

Moving Passengers Curb to Curb the Smart Way

BY HENRY LI, General Manager/CEO, Sacramento Regional Transit District

Over the past several years, the national decline of public transit ridership has become a significant concern among industry leaders. There's been a great deal of discussion among providers to think outside the box and find new and innovative ways to retain and attract riders.

With significant advances in technology—specifically the increased convenience of smartphones—the Sacramento Regional Transit District (SacRT) has moved at lightning speed to respond to these changes.

SacRT is investing capital dollars in microtransit, a real-time, on-demand shuttle service that operates in designated geographical boundaries using neighborhood-friendly buses. Aptly named “SmaRT Ride,” our microtransit service allows passengers to order curb-to-curb bus service using a smartphone app.

Affordability and convenience have made this new, on-demand service attractive to people who may not have considered taking public transit in the past, and it is one the industry is closely watching to determine how best to integrate within existing service networks.

Working collaboratively with the city of Citrus Heights and software developer TransLoc, SacRT rolled out the SmaRT Ride microtransit pilot in February 2018 as a replacement to dial-a-ride service in Citrus Heights, generating a great deal of national and local media attention.

Within two months, SacRT expanded the pilot to include two additional communities. The original dial-a-ride service averaged 8,000 annual trips, while SmaRT Ride has already provided 10,000 trips in its first four months.

SacRT's goal is to provide a ride with an arrival time of less than 30 minutes and to charge the same base fare as light rail and bus service, making it much more affordable than traditional ride-hailing services.

Thanks to the pilot's overwhelming success, the Sacramento Transportation Authority awarded SacRT \$12 million to expand SmaRT Ride into 10 additional communities. As part of the grant award, SacRT is required to expand into areas that are currently underserved by public transit.

SmaRT Ride will begin serving the community of South Sacramento starting July 30. A grassroots effort is already underway to partner with community stakeholders to educate

residents about the many benefits of the service. SacRT is dealing with language and cultural barriers with the help of civic and non-profit organizations.

While microtransit may be popular among the masses, it is inherently limited by the number of passengers each vehicle can serve on an hourly basis. This is why SacRT is developing SmaRT Ride zones that do not compete with fixed-route service.

SacRT is reimagining a systemwide network that will likely increase the frequency of high-performing bus routes while decreasing the number of lower-performing routes in less densely populated areas. Ultimately, SacRT's goal is to provide a much-needed mobility solution that encourages a seamless car-free lifestyle.

SacRT is excited to be leading the effort with microtransit and looks forward to sharing best practices with peer agencies. The challenge is significant, but we are committed to finding innovative ways to address the new mobility management paradigm.