Addressing Homelessness in Transit

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Overview

• Identifying the problem
• What was our initial response
• Initial Results
• What we are doing now
• Where are we going
• Conclusion
Problem Identification

• Is there a problem?
  – Increase in homeless concentration on trains after a major homeless encampment was disbanded.

• What attributes comprise the homeless population?
  – Drug use
  – Mental illness
  – Bad decisions

• Do we even need to address this issue?
  – Patron concerns of safety were being voiced through complaints to DART executives, customer service hotline, and social media.
    ○ We had to act
What was our initial response?

• To address the public’s “sense of security” concerns, the DART Police Department took action to counter the increase
  – Assisted rail operators in clearing trains prior to going out of service
  – Adjusted police officer work hours to address early morning concentration of homeless at train stations
    o Identified concentration using station cameras
    o Patrons’ use of “Say Something” app to report concentrations
• DART Board demonstrated their support by passing a resolution to bring attention to the growing issue
  – Directed increased police presence in our downtown area
  – Directed 100% presence of police, fare enforcement, and/or contract security on trains
Initial results of our action

- Initial survey results produced positive reactions from our patrons

- Although our efforts to address homeless on trains was received positively by our patrons, we knew we had to do more
What are we doing now?

- Four major areas:
  - Research, Education, Coordination, and Outreach
- DART Police Actions:
  - Research
    - Peer reviewed LA Metro model
    - Collected data on times and places where homeless concentrate around our system using:
      - CCTV at stations to observe concentrations
      - Officer reports of concentrations
      - Patrons’ communication through “Say Something” app
      - Customer service surveys
What are we doing now?

- Research continued
  - A DART Customer Improvement Team (CIT) is studying homelessness and the different causes in North Texas
    - Found mental illness, drugs, and bad decisions were the three top reasons for homelessness
    - Recommended DART enlist the participation of social service and other governmental agencies to devise a coordinated response to homelessness
- Education
  - Provided training to all police officers, fare enforcement officers and security officers who ride trains on how to respond to homeless people using de-escalation tactics
  - Conducted training of de-escalation tactics to bus operators
What are we doing now?

- **Coordination**
  - Collaborated with Adapt Community Services for Mental Health to provide emergency mental health services to homeless persons who are in distress
  - Met with District Attorney’s office on establishing a jail diversion program for statutory crimes and with VA administrators to provide services for identified veterans

- **Outreach**
  - Partnered with charity organizations who provide services to the homeless
    - Participated in feeding the homeless and providing education on ridership and safety
    - Partnered with a homeless ministry and a DART contractor to provide mid-day cleaning jobs on DART rail to the homeless
Where are we going?

• Continue to collect data on homeless trends and refine our response as the situation changes
  – Deploy our officers, fare enforcement officers, and contract security officers to new areas of concentration
• Continue to train bus operators on de-escalation tactics and expand the training to rail operators and station concierges
• Continue to work with charities, social service organizations, and local government officials in a collaborative effort to establish a long-term solution to homelessness
  – Develop memorandums of agreement, as necessary
• Implement “outreach” teams consisting of public and private agencies to engage the homeless and help them find a solution to their homelessness
Conclusion

• Homeless people on trains and station platforms presents a challenge to many transit agencies, and we were not immune

• Identifying reasons for homelessness is key to finding long-term solutions

• Developing a plan, with other social service agencies, to address homelessness is vital to providing a long-term solution
Questions?