



Florida Department of Transportation Research

Ridership Impacts of South Florida's EASY Smart Card

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Transit agencies across the U.S. increasingly are replacing electronic fare reading systems with Advanced Fare Collection (AFC) or "smart card" systems. In 2009, Miami-Dade Transit (MDT) was the first Florida transit agency to deploy AFC, branded EASY Card. MDT designed the system to be compatible with other transit providers, including the South Florida Regional Transit Authority's TriRail, Palm Tran, and Broward County Transit.

AFCs have many benefits. Customers can pay for EASY Cards with credit/bank cards and receive balance protection. They can use EASY Cards to take advantage of discounts offered by participating vendors. Use of EASY Cards reduces boarding time and enables MDT to obtain more accurate passenger counts, resulting in better reporting.

Researchers at the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida recently used MDT's EASY Card program as a case study to document issues related to deployment, including organizational decision making, fare policy, usage, revenue, ridership mode, fare media choice, purchase options, and customer behavior related to EASY Card implementation.

From interviews conducted with MDT staff, researchers learned that the pre-deployment education and awareness campaign that used a variety of media and outreach activities, coupled with extensive hands-on interaction with customers at stations and terminals, significantly benefited the success of the program's rollout. Successful techniques to promote the program included distribution of free introductory EASY Cards and, for a short period following rollout, some flexibility in terms of fare payment and forgiveness. Researchers found that MDT experienced few issues related to card fraud, but instituted a zip code validation process and capped the credit charge limit to \$112, or three charges per day, as precautionary measures.



Researchers found that MDT was successful in establishing 84 outlets where customers can purchase EASY Cards, and a program that allows group discounts and pre-tax payroll deductions and, for full-time students, half-price passes.

Researchers found that the EASY Card Stored Value Full Fare was the most popular Metrorail fare category used on seven of 10 of the highest ridership Metrobus routes. Researchers found that ticket vending machines were the highest selling outlets in the MDT system and, although still a relatively small portion of overall MDT fare sales, the popularity of internet sales grew significantly between 2010 and 2012. Researchers found that Metrobus ridership grew from 23.8 million to 24 million between 2011 and 2012, while the sales of EASY Card and the one-day EASY Ticket combined grew by approximately 2.2 million during the same period. Researchers also found that reports of fraudulent EASY Card activity have been minimal and that potential implementing agencies should anticipate significant benefits in terms of enhanced system functionality, control, revenue reporting, and data reliability.

The researchers developed a list of observations and recommendations that may be useful to others considering AFC deployment.