Case Study
LeeTran

LeeTran meets the fixed route and paratransit needs of Lee County, the most populous and fastest growing county in southwest Florida. Mobility-impaired residents rely on Passport, a LeeTran demand response service. Passport operates within Lee County's 805 square mile area, and performs approximately 600 trips each day.

600 Passport trips per day • 42 Ranger equipped paratransit vehicles • 2.8 million riders each year • Over 540,000 residents

History

Dedicated to providing exceptional service to its riders, LeeTran knew it was necessary to bring its contracted ADA division in-house. In November 2004, Passport was created, which allowed LeeTran to be more responsive to its riders' needs.

Business Objectives

To keep pace with a growing and aging community, LeeTran wanted to automate Passport's communications processes. Key goals were to increase scheduling flexibility to allow for same-day trips, track each driver's whereabouts and activities to improve safety and on-time service, and electronically collect and verify job/vehicle data to increase the accuracy of reports.

Technical Solution

To meet these objectives, LeeTran selected the end-to-end mobile computing solution offered by Mentor Engineering and RouteMatch Software. Mentor Ranger®, a fixed-mount mobile computer, has been installed in all 42 Passport vehicles. Ranger features a Windows CE 5.0 operating system. Running on Ranger is Mentor Mobility, a mobile software application designed specifically for the demand response industry that lets drivers communicate in real time with dispatchers. At the dispatch center, RouteMatch gives dispatchers the ability to electronically assign trips and send schedule changes to vehicles instantly.

Challenges

At first, drivers were unsure about the new technology, and a few had difficulty understanding it. Supported by customized driver's manuals from Mentor Engineering, drivers now depend on the technology. "If the system is down for whatever reason, my phone rings off the hook with drivers wanting it back," says Jill Brown, operations manager at LeeTran.

End Result

Since installing the technology six months ago, LeeTran is already noticing an increase in efficiency. Being able to see the real-time status of drivers, electronically dispatching the nearest available driver to a new call, and providing drivers with onscreen maps, has meant an increase in scheduling flexibility and on-time service. As well, switching from radio to mobile computing communication has lead to a quieter vehicle and office environment. Finally, the electronic capture of vehicle and job data has led to improved accuracy, and negates the need to hire data entry staff, saving money.

Mentor's mobile computing solutions have been changing the way transit agencies communicate since 1988

Client**View**

LeeTran's goal is to improve community livability, accessibility, and economic development with their Passport program. To make this goal that much more attainable, LeeTran equipped their fleet and head office with a mobile computing system.

Time for Change

Relying on cellular phones and radios for driver/dispatcher communication, and paper maps for navigation, LeeTran knew they needed to automate their processes if they were to keep pace and continue to exceed service expectations in a growing and aging community.

Jill explains: "Meeting the growing demands of the community required three key things. First, we needed increased scheduling flexibility with the capability to schedule same-day trips. Second, the ability to track our drivers' whereabouts and activities was essential. Finally, we required automatic data verification to accurately record job details throughout the day. With our pre-existing system, this was simply not possible."

Technology Solution

In an effort to meet these requirements, LeeTran issued a Request for Proposal (RFP). Wanting an "off-the-shelf" technology that demonstrated a high degree of functionality, dependability, and ease-of-use, they selected the end-to-end mobile computing solution offered by Mentor Engineering and RouteMatch Software.

Even after the technology was installed, Mentor provided LeeTran with technical support. As Brent Ritchie, Mentor's regional sales manager explains, "Training services, which include customized, easy-to-understand driver's manuals, and ongoing support from the same engineers that installed the system, helps to ensure that LeeTran is able to use the technology to its full potential."

Transforming the Organization

Passport has been using the technology for the last six months, and improvements have already been noted.

"It has made our organization more efficient," says Jill. "With the new AVL capability, we're now able to check the real-time status of drivers and, if we see a time issue developing, we can make schedule adjustments to ensure on-time service. As well, when a call comes in, dispatchers can instantly see the vehicle that is nearest the call, and electronically message the driver. The immediacy of this new scheduling system means that customers can book same-day trips, improving their access to the community. Dispatchers and drivers also love the ability to send text messages to drivers because it means a quieter work environment."

Peter Gajdjis, deputy director at LeeTran, adds: "With the onboard maps drivers are able to quickly find their next pick-up and drop-off location, leading to more on-time service and happier customers. From an administrative standpoint, the electronic collection and verification of vehicle and daily event information is faster, more accurate and more cost effective than it was with our manual processes."

Looking Forward

LeeTran has created a transit development plan that forecasts the growth they hope to see in the next 10 years. This plan includes a doubling in the number of demand response vans in operation. Moving ahead with this growth strategy in an organization without mobile computing would be close to impossible.

Says Peter: "Without this technology we would have had to hire more people for data entry and data verification positions, which would be an expensive proposition. Also, without the electronic navigation system, it would take new drivers longer to find their destination. With cities growing and changing so quickly, paper maps can't keep up at the same rate as electronic ones."

Jill also sees that a big benefit of this technology will be a more responsive LeeTran, not just in terms of on-time pick ups, but also when dealing with complaints. "Now, if a customer tells me that their bus didn't show up at the specified time, I can look at the system and see the driver's exact location and activities. This results in faster issue resolution. Tracking driver activities also means a safer ride for passengers."

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