CDTA Upgrades, Simplifies Fare Payment with Genfare and 'Navigator'

By Brian Sullivan, Lost Art Communications LLC

Capital District Transportation Authority in Albany, N.Y. has never shied away from a technical challenge. When it came time to upgrade the fare payment programs, CDTA jumped in with both feet by selecting a first of-its-kind, fully customized, web-hosted Genfare solution that would make the passenger experience as convenient as possible with new software specific to CDTA, smart card and mobile payment capabilities, completely customized point-of-sale (POS) devices, and a "pay-as-you-go" approach that makes the new fare payment system one of the easiest to use.

Making Fare Payment Easy

CDTA's Navigator system uses a durable plastic fare card onto which riders can pre-load bus fare, tap card over the farebox and the fare is automatically deducted. At $1.30 per ride, Navigator users on the "Pay-As-You-Go" plan save $.20 per ride and are only charged for a maximum of three rides per day. Or, they can choose to pay $65 a month for unlimited rides under the Frequent Rider plan — the same as CDTA's 31-Day Rolling Swiper card.

"We worked so closely with Genfare to ensure we had developed and implemented a fare payment system that was so easy to use, our passengers would not even have to think about it when they board our vehicles," said CDTA Director of Information Technology Thomas G. Guggisberg. "With our Navigator program, we have achieved exactly that, and our passengers have truly embraced it."

"CDTA was the perfect partner for this project," said Genfare President Darren Dickson. According to Dickson, both organizations shared similar core philosophies throughout the project, including riders pay their fares the way they wanted to, which meant they could not eliminate any payment method the passengers are using. "We took an 'incremental victory' approach to how we developed and rolled out the new system. When we needed to take new information to the public, or offer education on a completely new technology, we would be sure to time it so that the passengers were always pleasantly surprised, leading to a quick adoption rate for the new features."

CDTA Director of Information Technology Thomas G. Guggisberg uses the Navigator fare card, which can be used with a "Pay-As-You-Go" plan or a monthly plan.

Navigating To the New System

The team took a thorough approach to reaching out and educating riders on the benefits of Navigator. "We conducted aggressive pilot testing, we worked with the local libraries because we share a similar customer base, we advertised and produced YouTube videos, we leveraged our social media networks, and we worked with the local news media to be sure we pursued every possible avenue to ensure everyone was comfortable with the new system," said Guggisberg.

The Navigator system is as robust and convenient behind the scenes as at the farebox. Genfare and CDTA worked

CDTA on your phone makes getting around on CDTA buses a breeze. Find closest stops, scheduled arrival times or plan a trip in Albany, Schenectady, Troy and Saratoga Counties in New York.

together to develop a customized, user-friendly web-based passenger interface. "We will have up to 50 POS systems in our service area, at an extensive array of locations: supermarkets, libraries, box office locations — wherever our customer base desires them," said Guggisberg. "We needed a small footprint, a versatile technology approach, and most importantly, a system that is easy to use."

"With CDTA, we effectively redefined how we function with regard to POS systems," said Dickson. "The Navigator POS devices are self-reliant and easy for even 'non-transit' customer service agents to use, because like any transit agency, CDTA wants to make it as easy as possible for new customers to become regular passengers."

"We took POS systems to the next level for CDTA," said Genfare Director of Engineering Vijay Balan. "With CDTA we developed a roadmap that includes an 'agnostic' approach where the system does not require a specific tablet or receipt printer, making it as versatile and easy to use as possible."

Improving the CDTA Customer Journey with Mobile Ticketing

One of the next enhancements to the Navigator system is being piloted right now: fare payment using the convenience of personal mobile devices. "We recognize there is a lot of change in the way our customers want to make payments — in transit, as well as in other situations — so we needed the Navigator system to accommodate mobile fare payment," said Guggisberg. "Not everyone is embracing this technology just yet, but in keeping with our approach to allow for as many customer payment methods as possible, we engineered the new system to allow for mobile fare payment."

Like with the implementation of the overall Navigator program, Genfare is working side-by-side with the CDTA team to conduct a pilot of the mobile fare payment features. According to Dickson, the team is taking the same "incremental wins" approach to testing mobile payments. "It's all about continuing to build positive momentum, as we had done before, to ensure we get this new payment capability just right for CDTA passengers."

Guggisberg envisions that once fully implemented, mobile fare payment will be popular with CDTA's various universal access programs that are in place with all of the local colleges and universities as well as with several large employers.

Pay-Off: Happy Passengers

The adoption of the new system by passengers since its official launch in January 2017, has been amazingly successful. "The launch has been so successful that we are already moving forward with Genfare on a number of enhancements," said Guggisberg, "including testing of certain discount and promotional codes, rolling out a smart card for our paratransit customers, and piloting disposable smart cards for riders who use CDTA for shorter periods of time."

As further proof of the success of CDTA's innovative and passenger-centric policies, the agency was recently named the Best Mid-Size Public Transportation System in North America by the American Public Transportation Association.

Navigator users can save $.20 per ride with the "Pay-As-You-Go" plan.

Users tap the card over the farebox to deduct the fare.

Get to Know the CDTA Team:

Thomas Guggisberg
Director of Information Technology
CDTA

With over 22 years' experience, Guggisberg has responsibility over all aspects of Information Technology services and technology initiatives, including Intelligent Transportation Systems and major IT capital projects, such as the Navigator smart card and mobile ticketing system. Currently, he serves as the Program Manager for the deployment of a new Intelligent Transportation Management System.

Anya Rozanova
ERP Administrator
CDTA

Rozanova is the ERP Administrator and Program Manager for the Navigator smart card and mobile ticketing system at CDTA. For the past 5 years, she has served as a project manager on new technology initiatives, including upgrades to existing applications and the development and integration of new technologies with CDTA enterprise systems, such as the Navigator fare collection system and other intelligent transportation management systems.

Michael Bruno
Manager of Revenue Operations
CDTA

Bruno has over 30 years' experience working in a number of financial management roles and management capacities. As Manager of Revenue Operations, he is responsible for all aspects of revenue collection, including the successful operations and support of the Navigator smart card and mobile ticketing system.