



System Name: Valley Regional Transit, Specialized Transportation Department

Service Area: Ada and Canyon County, Idaho (including large cities of Meridian & Boise)

Background

Valley Regional Transit is the Regional Public Transportation Authority for Ada and Canyon Counties in Idaho. Valley Regional Transit manages contracts for the operation of ValleyRide fixed route bus services and ACCESS paratransit service. ValleyRide bus services consists 21 fixed-line routes in Boise/Garden City, three fixed-line routes in Nampa/Caldwell, and six intercounty fixed-line routes connecting Ada County and Canyon County. Most service is in the urban area, however some of the specialized services operate in rural areas.

The VRT Board of Directors is composed of up to 29 members. These members are publicly elected or appointed officials from each jurisdiction. The Board represents 19 jurisdictions in the two counties and a service population of about 650,000 people.

The system consists of traditional fixed route service, paratransit (ACCESS) and a suite of services under the specialized transit umbrella. For the purposes of this case study, the specialized transit services will be highlighted.

Specialized Transportation Department

Service Area Population	Ada County – 481,587 Canyon County – 229,849
Service Area Size (sq. mi)	Ada County – 1,060 Canyon County – 604
Data for Year	FY 2019
Annual Passengers	114,124 – an increase of 14.5% mostly because some systems were able to add vehicles, increasing capacity
Annual Miles of service	465,000 Up from 1.56 rides/hour to 2.81 rides per hour between 2017 and 2019
Annual Operating Expenses	\$2,470,000
Annual Operating Hours	33,000
Operating Cost/Trip	Costs depend on the agency providing the ride and if a volunteer or paid driver is used. \$5.50 - \$25.80 per trip.
Fleet	32 shared vehicles. In addition, some agencies and all volunteer drivers use their own vehicles.
Major Funding Sources	VRT is funded by Federal transit and local funds. As Idaho provides no dedicated state funding for the program, partnerships are critical for to provide the local match required by Federal transit programs. Local match funding comes from senior services, cities, health

	systems, local non-profits, and volunteer in-kind match. Fares on the Specialized Transportation programs are only collected in the VRT Late Night Program.
Partner Agencies	Senior centers in the cities of Eagle, Kuna, Meridian, Star, and Parma; Metro Community Services; Supportive Housing and Innovative Partnerships; Church of the Harvest; Calvary Church; Interfaith Sanctuary; International Rescue Committee; St. Luke's; Saint Alphonsus; Jannus; and Packers Sanitations Services.

Coordination

There is a department within VRT dedicated to filling the gaps in the traditional transit service. This Specialized Transportation Department oversees programs that provide transportation services to vulnerable populations in their community including for seniors, persons with disabilities, low-income workers, and critical healthcare patients.

Many of these partnerships assist smaller agencies that were unable to maintain and replace their vehicles. VRT developed a fleet of shared vehicles for this purpose. Specialized transportation programs and area non-profits can contract with VRT to use the vehicles for a flat, yearly rate. VRT also operates a volunteer driver program. Both of these programs provide transportation for older adults and people with disabilities.

Additionally, VRT has two low-income job-access programs. The first program, Village Van, works directly with large employers who contract with VRT for vans for second, third, and weekend shift workers in grouped rides. VRT established neighborhood routes to pick up low-income employees and transport them to work for contracted employers. The program works to provide better paying work opportunities for low-income, transportation-dependent residents.

The second job-access program VRT oversees is a partnership with Lyft. The VRT Late Night program provides on-demand job-access transportation for low-income workers from the hours of 9pm to 6am. The program is available throughout Boise and Nampa, and eligibility requirements have to be met to qualify. The rider pays up to a predetermined amount, and VRT pays the remainder. Qualified individuals can utilize this service to get affordable transportation to work, apprenticeships, and job training courses. The partnership with Lyft serves mostly individual riders and is valuable because there is not a high volume of riders needing transportation to the same location at the same time. Utilizing the Lyft platform gives VRT a cost-effective way to provide critical transportation to a vulnerable population.

Another partnership VRT created is with hospitals for critical care patients that are at the highest risk for hospitalization. Individuals with certain diagnoses require continuous follow up care that requires consistent transportation. The Rides2Wellness program is exclusive to specialty clinics identified by a steering committee. Local healthcare systems invest in the program and work with VRT to schedule trips with private providers. Rides2Wellness provides free rides to patients in need. This program helps these patients avoid further hospitalization. The steering committee includes representatives from VRT, two healthcare systems' administration and social workers. The steering committee helps guide expansion of the program and approve new clinics. The steering committee is currently working to expand the program into Canyon County.

By coordinating with VRT, partner agencies are able to use the VRT scheduling software, Routematch, to more efficiently schedule trips. Originally, VRT scheduled all trips. That soon became overwhelming as the suite of services and providers grew. Now, several agencies are established as sub-users. VRT trains their partners' personnel to schedule their own trips. VRT can see all trips and VRT Customer Service remains the main source

of information and referral for all customers. Access to technology has assisted smaller agencies. For example, one Senior Center was providing rides only to and from the center using agency vehicles driven by volunteers. With the scheduling software, they are now able to provide rides with a paid driver – expanding their services to the general public and to destinations throughout the community. Partner agencies pay the additional software licensing fees.

Challenges

Challenges have included turnover in leadership in the partner agencies and consistency in costing rides. Agencies charge different fares for their rides making coordination among the small partnering agencies difficult. Finding funds for local match is challenging, and the difference among the populations of the two counties served impacts the ability to source local match.

VRT has tried other shared vehicle arrangements, such as the casual user program. This program made the shared fleet available for a single trip or occasional use. Despite being a needed service, until the logistics can be worked out so they do not cause conflict with the annual contractual agreements, the program was discontinued.

Keys to Success

VRT works with a number of partners to find solutions to transportation issues in the community. Open communication and addressing problems promptly have been critical to success of these partnerships. Partners need to understand the implications of using a shared scheduling system, as well as the potential to provide more rides as well as the responsibilities of proper reporting.

Identifying the barriers for the small agencies, allowed for VRT to work with them on solutions. Issues addressed included difficulty maintaining vehicles and lack of technology in the small agencies. VRT was able to work with partners to provide access to scheduling and dispatching software, and maintains the fleet vehicles at VRT.

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