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Development

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Evaluating the Connection Between Transit and TNCs (Transportation Network Companies) in Pinellas County for Statewide Application

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Current Situation

“Ride-hailing” services, in which an individual orders a car and driver through a phone app, were conceived almost 20 years ago, but with the founding of the first transportation network company (TNC), Uber in 2009, this concept began to change the transportation landscape. Uber was quickly followed by other providers such as Lyft and Sidecar. These services are mostly available in urban areas, but because they address a need that taxis and public transit cannot easily meet, they have a broad clientele, providing billions of rides annually.

In 2016, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) was the first U.S. transit agency to partner with TNCs to provide additional services and a more integrated ride experience through a number of different programs. Direct Connect subsidizes a TNC ride from home to beginning transit stop and from final transit stop to a destination. Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Late Shift is a subscription service that offers up to 25 late-night TNC rides per month, past the typical hours of service for traditional transit. Public-Private-Partnership for Paratransit MOD (P4-MOD) allows riders to book a TNC paratransit ride whenever it is needed, rather than booking in advance. These programs offer valuable services, but evaluating whether they meet transportation and budget goals has proven difficult.

Research Objectives

University of Florida researchers studied partnerships between PSTA and TNCs to enhance understanding of project development and how cost-effectiveness can be maintained.

Project Activities

Through a literature review, the researchers studied agency-TNC partnerships across the U.S. They compiled information about the services offered by these partnerships, their structure, and financial operations, and they examined key lessons and challenges.

Evaluating transit services is complicated because use of these services varies geographically and by time of day and day of week. The researchers collected such information for the Direct Connect and TD Late Shift programs. They examined use patterns for these programs, and as background for the analysis of partnership services, they collected the same information for PSTA in general and its primary partner, Uber. A cost-efficiency analysis was used to examine whether the Direct Connect program is cost-efficient. Finally, user satisfaction surveys were conducted for the Direct Connect and TD Late Shift services.

Among other findings, the researchers found that transit and TNC use grew overall during 2018–2020. Monday through Thursday were peak days of use for both services. For every unit increase in Uber rides, transit rides increased by seven units, indicating that the partnership improved access to and use of public transit. The cost efficiency analysis resulted in specific recommendations for where partnership services would be more cost effective than current transit services.

Project Benefits

This project showed the advantages of transit agencies partnering with TNC services and provided a useful method for evaluating their effectiveness and cost efficiency.

For more information, please see www.fdot.gov/research/.



At certain PSTA bus stops, transit riders can get a discounted ride to their destination.