

2021 Trends Report



Photo: ButterFLi, Los Angeles, California

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The National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC)

NADTC is a national program funded by the Federal Transit Administration and administered by Easterseals Inc. and USAging, with guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living.

Our Mission:

To promote the availability and accessibility of transportation options that meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers.

The mission of NADTC is to:

- **Serve** professionals in the fields of transportation, aging, disability, human services and caregiving.
- **Provide** resources and training through an information and referral hotline, website, as well as both distance and online training.
- **Empower** communities across the country to implement or improve innovative transportation programs at the local level.
- **Support** older adults, people with disabilities of all ages, and their families to help them find the best mobility options in their communities to reach their destination of choice.

For more information about NADTC and the services we provide, please visit www.nadtc.org/

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Marketing Your Transportation Program

Background

In a 2018 national survey of older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers conducted by the NADTC, the survey reported that most of the respondents turned to family, friends or neighbors for information about transportation services available in the community. Respondents further reported that there is no single “go-to” information resource for alternative transportation options and that very few are familiar with public transportation options with only a quarter of respondents saying they are very familiar. Outside of friends and family, most older adults and people with disabilities are not looking to other sources to find out about local information about transportation. The crux of the matter is that if information about transportation options is not being easily accessed then these transportation options are probably not being fully utilized by older adults and people with disabilities who need these services to remain independent and connected to the community.

Transportation providers often talk about needing to fill mobility gaps in situations when services like fixed route or specialized transportation only go so far, but what many providers sometimes neglect to consider is the need to fill communications gaps that prevent individuals in the community from knowing about the transportation service they provide in the first place. Accessible vehicles are important when serving older riders or riders who use assistive devices or have a disability. It is also important to consider the distance of transit stops from a person’s home or workplace or that the path to transit is comfortable and safe and accessible to bikes and pedestrians. However, accessibility should be thought about in a broader sense, ensuring that how a person receives information about transportation in their community is not only available, but “accessible” to them. For example, a rural provider should not put all their marketing eggs in a social media basket as it is common for rural areas to experience broadband and connectivity challenges and marketing about a service through channels that are internet dependent may not be as accessible to those they are trying to reach. Conversely, social media strategies could work much better in urban or suburban settings where internet connections are more reliable. Simply put, what works in one area may not work in another, therefore, when thinking about marketing transportation services, there are many components to consider when developing an effective plan.

Accessibility in the Broadest Sense

When the word “accessibility” is used, the first thing that typically comes to mind is the ADA. This is not just a common first thought, but an appropriate one as well. Providing accessible vehicles or accessible accommodations related to riding public transportation is critical to enable individuals with disabilities to access work, home and community. Yet, it is important to consider accessibility in the broadest sense in order to effectively market transportation

programs to every potential rider in the community, not just those with travel-limiting disabilities.

Information about transportation services should be accessible to all community members, despite their age, income, ability, race or ethnicity. When marketing a new or existing service, providers must consider who their target audience is and ensure outreach strategies meet the needs of the population they want to reach. Strategic marketing should not solely be about increasing ridership, but should be relevant, acceptable and accessible to current and future riders. For example, in “Transportation Barriers and Needs for Immigrants and Refugees: An Exploratory Needs Assessment,” Hopelink and King County Mobility Coalition stated that “Information/Language” as a major barrier to transportation access for their immigrant and refugee population, citing:

“Language, and the lack of translated transit information available as written materials, signage, and announcements are significant barriers among immigrant and refugee communities. Those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) can find it difficult to navigate the public transit system due to lack of information available in their native language and the inability to be able to communicate with bus drivers.”

When developing marketing strategies for a transportation program or service, keep in mind the “who” before the “how.” For some transportation providers, disseminating information and marketing materials in a variety of languages, including translation capabilities is a critical component to effective marketing and use of service by non-English speaking individuals or those with Limited English Proficiency, like those residing in King County. For other providers, marketing strategies may need to focus on additional groups, including (but not limited to) underrepresented racial and ethnic populations, individuals who are hearing or visually impaired or living with other physical and intellectual disabilities, those residing in rural or other remote areas and those who are unfamiliar or new to transit. If providers adopt a one size fits all ideology when it comes to marketing their transportation service to diverse audiences, they run the risk of preventing one or more of these groups from accessing transportation to get to the places they need and want to go.

An Unrecognized Barrier

In 2020, the NADTC conducted an annual survey of stakeholders to identify needs and gather input on NADTC products, priorities and activities. When asked, “What are your organization's top issues regarding transportation for older adults and people with disabilities?” several respondents mentioned, 1) marketing local transportation options, 2) lack of marketing their services to the aging community and 3) a focus on transportation options in rural and small urban areas including marketing. Additionally, the NADTC has received a number of technical assistance and information calls inquiring about ways to market transportation programs in the community. In NADTC’s recent national survey of diverse older adults, younger adults and caregivers, the top barriers to accessing transportation reported were: not enough public

transit or options in the community, concerns about wait time; no friends or family who drive regularly; transportation too expensive; and concerns about COVID-19. Most transportation providers have an acute awareness of the physical and environmental transportation barriers their communities face, but a critical barrier often overlooked is the lack of information about available transportation in the community. It is known that most older adults and persons with disabilities rely on friends and family for information, with some also turning to the internet, but what we also know is these same friend and family caregivers turn to their friends and family as well for transportation information. This presents a huge gap in service and access to mobility options when both the rider and those who have the responsibility of arranging rides don't know how, or where to access information about transportation in their communities.

Educating Communities to Encourage Engagement

The fallacy of the phrase, “If you build it, they will come,” is widely known by many. Even if what you build is in direct response to what the community asked for, at a town hall meeting, through a survey or a focus group, the response to the product or service may not be as robust as the initial ask. The unfortunate occurrence is that very few, or sometimes no one in the community who asked for the service takes advantage of it once it is launched. This scenario is a familiar one to many transportation providers who have expressed frustration when they have created a service, whether adding a route or implementing a micro transit or on-demand service to only discover once these services are “launched,” very few chose to use them. Often the piece that's missing when trying to market a transportation service is education. When providers lead with educating current and potential riders about the service, before promoting the service, members of the community are in a better position to understand what the service is about and how it will benefit them. Therefore, education can encourage a higher level of engagement of the service from the community.



The challenge with educating the community about a service before promoting the service is that it takes time and resources. Often time and resources that many organizations are not able to put towards an awareness or education campaign. However, education may be the critical step to ensure a positive response to marketing related to your service and in turn encourage a positive interest in using the service.

In addition to education, trust plays a considerable role in a community fully adopting a new or sometimes an already existing service. If your target audience is unable to look to friends or

family for a “green light” to use your service simply because they are unfamiliar with your service or with your organization, you may want to consider the steps that have been taken to educate the community before spending a great deal of time and money on a marketing campaign or launch a service.

Partners in Promotion

Getting the word out about a transportation service or program is typically the responsibility of the transportation provider, however marketing efforts don’t have to start and stop with the provider organization. Transportation providers can look to other organizations in the community to partner with them to help spur their marketing efforts to reach a target audience. For example, if a provider’s primary rider group are older adults, they could partner with local aging organizations (e.g., Area Agencies on Aging, senior centers) to help get the word out about the transportation service. If the provider is the lead aging

organization themselves, they could consider partnering with local healthcare facilities, meal delivery or other critical services who could provide a flyer or other promotional material that talk about your service to their patients or customers. This example of cross marketing can be a great tool to increase the awareness of your service to a broader audience.

In addition to soliciting the assistance of other community agencies to help market your transportation service to their constituents, identifying transportation professionals, like mobility managers or travel trainers could also help spread the word about your transportation service.

Mobility Mangers

According to the National Center for Mobility Management, two of the key functions of a mobility manager are to, 1) encourages innovation and flexibility to reach the "right fit" solution for customers and 2) strive for easy information and referral to assist customers in learning about and using services. Mobility managers look at the complete network of community transportation, from public transit to volunteer transportation, to bike and pedestrian options and more. Because their role includes knowing and educating customers about the full range of available travel options in the community, mobility managers could serve as excellent partners to help you market your specific transportation service.

Ideas to Market Your Transportation Service:

Agency website

Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)

Setting up a booth at community fairs

Direct marketing (e.g., sending information via snail mail)

Print media (e.g., newsletters, newspaper)

Broadcast media (e.g., radio or TV ads)

Travel Trainers

Travel trainers instruct individuals, typically older adults and people with disabilities who have little to no experience in using transportation, how to access and use public and private modes of transportation independently. Whether group training or one-on-one, those interested in familiarizing themselves with transportation options in their community can benefit from this type of instruction. Like mobility managers, travel trainers are usually familiar with local transportation options, how to access them and how to use them. They have a captive audience to educate about your transportation service and can be a valuable partner in your marketing efforts.

Every Ride Counts

To address the advertising concerns of smaller transportation providers who either lacked the staff or financial resources to effectively market their programs, the NADTC developed a comprehensive publicity campaign called Every Ride Counts to help providers promote the availability and accessibility of their services to older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers in communities around the country. The Every Ride Counts campaign is comprised of carefully crafted messages and materials like postcards, flyers, posters and social media images that can be customized with local contact information and that promote the use of varied transportation options by older adults and people with disabilities in the community.

NADTC has made these materials available and free of charge to transportation, aging and disability agencies around the country with the hope that they will be used to make older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers aware of how, with just a bit of planning, local transportation options can help them get where they want and need to go.

Local Success Stories

In 2019, NADTC selected four transportation organizations to participate in a targeted Every Ride Counts pilot program to increase the awareness of local transportation options provided by these organizations: North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO) in Fort Collins, CO; the Dunn County Transit Commission in Dunn County, WI; the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Buffalo and Pepin Counties (ADRC) in Buffalo, WI; and Capacity Builders, in partnership with Lou Go's Taxi in Farmington, NM.

NADTC partnered with The Hatcher Group, a strategic communications and marketing firm who designed and strategically placed advertisements across a variety of channels, with the support of local advertising agents and feedback from the grantees. These advertisements included billboards, bus ads, radio spots, movie theater commercials, taxi toppers, shuttle wraps, and Facebook Ads. Additionally, print materials including flyers and magnets, as well as social media toolkits were created for each organization.

This Every Ride Counts pilot successfully increased awareness, engagement, and ridership in the four targeted communities. In Fort Collins, users of the online Find My Ride tool increased by

1187 percent and the Facebook ads received 430,689 total impressions. In Dunn County, DCT website visitors increased by 216% and the Facebook ads received 25,323 impressions. In Buffalo and Pepin Counties, ridership increased by 75% and website visitors increased by 42 percent. In Farmington, ADA ridership increased by 65 percent and Lou Go's received 200 more calls for rides than in the month prior to the campaign launch.

To learn more about how Every Ride Counts can work for your transportation program, visit the NADTC website at, www.nadtc.org/EveryRideCounts

Promising Practices and Strategies

HIRTA Public Transit

HIRTA Public Transit promotes an environment reflective of the communities they serve, ensuring all riders feel welcome and included. Through surveys and focus groups, HIRTA is identifying the needs of a wide range of demographics in their community to provide the most inclusive service. Some of their inclusive materials include an impaired vision brochure, large print brochures and documents translated to Spanish and other languages upon request.



The HIRTA website is also available in multiple languages. Through their “Do You Have Transportation?” program, HIRTA is developing strategic partnerships with healthcare clinics and other local businesses to advertise and raise awareness about their transit service as well as employment opportunities. To learn more about HIRTA visit their [website](#).

Rural Health Information Hub

The Rural Health Information Hub provides a brief overview of how to market a rural transportation programs, as well as some of the important steps to take in developing effective marketing strategies



to reach riders in rural areas. To learn more about RHI Hub, visit their [website](#).

National Rural Transportation Assistance Program, Marketing Toolkit

RTAP has developed a marketing toolkit designed to be a comprehensive and practical guide for rural and tribal public transportation agencies to develop and implement successful marketing programs for their systems. The toolkit includes a “how to” guide, steps to developing a marketing plan, strategies, templates and more.





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