



# RISE OF OFF-PEAK TRANSIT USE: DEMAND AND RESPONSES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY



Over the last few years, transit agencies across the country have experienced increased demand for off-peak service. This demand has been faster growing than demand for peak service in many cases; for example, in New York City between 2007 and 2012, weekend ridership grew 10% while weekday ridership grew only 7%; the Metrolink commuter rail in Los Angeles saw an increase of 30% in weekend ridership in 2013 compared to 2012; and in October 2012 Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) found that weekday off-peak ridership had grown by 14% compared to the year before, Saturday ridership had grown by 21%, and Sunday ridership had grown by 13%, compared to a 10% increase in peak ridership during the same time period (Jaffe, 2014).

Some of the reasons for this increase in demand vary from city to city, but the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) recent report, *Commuting in America 2013*, sheds some light on worker characteristics that contribute to this phenomenon.

Findings from this report indicate that worker travel is less consistent today than it was in the past; days and hours employees work change, and therefore, so does departure time to get to work; some take different routes to work to avoid congestion or make various stops along the way. Furthermore, with the wider implementation of telecommuting, whether an employee travels to work at all may be inconsistent. These worker characteristics influence commuting patterns on transit, but because only 34% of transit travel time (as of 2009) was associated with commuting trips (AASHTO, 2013), other factors must also be at play.

Industries identified as contributing to less predictable work schedules are the service industry, which has grown immensely in many regions, and also the technology sector, some businesses of which keep unusual hours (Grynbaum, 2011; Jaffe, 2014). One of the additional reasons for increased off-peak demand for transit, common to multiple locations, is the growth of business and residential development near transit

stations. In New York, this development has occurred in "once desolate areas" of Queens and Brooklyn, creating demand where none was present previously; in the Bay Area this type of development is seen as potentially the biggest driver of new off-peak demand, according to Tom Radulovich, head of BART board of directors (Jaffe, 2014). Other potential reasons to explain the growth in the demand are improvements to the transit system, declining rates of car ownership, and the introduction of unlimited transit cards; the last of which was introduced in New York in 1998 and prompted a large increase in weekend rides because it became easier for New Yorkers to take "leisure-time trips" (Grynbaum, 2011; Jaffe, 2014).

In response to the growing off-peak demand, many transit agencies have added or expanded service. For example, Minneapolis-St. Paul expanded bus services for eight routes last summer, increasing frequency, adding evening and weekend service, and extending hours of service, effectively tripling some of the off-peak service (Metro Transit, 2013; Jaffe, 2014); Metrolink in Los Angeles has doubled Sunday service for at least one of their routes, increasing the number of Sunday trains from six to twelve (Hymon, 2013); and BART plans to enhance service to reach a 20-minute base service on nights and weekends, and extend night and weekend service to lines that were previously just weekday, in addition to adding peak service and frequency (BART, 2012).

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# NOTES FROM THE TOP

BY DONNA LAVIGNE



Greetings to all! As always, the Public Transportation Section has a multitude of things going on. Currently, we are completing the reviews of the Elderly and Disabled, Rural, JARC, and New Freedom applications, which we will be submitting to FTA. We are also conducting annual site visits, workshops, trainings, preparing contracts, and conducting outreach to parishes without public transportation. In addition to all of this, we have been interviewing to fill several vacancies in the Public Transportation Section.

As I mentioned in the previous newsletter, Assistant Director, Harold Beck, has decided to retire. We wish Harold the best, and we're happy to announce that Michelle Horne will serve as our new Assistant Director. Michelle has twelve (12) years with the Public Transportation Section. Prior to her new appointment, Michelle served as the Assistant to the Rural Program, the Rural Program Manager, and the Urban Planner. She has strong leadership ability, and extensive experience and knowledge of all programs in the Public Transportation Section. With that said, we are also happy to announce that Casey Lewis will replace Michelle as the new Urban Program Manager/Planner.

Furthermore, Bennie Nobles, Safety and Security Program Manager announced his retirement effective April 1. Bennie has been with DOTD for five years. We wish Bennie the best in his future endeavors.

Joining our team is Tina Athalone, the new Elderly and Disabled Assistant Program Manager. Tina comes with a wealth of knowledge on vehicle and fleet management, risk management, procurement, and budget preparation.

We continue to move forward with our statewide coordination efforts, and are appreciative of the work that the Metropolitan Planning Organizations are doing to support the FTA's coordination requirements. Please make every effort to attend the coordination meetings in your region. Your input is valuable to the success of human services coordination.

Just a gentle reminder for all of our providers, the end of the fiscal year is approaching, June 30. To ensure payment for FY 2013/2014 invoices, please send final invoices to our office no later than July 15. We will be sending notices out closer to that date.

Finally, we would like to encourage you to send topics or articles for future newsletter editions. If you would like to highlight your transit system or recognize one of your staff members, we will provide a forum to do so. We encourage you to share innovative ideas, techniques and uplifting stories about your transit systems and/or special client. We want the transit newsletter to be an informative publication that addresses issues of interest to you and others.

That's it for this time.....and thanks for all that you do to increase the mobility of those in need here in Louisiana.



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS & EVENTS



STAY TUNED FOR  
SCHOLARSHIP  
INFORMATION...



## NTI COURSES

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: [www.ntionline.com](http://www.ntionline.com)

APR 11	Understanding ADA .....	Oklahoma City, OK
APR 22 - 24	Disadvantaged Business Enterprise .....	North Little Rock, AR
APR 30 - MAY 1	Procurement for Small and Medium Transit Systems ..	Columbia, SC
MAY 19 - 23	Transit Academy .....	Dallas, TX

## APTA COURSES

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com)

MAY 2 - 6	2014 International Bus Roadeo.....	Kansas City, MO
MAY 4 - 7	2014 Bus & Paratransit Conference .....	Kansas City, MO

## FTA TRAINING

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: <https://transit-safety.fta.dot.gov>

APRIL 1 - 3	Substance Abuse Management and Program Compliance .....	Baton Rouge, LA
APRIL 4	Reasonable Suspicion Determination for Supervisors .....	Baton Rouge, LA

## SWTA EVENTS

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: [www.swta.org](http://www.swta.org)

APR 1 - 2	The SWTA Effective Transit Supervisor's Workshop.....	Santa Fe, NM
Registration is now open. For more information, visit: <a href="http://www.swta.org/news_events/details/the_swta_transit_supervisor_workshop">http://www.swta.org/news_events/details/the_swta_transit_supervisor_workshop</a>		

# SPOTLIGHT ON...

## New Assistant Director Named

### Michelle Horne Named as New Public Transportation Assistant Director

As reported in our December newsletter, Harold Beck is retiring from his position as Assistant Director at the end of March. After an extensive interview process, our very own **Michelle Horne has been chosen to fill the vacant Assistant Director's position.** Michelle brings an impressive set of skills and knowledge to her new position.

Michelle began her career with the State of Louisiana over nineteen (19) years ago and has been with DOTD Public Transportation Section for the past twelve (12) years. She began her tenure with the Public Transportation Section as the Assistant Program Manager for the Rural Transportation Program, and later became the Rural Transportation Program Manager. Michelle has been the Urban Program Manager/Planner and the Intercity Bus Program Manager for the past six years. In addition to those responsibilities, she has also served as the Senior Program Manager to the Public Transportation Director and staff.

As if the above responsibilities were not enough to occupy her time, Michelle took the lead in developing the grant application for the rural transit systems. She was able to secure an additional \$15.2 million following the appropriation of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). In 2010, Michelle was presented the DOTD Secretary's Award of Excellence for her efforts in securing the 100 percent federal funding through



the ARRA program and for her efforts in coordinating with FTA to secure 100 percent federal funding for the LAS-WIFT Intercity Bus Service.

Michelle's unique blend of knowledge and expertise in the various DOTD Public Transportation programs will be a great asset in her new role as the Assistant Director. Michelle looks forward to working with everyone in continuing to support and improve public transportation in Louisiana.

# DOTD ON THE GO...



One of the DOTD PT Section's mandates is to provide information and technical assistance to transit providers in Louisiana in order to assist them in meeting their requirements for FTA funding. These activities come in many different formats and venues. DOTD PT provides numerous training courses, workshops, and training materials, as well as a website and an annual conference. To keep all of our constituents up to date on DOTD PT's activities, DOTD On The Go features just a few selected items each quarter.

## SITE VISITS

Part of the outreach and assistance that DOTD provides to the Rural Public Transportation (Section 5311) and Elderly and Disabled (Section 5310) providers, are site visits from the program managers. A total of 4 site visits to rural providers and 7 site visits to Elderly and Disabled providers have been conducted during the months of January, February, and March 2014. These visits included Assumption Parish Council on Aging, Washington Parish Council on Aging, Evangeline Parish Council on Aging, Allen Parish Council on Aging, Gulf Coast Teaching Family Services, Inc., The Magnolia School, Inc., Lafayette ARC, Inc., Arkansas Elder Outreach, Arthur Monday Senior Center, Greater New Orleans ARC, and Jefferson COA, Inc.

## OUTREACH

As most of you know, one of DOTD's primary goals is to provide some form of public transportation in all 64 parishes. It is a goal listed in the Louisiana Vision 2020 Plan. To further this goal, DOTD has been conducting educational visits to all of the parishes in Louisiana that do not currently have some form of public transportation service. Extensive outreach was conducted in 2013 and will continue in 2014. DOTD has conducted 2 outreach meetings as part of the Rural Public Transportation Program since the beginning of the year, one with the West Feliciana Parish Council on Aging and the Madison Parish Council on Aging.

## WORKSHOPS

In the first three months of the year, DOTD hosted:

- 3 PASS trainings;
- 3 driver trainings;
- and 3 marketing workshops.

*If your agency or someone within your agency deserves recognition for a job well done, or has already received recognition or an award, please let us know. Email or send a brief description, photos, and contact information to [Donna.Lavigne@la.gov](mailto:Donna.Lavigne@la.gov) or to Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development/Public Transit Section, attn: Donna Lavigne, P.O. Box 94245, Baton Rouge, LA 70804.*

Though the examples discussed have shown that it is possible, obstacles exist to expanding transit service to meet new off-peak demand. One of these challenges is money; off-peak service may introduce new operating and capital costs due to necessary drivers and maintenance and potentially new vehicles. Additionally, some agencies may view moving resources from peak service as risky because rush-hour ridership is consistent, and revenue is reliable. Politics may also be an obstacle as some politicians may favor vehicles or have a rush-hour mindset, believing that most workers commute during peak hours, making peak service the priority. Furthermore, the low-income riders who would likely benefit the most from off-peak service have the weakest political voice (Jaffe, 2014). Finally, if service expands significantly, finding time to perform system maintenance may become a challenge. In New York, where the subway runs 24 hours per day, this has been especially difficult

as ridership has increased on weekends (when they normally perform maintenance); in this case, the focus has become keeping riders informed about service disruptions instead of changing maintenance schedules (Grynbaum, 2011).

These challenges may be worth working to overcome however, because multiple benefits may be achievable as a result of increased off-peak service. A case study was performed by Deka and Marchwinski (2014) exploring the benefits of introducing off-peak service on one transit line in New Jersey, the Pascack Valley Line (PVL). Off-peak service was introduced on the PVL in 2007 and by 2010 its average daily ridership had increased by about 18%. The authors conducted their research through focus groups and rider surveys, surveying both peak and off-peak riders, finding that significant portions of respondents changed their travel behavior as a result of the introduction of off-peak service

and that 69% of respondents (61% of which were peak riders) would change modes if off-peak service were reduced, which indicates that this service is not only beneficial for off-peak riders. Though results may have been influenced by the recession, the authors found that the off-peak trains generated \$3.06 million in weekday revenue, contributed to a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) of 13 to 14 million, and led to a net green house gas savings potentially in the range of 1,545-3,366 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (Deka & Marchwinski, 2014). These findings indicate that if obstacles are overcome, expanding off-peak service can lead to numerous benefits for transit agencies and the larger community as a whole.

## FROM CAPITOL HILL...

According to a press release put out by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in January, \$24.9 million will be made available through its Low or No Emission Vehicle Deployment Program (LoNo) to put non-polluting transit buses in communities around the country. Established under MAP-21, LoNo focuses on "commercializing the cleanest and most energy-efficient U.S.-made transit buses to help reduce emissions like carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide" (FTA, 2014).

Of the \$29.4 million, \$21.6 million will be grant funds for buses and \$3.3 million will be grant funding for facilities and related equipment support. These LoNo funds will be awarded on a competitive basis to transit agencies and state departments of transportation that work with bus manufacturers currently making low- and zero-emissions buses. The press release states that priority will be given to applications that:

- Seek to fund the incremental difference between a standard bus and a LoNo vehicle, as a way to stretch procurement dollars further;
- Incorporate the highest level of U.S.-made content, exceeding Buy America's current 60 percent threshold; and
- Demonstrate a long-term commitment to expanding LoNo fleets beyond what these program funds support, including the use of Federal formula funding

LoNo buses can not only lead to environmental benefits, but also fiscal benefits by saving transit agencies money on fuel and maintenance in the long run, as zero-emissions buses can get more than double the fuel economy of diesel- or other-fueled buses.

