



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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One-Call: Planning a “No Wrong Door” System for Transit Service

By Clifton Hall



A. Smith

Computerized dispatch and scheduling in the newly-opened Flint Hills Regional Transit Facility allows ATA Dispatcher John Evans to respond to passengers' travel needs while checking the schedule. Flint Hills ATA provides services in Riley, Geary and Pottawatomie Counties, and is working with Marshall County to expand regional dispatching services.

Sometimes it is unclear to members of the public how they can seek information about transportation options available to them. One solution is a central information call center, known as a One-Call or One-Click system. This article provides basic information and resources regarding the implementation and planning of a One-Call system.

One-Call systems are not unique to transit. The flagship example is the 9-1-1 emergency call center, where people are encouraged to call during emergencies to receive fire, police, and emergency medical services. For transit purposes, a One-Call system can be defined as one that gathers information on services and programs of local transportation providers, and then connects the caller directly with those providers. This saves the customer from over-complicated research and running into barriers that

prevent him or her from receiving needed services.

Connecting with riders

The main objective of a One-Call system is to provide access to regular, everyday transportation service to citizens, or the occasional services they might

need otherwise. With this in mind, the One-Call center typically follows a three step customer service process of 1) inform, 2) assist, and 3) access. The center informs the customer, giving an idea of what is available and how their needs can be met. Next, the center can provide individual assistance, such as route and schedule planning, eligibility determination, and coordinating and advocacy services. Last, the center can connect the customer to transportation resources through centralized dispatch or calls to the appropriate agencies, giving them access to rideshare, paratransit, ticketing, and other transit resources.

Call center mission: Increase access to services

Usually, a call center acts as a transportation brokerage. The call center provides a clearinghouse for available

transportation services in the area.

Although multiple services may exist, the best and most available access can be given to the customer by the call center, reducing the possibility of the customer sifting through missing or conflicting information.

Customer service and the participation aspect of call centers make them an effective tool in mobility management. Positive benefits of call center implementation may include increased ridership, reduction in duplicated services, and better public image. One-Call centers may enhance your current mobility management strategies.

How to develop a One-Call system

At the core of any effective One-Call center is a strong partnership among a community's transportation providers. If cooperation is low in your service area, it will be difficult for a resource pool such as a One-call Center to form.

The resources each organization provides—as well as how they are provided, how each conducts business—is important in moving forward with partnerships.

If your area has a mobility manager, he or she will be the key point in connecting and visioning a call center plan. As a team, you can determine what need gaps are the most important to fill in your community. Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plans can serve as a guidepost to the needs of the community.

One of the first things your group can do is decide if one of the members would make a good host for the new call center. If not, what shared software or other solutions best meet the needs of each organization? For smaller transit providers,

often the best solution is to partner with a larger provider with more technology and staff. This negates the needs for start-up costs of new systems and hiring. For a larger agency, it is often beneficial to add service to the existing system; contracting fees help pay for the systems costs and additional employees.

Think regionally

Since One-Call centers are inherently about partnerships, in rural areas it may be necessary to think of call centers as serving a region. In recent T-works legislation, funding was nearly doubled to enhance coordination between rural 5311 transit providers. The type of coordination possible generally falls on a scale between a regional call center, headed by a single organization, to a less centralized scheme where providers in the same region use synchronized electronic scheduling and dispatch to coordinate long trips efficiently and in a customer-centered manner. There is also a “service contracting” model where providers purchase certain services from each other in a coordinated effort.

Examples of One-Call centers in action

Hubbard County Heartland Express, an on-demand bus service located in Park Rapids, Minnesota, began contracting with Paul Bunyan Transit, located in nearby Beltrami County, to handle all calls, routing and dispatching. Previously, Hubbard County relied on a cell phone carried by their sole bus driver, but this driver-dispatcher system would be unwieldy when they expanded to a second bus. Now, they have been able to use dispatch software, automated vehicle locators, and mobile data terminals for more efficient operation. Ridership for Hubbard County increased by 18 percent in the first three months, and saved an

estimated \$23,000 in staffing, used for adding a dispatch employee.

A Kansas example of a One-Call center in action is in Finney County. The County has been acting as the central scheduler and dispatcher for both its jurisdiction and Dodge City in neighboring Ford County. Dodge City has seen an increase in ridership because of the centralized call center.

Anne Smith, Director of Flint Hills Transit in Manhattan, was a part of Flint Hills’ adoption of a Regional One-Call Center Model. She says after implementing the system, “One of the best things to come out of this process has been that our ability to coordinate trips with other providers that, in the past, could never have happened.” She noted word got out quickly about the ability to help transit users who need to travel across the region.

Smith says one of the biggest challenges to implementing the new system was resistance to changing policy and procedures, from employees, stakeholders, and even riders. People were satisfied with the status quo, and it was difficult to show that “just because it ‘ain’t broke’ doesn’t necessarily mean it’s actually working.” Customers were also resistant initially. “Initially some riders were very skeptical and resistant to the changes. Most riders now understand the process, and that we can, thanks to the changes we have implemented, provide more service options and do it more efficiently. Educating riders about public transportation, what it is—and just as important, what it is not—is a critical part of the process.”

Even though the transit system has fully implemented One-Call system, they are looking to expand its capabilities. They would like to connect vehicles to the dispatching center with real-

time data, which will improve on-time performance and operational efficiency. Even customers will “be able to access real-time data on-line, [which] we believe will help reduce call traffic and create an overall better experience for the customer,” Smith said.

Your next move

One-Call centers provide a valuable tool to small transit providers. Limited resources in large geographical areas make it difficult for one operator to fulfill the intra-regional transit needs of their customers. By forming or strengthening partnerships among other providers in your area, it is possible to coordinate and share resources to make customer service a function of your collective operation and mission.

If you’re interested in such a partnership, contact providers in your area to start a conversation about the possible benefits of a One-Call center or centralized dispatching. KDOT is committed to helping you and your fellow providers increase the level of service in your region in the way you think will best accomplish your goals. KDOT is developing a business model to help agencies more easily coordinate and share technology within their region.

For more information contact Josh Powers at KDOT at joshuap@ksdot.org or call (785) 296-4907. More information on regional transit in Kansas can be found at the Kansas RTAP website at <http://www.krstop.org>

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