# New Mobility Mindsets: On-Demand Transit

Webinar Questions and Answers

November 16, 2020

## *Question and Answer Session*

**Can you please talk about implementation costs associated with on-demand transit, in comparison with traditional fixed-route?**

**Gary Thomas:** From our perspective, the implementation of the GoLink zone – the real issue is understanding what you're trying to accomplish. In our case, we were trying to make sure that we provided good transit in a coverage kind of approach so people had an alternative option to the car. I mean, if I have a bus with a 60-minute headway, we know that's not an option compared to a car. The only people that are going to ride that bus are the people that have to. But when you start talking about a 10-minute response time, then it really does start to become a competitive process. Now, as far as cost of the implementation, the cost – depending on how you're going to – what kind of services, what kind of vehicles, assets you're going to put in that zone. In our case, as Elliott said, we had vans in our zones but then we went to Uber Pool to back up the vans. Vans cost money. Uber Pool doesn't, other than the subsidies, so now you're really talking about what subsidy you want to pay for those trips. In our case, we chose that the subsidy was maybe a little bit more than fixed route, but not significantly more, so it was certainly worth the money for us to have coverage in those areas.

**Elliott Doza:** That's a great question. How do we weigh fixed route and microtransit? Understanding the expectations of performance of the service is critical in understanding where microtransit can fit. It's typically lower ridership and less productive in our case in many of our communities. So, the answer was we identified transportation challenges through a small study in 2018 in our region and we said, "Okay, well, how can we solve these challenges?" We actually looked at fixed route, we looked at on-demand service, we looked at partnerships with Uber and Lyft for the needs of our first zone, Grove City. The community was using the microtransit model that we looked at. Justifying spending additional money and potentially taking service hours away from fixed route – what we did was pursue grant funding and then a funding partnership with the City of Grove City, and then also our second zone, the City of Westerville. Both of those zones provide the bulk of the cost. What we did was find kind of a creative funding source through the senior transportation fund, so we actually received most of the funds they would spend on senior transportation to help pay for the service. Then, moving forward into on-demand bus or microtransit in areas that you may have to cut the fixed route service or decide if we need to change the fixed route into an on-demand service. That's not a simple answer from Central Ohio Transit Authority. We are a union shop. You know, we don't want to take away too many jobs. Our microtransit operators are part-time. Our on-demand bus operators are full-time. So, what we'll decide in the future as part of our current effort is does this low performing segment that may take two to three buses an hour to operate – does it make more sense to use one to two buses an hour and turn that into an on-demand zone? It'll save resources; however, it still achieves the goal of deploying our fixed route resources.

**Can you talk about carbon footprint minimization strategies?**

**Gary Thomas:** What we're watching is ridership, and shared rides specifically, so any time that we can get someone out of their personal car, we think it's a win. And if we can start sharing those rides, which is why we use Uber Pool instead of UberX, then we can start to share rides in that regard as well. So, as of right now, we haven't necessarily looked at the carbon footprint impacts as much as we've looked at the ridership and where our shared rides are and when our shared rides are so we can better tailor that service to our customers.

**Arthur Guzzetti:** I'll make a big picture comment here, and that's that the real goal is getting people accustomed to a lifestyle or making a lifestyle possible that is less automobile-dependent. This is a piece of it. It might not be the whole piece, but the fixed route system is great. It's more efficient. You could move a lot of people on the route and it's more cost-effective, but it might not be the whole answer. So, this is another piece of the puzzle that helps create the options. It gives you the possibility of having a lifestyle that's less auto-dependent. That's the win.

## *Questions Not Answered during the Webinar*

**I can see riders getting confused and checking out if there are too many applications (apps) being used in a region. How are you navigating selection and coordination of apps with other transit agencies in your regions?**

**Gary Thomas:** All transit agencies in the North Texas area are using the same app, which is Dallas Area Rapid Transit's (DART) GoPass app. We included Trinity Metro and Denton Country Transportation Authority (DCTA) on the app when we began in 2013 and as each of those agencies moved toward wanting their own branded app, we worked with them to provide their unique version of the GoPass app. We now have five agencies using the app, we have been selected by the sixth agency and are working through the contract terms and have proposed to several other agencies.

**Elliott Doza:** Currently, the Central Ohio Transportation Authority (COTA) is the only transit agency in the region with a mobile app. There is one other urban transit system, Delaware Country Transit, and they have not deployed their mobile app yet. Our ultimate vision is to have a single, integrated trip scheduling and payment mobile platform for the entire central Ohio region. However, COTA has two separate mobile applications, a mobile ticket app from Genfare and a COTA//Plus mobile app for trip scheduling and payment. There is some confusion among users as to which app can do what. Our strategy is to provide a very clear marketing campaign, providing direct links to the app on digital materials and instructions on how to find the app on paper. On occasion we will have a rider purchase a pass on one app and attempt to use it on another; we do offer full refunds in these cases. Again, our vision is to have all of our trip scheduling and payment technologies integrated both within COTA and with other rural and urban providers in the region.

**Who regulates the On Demand transportation providers in Texas, Ohio, and FL?**

**Gary Thomas:** DART is a public agency that was created under state law, so we are bound by local, state and federal laws.

**Is DART working with or marketing the app to Metro Transit in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area?**

**Gary Thomas:** DART responded to a solicitation from Metro Transit, but they are not working together at this time.