

All-in on innovation



VIA Metropolitan Transit's fare collection upgrade prioritizes rider choice while beating the Texas heat

Case Study



GENFARE 

Overview

San Antonio is a vibrant, sprawling city in Texas, where growth was influenced by post-WWII highway expansion. The region has seen steady population increases for decades, and large-scale special events and popular historic sites attract millions of annual visitors.

The region’s public transportation provider, VIA Metropolitan Transit, has gone all-in on innovation to reduce maintenance tasks, boost bus frequency, and modernize the transit experience while attracting new riders and supporting its community. Ridership is up by more than 27 percent since 2021, reaching nearly 31 million trips in calendar year 2024.

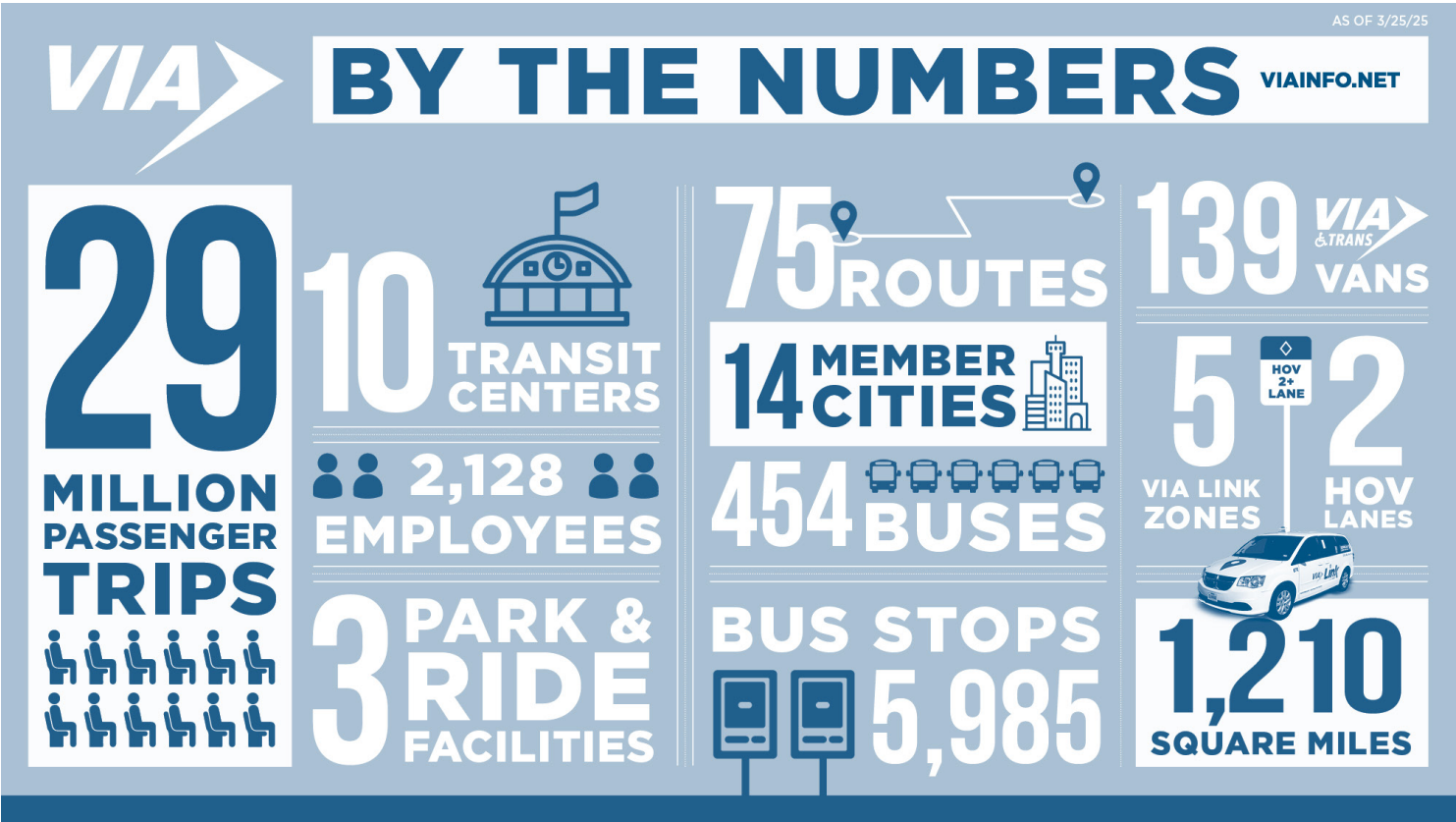
In 2024, VIA was named “Outstanding Metropolitan Transit Authority in Texas” by the Texas Transit Association, recognizing the agency’s work to enhance access and help drive economic development. As part of a voter-approved plan,



- VIA has invested in enhanced services and goals, including:
- **VIA Link** on-demand microtransit service
 - **Smart technologies** such as real-time bus tracking
 - **Its “Better Bus Plan”** to cut wait times across the system to 30 minutes or less on traditional bus routes, expand on-demand microtransit service, and increase rider access
 - **Advanced Rapid Transit**, projected to launch in 2027 and 2029
 - **Sustainability initiatives** including low- and no- emission natural gas and electric bus fleet expansion

To support these future-forward plans, VIA chose to upgrade its aging fareboxes. It wanted to move away from magnetic fare cards, add tap-and-go features to support credit and debit card acceptance, and further streamline operations.

San Antonio, Texas



San Antonio, Texas

The San Antonio region is known for its unique blend of cultures and its rich history, including connections to the Spanish colonial period and the Alamo mission and fort.

Today, San Antonio is a hub for tourism, business, and military installations. The metropolitan area is a major center for bioscience and the healthcare industry, along with aerospace, information technology, and cybersecurity. The launch of VIA Metropolitan Transit (VIA) in 1977 coincided with an era of rapid population growth that continues today.

The city also features a scenic 15-mile river walk. It attracts millions of visitors each April to Fiesta San Antonio, a 10-day celebration. It also hosts one of the largest stock shows and rodeos in the U.S. Its Frost Bank Center is home to the five-time NBA champion San Antonio Spurs.



Goals

VIA's goals for its recent fare collection upgrade fell into three main categories:

- ✓ Resolving maintenance challenges caused by the hot south Texas climate
- ✓ Providing better service around the city's big events
- ✓ Modernizing and integrating hardware and software to improve both operations and rider satisfaction



Beating the Texas heat

San Antonio heat contributed to 90 percent of VIA's pre-upgrade unscheduled farebox maintenance problems, says VIA Fleet Manager Kellen Houghton. The agency needed a fix for its magnetic fare cards, which became sticky during the city's frequent heat waves, jamming TRiM units, eating up maintenance hours, and halting fare collection for the day on the affected buses.

This experience made the fleet management and maintenance teams big fans of switching from magnetic cards to a barcode reader and printer. The new solution is "simpler, much easier to work on, and there are fewer moving parts to maintain," Kellen says.

Boarding crowds at big events

The agency wanted quick and efficient fare payment options for the thousands of non-traditional riders who flow through its Park & Ride Event Service hubs during big regional events such as 2025's NCAA Final Four basketball tournament and the annual Fiesta San Antonio.



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Modernizing fare collection technology

Beyond practical fixes for its fare collection challenges, VIA wanted to upgrade its services by adding new capabilities that modern fare collection technology offers. At the same time, it also wanted to retain options like day passes and cash and coin to continue to equitably serve its riders. New features VIA wanted to adopt included:



Providing transfers and change receipts

The switch to a barcode reader and printer, initially identified as a solution to climate-related maintenance issues, also checked this box.



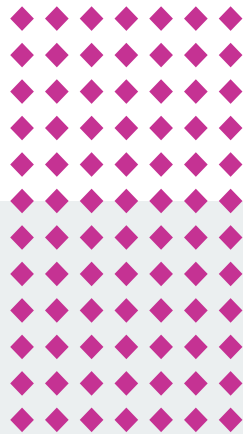
Moving to cloud-based data collection and reporting

The agency was intrigued by cloud-based integrations for collecting and reporting real-time data to help it meet voter-approved service improvement goals.



Adopting open payment

The fleet management team also advocated for the addition of contactless bank cards and mobile wallets as a fare option. It preferred a single-vendor solution for open payment rather than using multiple vendors with different systems. "We thought that this would simplify and speed up boarding for customers, and there would be fewer items to maintain on the bus," says Kellen Via Fleet Manager. "That seemed to be a big positive from my perspective."



There were all these enhancements that would give back time to other departments as well as allow us to better serve our customers."



— Brianna Gaytan,
Customer Experience Project Manager, VIA

Solution

VIA chose a customizable fare collection solution partnership with a proven vendor, ensuring hands-on support for the smoothest transition possible. Genfare’s latest fareboxes, backend software, and collaborative capabilities fit the bill. The first phase of the project, which is now complete, included four elements.



Fast Fare fareboxes

Genfare installed Fast Fare® fareboxes on 457 of VIA’s fixed-route buses, configured to accept open payment, printed and electronic bar-coded media, closed-loop smartcards, and cash and coin. The fareboxes also included a printer that produces paper tickets with a unique QR code for day passes, free 2.5-hour limited transfers, and receipts for a dollar or more in change that can be exchanged for a credit.

The initial plan was to incorporate open payment on the Fast Fares at a later date, but once VIA management saw how consolidating the solutions would further simplify the rider experience, it decided to enable open payment on the Fast Fare fareboxes soon after installation. That feature was up and running within 60 days of the decision, says Luis Cantu, Program Manager at Genfare.

Genfare Link

The heart of the fare collection solution is Genfare Link, a cloud-hosted fare processing platform that centralizes transaction recording and reporting, fare management, integrations, and other administrative and day-to-day functionality, all while keeping data like payment details secure. Genfare Link’s open architecture allows agencies to integrate data from third-party systems and applications, including CAD/AVL systems and mobile ticketing apps.

VIA appreciated how Genfare Link’s accurate, real-time data gathering and reporting would help the agency meet its goals to further improve the rider experience and enhance operational efficiency. The Fast Fares record every fare transaction and event, and Genfare Link gathers this data in real-time, as farebox connectivity allows. This data, such as rider type, payment methods, and location are filtered through analytical and visualization tools to empower VIA to better analyze trends and patterns.

“We first approached this as something that was going to enhance VIA’s operations and give back time to our maintenance and garage staff, but there were all these enhancements that would give back time to other departments as well, and allow us to better serve our customers,” says VIA Customer Experience Project Manager, Brianna Gaytan. “It blossomed into more.”

Administrative point of sale terminals

Genfare installed 13 new administrative point of sale (APOS) terminals to provide easy access to riders’ accounts and perform customer service functions such as replacing passes, viewing history, creating or modifying accounts, generating refunds, and reporting lost media. The APOS terminals also provide a means for riders to digitize cash onto smart cards.

Platinum software support agreement

VIA chose Genfare’s platinum level, Software Support Agreement (SSA) which means the agency has ongoing, 24/7 support and access to Genfare’s Customer Portal for training, documentation, and support tracking.



Future phases

VIA’s board is still considering additional phases in which Genfare plans to contribute fare collection technology to projects focused on paratransit and bus rapid transit. VIA’s goal is to eventually consolidate all fare collection under Genfare.

This will allow for a single source of truth for customer and fleet data, reporting, and overall operational efficiency, says Luis. It also helps reduce rider confusion during boarding, he adds.



A major transformation like this requires having strong partners to support you.”



— Luis Cantu,
Program Manager, Genfare



Project implementation and process

What started as an operations initiative to replace old fareboxes quickly became an agency-wide project. “When we took a look at the scope, we realized if we want this to be successful, it’s all hands in,” Brianna says.

VIA was determined to bring all stakeholders on board with the changes. To do so, it broke down the fare collection transformation into phases including discovery, testing, training, launch, and post-launch. This created opportunities to reintroduce the program as needed and keep staff excited about the process. It also allowed the marketing team to have everything — from the point-of-sale equipment installation to a website revamp — up and running before it reached out to its customers.

In addition, VIA management made sure to share the operational benefits of the new system with its staff members throughout the implementation process, such as how it promised to save hours of time each week and would allow them to devote more of their days to providing better service and participating in special projects.

The phased plan made a big overhaul achievable, according to Brianna. “It’s less intensive for staff and customers,” she says.

Real-world testing

Genfare also helped to pilot test the open payment fare solution, providing further assurance that the system – and the bus operators – were ready to go live. In August 2024, VIA and Genfare deployed teams on pilot buses to observe payment scenarios and the real-world impacts of issues like rejected bank cards or poor-condition dollar bills on boarding time and other potential customer stressors.

VIA reports that it clocked 120 total hours of QA testing leading up to the open payment launch.

“Genfare was really patient with us, because in Texas, it gets really hot — I think one of the [pilot testing] afternoons was over 105 degrees,” Brianna says. “They weren’t in a rush for us to get fareboxes installed, and they let us know they wouldn’t move ahead until we were 100 percent comfortable.”

Test, train, and test and train again

Genfare’s proven process supports a smooth implementation, starting with user acceptance testing (UAT) as a standard and earning buy-in from agency personnel. Engagement during VIA’s UAT sessions was so strong that the agency now requires UAT from its other vendors, Brianna says.

“It was so successful with Genfare, and we saw how we could mimic it with other implementations. Not only for technology, but other types of projects as well,” she says.

Dedicated onsite support made multiple training sessions possible for different groups across VIA’s departments, familiarizing everyone from customer service to marketing to bus operators with the new equipment and the many new payment options. Testing and training were also customized to each role, and even to learning style, ensuring that everyone was comfortable with scenarios they might encounter while using or maintaining the system.

“Genfare adapted to the different audiences,” Brianna says. “They would try different methods as needed, such as meeting one-on-one for additional training on the farebox, or showing the old and new fareboxes side by side,” so that personnel understood the differences.

“I know a lot of people from the VIA team were impressed with that,” Brianna adds. “Sometimes vendors are like, ‘this is my baby.’ But I don’t think we ever heard a ‘no’ or a defensive answer from Genfare.”



Onsite support

To facilitate this intensive training and ensure a successful rollout, Genfare Program Manager Luis Cantu remained on site throughout. “I personally stayed for two months in San Antonio to make sure that they got up and running,” he says. “Going through a major transformation like this really requires having strong partners to support you.”

“We had a great project team leading up to implementation,” Kellen adds. “It was great working with Luis and his [team].”

VIA has been proactive in taking advantage of Genfare support for technical issues or ad hoc training as needed. For example, when the first Fiesta San Antonio since the implementation rolled around in April, VIA management requested refresher training. Luis returned to San Antonio to ensure that VIA personnel were comfortable with the new fare collection solutions and that attendees would have a hassle-free experience as they traveled to and from the 10-day event.

Marketing and outreach

Riders got an intensive education as well. VIA spent 936 hours doing grassroots outreach to inform riders about the farebox upgrade and the replacement of VIA’s magnetic fare card with its reloadable, tap-and-go GoCard and preloaded, limited-use GoCard lite, focusing on customer convenience and new ways to pay.

The agency’s efforts also included an informative webpage and video highlighting its “Tap into convenience” campaign and “street teams” who manned information stations across the network and had face-to-face discussions at its transit centers. Team members wore branded T-shirts with a QR code on the back that passengers could scan to learn about the new fare options as they rode the bus. Genfare shared advice and marketing tips based on what its other transit agency customers had found successful.

Training at every step

Genfare makes sure your staff knows the ins and outs of your agency’s solution, from pre-implementation through the life of your products.



On-site

Before your solution is installed, we conduct a 5-day, in-person train-the-trainer course covering the operation and maintenance of your new products. This gives your team time to train your drivers and other operators.



Virtual

Before you adopt a new solution, we conduct virtual training sessions in a lab environment. When your system is launched, training on how to create, use, and analyze reports continues with live data.



Follow-up

We can return to repeat courses or offer refreshers as your staff turns over or simply needs to brush up on how to use and maintain your solutions. On-demand training videos and documents are available on our customer portal at any time.



On demand

Our Customer Portal is the gateway to 24/7, on-demand training. A robust and continually updated library of training videos, knowledge base articles, and user manuals cover the use, maintenance, management, and troubleshooting of Genfare products along with the features and functions of our solutions. Supervisors can assign training tracks to their team members and monitor progress.

TAP INTO CONVENIENCE

Now you can pay quickly and easily with a credit card or phone—right on the bus!



“

A phased approach made the upgrade less intensive for staff and customers.”

— Brianna Gaytan,
Customer Experience Project Manager, VIA



Results and Takeaway

More than 6,000 open payment transactions were completed at VIA bus fareboxes in the first four weeks of its tap-to-pay rollout, and data shows the agency started reaping the benefits of its upgraded fare collection system right away. It recorded a 5.4 percent year-over-year improvement in bus on-time performance in February, its first month with tap-to-pay functionality, and a 4.5 percent improvement in March.

“It can take months to see any improvements in these cases, but we started seeing it right away,” Brianna says.

Events went smoothly

The 2025 NCAA Final Four basketball championship and the annual Fiesta San Antonio gave special event riders the opportunity to skip long, hot lines to purchase fares. With the new fare options, they could tap their bank cards or mobile wallets and board quickly to enjoy air conditioning and Wi-Fi on the buses.

Maintenance calls fell sharply

There has also been a huge reduction in unscheduled maintenance calls, reports Kellen. By replacing the former TRiM unit for magnetic card processing with a barcode printer and reader, VIA said goodbye to jams and other heat and humidity-provoked problems throughout the fleet.

Unjamming TRiM units “was just a part of our daily maintenance,” he says. With the new hardware and fare media solutions, those problems “disappeared overnight,” he adds.

Reporting provided clear insights

In addition, VIA’s consumer analytics team was immediately able to use Genfare Link’s data collection and reporting capabilities to be more structured and strategic about customer education. It has identified routes with a high utilization of open payment, allowing precisely targeted marketing and outreach efforts along those routes.

“We’ve never had that line of sight before,” Brianna says. And it will only get better – the team expects the insights will become even more impactful once the data is completely consolidated into Genfare Link.

Service and support got easier

The agency also continues to take full advantage of Genfare’s Software Support Agreement, with priority access to customer care and technical support, and access to its Customer Portal for easier management of the new farebox experience.

“Genfare was really committed to getting us whatever we needed,” Brianna says. “It’s been wonderful. Their support really made a difference.”



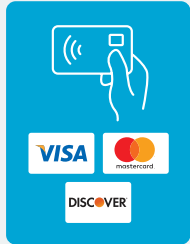
Solution Delivered



Fast Fare fareboxes



GENFARE link



Open payment



Software Support Agreement



Smart cards and Limited use contactless cards



Administrative and retail point-of-sale terminals

Magnetic card jams “disappeared overnight” with the new fare media solution.



— Kellen Houghton,
Fleet Manager, VIA



We'll make it work for you

We understand the funding and timing constraints transit agencies face. Whether you need a rapid, full-solution fare collection implementation or a phased approach spread out over multiple years, Genfare can make it happen.

Contact your Business Development Director to learn more about how Genfare can support your transit agency's needs within your budget and timeframe.



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