The Top 5 Pieces of Transportation Advice
From Industry Experts
As in every industry, the future success depends upon the decisions of today. While we don’t have a guaranteed picture of what the future holds for the transportation industry, there are certain trends that are unavoidable. How all agencies prepare for the future will depend upon budgets, funding levels and goals, but there are certain rider expectations that are clear. As part of the plan to enhance services, fixed route software can play a major role in building prosperity. Here are the top 5 pieces of advice from transit operators on what the future brings and how fixed route software can help to address them.

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Who we’re listening to:

Lourdes Alcox
System Manager/Business Relations Manager at Manatee County, Bradenton, Florida
“Technology can tell us where service is needed.”

Tim Witten
Special Projects Manager, Blacksburg Transit, Blacksburg, Pennsylvania.
“The pace of change is ever-increasing.”

Craig Smith
Director of Information Technology, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority, Canton, Ohio.
“We’ve had great success with ITS. It does a lot for our community.”
Millennials Have a Higher Expectation of Technology

The online world is becoming the main source for purchasing, information and communication. But it’s not just the youth that are involved with technology. Everyone wants to know exactly when their bus will arrive. In an era of GPS-enabled personal devices, there is an expectation that a rider’s transit experience should be as convenient as looking up a movie’s start time and even purchasing tickets.

1. "Google Transit had a positive effect... younger groups and retirement age people. A wide range of users.”
   –Lourdes Alcox

2. "[Millennials expect you to have a higher level of technology than your traditional rider."
   –Tim Witten

*source

83% of millennials have a smartphone*

98% have at least a cell phone*
2. **Improve Communication With Riders**

A decade ago, a transit agency was content to be able to simply broadcast updates to its ridership. This was essential for providing information about a service interruption or a delay in service. The modern transit agency has the advantage of being better able to gather live information from riders because of modern communication portals: cellphones, texting, social media updates, etc. With better communication, an agency can learn about a service outage or other problem far sooner than in the past.

“Every piece that we have implemented has done a lot for our riders.”
–Craig Smith

“Instead of just a one-way communication, we’ll have an opportunity to get information back from the consumers.”
–Tim Witten

“Social media is where I find out if the app isn’t working, or if their bus isn’t on time. We log all those comments I know almost instantly when there’s an issue cause so many people are using it.”
–Craig Smith

“We received social media feedback about what was needed. [We] manage our resources more efficiently.”
–Lourdes Alcox

“I can reach 20-30% fairly quickly through Facebook and Twitter. This helps us build better systems. Sitting here at my desk, I can look at rider statistics, but it’s not quite the same as talking to someone in a real conversation about how they’re using the system.”
–Tim Witten
Start Planning For The Future, Today!

The odds are you are going to be looking for at least one of the following pieces of technology in the coming years. Our panel of transportation experts agree that these are the top peripherals and add-ons to fixed route software that all agencies should consider.

“[With Wi-Fi] we can look at the mac address to get origin and destination information [to help us] understand demand a little better.”

–Tim Witten

“Wayside Signs... smartphones, apps.”

–Tim Witten

“ITS system procurement. Automatic passenger counters first, then CAD/AVL.”

–Lourdes Alcox

“Update our fare collection and smart card technology.”

–Craig Smith
When purchasing fixed route software solutions, it’s important to develop the long-term relationship you’re about to have with your vendor. Communication is also vital between your various stakeholders. If your systems don’t integrate, this can cause problems when trying to operate efficiently down the road. Be sure to talk with your team to learn the technological expectations of automation and an ITS implementation.

“Do your homework on whatever vendor you end up using.”

“Automation is great but if you can’t maintain it, I think that would be a bad thing, as far as financially.”

“All stakeholders need to be aware of the technology they’re buying so it integrates.”

Craig Smith

“You’re buying systems that require long-term support. Do your homework.”

“Do a functional spec, don’t just use a vendor RFP. Take the time to write an RFP based on what you need.”

“Make sure that if you’re in charge of technology you’re having conversations with your team. Look long-term.”

Tim Witten

“We were not involved when maintenance procured their software. This is a problem because they may not integrate.”

“Know the operating costs of it.”

“Before you go out and purchase, do your homework. Know the funding that you have so you can pay for it.”

Lourdes Alcox
Conclusion

Take the advice of our panel of experts and start looking at technology to improve your overall operation. Whether it’s rider-facing applications and passenger information systems or fixed route software for intuitive and optimized dispatching and routing, your agency must start meeting rider expectations. Start by learning more about what TripSpark can offer and how our integrated systems work.

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