Messaging to Attract Riders

MARGARET DONAHOE

ADVOCACY DIRECTOR

MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

APTA Local Coalition Grant

Project to Work With Systems on Technology Opportunities

- Survey results
- App / mobile website
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google Maps
- Transportation Network Companies (TNCs)

Transit Technology Survey Respondents

- Anoka Co. Transit
- Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Brown Co. Heartland Express
- Central Community Transit
- Chisago-Isanti Co. Heartland Express
- Greater Mankato Transit System
- Hubbard Co. Heartland Express
- Maple Grove Transit
- Minnesota Valley Transit Authority
- Moorhead MATBUS
- Paul Bunyan Transit
- Prairie Five RIDES

- Prairie Lakes Transit
- Rochester Public Transit
- Rolling Hills Transit
- SMART Transit
- SouthWest Transit
- Trailblazer Transit
- Transit Alternatives
- Tri-CAP Transportation
- United Community Action Partnership
- Wadena Co. Friendly Rider Transit /   Becker Co. Transit
- White Earth Public Transit

Current technologies utilized

- **Website** – 100%

- **Facebook** – 74%

- **App / mobile-friendly website** – 35%

- **Google Maps** – 35%

- **Twitter** – 30%

- *No responding systems currently have **Transportation Network Company (TNC) / rideshare** integration*

Technology implementation priorities

- **App / mobile-friendly website** – 43%

- **Website** updates / improvements – 35%

- **Google Maps** – 30%

- **Facebook** – 17%

- **Twitter** – 13%

- **TNC / rideshare** integration – 4%

Barriers to addition / upkeep of new technologies

- Staff is too busy – 65%
- Lack of funding – 61%
- Staff would need training – 43%
- Riders do not ask for new technologies – 30%
- *Additional response: County won't allow Facebook access*
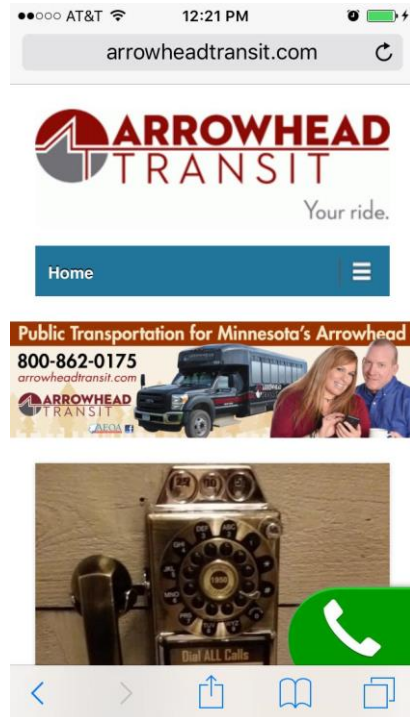
Why is an app / mobile website important?

- 80% of internet users own a smartphone *(Smart Insights, 2017)*

- Since 2014, more websites are accessed via mobile than computers
  - Gap continues to widen

- As of January 2016, over half of Facebook users only access it via mobile

Internet Access Method
(comScore, Dec. 2015)
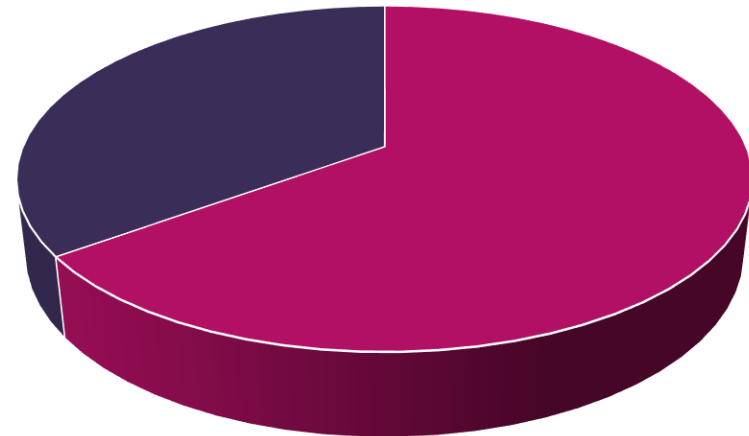
■ Mobile   ■ Desktop

Best Practices: App / Mobile Website

- ► Minimum: One page with easily accessible contact information

- ► Focus on making important information easy to find and read

Why is Facebook important?

- Most popular social media tool worldwide

- 79% of US adults who use the internet use Facebook (68% of all US adults)

- Part of Facebook's continued growth is increasing use by older adults

Source: Pew Research, 2016

Why is Twitter important?

- #4 in popularity worldwide
- 24% of US adults who use the internet use Twitter (21% of all US adults)
- Younger Americans are more likely users than older Americans, but all age groups have users
- Twitter is often accessed when there is breaking news
- #Hashtags are important (high visibility), but use caution

Source: plugingroup & Pew Research, 2016

Best Practices: Twitter

- Short Twitter handle

- Solely for the transit system if possible

- The account description on the left under the profile picture should include a link to the website

- Encourage the system's account to follow @MNPublicTransit and vice versa – help drive traffic!

Potential content for Facebook and Twitter

- Schedule changes / weather alerts
- Job postings
  - Facebook: link to website and/or use Jobs (see left sidebar)
 - Twitter: link to website
- Event photos
- Employee / rider profiles

It is easy to link together Facebook and Twitter to save time.

Hootsuite *is a great and free option.*

Additional Social Media Tips

- Have **accounts** on both sites to increase exposure
  - Link them to one another and link both to the system's website
  - Make sure account information like the About tab on Facebook and the profile box on Twitter is filled out / updated
- Keep **posts** as short as possible to increase engagement
  - Only essential details
  - Tweets are limited to 140 characters each
- Use **images** whenever possible to increase visibility
  - Polls, numbered lists and graphics are great too

Google Maps
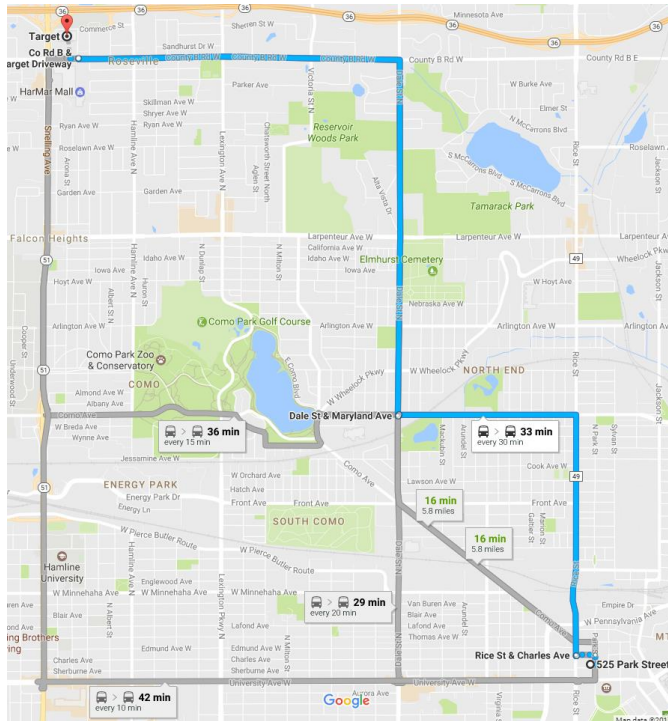
- Public transit services that operate with fixed routes and schedules can join Transit Partner Program for free

- Travelers and urban users are used to using Google Maps to plan multi-modal and transit-only trips

Other Tools Used by MN Systems

► **Online chat feature.** This is for those with speech or hearing impairments or for medical return appointment schedulers and allows the user to chat with a dispatcher to schedule, change or cancel a ride.
https://www.ridemetrobus.com/home/dial-a-ride

► **Event tracking on a website.** We can see which addresses people are trying to get to and will share this with our planner for route planning.

► **Communication Tools on the Bus**. TV monitors, posters, other ways to communicate about service, discounts, upcoming events, etc.

How Transit and Integrated Technologies Help People with Disabilities

Transit service:

▶ Gives **independence** to wheelchair users and people who do not drive

▶ Reduces isolation by providing **community access**

▶ Eases responsibilities of **caregivers** by providing rides to appointments and other outings

▶ Connects riders with disabilities to **productive employment**

Transit technologies:

▶ **Online booking** of bus rides is an alternative to traditional phone calls

▶ **Farecards** simplify the payment process – no need to make a trip to the store to buy tickets or tokens

▶ **Real time mobile alerts** ensure shorter wait times in inclement weather and give peace of mind to caregivers

▶ **Modern software** streamlines the dispatching process, providing improved coverage

Metro Transit

Lots of Tools for Riders and Potential New Riders

▶ Rider Alerts by route that are sent directly to the email inboxes and/or phones of those who sign up

▶ Personal account creation to manage fare cards

▶ NexTrip - provides real-time bus departure information and is available via phone, web, mobile device and on signs at certain locations like downtown Minneapolis

▶ Trip Planner tool online

▶ Interactive route map online

▶ Integration of routes and timetables on Google Maps

▶ Mobile app with trip planning, arrival information and ticket purchasing capabilities

▶ Mobile-optimized website for all devices

▶ Online Store for ticket purchases

Tried and True Advertising

❖Television Advertising

❖Digital Advertising with local newspapers and local media

❖Radio Ads

Videos Tell a Great Story – Set up a You Tube Channel

For Smaller Systems in more rural areas, letting people know about transit options and how they work is critical.

❑ Description of Service   Contact Information
❑ Friendly Drivers   Need For Funding
❑ All types of Customers
❑ Description of Routes
❑ **Anyone Can Ride**

Videos Tell a Great Story

For Smaller Systems in more rural areas, letting people know about transit options and how they work is critical.

The Otter Express in Northwestern Minnesota has a great tool for publicizing its service.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCArqRbejSs

Minnesota Public Transit Association

www.mpta-transit.org