



Florida Department of Transportation Research

Best Practices in Bus Dispatch

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In 2007, the National Center for Transit Research sponsored a study of best practices in extraboard operator management, finding that in most transit agencies, extraboard manpower is managed by dispatchers as one of their many functions. This pointed to a need for a better understanding of dispatchers' roles and ranges of functions and to share optimal practices among transit agencies.

Dispatch functions fall into three broad categories: incident, labor, and equipment management. Similarities of dispatch functions across transit agencies are well known, but differences in operating policies, procedures, and functions of dispatch have not been well-researched or documented. A literature review revealed no previous studies of this subject. This study by researchers from the University of South Florida begins to address the gaps in knowledge about dispatch practices. The researchers investigated best practices, standard operating procedures, and uses of technology in transit agencies of all sizes. In addition to their literature review, they employed a survey and case studies of two public transit agencies.

A Web-based survey was developed consisting of 28 questions that utilized a previous study by the authors for FDOT (Best Practices in Extraboard Management—Optimum Sizing and Strategies, FDOT Report No. BD547-23) and the Miami-Dade Transit Operations Supervisor Manual. An email to members of the Florida Operations Network requested participation in the survey, and 48 operations professionals from nine Florida transit agencies responded, representing agencies running fewer than 50 to more than 250 buses.

The survey covered several areas of dispatcher roles. Many questions related to the dispatcher's experience, training, and job conditions. Another major group of questions concerned operations and technology available to the dispatcher. Employment levels and strong/weak points in dispatcher operations rounded out the survey.



The dispatcher is a critical link in the daily operation of a public transit service.

After evaluating the results of the survey, researchers recommended to FDOT that case studies be conducted at small and medium transit agencies. The agencies selected were VOTRAN in Daytona Beach and Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) in Clearwater/St. Petersburg. Site visits were scheduled, and materials were supplied to the agencies beforehand. Operations were observed continuously for eight hours at each agency, and observations were entered in a spreadsheet designed for this effort.

Based on the literature review, the survey, and the extensive analysis of the case studies, the researchers made extensive recommendations for best practices in the form of standard operating procedures. Starting with the Miami-Dade Transit Operations Supervisor Manual, the researchers added detailed annotations to create a manual for best practices in dispatch.

The results of this groundbreaking study make available to the entire public transit community a roadmap for increasing efficiency and effectiveness by providing a model standard operating procedure and assessing the future curriculum-based training needs for dispatchers.