



Florida Department of Transportation Research

Dynamic Delivery of the National Transit Database Sampling Manual

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The National Transit Database (NTD) is “the Nation’s primary source for information and statistics on the transits systems of the United States”, and it is mandated by federal law to support public sector investment decisions. Public transit has been for several years the fastest growing transportation sector. Performance data drawn from the NTD are used annually in distributing over \$5 billion in federal funds.

Supplying data to the NTD is required of agencies receiving funds from the Federal Transit Agency (FTA); over 600 agencies nationwide submit to the NTD. For 30 years, the FTA has provided reporting guidance through a set of circulars, but these documents cover a limited number of modes, do not reflect the operating conditions of individual agencies, and do not take advantage of modern sampling techniques. In 2010, at FTA’s request, the National Center for Transit Research (NCTR) at the University of South Florida produced the first official version of the NTD Sampling Manual.

Since that release, FTA has identified possible improvements to the manual’s content and delivery. NCTR researchers were asked to review the list of improvements and implement those that were most feasible and beneficial. They also developed a method for dynamic delivery of the NTD Sampling Manual. Dynamic delivery is not the same as electronic delivery; the manual is already delivered over the Internet. Instead, “dynamic” refers to structured manual delivery that allows agencies to customize manual guidance based on their specific operations. The report appendix contains the complete, new version of the NTD Sampling Manual.

Ten potential changes to the manual were grouped into four categories: precision of sampling data; creating additional sampling plan options; reducing the reporting burden; and simplifying the manual. Each improvement was evaluated for its pros and cons; most were used. New manual features resulting from this effort included

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recognizing new modes, adding waivers for small systems, streamlined guidance, alternative sampling plans, and others.

For dynamic delivery, the researchers envisioned a system using a content management system (CMS) to store the manual, assembling and delivering only those parts appropriate to an agency’s usage profile. In this way, each agency creates a custom manual that meets FTA requirements. The researchers used several criteria to review candidate CMS: performs the basic task of assembling a manual based on a user profile; easy to update; allows access to the entire manual; and allows users to save or print dynamically created content. The availability of a wide range of open source materials that would allow customization of the software was also a consideration. Based on these ideas, the researchers chose WordPress, a widely used software suite for producing and maintaining Web sites.

Changes to the NTD Sampling Manual and the availability of dynamic delivery will improve reporting of public transit statistics, better target available funds, and support improvements in this vital public infrastructure.