

Technology in Rural Transportation



A recent study documented more than eighty proven, cost-effective, “low-tech” solutions to rural transportation needs, most developed or implemented by local transportation professionals. One of these solutions is outlined below:

Learn all about the simple solutions on the Internet at <http://inform.enterprise.prog.org>

The simple solutions report is available from Hau To at (503) 892-2533, or email: to@crc-corp.com

Coordinated Rural Transit Services

Overall goal:

To combine the transportation operations of a variety of providers in order to offer a more cost-effective and higher level service to users.

Technical approach:

Numerous rural residents either do not drive or do not have access to vehicles and therefore rely on the mobility services offered by transit operations. This simple solution combines and coordinates the services of several local agencies to offer a more efficient and effective public transit service using the combined fleets of various operators. Various agencies, including a child development center, a counseling service, two senior centers, a youth home, and a nursing home originally combined their individual vehicle fleets and operations to form a single transit organization. A central dispatching center was created to handle requests for transportation from the clients of all these agencies. In 2000, the center upgraded their system to "Q" software, which serves as both its dispatching and communications system. This replacement of the original "Rides Unlimited" dispatching system will allow the center to download information to the buses. The organization has 12 vehicles, and each vehicle is fitted with GPS tracking.

Current status:

The system has been operational for over eight years. At the present time, the center provides dispatching services for approximately 15-20 agencies.

Location / geographic scope:

The Sweetwater County Transit Authority serves the rural county of Sweetwater, Wyoming. The county is roughly the size of Vermont.

Agencies involved:

Sweetwater County Transit Authority, Wyoming.

Cost information:

The system used in Sweetwater County originally cost around \$10,500 for software supporting three workstations. Training costs were \$2,000. The



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computers required to run the software are 486 PCs with upgraded memory. Various other comparable systems are on the market for around \$10,000 to \$15,000. Subsequent technical support is provided remotely by a technician dialing into the system via the PCAnywhere program.

Transit Authority income comes from contracts with agencies, various grants (including an ITS grant), Federal subsidy, state subsidy, fares, and donations, in decreasing order of magnitude.

Key contacts:

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Have goals been achieved?

Ridership has increased by five times since the organizations joined forces to form a single transit authority using the centralized dispatching system.

Solution timeline:

The Transit Authority has installed the communications backbone. It now plans to equip all vehicles with mobile data terminals in order to log rides, transfer information and streamline payment for services using magnetic stripe cards. They also intend to increase provision of same day service. At present approximately 14 percent of trips are provided on the same day they are requested.

