SouthWest Transit’s Microtransit Service
MPTA 2021
SouthWest Transit (SWT) Overview

- Public transit provider for southwestern suburbs of Minneapolis - Eden Prairie, Chaska, Chanhassen, as well as Carver and Victoria (contracts).
- Governed by a commission consisting of six individuals appointed by the member cities and one rider representative.
- Suburban provider established by State Legislative action in 1983 due to the fact that the existing structure was not responsive or meeting the needs of the growing suburbs.
- SWT was formed in 1986.
- Pre-COVID: Operated over approximately 160 trips per day with 75 buses.
- Major routes bring commuters to Downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota
- National leader in innovation, technology, and transit-oriented development.
- Provider of choice to many special events.
- Pre-COVID: Annually provided over 1.2 million rides.
WHAT IS SW PRIME?

- First of its kind shared ride microtransit service in Minnesota. Service began operating in 2015.
- The general public can request a ride on demand only within the SWT service area.
- Scheduling is allowed for out of service area trips to limited locations.
- Curb-to-curb service.
- Serves our entire service area plus select locations outside our service area.
- Scheduling software (Spare) used to book, batch, and route ride requests.
- Current Fares
  - General Public: $4/ride
  - TAP/Senior Days: $2/ride
  - Mall of America: $6/ride
  - MSP Airport: $8/ride
  - SW Prime MD: $5/ride
SW PRIME FLEET
Prime Performance Pre-COVID

- Average Ride Time: 9.43 minutes
- Average Wait Time: 18.62 minutes
- Average Daily Riders: 378
- Average Trip Distance: 5 miles
- Passengers Per In-Service Hour: 2.29
- Peak Buses Used: 14
- Avg Subsidy Per Passenger: $8.63
- Ride Booking Method
  - 65% Online
  - 35% Phone
- Customer Reviews: 4.8 out of 5
  - Ratings received immediately after completion of rides.
COVID-19 Impacts

- Immediate 75% drop in ridership.
  - Significant ridership loss of certain demographics - seniors and commuters.
- Software allowed us to immediately alter the service to allow for only one ride per vehicle.
- Reduced fares.
  - Essential workers - Free
  - Lowered standard fare to $4/trip
  - Lowered Prime MD - $5/trip
- Driver barriers installed on all vehicles.
- Passenger areas were sanitized after every trip and vehicles are sanitized after every run.
- SW Prime ridership had grown back faster than fixed route ridership.
  - Currently at 80% of pre-pandemic ridership.
- The pandemic required us to rethink the SW Prime service, which allowed for new services to immerge.
New Services

- **Grocery Getter Service**
  - $2 rides to all grocery stores in the SW Prime service area.
  - 9am-12pm on weekdays - period of the day that had capacity on the system.

- **Shakopee Service**
  - $4 rides to/from the majority of Shakopee including Mystic Lake, Valleyfair, and Canterbury Park.
  - Rides can be on-demand or scheduled (to promote batching).
  - Rides must originate or terminate in the SW Prime service area.

- **494 Service**
  - Scheduled or on-demand service along the I-494 corridor between Eden Prairie and MSP Airport.
  - Rides must originate or terminate in the SW Prime service area.
  - Service includes Southdale Mall and Normandale Community College ($4), Mall of America ($6), and MSP Airport ($8).
    - Airport rides can be scheduled 14 days in advance.
    - Park and Fly available at our Eden Prairie ramp ($5/day).

- **Free rides to COVID-19 vaccine sites.**
Lessons Learned

- **The Algorithm Is Important**
  - Suburban vs. Urban
  - One size does not fit all
- Service Area - Don’t Be Too Restrictive
- Operating On-Demand and Scheduled Rides Together Can Be Problematic
- Administration
  - Negative customer interactions has led to increased admin staff time
  - Less staff required compared to traditional Dial-a-Ride
  - Ensure proper fraud protections are in place
- Ridership Demographics Are Similar to Dial-a-Ride
- Don’t let First Mile-Last Mile Be the Only Consideration
- No Standing Orders
- Microtransit Can Be the Public Transit Form of TNCs (Depending on service area characteristics)
  - Think Dial-a-Ride and Taxis
- Be Willing To Take Risks
  - Trial and error
  - Make changes on the fly
What’s Next?

• Electric Vehicles (2022)
• Autonomous Demonstrations
• Suburb-to-Suburb Service
• Mobility as a Service (Microtransit/Fixed Route)