FTA

FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

REPORT SUMMARY

FTA Open Data Policy Guidelines

Background

The Open Government Initiative establishes the goal for federal agencies to promote transparency, participation, and collaboration through systems that make government data easy to acquire, analyze, and respond to. Under this broad directive, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) is requiring each of its modal administrations to develop open data policies. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is seeking to fulfill this objective internally and also through working with transit agencies on greater transparency and accessibility of their data. Across the U.S., agencies are working to improve information delivery to transit customers by adopting open data practices. The widespread adoption of open data practices is of significant interest to FTA, which seeks to improve operational efficiency and increase transit ridership.

Objectives

The purpose of this project was to identify and document best practices from transit agencies that have successfully navigated the challenges of sharing data in the public domain and to provide guidance to FTA regarding measures it could take to encourage open source data to the entire transit industry.

Findings and Conclusions

During times of increased ridership and reduced revenues and support, transit agency open data activities have improved customer experiences while reducing costs associated with customer activity.

The mechanisms used to identify best practices were a conference workshop and two webinars in which experts provided information, experiences, practices, and lessons learned from their unique viewpoints.

From a customer perspective, delivering data from a back-end operation to customer-facing applications enables transit agencies to improve customer satisfaction, become more engaged with customers, improve the quality of service delivered, and increase ridership. The widespread availability of schedule and real-time information through applications built upon open data ensures that agencies deliver the highest quality of service to their customers and, due to the analytical opportunities of open schedule and real-time data, customers enjoy the benefit of improved service design based on open data sources.

From an agency perspective, benefits include improved efficiencies, greater transparency, enhanced analytical capabilities, opportunities for improved service and performance analytics, and improved relationships with data stakeholders, as well as cost savings and efficiencies that have a direct impact on agency effectiveness. The open data framework also has been used to streamline data collection and information delivery.

Under the Open Government Initiative, FTA should encourage transit agencies to embrace open data practices through advocacy, training, and administration activities. Through promotion and advocacy, FTA could alter the perspective of the industry and provide a roadmap towards open data. By taking advantage of existing training programs, FTA-sponsored training would focus on teaching technology and data management skills and would highlight how these skills will help move an agency toward open data practices. FTA also could alter its existing Master Agreement and Certifications and Assurances and require agencies to conform to open data commitments for all federal dollars spent on technologies producing real-time and schedule data.

Benefits

From an innovation standpoint, the development of the GTFS open data format has had a profound impact on the public transit industry. In addition to providing a platform for customers to plan transit trips using a web browser or smartphone, GTFS data have been used by software developers to create myriad smartphone and web-based applications, varying in function from service evaluation to trip planning to locating apartments near transit services. By making their data open, transit agencies can improve customer experiences and reduce costs associated with customer activity. FTA has many tools at its disposal to lead the transit industry toward embracing open data, which will help it extend its commitment to open data beyond its offices and into the industry, ultimately fulfilling its commitment to open and effective government.

Project Information

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This research project was conducted by Martin Catalá of the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research. For more information, contact FTA Project Manager Charlene Wilder at (202) 366-1077 or charlene.wilder@dot.gov. All research reports can be found at **www.fta.dot.gov/research**.