

February 28, 2000



Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority

One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA
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TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: JAMES L. de la LOZA, EXECUTIVE OFFICER
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT: TRANSPORTATION COMMUNICATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT
PILOT PROJECT FINAL REPORT

ISSUE

The MTA recently completed a pilot project funded by the Federal Transit Administration to evaluate and improve methods of customer information service delivery and participation in transportation planning projects for the Asian Pacific Islander (API) constituency. This item summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Transportation Communication Needs Assessment - Pilot Project, Final Report (Attachment A). Continuation and expansion of the specialized services and strategies implemented through this project would require new sources of local funding.

BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Project

Los Angeles County is a burgeoning, diverse region, in which more than 150 languages are spoken, 18 of which are Asian or Pacific Island. As a consequence of the influx of immigration, more than 40% of Los Angeles County households speak languages other than English. Studies have shown that much of the recent immigrant population places a greater reliance on public transit.

Given the growth trends and changes in demographics, in 1997 the MTA completed a countywide transportation communication needs assessment to evaluate current methods of customer information service delivery and participation in transportation planning projects for its Asian Pacific Islander (API) constituency. In the fall of 1998, the MTA took the Transportation Communication Needs Assessment Study to the next level and initiated a pilot project, a demonstration project to teach non-English and limited-English proficient Asians how to use public transit and how to access information about public transportation.

The project was funded by a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and a local match. MTA hired a consultant firm, Lang and Murakawa, to assist in implementing the project.

Community Involvement

Community involvement was crucial to the success of the project. API community leaders played an initial key role in obtaining the FTA grant and have followed the progress of the project closely. Throughout the process, MTA staff and consultants communicated closely with two community liaisons participating in the project, community leaders, other stakeholders, and elected officials. Additionally, MTA partnered with two community-based organizations to implement portions of the project.

Cambodian Community Focus

Due to budgetary constraints and the desire to create an effective, focused project, the Cambodian community in Long Beach was selected as the target audience for the pilot project. This decision was made after careful consideration of two other options and with input from the community liaisons. The Cambodian community fit the selection criteria well: 72% do not speak English well (1990 Census), and many are non-English speaking; community members face huge mobility problems, with a large percentage not owning vehicles; the population is geographically centralized in Long Beach; and they are serviced by strong community-based organizations, providing the opportunity to develop partnerships.

Pilot Project Tactics

The pilot project employed a number of tactics to meet the goal of teaching community members how to use public transportation and access information about public transportation:

- Specialized brochures; translation of existing MTA brochures
- A community, door-to-door canvass program to hand out information/answer questions
- Transit Information Hotline in Cambodian
- Transit Familiarization Days/Participation in Community Events
- "Try Transit" Field Trips
- Outreach to Asian Media
- Presentations to Community Groups

The MTA/consultants partnered with two community organizations, the United Cambodian Community (Long Beach) and the Western Region Asian Pacific Agency (Westchester) to successfully implement these tactics.

Recommendations

The Final Report includes recommendations to continue or expand the specialized services and strategies tested during the pilot project. The federal grant/local match funded these services through the end of February 2000. New local funds would need to be identified to continue or expand them.

The recommendations, detailed in the Final Report, are targeted toward various MTA departments and include both short and longer term and low and higher cost strategies.

Since the MTA's community outreach function is a decentralized one (Marketing, Customer Relations, Media Relations, Public Affairs, Government Relations, Regional Transportation Planning and Development all operate independently), one of the key recommendations is to designate an MTA staff liaison to the API communities. This person would be responsible for initiating and coordinating API-related activities among the responsible departments. Alternatively, a consultant firm specializing in Asian community outreach could fulfill this role, with oversight from an MTA manager.

Low cost recommendations include:

- Develop relationships between API leaders and MTA executives
- Conduct specific media activities to target API ethnic media
- Create a regular e-mail list to keep API stakeholders informed of MTA news
- Incorporate Asian landmarks on the MTA trip planner
- Incorporate API cultures in cultural awareness training programs for operators

Higher cost recommendations requiring new local funds include:

- Designate an MTA staff liaison to API communities
- Maintain regular communication with API leadership, stakeholders, and legislative staffers
- Continue newsletter and mailings targeted toward APIs
- Develop collateral in API languages and a strategy to distribute them
- Conduct training for community-based organizations to use MTA trip planner
- Implement an ambassador/docent program staffed by API community members
- Maintain an MTA presence at API cultural events
- Continue telephone hotline in Cambodian/expand to other non/limited-English communities and promote this service through media, advertising, etc.
- Continue/expand community canvass program

NEXT STEPS

The pilot project, initiated by the API community itself, is only the first step in what could evolve into a more comprehensive program if new local funding sources can be identified. The low cost pilot project recommendations can be implemented in the shorter term as staff time permits. Other recommendations will require identification of new funding sources and the oversight of a designated MTA staff person.

The pilot project purposefully focused on the Asian community. Other non/limited-English speaking communities in the MTA service area could request similar services. Transit properties, such as the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and GO Transit in Toronto, contract with private firms to provide 24-hour telephonic interpreting services in over 100 languages. This type of approach would be effective to provide transit information hotline service for the multi-linguistic population of Los Angeles County.

The grant-funded project is now complete. Per the grant requirements, the attached Final Report was forwarded to the FTA at the end of February 2000.

Prepared by: Andrea Burnside, Transportation Planning Manager

Attachment:

Transportation Communication Needs Assessment Study - Pilot Project, Final Report