

Riverside Transit Agency

Background

The Riverside Transit Agency (RTA), headquartered in Riverside, was established in September 1975 by a joint powers agreement between the Riverside County Board of Supervisors and cities in the western part of the county.

Transit service was initiated in March 1977. During the first fiscal year (1977-78), RTA operated eight fixed routes with twenty-six leased buses and three Dial-A-Ride services. Its service area covered 300 square miles in six cities with an annual operating budget of \$3.4 million.

The current service area covers approximately 2,500 square miles, including fourteen cities and adjoining unincorporated areas of the county. The annual operating budget is now more than \$20 million. During the current fiscal year, RTA is operating twenty fixed routes and contracts for two fixed trolley routes, seven fixed bus routes, two inter-county bus routes and eleven Dial-A-Ride services (referred to as para-transit services).

RTA's Dial-A-Ride services are complimented by Riverside's Dial-A-Ride (Riverside Special Services) plus several independent operators in the western part of the county. The U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Rules established for implementation of the "Americans with Disabilities Act" (ADA) of 1990 require that such para-transit services be available wherever a fixed route system is operated.

Ridership on para-transit vehicles may be by subscription, but the rules limit such riders to 50 percent of available capacity. If the 50 percent limit is exceeded, additional transportation must be provided for ADA-certified riders.

ADA-certified riders are those patrons whose disabilities are verified by medical authorities contracted by the transportation provider. Rules allow the transportation provider to require recertification of riders if their disability is not permanent.

Funds generated by paying passengers average about 19 percent of operating costs. Other RTA-generated revenue comes from advertising and investments. The remainder of operating funds is allocated from federal, state and local transportation funds. These funds are funneled through the Riverside County Transportation Commission that oversees all financial needs of transportation in Riverside County. Capital funds are usually received via grants which must be applied for by the RTA. The use of grants is closely regulated by the DOT. Public transit agencies are subsidized because of the valuable service provided to the disabled and lower income residents.

The senior administrative staff of the RTA has recently been reorganized. Since reorganization, a strong management team is being developed.

Findings

1. The RTA is actively working on the transportation problems of the disabled residents, but still has areas that need to be addressed. For example:
 - a. Bus drivers sometimes fail to call out stops or activate the automated bus stop call-out system to assist the visually impaired.
 - b. Appropriate informational aids, specifically to assist the visually impaired, are not provided at bus kiosks.
 - c. Bus drivers do not always properly secure wheelchairs aboard the bus.
 - d. Reservations for "next day" Dial-A-Ride service are not always available.
2. Bus stops in cities and throughout the county, many constructed before the ADA inception, are inaccessible to wheelchair-dependent patrons.
3. The RTA is not consistent in its ADA recertification program. Those persons with ADA certified severe mental retardation are exempt from recertification. There are some riders with irreversible physical disabilities who will always qualify for ADA certification.
4. RTA cannot always provide the required "next day service" for ADA certified patrons. RTA-operated inter-city Dial-A-Ride and early morning Dial-A-Ride services within the City of Riverside are often reserved more than 50 percent by subscription riders.
5. Internal purchasing and payment procedures are cumbersome and outmoded. Managers are required to hand carry purchase orders to obtain approval signatures, for authorizing orders as well as filling repetitive orders. Present invoice payment policy causes delays by the requirement to manually check and correct billing errors. These inefficient procedures have contributed to delays in payments to some vendors and have resulted in some suppliers requiring cash on delivery or denying further service.
6. The current grievance hearing procedure, contained in the RTA Human Resources Policy, needs to be addressed. The policy:
 - a. does not prevent a manager who terminates an employee from being a member of the employee's grievance hearing.
 - b. allows the Board of Directors to deny a terminated employee a grievance appeal hearing before the RTA board based on the premise that the person is no longer an employee of the RTA.
7. Salary scales for non-union employees have not been increased in more than five years. As a result, experienced, trained, qualified employees have resigned.

8. Lack of space is critical in the maintenance department at the Third Street terminal. Operations are efficient, the area kept orderly and clean under congested conditions. Funds have been available to relieve the situation for some time. It is anticipated that as much as three years will be required to complete a new facility.

9. The Orange Blossom Express is a unique transit service, funded by RTA, tailored for use in the City of Riverside. It has a very low ridership which yields a low financial return.

Recommendations

The Riverside Transit Agency Board of Directors direct that:

1. The correction of and institution of items not in full compliance with the requirements of the ADA be accelerated.
2. RTA management modify existing policy to ensure that riders with irreversible disabilities are exempt from the requirement for ADA recertification.
3. The inter-city Dial-A-Ride and the early morning Dial-A-Ride services within the city be expanded to adequately fulfill ADA certified patron requirements.
4. RTA purchasing and payment systems be modernized to increase efficiency.
5. RTA Human Resources Policy be reviewed and revised as appropriate to ensure that:
 - a. a grievance hearing is not merely a reconsideration by the same person or office that made the original decision.
 - b. an employee who is terminated be given sufficient time, even if no longer an employee, to allow for a grievance appeal hearing by the RTA Board of Directors.
6. The present RTA salary structure for non-union employees be reviewed.

The Riverside Transit Agency Board of Directors:

1. Address the need for the county and respective cities to upgrade all bus stop areas that are inadequate for wheelchair-dependent patrons.
2. Expedite the decision on an additional site selection and implementation of the plans for relief of the

congestion in the Maintenance Department operations area.
3. Establish a policy to require that cities fully fund the operational deficits generated when a city has sole use of unique transit services.