



MOBILITY ON DEMAND (MOD) SANDBOX DEMONSTRATION: PINELLAS SUNCOAST TRANSIT AUTHORITY (PSTA) PUBLIC-PRIVATE-PARTNERSHIP FOR PARATRANSIT EVALUATION REPORT

Background

The Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) Public-Private-Partnership for Paratransit project is one of 11 Mobility on Demand (MOD) Sandbox Demonstrations funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). PSTA partnered with Lyft, United Taxi, Care Ride, Wheelchair Transport, and Goin Software to develop and demonstrate an approach to more efficiently and cost-effectively provide paratransit service.

PSTA has spent around 10% of its operating budget to provide service to over 12,500 eligible customers of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-required paratransit, performing over 275,000 annual paratransit trips through its Demand Response Transportation (DART) Program. DART's lack of flexibility and limited pick-up time reliability were general complaints from paratransit customers. To increase the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of paratransit services while improving customers' mobility and accessibility throughout Pinellas County, Florida, the project aimed to deploy an integrated platform and app that provided on-demand curb-to-curb paratransit service.

To evaluate user response to the integrated platform and app and its effects on service operation and user mobility, a study was developed that asked participants to take a pre-study survey and a post-study survey. The evaluation team collected data relevant on this MOD Sandbox Demonstration between June 2019 and August 2021. Paired observations from both surveys, travel activity, payment data, paratransit operating expenses, fare revenues, and insights from expert (stakeholder/project partner) interviews were used to evaluate the pilot project.

Objectives

Through the MOD Sandbox Program, FTA enabled PSTA to explore innovative business models and partnerships to deliver a high quality, seamless, and equitable paratransit service. The project objectives were to 1) improve users' accessibility and mobility, 2) improve users' quality of life and satisfaction with paratransit services, 3) reduce users' wait and travel times, 4) reduce spending on paratransit trips, 5) facilitate payments for paratransit, 6) diversify users' trip purposes, and 7) produce lessons learned for future projects.

Findings and Conclusions

The project evaluation revealed that the program had positive impacts on users' mobility, accessibility, wait and travel times, payment experience, satisfaction with paratransit services, and diversity of trip purposes.

This report presents the results of an independent evaluation of the PSTA MOD Sandbox Demonstration, with lessons learned that potentially can help advance similar initiatives within other transit systems. The evaluation was guided by 12 hypotheses analyzed using survey data, activity and other data, and expert interview data. Key findings include the following:

- **Users of the PSTA system reported greater mobility and accessibility with the new system.** Survey and trip activity data showed an increase in users' mobility, accessibility, and travel activity as a result of using the new system.
- **Wait and travel times for users declined.** Around half of pilot participants experienced shorter wait times and a decline or no change in their travel times.
- **Users of the PSTA system reported satisfaction and an easier payment experience with the new system.** A majority of pilot participants reported enhanced satisfaction with the new system and an easier payment process as a result of e-wallet payments.
- **The trip purpose of system users was diversified and the spatial diversity of locations to which users traveled increased.** Survey and trip activity data showed that the new system provided users with access to a greater number of diversified trip purposes which met their needs.

Benefits

The Public-Private-Partnership for Paratransit project was a learning experience for all stakeholders about contractual negotiations, project operation, technology challenges, and other issues related to the continuation of the project. Demonstration partners reported their satisfaction of the public-private-partnership because it allowed PSTA and mobility providers to work together and overcome challenges. Ultimately, the pilot increased the mobility and accessibility of system users within Pinellas County and enhanced their reported quality of life. It demonstrated the capabilities of an integrated platform to reduce wait and travel times, streamline the payment process, and improve access to diversified locations. Lessons learned from the pilot project may allow for future projects to build on this experience and advance common objectives with similar initiatives within other transit systems.

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