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  Central Texas Rural Transit District, City and Rural Rides (CARR)

Central Texas Rural Transit District, City and Rural Rides (CARR) Achieves Advanced ITS Coordination in Just Four Months with RouteMatch Software and EPV Group

Planning any Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) engagement can be perceived as an overwhelming endeavor, but by relying on sound counsel and partnering with a proven technology partner, it can be achieved - even in a short period of four months.

Such was the case for Central Texas Rural Transit District, City and Rural Rides (CARR).

Serving 11 counties across 11,000 square miles, the award-winning rural transit agency sought to improve coordination between its counties and launch a formal ITS project. Because of CARR's continued increase in ridership, and corresponding increase in inter-county travel requests, CARR needed route and dispatching management tools to act preemptively.

CARR's main goal was to replace manual scheduling and dispatching processes. The transit agency also wanted to eventually move to a more paperless environment with an integrated automated vehicle location / mobile data computing system. When stimulus funding became available, it was then that the transit agency began working with the Texas Department of Transportation. To peg goals and define criteria for the transit agency's request for proposals, CARR worked with the Texas Department of Transportation to employ a third-party ITS systems management consultant, EPV Group, to conduct a needs assessment, procure the request for proposal (RFP), and project manage the implementation.

"We did not know much about ITS technologies and needed help to gain a better understanding before engaging any vendor. Hiring a consultant was one of our best decisions," said J.R. Salazar, General Manager, CARR. *"They helped us identify our requirements within the context of our agency."*

US Company, AVL, Price and Implementation Considerations

CARR's evaluation criteria comprised of 65% dedicated to a series of requirements which also included computerized Automated Vehicle location (AVL) / Mobile Data Communications dispatching as CARR knew its current practice of faxing papers and making copies for reconciliation was unsustainable. Twenty-five percent was dedicated to price comparison, and 10% toward an aggressive implementation schedule.

Central Texas Rural Transit District, City and Rural Rides (CARR)

Headquarters:
- Coleman, TX

Solutions:
- RouteMatch TS
- Automated Vehicle Location / Mobile Data Computers
- RouteMatch Provider Web Portal
- Interactive Voice Response
- RouteMatch Data Interchange Utility

Challenges:
- Need for inter-county coordination
- Rise in ridership
- Need to manage multiple Medicaid contracts

Solution:
- Scalable, end-to-end ITS Demand Response Technology with RouteMatch
- Sound advice from third-party consultant, EPV Group

Results:
- 65% paper reduction
- More than 75% productivity savings
- Smooth rural regional implementation achieved in four months

J.R. Salazar recognized that stake-holder input was critical and thereby enlisted additional insight from the transit agency's operations manager, assistant general manager, and EPV to assist in the vendor selection. Following an exhaustive evaluation process and proof of concept, the group unanimously decided in favor of RouteMatch Software.

"One of the reasons why we chose RouteMatch is because RouteMatch is a US-based company which means our data and support team stays here in the US. Also, we knew of RouteMatch's long-term history of serving other transit agencies around the country," said J.R. Salazar. "This was a big deal to us. We were uncomfortable with the thought of our data being hosted overseas or someone else owning our data. We also wanted to have one point person for any questions we had."

RouteMatch Technology Brings Positive Change

As this was the first major project that required transitioning from a paper-based, home-grown system to a computer-based one, user reception was a concern. Therefore, strong management commitment and collaboration were critical to ensuring a smooth transition.

"It's a learning curve," said J.R. Salazar. "RouteMatch provided us with invaluable, extensive training, but most of us still had very little experience with any technology, much less ITS technology. We never realized the number of settings that can exist in one function. The good news is that once users got acclimated, everything got much easier."

Despite these initial technology teething pains, many of CARR's most reluctant employees became ardent fans of the new technology within a matter of weeks. Drivers, for example, became one of the transit agency's heaviest "power users." They now enjoy more interaction and visibility with the administration office.

"There was some give and some take on all sides, but the important thing was CARR and RouteMatch worked as one team, and went out of their way to ensure that this would be a success," said Marty Loya, Project Manager, EPV.

With RouteMatch's suite of end-to-end ITS technology centralized in one place, CARR has been able to streamline duties and more properly staff its resources.

Of the RouteMatch technologies CARR has implemented, Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) Playback became one of the most frequently used and beneficial. RouteMatch has enabled CARR to monitor vehicle speeds, and track and record the location of vehicles in real-time, which had previously never been done before, helping ensure both driver and passenger safety.

Another highlight is RouteMatch's Provider Web Portal which has helped CARR manage its Medicaid contracts in 19 counties. The RouteMatch Provider Web Portal has allowed CARR to save times and trips recorded, and verify and reconcile each trip for each Medicaid provider. Due to RouteMatch's high configurability and open architecture, CARR has been able to modify and improve the way it uses its web site, TEJAS, where CARR downloads its Medicaid trips. Instead of having to manually input trip details, and subsequently fax and reconcile trip data, all billing and trip information can be easily transmitted seamlessly through the RouteMatch Data Interchange Utility. Furthermore, Medicaid providers and subcontractors can import the trips into their own System's web portal - creating a much needed self-service function.

This functionality alone resulted in significant time savings. What previously took 10 hours from three CARR staff members now only takes only two hours, from one staff member.

Already, CARR has also been able to reduce the amount of paper produced by 65% as driver manifests do not need to be printed and faxed multiple times throughout the day. CARR hopes that as users get more acclimated with RouteMatch's system, this number will rise to 90%, moving closer to the agency's goal of becoming a paperless or "near paperless" environment.

Collaboration Fuels Future Improvements for Riders

According to consultant EPV, usage of the RouteMatch system at CARR is well above industry average within the short time span of four months. CARR attributes this above industry standard number to the pre-planning process that was put in place by EPV and the creative, cooperative approach toward customer support RouteMatch's implementation and client services teams have provided throughout the engagement.

Says J.R. Salazar: "When I speak with colleagues at other transit agencies, they are amazed at the speed in which we implemented our ITS project, and our high level of satisfaction with our RouteMatch team and support. We give RouteMatch a five out of five. What took us four months to do has taken many agencies at least one or two years to accomplish. We have no doubt that our RouteMatch technology will help us continue to improve our service to our riders while allowing us to be more operationally efficient and fiscally responsible."