Public Transit and Social Responsibility: Homelessness

1. Why transit systems are attractive to homeless individuals
2. How agencies are balancing ridership and the homelessness epidemic
3. Biggest challenges for transit providers
4. Call to Action for the industry
WHY ARE TRANSIT SYSTEMS ATTRACTIVE TO HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS?
“Homeless individuals would rather be at transit facilities because they know they are protected by the police.”

– Gary Denamen, New Jersey Transit Police Outreach Officer
Survey Findings: Impact on Transit

• Homelessness is an issue that impacts nearly all agencies
• Often more visible in cities with large homeless populations
• 78% say homelessness impacts ridership
• Desire for agencies to be a part of collective solutions

Two Different Viewpoints:
“Homeless individuals can make others feel uncomfortable, thereby deterring choice riders”
“Homeless individuals ride transit for shelter, thereby adding ridership”
Survey Findings: Resources

Does your agency have a homeless outreach program or partner with any community organizations?

Yes, 39%  
No, 61%

Does your agency have budget allocated for issues related to homelessness?

Yes, 5%  
No, 95%
WHAT ARE AGENCIES DOING TO BALANCE RIDERSHIP AND HOMELESSNESS?
Transit Agencies as Community Partners

- Work with social service organizations to align transit service with key social service destinations
- Reduced fare partnerships
- Shelter in inclement weather
Considerations for Bus Systems

- Fare free services
- Operator safety and training
- Transportation for all community members

Fare free downtown shuttle in Savannah, GA
Pit Stop
Restrooms
New Jersey Transit: Crisis Intervention Officers

- New Jersey Transit Police Department (NJTPD) has two crisis intervention officers specifically to work with homeless individuals
- Partner with Volunteers of America and other social service organizations
- Includes a safe surrender partnership with the courts
WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR TRANSIT PROVIDERS?
Recognition of Responsibility: Why Should We Care as an Industry?

• Selling public transportation to areas beyond those currently served
• Ensuring the safety of customers and cleanliness of facilities
• Homelessness is projected to keep growing
Providing a System that Supports the Entire Community

• “If we’re here for just the transit dependent population, we won’t be here for long. Addressing the homeless population is a must to maximize expansion opportunities.”
  Gary C. Thomas, President/Executive Director, Dallas Area Rapid Transit

• “We must collect big data to tell the story of the human experience as it relates to homelessness.”
  Curtis Koleber, CEO and Executive Director, CAT (Savannah, GA)

• “Match good intentions with adequate funding.”
  Chuck Kamp, General Manager, Madison Metro (Madison, WI)
Call to Action

1. **Treat all individuals with dignity and respect.** Serve the entire community including homeless individuals

2. **Incorporate outreach officers with law enforcement** to connect individuals with services

3. **Align transit service with social service destinations** to help ensure services are received
4. Partner with local municipalities & the private sector to identify funding opportunities

5. Develop creative solutions that do not require funding such as hiring a homeless individual for an entry level position
Thank You