesex County (N.J) Department of Transportation, the challenge is convincing the riders to leave a one-vehicle paratransit trip for a transfer trip to a fixed-route service. Those riders may have limited experience with fixed-route transit, and the integration of services can make riders uncomfortable. This concern is echoed by other transit agencies, with numerous agencies having identified as a top priority the need to educate riders about integrated services.

Solution: One strategy to overcome concerns by current paratransit riders is to offer travel training programs. Paratransit Inc. in Sacramento, CA has been a leader in mobility training, offering a program that promotes independent travel for current paratransit riders. The non-profit organization educates riders how to get to or from fixed-route stations, the specific stations in their area, and how to identify landmarks for navigation. They offer the following services:

- Basic one-on-one training (10 hours or less)
- Intensive one-on-one training (More than 10 hours)
- Group training

The mobility training program has been shown to be very effective in deferring trips from paratransit to fixed-route and other services. Other agencies took notice. A mobility training contract was awarded to Paratransit Inc. by Spokane Transit's board in 2006, running through 2011. During this five year span, the program accounted for 131,090 deferred or avoided paratransit trips for a total cost avoidance of over \$2.3 million. Travel training educates users on the nuances of fixed-route transit, and helps the user gain travel independence, subsequently reducing costs for the transit agency.

Promoting integrated services

In addition to travel training, various marketing strategies

Mandatory feeder programs generally do not market feeder service to transit ridership, but rather explain in their service brochures that service to paratransit-eligible riders may require a transfer to fixed-route service. ACCESS in Pittsburgh took this a step further by providing information about the integrated services in an eligibility determination letter, a follow-up telephone call, a fact sheet, and through a personal trip planning service offered to the eligible rider.

have been employed to educate riders and gain support for integrating services. Agencies that use integrated services are generally very proactive in publicizing their services, with strategies ranging from brochures and web-based information to partnerships with local businesses and unique branding. Here are a few examples:

In Colorado, the Denver RTD has teamed with local municipalities to advertise their Call-N-Ride program through utility bills, schools, libraries, and recreation centers. The resulting marketing campaign is projected to increase ADA paratransit customers 200 percent.

In Pittsburgh, PA, local transportation management associations conduct an extensive marketing campaign to promote The Elder Express, a paratransit service available to seniors and individuals with disabilities that connects to fixed-route service. The service is \$3.00 per day and is routed through an area of Pittsburgh that has a high concentration of elderly residents. Eligible patrons are seniors 65 years and older who live in the 15217 zip code area. The service will drop off passengers at key nearby locations, including areas with access to the fixed-route service for trips outside of the service area. Originally funded through a federal grant, the service is now self-sustaining in part to an extensive public outreach promotion. The service was marketed through special free days and partnerships with local businesses to provide discounts to riders.

In California's Central Valley, the San Joaquin Regional Transit District (RTD) has transitioned to a deviated fixed-route service nicknamed "The Hopper." The Metro Hopper serves popular destinations throughout the Stockton city limits. Each bus can deviate from its normal route a distance of up to one mile to accommodate ADA-certified passengers. Because of this added flexibility, the Metro Hopper replaces two dial-a-ride services and county fixed-route services during Hopper service hours, in the areas covered by the Hopper.

The Hopper initially met resistance from customers,

The Metro Hopper initially met with resistance on a number of fronts, but resulted in an 86 percent increase in ridership and a 64 percent reduction in costs in fewer than three years.

stakeholders, and its funding partners due to initial capital costs. However, in part due to an extensive marketing campaign, the service has seen an 86 percent increase in ridership and a 64 percent reduction in costs in fewer than three years.

The Hopper service is distinguished from regular bus routes through a unique numbering system and color-coded routes printed in schedules and maps. “Freddie the Frog” was branded as the mascot, and the service was promoted through print, radio, web, direct mailer, schedules, brochures and outreach events. Since the Hopper’s inception in 2009, the agency’s paratransit cost per trip has gone down from \$47.00 to \$29.50 and the average number of passengers per hour has increased from 2.2 to 4.25. The San Joaquin RTD received the Compass Award from the Transportation Marketing and Sales Association for the Hopper Marketing Campaign in 2010.

Summary

As the cost of paratransit service continues to grow, transit agencies should consider integrating demand-response service with traditional fixed-route service. Integrated services have been shown to benefit both the passenger and transportation agency in terms of cost, level of service, and route expansion. Transit agencies have cautiously approached the transition because of the challenge of overcoming resistance in current paratransit riders. This challenge is not insurmountable however, with the use of marketing and rider education. Successful programs promoting integrated services in Denver, Pittsburgh, Stockton and Sacramento all serve as examples that have not only resulted in increased ridership, but improved the level of service, overall customer satisfaction, and significantly reduced costs to the local transit agency.

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