National RTAP
Rural Transit Assistance Program

FTA U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

Intercity Bus 101 Questions and Answers

July 25, 2023

National RTAP hosted an Intercity Bus 101: State of the Industry Peer Roundtable on July 25, 2023. The session discussed recent changes and how to set up states and communities to successfully integrate with the newly emerging industry. Multiple speakers from a diverse group of backgrounds described the state of the industry, technological advancements, and how best to move forward.

Access the webinar recording and presentation.

Q: Can you share the documents that Travel Washington uses to assess needs and connections and contracts etc.

A: Travel Washington's latest Intercity Bus study was released in 2019. They are also currently working on an update to this study since so much has changed post-COVID and are considering expanding with one or two new routes. When it comes to contracting, potential partners can contact Nina Stocker.

Q: Curious to know vehicle load factor pre- and post-pandemic.

A: WSDOT does not measure vehicle load factor specifically, though the private service providers do. Our subsidized 5311(f) service certainly saw a ridership decline of over 50% during the height of the pandemic. To date, ridership has recovered on most routes between 75-85% of 2019 numbers, depending often on the availability and frequency of meaningful connecting service. None of the subsidized 5311(f) service across our Travel Washington network has been cut since 2019, we maintained the network throughout the pandemic. The only service losses have been across the unsubsidized intercity bus network owned entirely by private bus operators. For WSDOT the goal remains to be access, so ridership metrics and vehicle load factor are not as much of a priority given that we operate on a cost per mile contracted rate for our program.

Q: How are intercity services differentiated from commuter bus services? Are there formal definitions separating the two?

A: Intercity bus as defined by Section 5311(f) has a specific definition. Generally, less than 50% of the passengers should return to their origin in the same day. More than 50% of same-day returns would be commuter service.

Q: Are the types of service related to the demand in the area?

A: Subsidized intercity bus services are usually planned based on the need to provide opportunity. Unbsubsidized services are usually based on demand or the need to connect the network.

Q: Who paid for the North Carolina facility? Is there 5311(f) money in there? Who pays to operate and maintain the facility?

A: 5311(f) funding was not used for the facility. The project was paid for with federal earmarks. The facility is owned and operated by the City of Greenville.

Q: Do you think the current NC intercity bus network is sustainable without future state or local funding?

A: Not all of North Carolina's providers are able to offer in-kind match so the network still requires significant state funding. They are also trying to support local transit agencies in providing additional feeder service to intercity stops through ConCPT funding and that is all state and local. State and local funding is essential to supporting the network.

Q: It is sometimes difficult to get good data from competing private providers worried about proprietary information and loss of competitive advantage. Any creative suggestions?

A: Do not request information from private companies in general meetings. They are usually happy to share information with sponsors, but cannot share information when potential competitors have access to it.

Q: Does anyone maintain a master list of all intercity bus operators in the United States?

A: The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) is building an Intercity Bus Atlas. Also, try Peter Pantuso at ABA or Brandon Buchanan at NBTA.

Q: Did FTA provide or have oversight or regulatory review over the Greyhound sale and its consequences? In those large communities where Greyhound has lost their station, what are they doing? Where are they unloading? What about Justice 40 type implications this and other market realities will create?

A: FTA does not have oversight responsibilities except for its grants.

Q: What is the future of Greyhound continuing to provide intercity in-kind match?

A: To the extent that there are still unsubsidized meaningful connections available, Greyhound will continue to provide in kind match.

If you have additional questions, please contact National RTAP at info@nationalrtap.org. The panelists shared additional resource documents that we would be able to share with requesters.

To subscribe to Chaddick Institute's intercity bus newsletter, contact Joe Schwieterman at Chaddick@depaul.edu.