

Memorandum

To: Roy Taylor, MDOT
From: Ben Stupka/Matt Webb, RTA
Date: May 30, 2019
Re: Lessons Learned from the Engaging the Region through Remix Project

Background

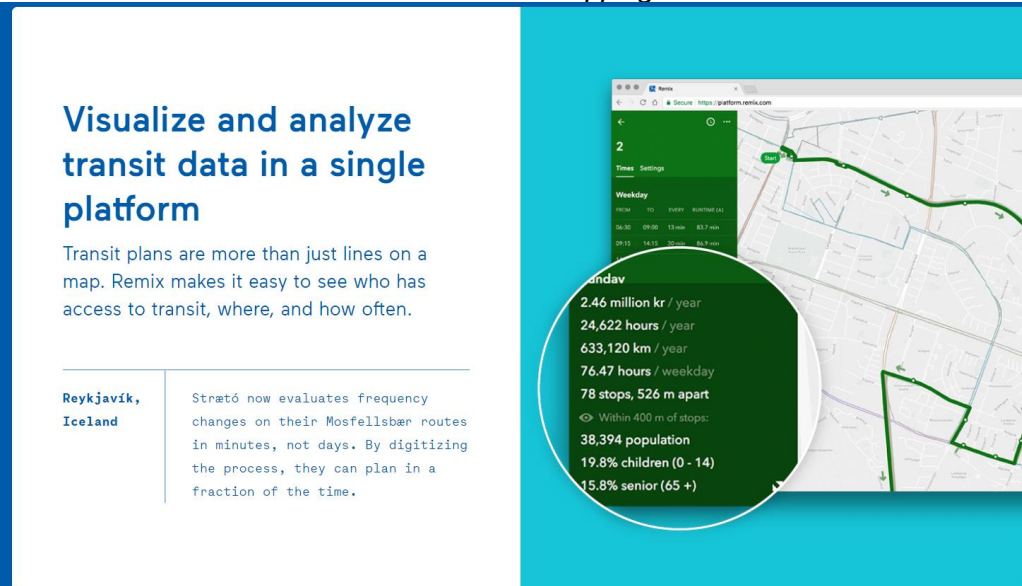
In 2015, the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) received a \$20,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation’s (MDOT) Service Development and New Technology (SDNT) program to pilot using an interactive transit route planning software called TransitMix (now called ReMix). The purpose of the grant was to:

1. See how the RTA could leverage the interactive nature of the software to directly capture public feedback on transit route recommendations in the Regional Master Transit Plan; and,
2. Use the software to quickly test route concepts that came up through public and stakeholder meetings

The project began in April 2015 and was completed in December 2016

This memorandum will provide an overview of the lessons learned during the grant period.

Remix Interactive Mapping Tool



Visualize and analyze transit data in a single platform

Transit plans are more than just lines on a map. Remix makes it easy to see who has access to transit, where, and how often.

Reykjavik, Iceland

Strætó now evaluates frequency changes on their Mosfellsbær routes in minutes, not days. By digitizing the process, they can plan in a fraction of the time.

Monday

- 2.46 million kr / year
- 24,622 hours / year
- 633,120 km / year
- 76.47 hours / weekday
- 78 stops, 526 m apart
- Within 400 m of stops:
 - 38,394 population
 - 19.8% children (0 - 14)
 - 15.8% senior (65 +)

Remix Overview

Originally called TransitMix, the Remix (<https://www.remix.com/>) platform is designed to help transit agencies plan better bus routes. It is the only software-as-a-service platform that provides a way to:

- quickly sketch routes and scenarios
- immediately estimate costs
- upload routes via GTFS data format
- overlay geospatial data
- allow for rapid evaluation and comparison

Remix has evolved quite a bit since the inception of the RTA project. Along with evolving and improving its transit focus it has also added Street Design and New Mobility tools to its interactive portfolio.

RTA Use of Remix

The RTA used Remix for the following activities over the life of the grant:

- The regional network (i.e. SMART, DDOT, and AAATA routes) and the draft RMTP network were coded into Remix to allow for a quick reference that could be used by multiple teams to check route overlaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Remix was used to develop alternatives for Airport service, Commuter Rail feeder service, and Commuter Express service.
- Remix was also used at the March 2016 public meetings to record specific comments regarding BRT and Commuter Rail route alignments; this was done by having an RTA staff person available with a laptop to sit down with people and code their comments into Remix.
- Remix was used to convert the RMTP network into GTFS. This will allow us to analyze accessibility improvements that result from the proposed network.

RTA Lessons Learned

The main lessons learned using Remix were:

1. The platform was great for quick route development, but it lacked accuracy in terms of cost estimates by route. Remix was great solution for RTA internally. Transit planning often requires a time-intensive, multi-step process with many disparate tools (e.g. Excel, GIS, Google Earth, bus schedules, etc). For the RTA this meant needing to be able to assess large regional transit issues with highly inefficient tools and with limited staff. One of the main benefits of Remix is that it enables agencies to understand the impact of multiple planning options immediately all in a visual, easy to use interface. This allowed the RTA to quickly develop route concepts in areas that had no existing transit service (e.g. connecting Washtenaw and Wayne Counties with local bus service). The basic route data that the RTA pulled out Remix (e.g. length, runtime, service hours, headways) did need to get put through a separate financial modeling tool to make sure the costs were in line with other changes the RTA was proposing.
2. The platform required a too much of a learning curve to be used by the public, but when deployed at public meetings with staff running the software it offered a great tool for communicating public transit route planning principles. The RTA had originally intended for this to be something that could allow for public facing interaction like being available for use on the RTA website. However, the RTA quickly found that the tool was a bit too complex for a member of the public to use effectively (note: Remix has evolved to focus this tool to agencies internal needs as well so it is something it has recognized as well). The RTA did have some limited success using Remix to collect some feedback at meetings, but it did take a decent amount of staff resources to run the software and sketch routes quickly and accurately. This process could have been improved through the RTA setting up the meetings and differently, or deploying the tool in a different way.

For example, we have heard from other transit agencies that they have had some success deploying Remix at pop-up events at major transit hubs.

Overall, the RTA would use Remix again and is interested in learning more about its new tools (especially New Mobility), but it would focus the effort on using the tool to internal to the agency and close stakeholders and not as an additional public outreach tool.