

Boosting An Agency's Productivity

Translating Operating Data Into Timely and Accurate Management Information

Montebello Bus Lines (MBL) has long had a tradition for operating its services with prudent financial controls. MBL had procedures in place to translate operations data into monthly management reports: the Statistical Information System (SIS) and a traditional Performance Report. These two documents provided management with a fairly thorough overview of the operational health of the agency, but these reports were not without drawbacks. Producing the reports was labor intensive requiring many hours. Data was pulled from multiple sources and systems requiring compiling information into one report. The production of these reports required gathering and imputing data but little time was left to do the most important function -- actually analyzing the data. MBL was eager to consolidate data-entry, reduce the redundancy inherent in its system, and integrate all components of transit performance management into one system that would be effective and efficient.

Montebello's goal of automation and integration fit the objective of TransTrack Systems Internet based data collection software, Transit Performance Manager™. TransTrack Systems™, LLC (TTS) was established in January 2002 to assist transit agencies in maximizing their business knowledge and significantly streamlining processes associated with collecting, reporting, and analyzing real-time operations and performance data. MBL and TTS joined forces in mid 2002. MBL was looking for automation of its SIS and TTS was looking for a market test for its software application, Transit Performance Manager™. The alliance of MBL and TTS resulted in a beta-test agreement, which was successfully completed in June 2003. This beta-test was so successful that MBL determined it would switch systems and began using the Transit Performance Manager for all data collecting and reporting needs for fiscal year 2004.

The Transit Performance Manager Enhanced MBL's Productivity

TransTrack's original goal was to automate MBL's monthly SIS. The Transit Performance Manager™ not only successfully automated MBL's SIS, but also offered the bus line's management a suite of reports to assist with both internal and external reporting, gave them the tools and the time to run a comprehensive analysis on the agency's Dial-A-Ride (DAR) program, and it simplified the expense allocation process.

Montebello's Internal Management Reporting

Montebello's Statistical Information Systems (SIS) provided management with several operational statistics for fixed-route and dial ride services, which included:

- Passenger detail by route and day type
- Passenger revenue by route and day type
- Revenue and deadhead hours
- Revenue and deadhead miles

The SIS gathered data from financial records, GFI farebox reports, and other operational data. Compilation and input of the data was time intensive, but it provided management with the key statistics to determine the overall health of the organization. In contrast, Transit Performance Manager™ gave MBL the opportunity to store the operational data, financial records, and passenger information in one simple and timesaving application. Transit Performance Manager™ rolled all this data into the management reports, thereby automating the production of the SIS.

The agency's Monthly Performance Report, was also time intensive and pulled data from multiple systems. It presented management with key performance measurements for fixed-route and dial a ride services. Performance measurements highlighted in the report include:

- Passengers per hour
- Cost per hour
- Revenue per hour
- Revenue per passenger
- Farebox recovery ratio

In addition to automating the SIS, Transit Performance Manager™ also automated the Monthly Performance Report for Montebello. The automation of these two reports resulted in significant timesavings, which were estimated to be one year's work of a full-time analyst!

MBL's External Reporting Requirements

In addition to automating the SIS and the Monthly Performance Report, TransTrack's Transit Performance Manager™ facilitates MBL's external reporting requirements. MBL will rely upon the suite of reports designed by TransTrack Systems™ to meet the National Transit Database's (NTD) current quarterly and year-end reporting requirements. The Transit Performance Manager™ application has already greatly simplified MBL's quarterly reporting and has become a major benefit and time saver in production of the year-end reports. Montebello's utilization of the software will also enable it to take advantage of Transit Performance Manager's California State Controllers and Los Angeles' County Transit Performance Measurement Program reports. The suite of reports geared to external reporting will result in considerable timesavings, and will permit management to view these reports at will.

Dial A Ride Analysis

MBL's cost savings as a result of the automation of the SIS and the monthly performance report gave it the ability to perform a comprehensive analysis on its Dial A Ride (DAR) program. MBL management suspected that the revenue hours for DAR were not being accurately recorded. Prior to utilizing the Transit Performance Manager™ software, MBL did not have the resources to conduct an analysis of the performance of DAR. TransTrack gave MBL the data collection tools and freed up the

additional manpower resources necessary to accomplish the task. Relying upon the tools to track DAR hours, miles, and passengers in the Transit Performance Manager™, MBL was able to determine that the revenue hours were being inaccurately recorded, and that the actual revenue hours were almost half of those being reported.

The inflation of the revenue hours resulted in a skewed expense allocation. Operating expenses were being allocated incorrectly by revenue hours between the fixed-route and DAR programs. This split historically was 97% fixed-route and the remaining 3% was DAR. After the analysis, it was determined that the split was actually 99% fixed route and 1% DAR. This change in the expense allocation gave Montebello's management the ability to establish an accurate operating cost for the DAR program. Furthermore, another benefit MBL reaped from the analysis was the ability to reduce the DAR fleet by one van, which was a tremendous cost savings for the agency.

Expense Allocation

Additional functionality in TransTrack's Transit Performance Manager™, that Montebello is utilizing, is its expense allocation methodology. This methodology virtually eliminated MBL's offline calculations to distribute costs between programs, functions, and modes of service. Also, the Transit Performance Manager's expense allocation methodology is more accurate than the static ratio between fixed route and DAR that Montebello had previously relied upon. Revenue hours are contained in the Transit Performance Manager™ and the allocation can fluctuate as the ratio between fixed route and DAR fluctuates without having to amend formulas or alter the methodology input into TTS. These benefits result in tremendous advantages to Montebello management, as it is now able to establish accurate costs per program and function without intensive manpower.

Conclusion

Since Montebello Bus Lines and TransTrack Systems formed their alliance in 2002, the transit agency has improved its productivity by having timely reporting of operating data on which to base its management decisions. TransTrack's Transit Performance Manager™ software application has met and exceeded Montebello's desire for accurate and timely reporting of operating data. TransTrack has also provided MBL with the tools and freed up the manpower that has enabled the agency to conduct an in-depth analysis of its Dial A Ride program enabling the agency to reduce its fleet, to have a more improved and accurate expense allocation between fixed-route and DAR and to save thousands of dollars.