



Expanding Late Night Bus Service: Boulder, CO

Rerouting Increases Ridership and Curbs Violence

A low supply to high demand ratio of late-night transportation options led to violence and vandalizing on buses and at bus stops. With ridership down by 14% over the previous year, a college town sought solutions. A unique town/gown partnership expanded transit service to late-night customers and workers, many of whom were college-aged young adults at risk for DUI. The new routing reallocated time and dollars to create more frequent service to the most popular portions of the original late night route, resulting in 32% increase in ridership and the best October in history.

Problem Statement

Boulder's University Hill is the neighborhood where the University is located and where the majority of late-night consumers, many of whom are students, reside. The majority of late-night dining and entertainment businesses, however, are located in downtown.

This college town was experiencing a dynamic wherein more people wanted a taxi, bus or safe ride home from downtown than there were rides available.

Boulder's Community Transit Network consists of seven buses branded with names and concepts rather than traditional route numbers. The Hop bus, for example, provides quick, high-frequency service to downtown, University Hill and 29th Street Shopping District.

Though Boulder's Night Hop offered two buses until midnight and a third until 3:00am, they were over-crowded, particularly the last run up to University Hill. Additionally, waits between pickups were 30 minutes, so many people would give up waiting and walk or drive home, creating potential risk to impaired pedestrians and drivers, and the general public.

The low supply to high demand ratio also led to violence and vandalizing on the bus and at bus stops, including altercations fueled by competition to board the last ride up to "The Hill" and rocks thrown by those left behind at buses too crowded to accommodate more passengers.

With ridership down by 14% over the previous year and pent up frustration apparently increasing, Go Boulder met with stakeholders to provide a solution.

Stakeholders

GO (The "GO" stands for Great Options in Transportation) is a City of Boulder Program within the Transportation Division that strives to develop a sustainable and balanced transportation system that supports the quality of life valued by Boulder's residents, employees and visitors. They are responsible for marketing existing transit service in the community and developing new programs and initiatives to grow ridership and reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled.

Process

To address vandalism, more police were temporarily assigned to the downtown stops and a table-tent campaign was initiated with messages that read, "Abuse it, you lose it." With limited budgets, police could not continue to both monitor the bus stops and clear the crowds at bar closing time. Although there was a noticeable decrease in vandalism and violence, there was also a steady drop in ridership during this campaign.

Outcome

- Rerouting increased frequency of service from 30 minute to 10 minute intervals.
- More bus stops were utilized in downtown.
- Crowd dispersal from the entertainment district in the downtown area was effectuated more quickly.
- Violence and vandalizing related to transit service was eliminated.
- Ridership increased steadily the first three months, generating a 32% increase over the previous year, and the best October in history. The Late Night Transit now serves approximately 500 riders per Thursday through Saturday night.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

There were few challenges since relationships and funding were already in place. Additionally, since bus transit is flexible, the stakeholders knew that if they tried something and it didn't work, they could always go back to what they had or try something else.

An ongoing challenge is finding a special kind of driver willing to work night hours and drive late-night clientele. As a result, positions are marketed to a certain type of employee and a lot of one-on-one training is provided.

Jurisdiction

City

Funding

The new routing merely reallocated time and dollars to create more frequent service to the most popular portion of the original late-night route.

Spin-off Projects

GO Boulder is interested in assessing where people who have obtained DUIs were traveling so as to better serve these potential riders and the community. GO Boulder continues to investigate ways to fund Late Night Transit services on more days of the week and during the summer months.

Start Date: 1/1/1995 - 1/11/2008

Contact

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