THE HOP EMPLOYS DEMAND RESPONSE SOFTWARE TO INCREASE SERVICE WITHOUT ADDING DRIVERS

Find out the Why and How

THE HOP:
Fixed Route and Paratransit agency serving Central Texas

PROBLEM/CHALLENGE:
Inaccurate, error-prone dispatching to its 180 vehicles

SOLUTION:
Automation for same-day scheduling, electronic manifests and real time messaging

RESULT:
Ability to add runs without increasing number of drivers

ABOUT THE HOP

The Hop is operated by Hill Country Transit District. It began operation in the 1960s to provide both fixed route public transit as well as ADA complementary paratransit service for citizens and visitors of the Central Texas area. Their mandate then, as it is now, is to provide mobility and quality of life, leading to a stimulation of economic development. Over the past 50 years, the Hop has grown to serve a nine-county area covering over 9,000 square miles. With so much territory to cover and the increase in ridership demands for their paratransit service, the Hop has scheduling needs that require constant supervision and attention. Attention to detail is very important to their planners and especially to their Technical Manager, Luis Pino, who became instrumental in the deployment of an ITS solution in 2008.

THE PROBLEM/ CHALLENGE

When the Hop began operation in the 60s, and onward through the 90s, they were still entering information in Excel spreadsheets. Information regarding trips (i.e.: locations, addresses, pick up times, number of miles traveled, etc.) was entered manually on clip boards. A driver's location was determined over the radio. The whole operation was time-consuming, error-prone and generally inefficient. Service was undependable at times, leading to complaints, which in turn was also slow when it came to complaint resolution. As ridership demands increased, they desperately needed a solution to help them increase the number of trips. However, because operational costs are a priority as well, they also needed to minimize the amount of drivers they hired.

Integrating the Hop's paratransit service with its fixed route service was also a priority that needed attention. Having the two halves working together was integral to being able to move all types of passengers, from daily commuters to those with special accessibility and mobility requirements.

> *"[Demand response Software] has allowed us to add runs without increasing the number of drivers."*

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DEMAND RESPONSE SOFTWARE SOLUTION

In 2008, Luis was part of the team that implemented a new ITS solution. This included a paratransit scheduling/dispatching component in the form of TripSpark's demand response software suite. The ruggedized Ranger (in-vehicle mobile data console) was installed in vehicles, which helped to support the data collection software and communication needs of their paratransit fleet. This solution helped immediately to enable:

- Same-day scheduling
- Electronic manifests
- Real-time messaging

> *"Dispatchers love the onscreen map."*

The CAD/AVL capabilities of the total solution allows dispatchers to see the status of vehicles on the road, which helps to ensure that schedule adherence policies are met. The time-consuming process of building the daily schedule was also reduced greatly (a benefit to both their fixed and demand response operations.)

> *"What used to take all day for our schedulers is now done in a fraction of the time."*

THE RESULT

The Hop can now automate data collection and driver scheduling in order to use their resources more effectively. They have been able to achieve their goal of increasing the number of runs without the budgetary stress of adding new drivers. Their employees experience faster scheduling, while their riders experience faster connections. The complaint process has also been streamlined, affording staff more time to deal with issues of greater priority. The overall result is a greater attention to detail. As Luis describes it, if "we needed to add a trip, we had to radio our drivers to see who was closest to the pickup location." Now, the same day scheduling capability assigns the right vehicle to the right location without the need to use a radio at all.

> *"We've also been able to increase the roles and responsibilities of our schedulers."*

Luis has found an unexpected benefit of the technology as well. The system's historical data is able to verify a vehicle's speed if the driver receives a speeding ticket. Being able to report on the activities of all vehicles provides greater depth of analysis when it comes to verifying an operation's service offering. Having greater insight can not only improve service, but also serves as evidence that an operation is maintaining its safety and performance standards.

> *"We have more data and more data accuracy, which gives us the ability to operate more efficient routes and runs."*

The Hop has discovered the overall benefits of CAD/AVL, Ranger consoles and Demand Response software. TripSpark continues to grow with the Hop's future needs and ridership demands.

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