

OVERFLOW EXTRA TRIPPER SERVICE CONTRACTED FROM SCHOOL BUS OPERATOR *CyRide, Ames, Iowa*

SUMMARY OF THE STRATEGY:

Instead of increasing its staff and fleet size, CyRide meets peak demand for service by contracting with a private operator to provide scheduled overflow service on specific routes.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION:

CyRide contracts with the private operator that also operates the local public school bus transportation to provide specific single trips along CyRide's fixed routes where demand exceeds vehicle capacity during peak times during the fall and spring semesters. The school bus contractor utilizes yellow school buses, which would otherwise be deadheading from Ames' schools, to stops along transit corridors where CyRide transit buses were unable to accommodate all passengers. CyRide experiences heavy demand in the morning rush hour; at times as many as 300 individuals may be waiting along a transit route corridor near high-density residential housing. The yellow school buses pick up the overflow at specific stops along the route and deliver these customers to their destination or transfer points.

CyRide accommodates the high demand for its transit services when ISU is in session in the fall/spring semesters by placing extra buses along high-density residential corridors. Where only one bus may be shown on the published schedule, CyRide actually sends out extra buses (up to 5 buses) to handle the ridership demands. CyRide's policy is not to leave any passengers at a bus stop due to heavy

AGENCY PROFILE

Organization Type: City government agency that is a collaboration between the City of Ames, Iowa State University (ISU), and ISU's Government of the Student Body (oversight by a Board of Trustees)

Service Area: Small urban - The City of Ames is 16 square miles with 2010 population of 58,965. Ames is home to ISU and experiences a tremendous population influx (approx. 31,000) when school is in session.

Resources:

- **Fleet size:** 79 vehicles
- **Staff size:** 154
- **Operating Budget:** \$ 7.56 million in FY 2011

Service Summary:

- **Modes Operated:** Fixed-route, ADA paratransit
- **Days and Hours of Service:** Fall and Spring semesters: Mon-Fri: 6:20 a.m. - 12:00 midnight ; Sat: 7:00 a.m. - 10:30 p.m.; Sun: 8:30 a.m.- 11:00 p.m.; Moonlight Express: 10:30p.m. - 3:00 a.m. on Fri.-Sat. nights when ISU in session during fall/spring semesters; reduced schedule during ISU Summer Session and breaks.
- **General Public Cash Fare:** \$.1.25; free to ISU students
- **Passenger Trips/Year:** 5.45 million in FY 2011

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loads. However, much of the heavy demand is just for one trip of service. Therefore, CyRide contracts for extra

vehicle trips from the local school bus provider (maximum of up to 7 trips/day) to operate certain designated trips during the fall and spring semesters when ISU classes are in session. Many of the trips starting point for service is near the end of the school bus operators' end point. The contractor is paid on a per vehicle trip basis (currently \$46.35/trip). CyRide finds this to be much more cost-effective than increasing its vehicle fleet and the size of its workforce, because the demand is needed for a short period of time (approximately 20 minutes) and only when ISU classes are in session.

No fares are accepted or received on the trips operated by the school bus provider. It is assumed that all passengers riding these trips are ISU students and ride free of charge as a result of paying fares through their student fees. The school bus provider records the number of passengers similar to CyRide's drivers on a manual spreadsheet that is subsequently entered into a database.

CONDITIONS THAT PROMPTED THE STRATEGY:

There is heavy demand for transit service when ISU is in session when weekday ridership can swell from 8,000 to 35,000.

In 2010, CyRide had only three spare buses due to the amount of extra buses operating in service by CyRide drivers. The extra buses from the school bus provider were the only way to further accommodate the larger loads along corridors in the morning.

CyRide has been using this strategy for many years.

RESULTS OF THE STRATEGY:

CyRide is able to accommodate some of the peak demand for service without expanding its fleet or hiring extra drivers who would be unutilized most times.

This approach appears to be cost-effective, although a direct comparison cannot be made because of the unit cost structure for the contracted service (\$46.35 per vehicle trip for FY 2011). In FY 2011 CyRide's operating cost per revenue hour was \$53.29. The expenses that would be incurred to purchase, insure, maintain, and operate new additional vehicles, as well as to train and employ additional part-time drivers, is unlikely to be lower than the cost to purchase the extra trip service.

METHODS USED TO DOCUMENT RESULTS:

- Ridership: In FY 2011, CyRide transported an average of 49.3 passengers per revenue hour on its fixed-route service.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS:

- CyRide provides a very high level of service for a small urban area, and is able to plan for peak demand times based upon ISU class starting and ending times. Additionally, supervisors monitor the service on a daily basis to account for unexpectedly high loads along corridors as residents move or alter their trip patterns.
- Availability of the school bus operator to provide the service on a per trip basis. However, the school bus provider has capped the extra trips they can provide at seven. The extra service is needed at times when school buses are deadheading or

essentially done for their morning school trips. The location of two schools which are situated along CyRide's most heavy-used corridors means that deadheading school buses are already in the vicinity of where the extra service trips are needed.

- CyRide's largest source of revenue is the ISU Government of the Student Body. Financed largely by student fees, ISU funding has a relationship to the service demand, since both are driven by the number of ISU students.

All of CyRide's fixed-route bus service is free to ISU students carrying an ISU student ID card. As a result, the school bus driver is not required to collect or receive cash as they are accommodating ISU students going to ISU campus. Generally, one stop would fill the yellow school bus and they would then proceed to ISU campus to drop their passengers along the route.

CHALLENGES:

- The contract operations need to be supervised to ensure they are operating as assigned.
- ISU students are initially uncertain that they can and should board the yellow school buses which do not project the same image as the CyRide transit buses. It is necessary to educate the ISU community at the start of each semester on the operating practice and to encourage them to board the yellow school buses when the school bus provider stops at a CyRide bus stop.
- When the local school system changed bus companies at the end of the 2010 academic year, it was uncertain if the new operator would be able and willing to provide the extra trips for CyRide. If not, CyRide would have been challenged with procuring seven new buses in a very short period of time (one summer), finding capital funding for these vehicles, and hiring and training additional drivers. Fortunately, the new operator was interested in providing the service.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

RECOMMENDED FOR:

- Small urban fixed-route services with times when demand exceeds available vehicle capacity (total vehicles and total passengers)
- Systems operating in university towns

RECOMMENDED ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS:

- Detailed assessment of demand patterns (boardings per stop by time of day)

- Peak demand times that coincide with school bus downtime
- Proximity of deadheading school buses to corridors where the extra service is needed
- Supervision of contractor

METHODS FOR DOCUMENTING RESULTS:

- Passengers per hour by route by hour
- Compare total contractor costs with estimated costs to operate same service in-house