

Public Transit Agencies Explore Options for Reaching More Riders

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AS TRAVELERS TURN TO transportation network companies (TNC) such as Uber and Lyft to meet their first-mile, last-mile and off-peak needs, public transit agencies are responding with on-demand services of their own—adapting existing services and even teaming up with TNCs to get riders to the nearest transit stop, often providing access with the use of apps similar to those used by rideshare operators.

Increasing numbers of public transit systems are augmenting existing services with microtransit options: small-scale, dynamic-route services available on demand. Microtransit provides efficient options in low-density, low-demand areas and also helps address the first-mile, last-mile challenges.

The Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART) in Tampa, FL, operates HyperLINK, a first-mile, last-mile, ADA-compliant option serving segments of the agency's service

area. HyperLINK combines rideshare and traditional public transit by delivering riders to and from their doorstep to local bus stops within designated zones, on demand. Riders can book via app or by making a phone call for the first or last segment of their trip.

"HART was looking to address the first- and

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HART's Tesla cars have contributed to increased ridership of the agency's HyperLINK service.

Photo courtesy of HART.

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last-mile transportation challenges faced by our customers on a daily basis," said Greg Brackin, director of operations support-ADA officer. "We established a dynamic rideshare-style service as a complement to existing transit service."

Service rolled out in November 2016 for HyperLINK's two northern zones, with two southern zones added the following month. In May 2017, HART joined forces with private funding sources to introduce four Tesla electric vehicles to augment service in the northern zones.

HART made some major changes to the program in October 2017, including new fare structures, cancellation of service in an underperforming zone and establishment of a new zone near the University of South Florida. Ridership increased by 51 percent in October, 56 percent in November and 63 percent in December compared with September ridership before the changes.

The agency is preparing to release a request for proposals for continuation of the program, including the current four zones with an option to expand with up to six additional zones.

FLEX service operated by the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit), Oakland, CA, is a dynamic, reservation-based shuttle operation that has been serving the Castro Valley and Newark areas since March 2017, following eight months of beta testing.

Using FLEX eliminates the need to wait at a bus stop for a fixed-route bus. Riders can schedule a shuttle from their desktop, tablet or mobile phone to take them to and from any bus stop within the service zone, on demand. They also can board FLEX without a reservation at San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District rail stations within the service area.

"FLEX service is the direct response to riders seeking on-demand transportation," said Michael Hursh, AC Transit general manager. "Our riders told us that what they enjoy best about FLEX is the ability to track their vehicle in real time and receive automatic alerts if there is a delay. To date, there have been over 25,000 passenger trips taken on FLEX, over 600 unique riders have tried the service and more than 70 percent of customers have returned after taking their



Riders can schedule an AC Transit FLEX shuttle from their desktop, tablet or mobile phone.

Photo courtesy of AC Transit

first trip."

AC Transit plans to expand FLEX service to the remainder of its southern service areas, allowing for expanded coverage throughout a low-density service area and enabling greater resources to be directed toward making regular bus routes more frequent on key corridors.

Toby Tatom, AC Transit transportation superintendent, added, "If a public transit agency makes transit services accessible to the customer, riders will choose public transit. FLEX has proven to be in demand and has the potential to thrive because it pays attention to the detailed needs of our riding public."

Rather than compete with rideshare operators, the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA), Lewisville,

TX, formed a new partnership earlier this month with Lyft to provide first-mile, last-mile connections to transit within the Highland Village and north Lewisville areas. Riders traveling within the Highland Village Lyft Zone

receive a discount for Lyft rides.

"Providing innovative mobility solutions for riders—especially first- and last-mile connections—is a major priority for DCTA," said Jim Cline, DCTA president. "Our partnership with Lyft will help us continue to provide efficient transit options for the communities we serve."

APTA's Vice President-Policy Art Guzzetti sees an evolving mobility ecosystem with public transit serving as trunk lines, and microtransit filling the gaps to make transit more convenient and efficient. "Integrating rideshare and microtransit services with traditional public transit is a great way to offer customers the 'complete trip.' Everywhere, transit agencies are bringing on new partners, with the traveling public the beneficiary," he said.

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