



## Accessible Wayfinding and Navigation – Aira App Implementation

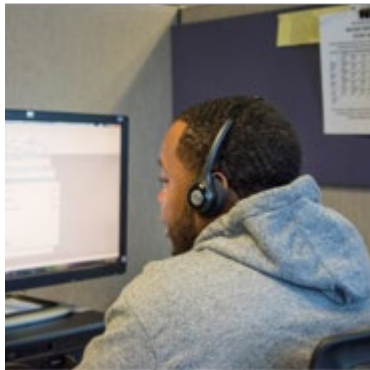
Bre Grand | Transit Information

## Today's Purpose

Provide an overview on Metro Transit's process to pilot and implement a service called Aira, to improve wayfinding and navigation accessibility for blind and low vision transit customers

# Transit Information

- Transit Information department – work to translate complex transit data into accurate, customer friendly information
- Operate and oversee call center, printed maps, static and electronic signs at stops, trip planner, online schedules



# Accessibility Gaps

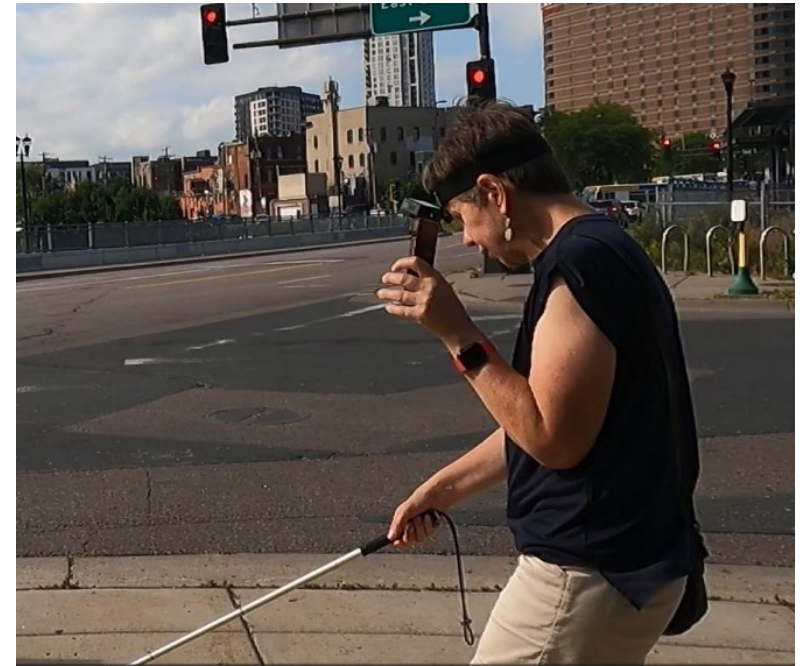
- Lack of wayfinding is a known customer pain point and particularly impacts blind and low vision customers
  - Safety challenges
  - Challenges identifying boarding locations, especially at places with many stops
- Transit Information call center reps provide live assistance, but cannot video chat or see current street conditions
- We wanted to bridge this accessibility gap and provide reliable, real-time wayfinding information for blind/low vision customers

## Technology Review

- In 2020, staff in our department connected with organizations that serve people who are blind and low vision to gain feedback on existing technologies and services that assist with navigation
- While a variety of navigation and wayfinding apps exist, not all provide real-time updates and the feedback we received included a desire to be connected with a human who could provide real-time assistance
- We put out a Request for Proposals for a livestream wayfinding and navigation service, and selected Aira

## Aira Overview

- 24/7, on-demand visual interpreting service for customers
- Customers use Aira app on their mobile device to connect to a live agent, who is trained in principles of orientation and mobility and audio description
- Agent can access customer's camera and location and provide assistance with wayfinding, reading, or other tasks

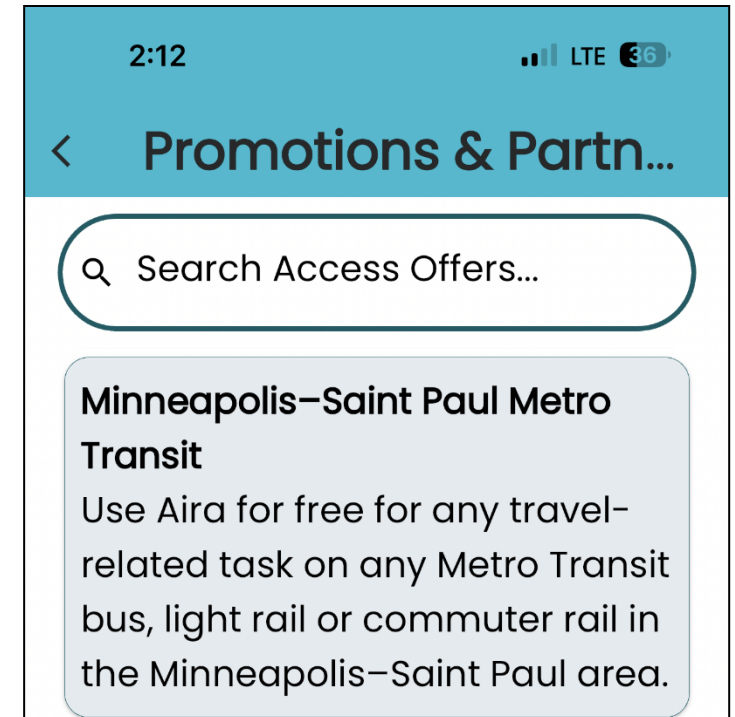


## Aira Pilot & Focus Groups

- Decided to conduct pilot period with Aira to test customer satisfaction with the service before committing to providing it longer-term
- Held focus groups with blind/low vision transit customers prior to starting pilot to better understand the common challenges with using our transit system
- Talked through various pain points along a transit journey. Common themes:
  - Lack of design consistency at stations
  - Bus bunching in busy locations (for example, Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis)
  - Mid-block stops difficult to find
  - Inconsistencies with on-board location announcements

## Aira Pilot Format

- Began pilot period in June 2021
- Aira offered to any Metro Transit customer for any length of time for assistance with their transit trip, free of charge to the customer
- Customers download app and can access offer within the app itself, or let Aira Agent know to apply Metro Transit's free offer





## Aira Pilot Outreach

- Geofenced larger transit stations and centers so that existing Aira users would receive push notifications about our free offer
- Publicized the service through online communications channels, outreach to various organizations, local media
- Internal communications for frontline staff

## Measuring Success

- Pilot was originally planned for six months, but was extended due to COVID-19/lower transit use
- Tracked usage during the pilot period, but focused on customer feedback to evaluate and determine whether to continue service
- Conducted follow-up interviews with customers afterward, for feedback about the service and whether it reduced transit barriers

## Customer Feedback

- Improved independence and confidence when using Metro Transit
- Removed common barriers that customers had previously experienced
- Improved sense of safety and overall enhanced customer experience



## Future Plans

- Ongoing commitment to expanding accessibility
  - Continue providing Aira as one tool, while also exploring evolving technology and low-technology solutions for wayfinding and navigation assistance
  - Ongoing feedback from customers, engagement with local organizations

# Thank You!

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