

## COMMUNITY TAILORED SERVICES

### Capital Area Rural Transit System (CARTS), Austin, Texas

#### SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY:

CARTS delivers transportation tailored specifically for each of the 169 communities it serves. The service frequency in or to the various locales range from many times a day to once a month. Much of this service is scheduled town-to-town service provided on a curb-to-curb advanced-reservation basis.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

CARTS operates rural community transit service on a curb-to-curb basis along flexible routes, with a scheduling framework designed to group town-to-town rides more efficiently, based upon most frequent travel needs. Service in the most remote communities may be provided as infrequently as one day per month - spoking out from larger towns, while service in the areas with highest demand is provided multiple times each weekday. Twenty-four hour advanced notice is recommended for scheduling rides.

The schedules are designed to provide service from outlying areas into local and regional activity centers, so that rural residents can go to the doctor, do their shopping and access employment and education. Town to town connections are also provided, as are trips to major medical facilities in large urban areas. CARTS developed its network of flexible routing and schedules so that routes with lower service frequencies feed (or spoke) into corridors with high demand and thus combined provide a relatively high level of service along these corridors.

#### AGENCY PROFILE

**Organization Type:** Rural Transit District, a political subdivision of the State of Texas governed by a board composed of one county commissioner from each of the nine counties it services.

**Service Area:** CARTS provides public transit in nine rural counties surrounding Austin, Texas (all of Bastrop, Burnet, Blanco, Caldwell, Fayette, and Lee Counties and the non-urbanized areas of Hays, Travis and Williamson Counties) - approximately 7,200 square miles. CARTS also operates the Medicaid transportation program throughout these nine counties (including urbanized areas) as well as Llano County (subcontracted to Hill Country Transit).

#### Resources:

- **Fleet size:** 125 vehicles
- **Staff size:** 125 total, including 2 schedulers, 3 dispatchers, 6-7 reservationists
- **FY 2012 Operating Budget:** approx. \$4.5 million

#### Service Summary:

- **Modes Operated:** demand-response, fixed-route, commuter and connector routes, and intercity interline service
- **Days and Hours of Service:** Varies by area and service. Curb-to-curb community transit ranges from 1 round vehicle trip 1 day per month from to all-day service Mon-Fri
- **General Public Cash Fare:** Zone-based -- \$2 for trips wholly within a town or city, \$4 for trips originating and ending within same county, and \$6 for trips ending outside the county of origin
- **Passenger Trips/Year:** 415,000

#### Contact:

Edna Johnson  
Assistant General Manager, Community Services  
Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS)  
PO Box 6050, Austin, TX 78762  
(512) 505-5660  
[www.ridecarts.com](http://www.ridecarts.com)

To provide an example, in sparsely populated Lee County, two trips per month (1st & 3rd Tuesdays) are made from Lexington to Elgin (in the Bastrop County, one county west of Lee County), as well as from Giddings to Elgin and on to Austin (two counties West of Lee County). From Elgin, service is available one day a week to Austin and the 1st and 3rd Tuesday, with vehicles feeding from more remote towns such as Lexington and Giddings. Mid-day local service is also provided within Elgin on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

As shown in the attached timetables for Lee and Bastrop Counties, the published schedules provide customers with the general departure time from each town. The published schedules provide customers in each time a general idea of where they can travel and when; however, each customer calls CARTS at least 24 hours in advance to schedule their own pick-up location and time. The CARTS dispatcher schedules pickup times to fit into the overall schedule, and exact pickup times will depend upon who else is riding that day.

The network of routes and their general schedules were developed to meet as many needs as possible, providing broad basic coverage, with more frequent service in areas of greater need/demand. This has meant that CARTS can't meet every trip request, but means that more demand can be met.

In the past year, CARTS launched its Interurban Coach service which builds upon the town-to-town regional service model that intercity bus carriers used to provide. The Interurban service resembles traditional intercity bus service in using fixed stops and timepoints, but with local curb-to-curb feeder service providing local

mobility to the fixed stop. This service also carries packages and interlines with the national Greyhound service.

### **CONDITIONS THAT PROMPTED THE STRATEGY:**

CARTS has a long history of using this approach to scheduling the town-to-town curb-to-curb service. It was first used with out-of-area (such as traveling to regional medical facilities in San Antonio). When major new discount retail (such as an HEB or Walmart) opened within the service area, CARTS scheduled new flexible routes to meet the demand for travel to these destinations. Over time, as CARTS identified travel patterns across the nine-county service area, more and more schedules were developed.

In growing communities such as Bastrop, CARTS service has expanded and evolved to include deviated fixed routes (Bastrop CAT Service) operated 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on weekdays and fixed-route commuter bus service to Austin two round trips each weekday, as well as local curb-to-curb service operated 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., curb-to-curb service to Austin three days per week, and curb-to-curb service connecting other towns to Bastrop one to three days per week.

### **RESULTS OF THE STRATEGY:**

CARTS management interviewed for this case study indicated that the service design emerged as a result of an identified need without a great deal of analysis, and CARTS has not tracked "before" and "after" measures that can be attributed to specific changes to the service. However, over the years, CARTS has successfully grown in capacity, rides provided, and infrastructure.

## **METHODS USED TO DOCUMENT RESULTS:**

As noted above, CARTS has not tracked “before” and “after” measures that can be specifically attributed to the strategy.

## **KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS:**

- Customer education - CARTS has developed a comprehensive series of public schedules for customers that are customized to each community (see attached examples from Bastrop and Lee Counties). The information is organized by trip origin, at the county and town level. For each town, the other towns to which a customer could travel are listed along with the days operated, and the fares.
- Simple fare policy - CARTS has a relatively simple fare policy for its 9-county curb-to-to-curb service.
- Technology - CARTS has also implemented a variety of technologies over the years that have facilitated the scheduling and dispatching process, beginning with computer-aided dispatching (Trapeze) in 1996 (described as a separate case study).

## **CHALLENGES:**

While no major challenges were identified in implementation, CARTS is now facing the significant challenge of updating the system. Making adjustments to the routes and schedules is challenging because the curb-to-curb service is so inter-connected and even small changes can ripple through many threads in the net. As a result, overall scheduling updates and improvements have not been undertaken in

recent years. CARTS is currently preparing to gather community input to find out what changes customers would like to see, before planning a systemwide update. CARTS is looking at taking a more fixed-schedule approach, establishing fixed stops where passengers can board without having to pre-schedule service, as is currently the case with the recently-launched Interurban Coach.

Minor challenges included:

- Marketing - to meet the challenge of educating customers across a nine-county service area was a challenge, CARTS developed a schedule for each county (see attached).
- Large Service Area - Managing remote operations would be a challenge without effective supervision. CARTS has three supervisors and fortunately has not encountered problems supervising drivers. From a dispatching perspective, while centralized dispatching is beneficial from many perspectives, it is a challenge since dispatchers may be unfamiliar with some parts of the nine-county service area, and while they use computer-aided dispatching system, much of the dispatching is done manually.
- Human Service Agency Transportation -
  - Scheduling conflicts - Human service agencies do not consult with CARTS when changing their program hours or site locations. Instead, it is common for a human service agency to make their changes and expect CARTS to adapt. Because of the

complexity of the route network, this is not always possible.

- Contracted Human Service Transportation that is Not Constrained by the General Public Schedule - CARTS provides contracted transportation (for example, Medicaid)

that is not restricted to the rural general public schedules. This can be challenging to explain to customers who see a bus in their neighborhood (operating contracted service) at a time when they want to travel, but when the general public service is not available.

---

## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

### RECOMMENDED FOR:

- Demand-response providers with town-to-town and county-to-county travel needs

### RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS:

- Analysis of current travel patterns to determine most frequent town-to-town trips made and times of travel
- Analysis of major travel origins and destinations (locally and regionally)
- Trip patterns that lend themselves to town-to-town service
- Effective route and schedule planning
- Simple fare policy
- Customer education - effective presentation of schedules

### METHODS FOR DOCUMENTING RESULTS:

- Before and after measurements:
  - Total trips, miles, hours
  - Calculate and compare trips per mile, trips per hour, cost per trip

### IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS:

- Sample schedules - Bastrop and Lee Counties

RIDES ARE SCHEDULED MONDAY-FRIDAY FROM 8:00 AM TO 4:00 PM / 24 HOURS ADVANCE NOTICE RECOMMENDED  
 LOCAL VEHICLES SERVE NEIGHBORING TOWNS SO LOCAL RIDE TIMES MAY VARY

Community Served	Destination	Route Day	Departure	Return	One-Way Fare	Reduced Fare*
GIDDINGS	<b>Local Service</b>	<b>Monday thru Friday</b>	<b>8:00a</b>	<b>4:30p</b>	<b>\$2.00</b>	<b>\$1.00</b>
	To: Elgin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	8:15a	4:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Austin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	8:15a	3:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Brenham	1st & 3rd Wednesday	8:15a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: La Grange	Monday	1:30p	3:30p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Paige	Tuesday	8:30a	1:30p	\$4.00	\$2.00
LEXINGTON	To: Rockdale	1st Friday	8:30a	12:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Elgin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	7:45a	4:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Austin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	7:45a	3:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Brenham	1st & 3rd Wednesday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Giddings	Thursday	8:30a	2:00p	\$4.00	\$2.00
DIMEBOX	To: Rockdale	1st Friday	8:30a	12:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Elgin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	7:45a	4:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Austin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	7:45a	3:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Brenham	1st & 3rd Wednesday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Giddings	Thursday	8:30a	2:00p	\$4.00	\$2.00
DOAK SPRINGS	To: Rockdale	1st Friday	8:30a	12:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Elgin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	7:45a	4:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Austin	1st & 3rd Tuesday	7:45a	3:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Brenham	1st & 3rd Wednesday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Giddings	Thursday	8:30a	2:00p	\$4.00	\$2.00

\*Reduced Fare: Seniors, Persons with Disabilities, and Children Under 12





RIDES ARE SCHEDULED MONDAY-FRIDAY FROM 8:00 AM TO 4:00 PM / 24 HOURS ADVANCE NOTICE RECOMMENDED  
LOCAL VEHICLES SERVE NEIGHBORING TOWNS SO LOCAL RIDE TIMES MAY VARY

Community Served	Destination	Route Day	Departure	Return	One-Way Fare	Reduced Fare*
BLANCO	<b>Local Service</b>	<b>Tuesday, Wednesday &amp; Thursday</b>	<b>9:00a to 12:30p</b>		<b>\$2.00</b>	<b>\$1.00</b>
	To: Johnson City	Tuesday & Thursday	1:00p	4:00p	\$4.00	\$2.00
	To: Fredericksburg	1st Monday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Fredericksburg	3rd Monday	10:00a	3:30p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Marble Falls	2nd Monday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Marble Falls	4th Monday	10:00a	3:30p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Austin	4th Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: San Marcos	2nd Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: San Antonio	1st Friday	9:00a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: San Antonio	3rd Friday	9:00a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
JOHNSON CITY	<b>Local Service</b>	<b>Tuesday &amp; Thursday</b>	<b>1:00p to 4:00p</b>		<b>\$2.00</b>	<b>\$1.00</b>
	To: Fredericksburg	1st Monday	9:00a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Fredericksburg	3rd Monday	10:30a	3:30p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Marble Falls	2nd Monday	9:00a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Marble Falls	4th Monday	10:30a	3:30p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: Austin	4th Friday	9:00a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: San Marcos	2nd Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
	To: San Antonio	1st Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00
To: San Antonio	3rd Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00	\$3.00	

For Round Mountain, Cypress Mill and other communities or rural areas in Blanco County, please call for information or pickup dates and times.

Group Field Trips: Any month that has a 5th Monday or 5th Friday can be reserved for group field trips. Advance reservations will be necessary, and will be booked on a first come basis. Trips can be taken anywhere within a 50 mile radius of Blanco County, will departure and return times during normal business hours. Bus will seat approximately up to 12 adults or 10 adults with access for two wheelchairs. There will be a flat fee of \$5.00 per person round trip, with a minimum of 8 persons.

\*Reduced Fare: Seniors, Persons with Disabilities, and Children Under 12

