

Technology with a Purpose at RIPTA



by Beth Noland

Transportation technology has a 'wow' effect on people. When you start showing them computer-displayed, realistic maps of vehicle routes with the ability to watch the vehicle in action and in real-time, or when you show someone how a rider can receive an update on their scheduled trip on an IP-enabled handheld device like an iPhone or Blackberry – you get a lot of 'oohs and aahs.' But at the end of the day, the real beauty of an intelligent transport system (ITS) is that it allows providers to reach and move all citizens regardless of location in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Take the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). RIPTA manages the state's broker system

for its coordinated specialized transportation program, called the RIde Program. And, it also operates a general public community circulator service called FlexService. RIde schedules about 3,000 trips per day using 121 RIde vans and local cab providers.

RIPTA's FlexService is a general public point deviation with reservations service operating in seven zones serving portions of 12 different communities with 22 runs. These areas tend to have smaller populations and some are located in rural areas making regular, scheduled fixed-route transit expensive and less effective.

Approximately 300 daily passenger trips are scheduled

on 13 daily Flex runs covering six of the seven Flex zones. The seventh zone provides on-campus shuttle service under contract with the University of Rhode Island.

Although FlexService is a general public service, certain trips including welfare-to-work, childcare, healthcare services and trips for people with disabilities receive priority. The service also provides intermodal connections with RIPTA's fixed route buses.

"Between our RIde program and Flex Service, it became clear to us that we needed improved tools to better coordinate trips, improve service efficiencies and most immediately reduce the cost of supplemental cab service required to meet the growing

demands of our ADA program," says Doug Wood, RIde Program Manager.

Technology for Efficiencies and Cost Savings

In 2007, RIPTA turned to RouteMatch Software to make significant improvements to its technological infrastructure and provide a system that would be flexible and scalable enough to meet long-term transportation demands.

"We had simply outgrown our software solution and realized that we needed something not only flexible, scalable and powerful, but a real turnkey transportation management system that would satisfy our paratransit and FlexService requirements now and into the future," said Doug Wood, RIde

Program Director."

Today, RIPTA is transformed. RouteMatch provides a completely integrated Intelligent Transportation System for RIPTA which includes a paratransit scheduling software system, automated call center IVR technology from LogicTree Corporation; and, AVL/MDC in-vehicle technologies from Mentor Engineering, Inc.

With a central call center of 22 employees, RIPTA uses these technologies to link the RIde program directly with its service providers, allowing each to monitor and better manage service in real time.

"Service dispatching had been a manual process, so the changes in this area have been significant," says Wood. He points to efficiencies in service

routing, scheduling, dispatching resulting in improved customer service.

"Now, we can identify the best passenger grouping and routing automatically, send that manifest to the drivers via their on-board computers, the GPS system provides route instructions for the driver and at the end of the day, all the ride information is downloaded into our main center for verification and billing," explains Wood.

Automating tasks has led to time and cost savings. Wood mentions some examples: "Billing requires far less time to complete and we had two FTEs leave that we didn't have to replace."

RIde provides RIPTA ADA paratransit service in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Approximately 40 percent of RIde trips are ADA. Service is available seven days a week including holidays in accordance with RIPTA service schedules. ADA trip reservations are accepted until 4:30 p.m. the day before service is to be provided.

Benefits Accrue Over Time

When a provider sets up an ITS, employees have to take one day at a time, learning a new program from the ground up. Now that the system has been up and running since April 2008, RIPTA discovers new features regularly and sees ways to further improve service.

"One area that has improved is scheduling groups. We have a feature that allows us to search by destination address," says Wood. "So, we can now easily bring up all trips going in the

ABOUT US

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Last, but not least, is the critical impact on customer service. While more qualitative and harder to prove, Wood points to many ways that customer satisfaction is measured.

"Complaints have gone down while at the same time we have become more efficient. We owe that to improved information for drivers, better management tools for dispatchers and our overall ability to field calls and resolve passenger problems faster," notes Wood.

Further customer service improvements are expected with the new IVR technology. The RIdE phone system now calls ADA passengers automatically to remind them of their next day pick-up times. This service will be expanded to other agency clients and will include automated customer call information and trip scheduling.

The 'wow factor' is still present at RIPTA, though. Wood explains that it still is great to have such a rich, interactive mapping display that allows employees to visualize, organize and manage customer trips from start to finish. Maybe it is 'whiz-bang' technology but with a humanitarian mission.

RIPTA Technology Tour

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) manages and operates a coordinated, specialized transportation service for the State, called the RIdE Program. RIPTA also operates a general public community circulator service called FlexService.

RIdE provides nearly 3,000 trips a day for RI seniors, developmentally disabled individuals, RIPTA ADA customers and Medicaid recipients. RIdE's Customer Service Center takes trip reservations, schedules all services, provides billing and service reports for funding agencies and monitors service quality.

RIPTA's FlexService is a zone-based, general public RIPTA service incorporating both demand response and point deviation service. It operates as a community circulator and feeder service to RIPTA fixed route bus service traveling outside of the Flex zone.

Visit RIPTA for a Technology Tour during EXPO!

- Thursday, June 4, at 9:00 a.m. and at 3:15 p.m.
- Transportation will be provided to and from the Rhode Island Convention Center, meet on Sabin Street.
- *This session is limited to 20 participants on a first-come, first-served basis. Sign up for the session at the EXPO Registration area.*

Join the RIPTA staff for a technology tour that promises to be informative and educational. Learn how they are using integrated transit ITS technologies to make their operations efficient and effective. RouteMatch Software provides a completely integrated Intelligent Transportation System for RIPTA which includes the RouteMatch TS™ paratransit scheduling software system; automated call center IVR technology from LogicTree Corporation; and, AVL/MDC in-vehicle technologies from Mentor Engineering, Inc. Combined with the RouteMatch AVL/MDC Interface, these technologies "link" with RouteMatch TS and provide RIPTA with an integrated, state-of-the-art system to efficiently handle its paratransit scheduling needs.

