

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR INCREASING STOP ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ROUTE IDENTIFICATION BY TRANSIT OPERATORS

FINDINGS IN BRIEF

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The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires that fixed-route transit systems perform stop announcements and incorporate: 1) a route identification system; 2) accessible equipment maintenance; and 3) public stop announcements in vehicles in excess of 22 feet used for multi-stop, fixed-route service. The style and frequency of stop announcements and route identification differ depending on service area, such as metropolitan, small urban or rural; the individuality of customer needs; and system size.

Although each fixed-route transit operator in the U.S. must comply with stop announcements, it is left to each transit system as to *how* to comply with the regulations. The *Resource Guide to Effective Approaches for Increasing Stop Announcements and Route Identification by Transit Operators*, prepared for Easter Seals Project ACTION by TranSystems in collaboration with Planners Collaborative, Inc. and the Disabilities Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF), provides tips, recommendations, and case study examples for incorporating stop announcements into transit service.

The guide also addresses route identification programs in an effort to improve overall transit accessibility for all customers with disabilities,

visitors or others not familiar with public transportation and the service area. This *Findings in Brief* summarizes the key points of the resource guide and focuses on how to develop stop announcement programs, employee training, stop announcement-related policies and procedures, and ways to monitor and evaluate announcement and route identification programs.

Key Components of Stop Announcement Programs

A successful stop announcement program typically includes the following elements:

- A functioning public address system or automated voice announcement system capable of broadcasting internal and external announcements.
- Written staff procedures for pre-trip testing, including specific instructions about required announcements and directions for what to do when technology fails.
- Written lists of required stop and route identification announcements specific to each route, for all route destinations, and for both directions.
- Support from management and union leadership to ensure that operators know what is expected of them as part of their job performance.
- A results-oriented monitoring program designed to encourage compliance and address non-performers fairly.



- Involvement of customers during the development, implementation, and monitoring stages of the stop and route identification program.

When a transit system is ready to develop a stop announcement program or update an existing program, several steps are suggested:

1. Convene an interdepartmental working group on stop announcements and route information.
2. Review ADA regulatory requirements pertaining to announcements.
3. Select appropriate technology for announcements and route information.
4. Develop stop and route announcement policies and procedures.
5. Train agency personnel to proficiency on transit-related ADA requirements.
6. Monitor and evaluate operator performance.
7. Maintain stop announcement and route information equipment.
8. Develop a marketing program to inform customers about the stop and route identification requirement.

Tips on how to implement these steps are provided in the section below.

Convening Interdepartmental Working Groups

Gathering stakeholder input is a first step when establishing a stop announcement program. Stakeholders may include transit system staff, board members, local government, and transit customers.

- Involve representatives from different levels of the organization (e.g. management, operators, maintenance, and administrative staff).

- Consider ways to encourage customer involvement in the process through advisory or feedback roles.
- Recognize that a comprehensive stop and route announcement program takes time and oversight.

Reviewing ADA Regulatory Requirements

For an effective program, transit managers should make sure everyone on staff understands what is required by the ADA. A system should set a goal of making 100 percent of *required announcements*.

United States Department of Transportation regulations pertaining to ADA-required on-board stop announcements, as well as external route and vehicle identification, are set forth in 49 CFR Part 37, Transportation Services for Individuals with Disabilities. 49 CFR § 37.167 (b) requires that stops shall be announced on fixed-route transit as follows:

- (1) *The entity shall announce at least transfer points with other fixed routes, other major intersections and destination points, and intervals along a route sufficient to permit individuals with visual disabilities to be oriented to their location.*
- (2) *The entity shall announce any stop on request of an individual with a disability.*
- (c) *Where vehicles or other conveyances for more than one route serve the same stop, the entity shall provide a means by which an individual with a visual impairment or other disability can identify the proper vehicle to enter or be identified to the vehicle operator as a person seeking to ride on a particular route.*

A transit system should decide how to implement the ADA locally and discuss policies and procedures for the four types of stop announcements. A successful announcement program includes written policies and procedures for both management and operators.

Developing Policy and Procedures

- Determine whether to announce only the minimum ADA-required stops, all stops or stops determined by the operator.
- Develop protocols for repeating announcements and how announcements should be worded.
- Test various approaches to route identification and solicit customer feedback.
- Have written policies for monitoring operator adherence to both stop announcements and route identification.
- Develop monitoring program in coordination with local unions and incorporate the program into union rulebooks.
- Develop a monitoring program that includes: documentation for overall compliance for statistical reports; identification and resolution of problem areas related to personnel or equipment; maintenance/current stop announcement and route identification lists; identifying and tracking trends through customer complaints.

Once a transit system has established its policies for stop announcements and route identification, transit administrators must decide on the type of technology to use. The technology should reflect system size and environment.

Selecting Appropriate Technology

The types of technology used by transit systems include public address systems, automated stop announcements, automatic vehicle location or

GPS, and security or CCTV cameras.

- Hands-free microphones are recommended so that drivers do not have to take their hands off the wheel.
- Consider using annunciator/PA systems to broadcast external route identification.
- Visit peer systems to learn about types of technology and how other systems use communication technology.
- Properly procure, install, and maintain technology.
- Properly train operators to use the technology.

Training Agency Personnel

The ADA and the USDOT require that each public fixed-route or demand-response system ensure that personnel are trained to proficiency. For vehicle operators to succeed, they must know what is expected of them, have the necessary tools and skills to do their jobs and receive feedback about their performance. Training should address ADA requirements, the reason for stop announcements, how to make stop announcements, and how to use on-board and external communication technology.

Training Tips

- Basic ADA training should be for all personnel, not just vehicle operators.
- Adult learners benefit from visual examples, discussion, written materials, and role-playing to help make points more clearly.
- Discuss how, what, when, and where to make announcements.
- Include supervisor training on how to monitor, coach, and enforce the stop announcement requirements.

- Include mechanics training on how to maintain and repair announcement equipment.
- Explain why it is a civil rights violation to not make announcements.
- Ask customers with disabilities to help develop and deliver training.
- Ask for operator feedback into development of announcements.
- Provide practice sessions for stop announcements to address any operator fear of public speaking and provide practice to help operators learn to speak clearly.
- Make sure that potential hires are aware of ADA-related responsibilities.

Operator Tips for the Four Types of Stop Announcements

At Transfer Points...

- Establish that transfer announcements need to inform passengers about transfers between modes.
- Establish that announcements need to inform customers of route branches that serve multiple end points.

At Major Intersections and Destination Points...

- Decide how to interpret and define a major intersection—some systems use signalized intersections as the definition of *major intersection*.
- Use termini of each route as major destination points, at a minimum.
- Decide locally on other destination points that should be announced, such as medical centers, educational institutions, shopping centers or other major traffic generators.

For Route Orientation...

- Consider making more orientation announcements in rural and outlying areas.
- Consider setting time or distance intervals for orientation announcements
- Incorporate orientation stops that are logical and easy for drivers making public address announcements, such as exiting a highway, turning or approaching well-known landmarks.

At Customer Request...

- Identify that stop announcements may be requested by anyone—not just people with disabilities.
- Use PA system for requested stop announcements on vehicles with automated voice annunciator systems.
- Inform drivers that they may need to catch the attention of customers who are deaf or have hearing impairments by gesturing or returning a stop request card they may have been handed when the customer boarded.
- Consider making the decision to announce all stops.
- Determine if the transit system will use an automated route identification to make external announcements when the door opens and that repeats at intervals.
- Consider using visual and audible real-time next vehicle information.
- Determine how weather or poor visibility affects the transit system. Consider customer-activated flashing lights at stops to signal vehicle operators in areas prone to fog or other conditions that affect visibility.
- Consider lowering the volume of automated external announcements in the early morning or late at night.

- Consider repeating stops in traffic or areas with high background noise.

Monitoring and Evaluating Operator Performance

Transit operators should incorporate performance monitoring and evaluation procedures into their stop announcement program. This will enable the public transportation system to monitor both overall system performance and individual vehicle or rail operator performance as well as address any applicable federal review requirements. Performance monitoring should address both FTA and local requirements for service provision.

FTA is responsible for ensuring compliance with the ADA and USDOT regulations. FTA conducts periodic reviews of paratransit and fixed-route transit services operated by federal grantees, which include examination of the stop announcement and route identification program. From a local perspective, individual performance may be tracked over time to determine system-wide compliance. Effective performance monitoring includes:

- Observing a sample of individual operator performances to generate a system-wide average
- Developing incentives that promote consistent compliance and reward exemplary job performance
- Including compliance with fixed-route stops and route identification as part of the recognition criteria where incentive programs currently exist

A transit agency's disciplinary process should be used if an employee does not comply with requirements. Measures should be on par with discipline for other safety violations. Willful disregard for company policies should be elevated through the disciplinary process.

Items to include in a monitoring program

- A clear definition of the goals of the monitoring program.
- A description of the monitoring process.
- Criteria for monitoring operator performance and equipment performance.
- A connection between monitoring and corrective action for both operators and equipment repairs.
- A requirement and procedure for follow-up monitoring once corrective action has been taken.
- A description of the frequency, sample size, type and method of selecting observations.
- A process for updating and maintaining accurate records.
- Undercover on-board monitoring may be used to document stop announcement activities.
- Technology may be used to provide an objective view of operator performance. Technology examples include: on-board camera and microphone surveillance and automated announcement usage.

Maintaining Stop Announcement Equipment

In order to appropriately make stop announcements and serve customers with disabilities, the USDOT requires that transit vehicle accessibility equipment must be maintained. This requirement pertains to lifts and other means of access, securement devices, elevators, signage, and systems for communication.

Tips for Maintaining Equipment

- Require that accessibility devices be repaired promptly.
- Require that when an accessibility feature is out of order reasonable steps be taken to accommodate people with disabilities
- Require that announcements be made by a PA system or an unamplified voice if the annunciator is broken.
- Require that PA system testing should be part of daily pre-trip inspections and depending on system size, an in-house mechanic trained to make communication repairs
- Include procedures for handling in-service equipment failures.
- Include procedures for simple problems that occur during pull-out and in-service (e.g, blown fuse).
- Establish an interface between the maintenance and IT departments.
- Incorporate communications-related items into repair order forms and parts department inventories.
- Perform preventive maintenance at regular intervals.

Marketing the Stop Announcement Program

A final step that transit systems may want to incorporate in the stop announcement and route identification program is marketing it. The marketing program will inform customers about the stop and route identification requirement and address questions or concerns they may have. The concept of marketing stop announcement programs is a growing area for systems to consider.

Important points to consider for a marketing program

- What announcements customers can expect to hear and why announcements are being made.
- Customer suggestions on improving the process, announcement content or whether adjustments need to be made to volume may be incorporated into a marketing and communications plan to acknowledge that customer needs are being heard.
- Informing passengers on how to recognize operators for good and bad performance
- Marketing can be provided via internet, public service announcements, bulletins, and customer service centers.
- Posting that stop announcements are required by law.
- Adding tactile signs near the driver's seat or doorways.
- Use caution when mixing PSAs with regular stop announcements. Messages can cancel each other out or may simply be too much information.

Summary

The ADA has specific requirements for the types of announcements that must be made, but the exact approach is left to local decision makers. Management, drivers, mechanics, and administrative staff should all be aware of ADA requirements and the key components of a stop announcements program. Each vehicle operator needs to ensure that riders are provided with the information they need on where to board and alight. For operators to succeed in doing this, they need to have the tools to perform their jobs, the training to know what to do, and feedback on performance.

Customers should also be involved in the planning and performance feedback functions of the program.

With the tips in the resource guide, an understanding of ADA regulations, and a review of how other systems approach their programs, transit agencies will have a solid framework for developing effective stop announcement and route identification programs.

Companion Resources

The Resource Guide contains case studies from several transit systems from across the country. Technology, policies, and monitoring procedures are among the highlights featured. Case study cities include:

Boston, Mass. – Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Charlotte, NC – Charlotte Area Transportation System

Memphis, Tenn. - Memphis Area Transit Authority

Philadelphia, Pa. – Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

Salt Lake City, Utah - Utah Transit Authority

Sacramento, Calif. – Sacramento Regional Transit District

Syracuse, NY/Central New York – Central New York Regional Transportation Authority

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