



Florida Department of Transportation Research

Flexible Public Transportation Services in Florida

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Traditional bus service has been defined by its carefully determined fixed routes and fixed stops. From time to time, routes may be re-evaluated in response to changes in a community's structure, changes in roads, etc. Resources and ridership often dictate the extent and location of bus services. In 1990, an addition to traditional bus service was mandated when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required that public transit systems add services for disabled citizens, resulting in the creation of paratransit buses.

Increasing demand for public transit and the need to stretch resources by running bus services as efficiently as possible has prompted further development of transportation services, extending the traditional model to include elements such as rides on demand, route deviation, and flexible routes. The range of options, collectively called flexible transportation services, offer many advantages, including cost savings, serving low density areas, serving special needs populations, and even reducing the need for paratransit services. In this report, University of South Florida researchers examined the current use of flexible transportation services in Florida.

The researchers conducted a literature review to determine the prevalence of flexible transit services and what lessons were learned during implementation and operation of the services. The researchers also addressed these issues with a focus on Florida by surveying Florida public transit agencies. Responding agencies were interviewed, and six transit agencies were selected for more in-depth investigations in case studies.

Case studies revealed that flexible transit routes allowed Florida transit agencies to replace underperforming fixed routes and expand transit service to non-traditional, low density service areas. The use of smaller buses improved access to neighborhoods that were inaccessible for larger transit buses. In all cases, the Florida transit agencies used their flexible routes to provide



Small buses that offer on-demand, curbside service are one possible element of flexible transportation services.

feeder and distributor service to and from their fixed route networks.

Although each service examined in the case studies was highly distinctive, the researchers identified a number of principles that supported successful efforts, such as having realistic expectations, setting appropriate limits to flexible service zones, designing route deviations to work with fixed routes, types of buses, utilization of technology, and others.

The researchers found that flexible transit services are well established in Florida, and they continue to evolve. A wide variety of service options has been employed, responding to local needs and operating policies. Flexible transportation services have been well received by the public. Continuing development of these services offers the opportunity to increase the reach of Florida transit services with greater efficiency.