

ALAMEDA-CONTRA COSTA TRANSIT DISTRICT



STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 11/9/2022

Staff Report No. 22-569

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Michael A. Hursh, General Manager/Chief Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Customer Services Quarterly Update

BRIEFING ITEM

AGENDA PLANNING REQUEST:

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):

Consider receiving the Customer Services Department Quarterly Update.

Staff Contact:

Beverly Greene, Executive Director of External Affairs, Marketing & Communications

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:

Goal - Convenient and Reliable Service

Initiative - Service Quality

The Customer Services Department quarterly update provides Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other activities that support and are aligned with the District's strategic plan, goals, and initiatives. The Customer Services Department provides proactive and reactive service to our riders via call center staff and technologies, many of which are available 24/7 across diversified, user-friendly, and accessible platforms. Regular internal audits of these tools combined with a continuing search for improvement ensure service levels our riders deserve.

BUDGETARY/FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no budgetary or fiscal impact associated with this report.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

The Customer Services Department plans, directs, and monitors all aspects of the District's customer service functions. It is comprised of the Customer Service Center (CSC), Customer Relations, Institutional Pass Program production, and manages the activities of the outsourced call center.

Customer Service Center (attachment 1)

The Customer Service Center (CSC), also referred to as the Clipper Customer Service Center, handles all Clipper-related requests (except for refunds and balance transfers); offers a variety of fare media and services, such as BART senior and disabled, paratransit, and Bike Link tickets; provides bus schedules and maps; handles

Regional Transit Connection (RTC) Discount ID Card requests; and manages Lost and Found. The CSC also assists internal customers (District employees) with Dependent and Pensioner ID cards.

As shown in attachment 1(A), there was a 26% decrease in revenue for the first quarter of FY2023. Generally, the fourth quarter shows the highest quarterly revenue because schools use budget to purchase fare media before the end of the fiscal year. August experienced the highest volume of fare media sold as seen in attachment 1(B) where the majority were requests for bulk fare media orders from non-profit agencies as well as schools. With schools beginning instruction in August, schools tend to send bulk fare media orders to prepare for the new school year. Non-profits, such as Bay Area Community Services, placed a large bulk order requesting 2,000 Day Pass Adult, 2,000 Day Pass Youth, and other fare products, causing a spike in fare media sold. As we approach the holiday season, requests tend to decrease, resulting in a drop in revenue.

For the Regional Transit Connection (RTC) card, a total of 441 RTC applications were processed during the first quarter of FY2023 - 5% decrease (28 applications) processed in comparison to last quarter, but saw a significant increase in August as seen in attachment 1(C) due to the additional 36 RTC applications received after visiting the Youth Adult Program in Oakland on August 19th.

Customer Relations (attachment 2)

Customer Relations manages the District's feedback response process. Staff monitors all incoming feedback, which are received through various communication channels, such as phone calls, emails, walk-ins, letters, the official mobile app, and social media. Customer Relations collaborates with various departments to ensure a timely response to our customers. During Service Planning & Operations Committee (SPOC) meetings, staff provides data and statistics to identify trends in order to determine areas needing service quality improvements.

Customer Response Times - Top 5 Departments Productivity* (attachment 2(A) and (B))

Division staff showed nearly the same percentage in meeting the five-day response time goal. District-wide, the number slightly rose to 87% compared to the last quarter.

Customer Feedback

From July through August of 2022, Customer Services received 2,234 unique customer contacts, an 11% increase over the previous quarter, and a 4% decrease from the same period in 2021 as shown in attachment 2 (C).

Reasons (attachment 2(D))

No-Show complaints represented the most common reason for customer feedback with 20% of the quarter's total. Pass-ups were second at 17%, and Operator Misconduct were third, with 13% of the total. This quarter's Pass-Up complaints increased slightly from around 16% to 17% of the total complaints continuing an upward trend that began in May of this year. Conversely, No-Show (20%) and Operator Misconduct (13%) complaints represented smaller shares of the period's total.

Pass-Ups (attachment 2(E))

Division 4 received the most Pass-Up complaints both in number (164), and percentage of all Pass-up complaints (40%). Elsewhere, customers reported 26 instances of being passed-up on the combined 72/72M/72R-lines, while the 51A-line had the most of any single route/line, with 14 for the quarter. Among other lines, pass-up complaints were dispersed, without concentration in any one area.

No-Shows (attachment 2(F))

The percentage of no-show complaints were similar for Divisions 2, 4 and 6; each with a rate of under 30% of their total complaints. Division 3 saw fewer: only 15% of their total complaints were about no-shows.

Commendations

Riders were eager to share positive feedback for many lines and operators, but Division 2 received half of all commendations. Riders commented on operators on the 33, 36 and 88 lines. And the 99-line out of Division 6 received eight reports of great operators.

“We want to express our sincerest appreciation for this bus driver! We took the 33 Bus to our wedding at the Piedmont Community Hall. We're urban planners, and we love AC Transit. The bus driver made our ride so special and very sweet. We have pictures if you want them! Thank you, AC Transit!!”

“I had the pleasure to take an awesome (36-line) bus ride on Friday night! This amazing driver gave me great advice on riding on the AC transit, especially at night! I am a frequent rider and out of all my experiences with bus drivers, she is the first to have a genuine and friendly conversation with me about safety travels tips. I can see that she takes pride in her job and very passionate to support everyday riders. By far, she exceeded all expectations for me, and I greatly appreciate her for being an excellent bus driver. Thank you so much!”

“The (88-line) bus driver had to stop, which blocked the view of the F bus from seeing the waiting passengers. He quickly got out of our bus to signal the driver of the F bus that there were two waiting passengers at the stop. I was extremely touched to see that he cared so much that people would catch their bus.”

“(The 99-line) bus driver was very nice, and she waited for me to get to the bus. I am old and disabled and most drivers pass me by, but this driver waited for me, and was very welcoming.”

Contact Sources (attachment 2(G) and (H))

The AC Transit official mobile app remains the method of choice for AC Transit customers wanting to provide feedback. In the last quarter, 49% of all feedback was submitted via the app, widening the gap over telephone (Call Center) calls.

Institutional Programs (attachment 3)

Institutional Pass Programs staff administers the Clipper card production of the EasyPass program and manages Student Transit Pass Program, funded by the Alameda County Transportation Commission via Measure BB, where qualified students in Alameda County can obtain a Clipper card with a pass allowing them to ride local AC Transit lines for free. This quarter, a new institutional program was added: The City of Alameda Senior and Persons with Disabilities Transit Pass Program. This new program provides eligible residents with a pre-loaded Clipper card that allows program participants access to unlimited rides on AC Transit local lines. This three-year pilot Pay-per-Ride program began July 1st and will extend to June 30, 2025. The City of Alameda's City Council approved a \$175,000 annual expenditure on February 15, which allows up to 315 participants with an estimated ridership average of 33 rides per month. Fare revenue for subsequent pilot years is dependent upon the number of boardings. The City also bears the administrative costs of the pilot program, including Clipper card pass production and shipping costs. In the program's first quarter, staff enrolled 182 participants with a ridership average of 15 rides per month.

Overall, the institutional programs enrolled 20,247 new participants this quarter (attachment 3). The first fiscal quarter is always a busy time for the EasyPass program. With the start of the academic year in August, staff is dedicated to ensuring a smooth onboarding for university students. With the launch of the new Clipper BayPass, this quarter was particularly demanding as staff worked to ensure a seamless kickoff of this new program. Additionally, several EasyPass clients have contracts beginning or renewing on July 1 to correspond with their fiscal year. The high new user count in July is due to these fiscal year clients as well as enrolling new students so they are ready to use their pass when they start classes in August. In September, many client site coordinators reconcile their participant count including removing any participants who are no longer eligible for the program. A decrease happens when reconciliation takes place as seen in the September data. The academic programs saw fluctuation this quarter with large additions in participants, but a decrease in overall users. This is caused by a transition period with college programs, generally in July and August, where the user numbers represent the students from the previous and upcoming school years. The user number dropped in September when the students of the prior school year were deactivated, leaving the actual number of students for the current school year. This number will slowly climb until the next cycle. For the Student Transit Pass program, about 6,000 students departed from the program as they graduated from high school and were no longer eligible. However, in contrast, we see that ridership continues to climb. It can be seen as a sign that users actively use the passes.

Call Center (attachment 4)

Call center services are essential to providing a means for individualized and personal customer service for travel, trip planning as well as to provide feedback to the District. It requires understanding, learning, and researching the District's operations and by using other transit assistance websites (e.g., Google maps and Swiftly), site navigation assistance, and knowledge of the District's policies, services, and fares.

The call center experienced steadily increased call volumes during the last quarter of FY2022 (attachment 4 (A)) with businesses reopening and workforce returning to offices now that COVID - 19 activity has decreased. As we move into the new fiscal year, see the end of the summer months, and the Alameda and West Contra Costa County school districts returned to in-person instruction in August, we saw a 41% increase in August call volumes.

The top five call dispositions (categories) represented in attachment 4(B) have been consistent in each quarter where the majority of calls request for general travel information. This category is not specific to planning a trip, but information requests such as "Where's My Bus", which makes up about 70% of calls. The uptick in travel information requests in August coincides with the call volume increases from Alameda and West Contra Costa County School District students returning to school.

As specified in the Request for Proposals, the contractor shall provide service levels that meet or exceed:

- 85% of calls answered within 20 seconds
- 98% of calls answered with 3 minutes
- Average response time under 20 seconds
- Call abandoned rate less than 4% of calls

The call center aims to meet or exceed the specified service levels, unfortunately, call volumes and workforce issues affected that goal. As reflected in attachment 4(C), in this first quarter, :20 service levels averaged 75%

of call answered with the abandoned rate of 4%. While the call volumes steadily increased month over month, workforce absenteeism also contributed to the slight rise in abandoned calls and unmet service levels, however, we began to see improvements as a result of recruiting five new call agents in September.

Clipper Boardings and Penetration Rates (attachment 5)

Attachment 5(A) represents AC Transit Clipper boardings and penetration rates. As of September 2022, overall ridership is still 62% that of pre-pandemic levels. Clipper penetration rates are about 10 percentage points below pre-pandemic levels. Compared to other agencies, AC Transit's penetration rate was impacted more, but it is increasing at a markedly faster rate.

Despite the decline in market penetration rates during the pandemic, the recovery since November 2020 when fares were resumed has increased significantly. Penetration rates in March 2022 were 48% higher than they were in November 2020 (attachment 5(B)). However, the penetration rate has slightly declined since this post-pandemic record high. MUNI's rate of increase during this period outpaced AC Transit but has tapered off since its peak in June 2021. Golden Gate Transit, MUNI and VTA have all seen general increases in Clipper penetration rate since January 2022.

Attachment 5(D) compares the market penetration rates of all Bay Area transit service providers since January 2016.

Clipper Mobile (attachment 6)

Clipper continues to be touted as the District's preferred way to pay. From January through July 2022, there were a total of 1,023,508 trips on AC Transit using Clipper mobile app. Since launch in April 2021, usage had continually increased until the start of the summer months where it appears to have slight decline possibility due to schools completing their sessions for the year. With concerns of an impending Clipper card shortage, the District has coordinated with MTC and promoted Clipper mobile payment options through social media. Additional social posts to promote Clipper covered Clipper discounts, all-door boarding, and institutional pass programs.

For print collateral, a new How to Pay on Tempo brochure was produced in four languages. The new brochure heavily featured Clipper and included detailed instructions on getting and paying with Clipper.

ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES:

There are no notable advantages or disadvantages associated with this report.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

This report does not recommend an action, therefore, there is no alternative analysis.

PRIOR RELEVANT BOARD ACTION/POLICIES:

None

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Customer Service Center
2. Customer Relations
3. Institutional Programs
4. Call Center

5. Clipper Boardings and Penetration Rates
6. Clipper Mobile Usage

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