

EFFICIENTLY MEETING PARATRANSIT DEMAND WITH PRIVATE PROVIDERS

Votran, South Daytona, Florida

SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY:

Volusia County's demand-response service meets the travel needs of two population centers using private operators, including a management company and two taxi systems.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

Volusia County's transit system, *Votran*, contracts out the operation of its entire transit system to a management company that is an independently-owned firm offering management, planning, and operation services for bus, rail, and paratransit systems. All transit employees except *Votran's* General Manager work for the management company. From the public's perspective, however, *Votran* is a county system; the professional management company seamlessly represents the county.

Votran's paratransit service is called *Votran Gold Service*. *Votran*, via the management company, runs its own fleet of county-owned vehicles, and provides much of the paratransit service on its own (including all of the service in the western part of the county). It also subcontracts with local lift-van and, in the eastern part of the county, taxi companies to provide additional paratransit services.

Votran Gold Service is pre-scheduled, shared-ride, door-to-door, specialized transportation which uses sedans, lift vans, and taxicabs. The customers pay the same fare for the taxi service as they would for the shared-ride van service. Reservations

AGENCY PROFILE

Organization Type: County government

Service Area: Volusia County (1,432 sq. mi; 2010 pop. 494,593). The activity centers and populated areas of the county are along the Atlantic Ocean to the east (including Daytona Beach) and on the St. John's River to the west, with state forest and conservation areas in between.

Resources:

- **Fleet size:** total 105 operated in-house including fixed-route and vanpool. Demand-response: 35 in-house operations; 20 contracted plus 4 taxis
- **Staff size:** approx. 200 total
- **Operating Budget:** In 2010: approx. \$18 million total, \$6.3 million for demand-response

Service Summary:

- **Modes Operated:** fixed-route, demand-response, taxi, vanpool
- **Days and Hours of Service:** demand-response Gold service is 6:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday with night and Sunday service within the ADA corridor. Fixed-route service is 6:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday with limited service nights and Sundays
- **General Public Cash Fare:** \$1.25 fixed-route; \$2.50 demand-response
- **Passenger Trips/Year:** In 2010: 3.57 million total; 240,983 demand-response; 1,790 taxi

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are booked from one to seven days before the day of the trip, and service is provided within one hour of the requested pick-up time.

Taxicab service is used primarily for will-call return trips, service scheduled on a same-day basis, and after-hours and on Sundays, when demand is lower. Votran pays its two taxi subcontractors the metered rate. The cab companies are paid through a purchase order. About 350 taxi trips were purchased in April 2012.

CONDITIONS THAT PROMPTED THE STRATEGY:

Votran Gold has been contracted out since 1994, and taxis have been part of the mix since about 2002. Prior to 1994, the Council on Aging operated the demand-response service.

RESULTS OF THE STRATEGY:

Using the contract operators enables the Votran Gold service to cost-effectively serve passengers during times of lower demand.

Taxis are also able to respond quickly to same-day service requests. For will-call service, taxi response time is typically 20-25 minutes as compared to an hour for a paratransit bus to return to service.

Customers are by and large very satisfied with the taxi service - to the extent that some wait to request service when it is likely they will be assigned a taxi rather than a paratransit van.

METHODS USED TO DOCUMENT RESULTS:

- Per the 2010 National Transit Database report, the operating expense per passenger trip was \$25.95 for demand-response and \$25.62 for taxi. However, the operating expense per revenue hour for Votran operations (\$46.68) is more than twice as much as purchased taxi operations (\$22.22). Thus if the taxi passengers were served using Votran vehicles, it is likely that the cost per trip for these passengers would be much higher than it is on taxis.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS:

- A well-run management company.
- The availability of professionally-operated taxi services, the good relationship Votran has had with its vendors, and the healthy attitude that local independent contract taxicab drivers have toward transporting paratransit trips.

CHALLENGES:

- Volusia County features a very unusual geographic characteristic in that all of its population centers are along the outer boundaries of the county with very little population in the center. The population centers are either on the extreme eastern end of the county where the Atlantic Ocean is, or on the extreme western boundary near the St. Johns River. This affects transit needs in that many people have to travel across the county to receive services, and other people, particularly in the west, are difficult to service in the evening hours and on weekends.

However, using the taxicab providers has helped Votran to address this challenge and Votran is actively recruiting more taxicab companies to service the more remote areas of the county.

- The current taxicab fleets are not wheelchair-accessible, so wheelchair accessible service is provided by a subcontractor, while the ambulatory service is provided by taxis.

- Passengers may develop a preference for taxi service that results in disappointment when they are transported by the regular shared-ride paratransit service. While Votran does not allow passengers to directly request cab drivers be sent, many are knowledgeable enough to know that if they request a taxicab at a certain time, and in a certain place, they are very likely to receive a taxicab service.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

RECOMMENDED FOR:

- Communities with available taxi services
- Communities with multiple population/activities centers that cannot be efficiently served by one centralized operation
- Public entities interested in benefiting from professional expertise available from a private management company

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS:

- If seeking professional management company, include national management companies on potential bidders lists for sending RFPs
- Identify areas and times of day which can be more efficiently served by taxi services than by traditional paratransit

METHODS FOR DOCUMENTING RESULTS:

- Measure trips per revenue hour, costs per revenue hour, costs per trip