Strategic Approach to a Customer-First Organization

Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority
www.mvrtta.org
Introduction

The Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority (RTA) has adopted a customer-first focus to help improve customer satisfaction and provide better service. By putting customers first, the RTA can consistently meet and exceed customer expectations of public transportation by continuously improving what customers value most.

To help determine what RTA customers value most in public transportation, Wright State University’s Center for Urban and Political Affairs (CUPA) led a customer satisfaction survey for the Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority in October of 1998. Eight hundred RTA customers participated in this study through on-board interviews or phone interviews. In addition to the study performed by Wright State University, in the fall of 1999, the University of Dayton’s Center for Business and Economic Research conducted a survey of 230 passengers with disabilities who used fixed route service. In both surveys, customers were asked the levels of importance and satisfaction they place on specific attributes of the following six factors: operator courtesy and knowledge, system performance, bus stop amenities, vehicle satisfaction, bus signs and boarding convenience, and availability of information.

Analysis

This analysis identifies customer values measured by importance and satisfaction. This information will assist in the development and integration of customer-first management principles into operations.

The analysis was developed to assist the RTA in prioritizing projects and allocating resources with the ultimate goal of building ridership through better customer retention.

Understanding the Survey

In both surveys, customers were asked the levels of importance and satisfaction they placed on specific attributes of the following six factors: operator courtesy and knowledge, system performance, bus stop amenities, vehicle satisfaction, bus signs and boarding convenience, and availability of information.

Participants ranked each attribute as “very important,” “somewhat important,” “not important,” or “not very important.” They ranked their level of satisfaction with each attribute as “very satisfied,” “somewhat satisfied,” “somewhat dissatisfied,” or “very dissatisfied.”

The results presented show the percentage of people surveyed who answered that the importance and satisfaction of each attribute was either, “very important,” or “somewhat important,” and “very satisfied,” or “somewhat satisfied.” There are two sets of results for each question to reflect the results of both the survey of fixed route riders and the survey of riders with disabilities.
### Operator Courtesy Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Performance</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fixed Route</td>
<td>Riders w/disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver driving the bus safely &amp; well</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politeness of drivers</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus driver knowing the systems, routes, and schedules</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver calls out all stops</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers show sensitivity to passengers with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Driver driving the bus safely and well

All RTA operators go through a seven-week training program addressing safety and operator care. Once training is completed, the operator is monitored by a service supervisor for safety of operation. In an effort to improve operator safety, service supervisors continue to ride buses each weekday to monitor driver safety. Should an operator not meet the standard of safety the RTA requires, that particular operator will be removed from a route and re-enrolled in the training course.

### Politeness of drivers

During the seven-week training course, operators are encouraged to be courteous to passengers by learning about politeness, patience and tolerance. In addition to the above course training, all operators attend sensitivity training to improve assistance and customer service to passengers with special needs.

To ensure the RTA promotes a courteous standard of conduct, our goal is to investigate and respond to all customer contacts within ten (10) working days. Complaints directed at specific drivers are followed up with a conference between the operator and a service supervisor to discuss standards of conduct.

An Operator of the Month award is given to a driver based on their attendance record. However, if two people tie for attendance, the operator with the most customer compliments within the past month wins. This offers operators an incentive to perform their duties safely and courteously.

### Bus driver knowing the systems, routes, schedules

All operators learn the systems, routes and schedules during the seven-week training course. To prepare operators for route changes, they are taught how to interpret a schedule board and read a route guide so they are capable of driving any route.

Each operator is given a personal route guide book with all the current routes and schedules to reinforce what they learned during training. In an effort to keep operators informed of any route changes, all operators continue to receive information about altered routes to put in their books. And, all changes are posted in the operator’s lounge.

New Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) equipment will monitor each operator’s performance by tracking individual buses via satellite. All RTA stops were geo coded (placed into the RTA system computer) and the information was fed into the satellite which is now able to track every bus within 15 feet of where it is actually located.

### Drivers call out all stops

Operators are instructed during the seven-week training course to verbally announce the location of all bus stops as they approach them. The new AVL equipment currently being installed on all buses announces all stops automatically.

### Drivers show sensitivity to passengers with disabilities

In addition to the seven-week training course, all operators attend sensitivity training to improve assistance and customer service to passengers with special needs.
## System Performance Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fitted Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus running on time</td>
<td>93.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus running often enough</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus making all scheduled stops</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Bus running on time

To improve running times on all buses, the RTA will evaluate running time information produced by new Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) equipment and hand surveys to make needed changes to times, frequencies, or routing. To ensure buses run on time, new AVL equipment will be able to monitor any individual buses running behind schedule. Dispatch will then be able to contact the bus operator, determine why the bus is late, and devise a plan to get the bus back on schedule. The RTA realizes that many people in the community rely on public transportation for things like employment, school, and medical appointments, and every effort is made to ensure the transportation provided by the RTA is reliable and always on time.

### Bus running often enough

To help improve service, the RTA evaluates maximum boarding information provided by surveys. The RTA will also implement Automatic Passenger Count (APC) equipment, which uses an infrared beam across the front door of selected buses to count everyone who boards. These methods can be used to determine if passengers have enough service to match demand, and adjustments can be made to provide better service.

### Bus making all scheduled stops

To reduce the rate of pass-ups, or buses passing bus stops without stopping to allow passengers to board, supervisors instruct drivers that they need to follow a code of conduct that includes picking up all passengers wishing to board their bus. All customer complaints regarding pass-ups are investigated, and responded to within ten days. Complaints against specific operators are followed up by a conference with the operator and a service supervisor to discuss standards of conduct.

## Bus Stop Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fitted Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequacy of weather protection at bus stops</td>
<td>88.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of seats or benches at the bus stops</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness of the bus stops</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety at the bus stops</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of route information at the bus stops</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus stops are near destinations</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus stops are near home</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus shelters are accessible to wheelchairs</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus stops are accessible to wheelchairs</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Adequacy of weather protection

To improve protection from the elements at many bus stops, the RTA has started a program to add more shelters at bus stops with relatively high usage. The shelters will be one of three styles ranging from the cap and bench style to a partially enclosed model, to an almost fully enclosed model. The RTA is also working with the various jurisdictions through the Community Grant Program to encourage and support their initiatives to place shelters at bus stops.
Availability of Seats or Benches

One way RTA is helping to improve the availability of seats and benches is to add a bench to every stop in the system provided there is adequate space.

This will be a cooperative effort between the RTA and the various communities within our service area. RTA hopes to complete this project in the near future.

Cleanliness

The RTA has contracted for regular cleaning and maintenance of all RTA-owned bus shelters in the system. This is done on a weekly basis and is monitored for performance. The cleanliness at other bus stops is a function of the local jurisdictions where the stops are located, but the RTA works closely with these communities to monitor and correct problem situations.

The RTA will also be providing more trash receptacles at frequently used stops to help control trash problems.

Safety

The RTA is taking a proactive approach to addressing lighting problems at frequently used bus stops which are not presently well lighted. The RTA is installing solar-powered lights which will improve visibility and safety considerably. The lights will include a model for installation in a bus shelter as well as a pole-mounted model for stops not having a shelter.

Availability of route information at many stops

The RTA maintains schedule information at many stops, particularly at stops served by multiple bus routes. Consideration is also being given to adding schedule information to more stops which are served by single routes and which have frequent usage by riders who are not regular riders.

Bus stops are near destinations

To assure that popular destinations are serviced by nearby bus stops, the RTA conducts on-board surveys to identify the common destinations of passengers. Bus stops are already located at most popular destinations, though if it is determined that a stop is needed, the site will be evaluated to determine if a bus stop can be placed there.

Bus stops are near home

RTA bus stops can be found in most residential areas with a population concentration. The RTA continually monitors growing neighborhoods to determine if bus stops are needed. Surveys help to ascertain the locations where most people board the bus, and which areas may need additional stops.

Bus shelters are accessible to wheelchairs

To allow everyone access to RTA shelters, all shelters installed by the RTA are accessible to wheelchairs. Older shelters that do not comply with ADA standards are currently being replaced with wheelchair accessible shelters.

Bus stops are accessible to wheelchairs

The RTA is continually working toward making all bus stops accessible to wheelchairs. Should anyone need special provisions, such as a cement pad placed at the bus stop, the RTA will work to provide facilities to meet that person's needs.
### Vehicle Satisfaction Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fixed Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough seats on the bus</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety on the bus</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus interior is clean</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable temperature on the bus</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort of bus seats</td>
<td>87.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus had enough hand rails/grab bars</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of next stop signal device</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Enough seats on the bus

RTA's policy on seating is to allow for 140% capacity standard on regular routes. This means that during busy periods some people will be standing on the bus. However, actual capacity conditions will be monitored to make sure passengers are not standing toward the back of the standee line regardless of the number of passengers. For example, the American Disability Act (ADA) states that passengers in wheelchairs must be tied down aboard RTA buses. This may reduce the number of passengers on the bus. However, passengers must remain behind the standee line. The standard for Limited Service (LS) routes is 130% and for express routes using the highway, the standard is 100%. The RTA will be able to improve the monitoring process with the addition of Automated Passenger Counting equipment that will electronically transfer the information and greatly speed the process of catching and correcting any capacity issues.

#### Safety on the bus

Federal, State and Local safety recommendations are incorporated in the basic vehicle design. To help provide security to passengers, 163 buses have two surveillance cameras mounted on the inside of each bus. All action is captured with a recorder mounted on the ceiling behind the driver. Should an incident occur, the RTA is able to retrieve the recording of the incident, replay the incident and create still photographs to aid police with investigations. Since these surveillance cameras have been utilized, there has been a noticeable decrease in graffiti and total number of incidents. These cameras are currently available on 163 buses and will be implemented on all new buses purchased.

For additional security, every bus has a “Call the Police” button. When this button is pushed, “CALL THE POLICE” appears on the destination sign on the outside of the bus. The newer buses are also equipped with a silent alarm that notifies Dispatch of any emergency. Dispatch will be able to precisely locate where the bus is with the new AVL equipment and send help immediately. With the new radio system, drivers will also be able to push an emergency button that allows Dispatch to hear what is happening on the bus so they are able to determine what type of help should be sent and monitor any developments that may occur. These precautions will be included on all new vehicles the RTA purchases.

#### Bus interior is clean

In an effort to maintain the cleanly appearance of revenue vehicles, all vehicles are scheduled for daily exterior washing and interior dusting as the buses are taken through the service lane. Hand rails and other frequently touched places are wiped daily to provide a sanitary environment. All buses are processed through the interior cleaning program every month for thorough detail interior cleaning. If the daily dusting and wiping is insufficient for a bus that is particularly dirty, a complete interior cleaning will be scheduled immediately.

#### Comfortable temperature on the bus

To help assure a comfortable temperature for passengers, all bus Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems are inspected on a 180-day cycle to ensure efficient operation of the HVAC system. Should a driver notice a problem with the HVAC...
system, they can report the problem to maintenance and a check of
the system is immediately scheduled.

**Comfort of bus seats**

In an effort to make passengers feel comfortable, all RTA vehicles
are equipped with padded insert seats. All buses purchased in the
future will include this amenity.

**Enough hand rails/grab bars**

The RTA vehicle specifications are written to incorporate all
Federal, State and Local safety recommendations and require-
ments. To improve the safety and comfort of passengers, padded
handrails on seat backs are also included in addition to the above
requirements.

**Accessibility of next stop signal device**

To provide convenience for passengers, these signal devices
consist of cables that run the length of the bus above the seating
area. The cable is pulled when a passenger requests the driver to
stop at the next available bus stop. At staggered locations, an
extension is added to allow passengers the ability to pull the cable
from a more accessible height.

### Signs and Boarding Satisfaction Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fixed Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility of route names and numbers outside of the bus</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of making transfer to another bus</td>
<td>91.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of paying fares on the bus</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver announces route number to those waiting at stop</td>
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</table>

**Visibility of route names and numbers outside of the bus**

The RTA currently purchases large front signs on buses that are
easily readable and more visible than traditional signs. To ensure
that every bus will have large front signs in the future, all new
buses purchased will be equipped with the signs. As buses are
replaced, the total number of buses with large front signs will
increase.

The RTA will implement an audio announcement system on all
buses so customers will not need to rely so much on visual signs.
Currently, all buses are being outfitted with radio equipment that
allows audio announcements of each bus stop and destination, and
each driver will be trained to operate this new equipment.

**Ease of making transfer to another bus**

One goal of the RTA is to make transfers convenient with as little
waiting as possible. Not all transfer needs can be conveniently
accommodated because of cost considerations and frequency
variations. However, as a general rule, most transfers can be made
between 10-20 minutes.

In addition, at night and on Sundays, local and suburban buses
meet in the city of Dayton (Central Business District) to allow
passengers the convenience of transferring between buses due to
the lesser frequencies.

The RTA will continue to evaluate the arrival times of routes at
peak transferring stations such as the hubs to create convenient
timed transfer opportunities.

**Ease of paying fares on the bus**

Passengers may purchase weekly or monthly passes at RTA Token
and Pass Outlets before boarding the bus to slide through a mag-
netic strip reader on the fare box. Also available at these outlets
are bus tokens good for one ride per token that may be easily
dropped into the change receptacle. Exact cash fare is also ac-
cpted by either dropping change into the change receptacle or by
inserting paper currency into the bill acceptor on the fare box.
Driver announces route number to those waiting at stop

Drivers are instructed during the seven-week training course to verbally announce the number of their route to all waiting passengers in order to provide information to passengers who may not be able to read visual signs on the outside of the bus.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fixed Route</td>
<td>Riders w/Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of service change information</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of printed timetables</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of phone representatives to answer questions</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of printed materials</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of information in a format you can use</td>
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Availability of service change information

Customer service is a strategic goal of the Miami Valley RTA and relaying information to the general public, especially to our passengers, is a priority.

Service change information is relayed to the public via press releases, on-board fliers called “take-ones” and information at various bus shelters and stops. To improve the expediency of retrieving service change information, RTA has information available on the RTA website and at the kiosks located at RTA hubs, the Job Center and Fifth Third Field.

Availability of printed timetables.

There are more than 150 schedule rack locations throughout the Dayton area. RTA implements a schedule delivery system to fill racks throughout Montgomery County. The racks are monitored on a frequent basis to ensure schedule information is available to the public.

Schedules can also be accessed on the RTA website and are always available via mail by calling the RTA RideLine.

Availability of phone representatives to answer questions

RideLine is available Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Sundays and Holidays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. In 1999, RideLine handled 692,909 calls at an average answering speed of 12 seconds. There is an average of 3 customer service representatives on duty each hour. The RideLine phone number is 226-1144.

Clarity of printed materials

The RTA prints all information regarding routes and schedules in an easy-to-follow format to make any necessary information easily understandable. Should a passenger need help reading the materials, RTA representatives are available to offer assistance.

Availability of information in a format you can use

All printed materials are available in large print upon request. Some printed materials, such as Project Mobility services and guidelines, are available in Braille upon request.
THE TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD is a unit of the National Research Council, a private, nonprofit institution that provides independent advice on scientific and technical issues under a congressional charter. The Research Council is the principal operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering.

The mission of the Transportation Research Board is to promote innovation and progress in transportation by stimulating and conducting research, facilitating the dissemination of information, and encouraging the implementation of research findings. The Board’s varied activities annually draw on approximately 4,000 engineers, scientists, and other transportation researchers and practitioners from the public and private sectors and academia, all of whom contribute their expertise in the public interest. The program is supported by state transportation departments, federal agencies including the component administrations of the U.S. Department of Transportation, and other organizations and individuals interested in the development of transportation.

The National Academy of Sciences is a nonprofit, self-perpetuating society of distinguished scholars engaged in scientific and engineering research, dedicated to the furtherance of science and technology and to their use for the general welfare. Upon the authority of the charter granted to it by the Congress in 1863, the Academy has a mandate that requires it to advise the federal government on scientific and technical matters. Dr. Bruce Alberts is president of the National Academy of Sciences.

The National Academy of Engineering was established in 1964, under the charter of the National Academy of Sciences, as a parallel organization of outstanding engineers. It is autonomous in its administration and in the selection of its members, sharing with the National Academy of Sciences the responsibility for advising the federal government. The National Academy of Engineering also sponsors engineering programs aimed at meeting national needs, encouraging education and research, and recognizes the superior achievements of engineers. Dr. William A. Wulf is president of the National Academy of Engineering.

The Institute of Medicine was established in 1970 by the National Academy of Sciences to secure the services of eminent members of appropriate professions in the examination of policy matters pertaining to the health of the public. The Institute acts under the responsibility given to the National Academy of Sciences, by its congressional charter to be an adviser to the federal government and, upon its own initiative, to identify issues of medical care, research, and education. Dr. Harvey V. Fineberg is president of the Institute of Medicine.

The National Research Council was organized by the National Academy of Sciences in 1916 to associate the broad community of science and technology with the Academy’s purposes of furthering knowledge and advising the federal government. Functioning in accordance with general policies determined by the Academy, the Council has become the principal operating agency of both the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering in providing services to the government, the public, and the scientific and engineering communities. The Council is administered jointly by both Academies and the Institute of Medicine. Dr. Bruce Alberts and Dr. William A. Wulf are chairman and vice chairman, respectively, of the National Research Council.