

ONTARIO CENTRE FOR MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES

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Best Practice Summary Report

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Urban Transit – Dial-A-Bus Service

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Practice Identification: Dial-A-Bus Service

Case Study Municipality: City of Peterborough – Peterborough Transit

Key Word: Operations, Alternative Service

Benefits which resulted from Adoption of the Practice:

- **Reduced costs in low demand periods**
- **Increased ridership/customer convenience**

Description of the Practice in the Case-study Municipality

Peterborough is a community of approximately 75,000 with a transit system operating approximately 30 buses in its conventional fleet during peak hours. During the evening hours (8:15pm to 11:15pm on weekdays and 5:15pm to 10:15pm on Saturdays) the service area is served by Dial-a-bus.

In this system the transit service area is divided into four zones, each served by a single bus. Service in all four zones is coordinated at the Downtown terminal with hourly departures.

Passengers located within each zone who require a ride call transit dispatch to request a trip, within about one hour of their desired travel time. For each trip, the dispatcher provides the driver with a list of pick-ups, and the driver designs a unique route to serve those points.

Passengers boarding at the downtown terminal are not required to call in advance, but only need to inform the driver of their desired drop-off point. Passengers travelling from one zone to another transit at the downtown terminal.

Evaluation of the Practice

Effectiveness

The Peterborough Dial-a-bus provides effective service to the entire transit service area. Regular service to the mall has eliminated the need for passengers boarding at this location to call for most trips.

Most passengers find the service convenient. Peterborough Transit staff reports that ridership has been stable since its inception and has shown recent increases. The service is under consideration for future re-introduction of Sunday service.

Efficiency

The current Dial-a-bus service in Peterborough is operated with four vehicles, requiring approximately 4,000 annual hours of operation costing approximately \$200,000 annually.

Staff estimate that a similar level of service on conventional routing would require at least seven vehicles. Dial-a-bus therefore, provides the same service frequency over the same area at less than 60 percent of the cost, a savings of approximately \$150,000 annually, or approximately 3.5 percent of the total annual operating cost.

Replication of the Practice

Several communities have experimented with variations of Dial-a-Bus concepts as cost cutting measures, including Cornwall, Brantford, and Oakville. This experience points to a number of lessons learned for successful systems:

- ~ manage the daily transition time from conventional fixed route to Dial-a-bus, to ensure that demand levels do not overwhelm the capacity of the system;
- ~ Dial-a-bus can be an effective tool for introducing service during new periods (such as Sunday) or in new areas, where passengers do not perceive the new system as a reduction in service;
- ~ service zones should be organized to permit one dedicated vehicle in each zone;
- ~ services should use regular fixed route stop locations, and ensure the vehicles operate exclusively on streets that are appropriate to transit;
- ~ smaller vehicles, appropriate to lower demand levels should be used. If these vehicles reach capacity on a regular basis, consider reducing the service area by adding more vehicles or converting to fixed routes. This threshold is typically in the range of 10 trips per vehicle hour;
- ~ market the system aggressively, based on factors of:
 - ~ convenience;
 - ~ safety (drivers are aware customers are waiting); and
 - ~ savings.

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