



How to build an on-demand transit service.



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At Via, we believe TransitTech can empower any public entity, from large transit agencies to small municipal governments, to deliver highly customized on-demand transit solutions to their residents. Perhaps you work for a transit agency, and planning and delivering transit services is your entire job — but you're not quite sure where to start with launching an on-demand complement to your fixed-route bus network. Or, maybe you work in a mayor's office, and transit isn't even in your job description — but you know that the administration's housing, education, economic development, and healthcare goals would all be easier to accomplish with a more reliable mobility network in place.

This guide is for both of you, and for every public employee in between. Think of it as a conversation that begins with two questions: what do you want to build, and what help do you need to build it? After answering those questions, the options are limitless — as microtransit's chief advantages are its flexibility, customization, and speed to launch.

So everyone can get on the same page, we'll start at the beginning: first covering funding and procurement, then service design, driver and vehicle management, customer support, and, finally, ongoing service optimization. If as you read, you think, "we're all set with funding" or "we've already drawn our service zone," great! Skip those sections — we'll meet you wherever you need us.

You're the expert on your city or region and we're the experts on launching and running microtransit. When we work together, you tell us the problem you're trying to solve, and we can handle the rest in partnership with you.

As you read this guide, you'll meet experts from a number of specialized teams at Via and we encourage you to reach out to them with further questions!

You can also always contact us at
partnerships@ridewithvia.com
for general questions and information.

Microtransit and leadership.

Redesigning a network or launching a new transit mode takes strong leadership. Leaders come to us with diverse backgrounds and sets of experience, but share a desire to work creatively to solve their communities' most pressing issues: equitable access to jobs and education, environmental sustainability, economic development, health, and safety. This guide will show you the practical 'how' of building microtransit — but first, we want you to hear from two leaders about the 'why'.



Carlos Cruz-Casas

Chief Innovation Officer, Department of Transportation and Public Works, Miami-Dade County

Ever since he joined the Department of Transportation and Public Works at Miami-Dade County nearly seven years ago, Carlos Cruz-Casas has faced a challenging assignment: overseeing how nearly three million people move in a county larger than some states.

Carlos initially saw microtransit as a way to relieve oversubscribed parking lots at rail stations, and worked with Via to launch GO Connect microtransit zones offering first- and last-mile service for commuters. But soon, he began thinking of microtransit as one component of a holistic mobility strategy that looked to outcomes-based metrics like access and coverage.

Now Chief Innovation Officer for the County, Carlos continues to leverage technology to ensure that mobility advancement in Miami-Dade County moves faster than “government speed,” as he puts it.



Barkha Patel

Director of Infrastructure, City of Jersey City

When Barkha Patel joined the City of Jersey City as a transportation planner, her work initially focused on innovative methods for improving streets for pedestrians and cyclists. Though nearly half of Jersey City's population commuted by some form of public transit, the City had no control of the network, which was administered by the statewide agency NJ Transit.

Encouraged by the success of her street-based projects, Barkha and other City officials began exploring their options for City-operated transit — and soon arrived at microtransit as a solution for supplementing the existing bus and light-rail services. Barkha credits City leadership for their willingness to look at transportation projects as experiments and the city itself as a “lab.”

After two and a half years of service marked by record-breaking ridership, the City is now reviewing service data to plan updates that ensure microtransit delivers on its original promise: offering residents in transit deserts an affordable way into the wider transit network.

Design your service.

Microtransit, just like any other transit service, exists to meet a need in your community. Defining that need is the first step toward building a successful service. On-demand transit is not a catch-all solution, but it is well-suited to a variety of use cases and types of mobility. The primary advantage microtransit maintains over more conventional, fixed-route buses, is that it offers flexibility and potentially lower capital and operating costs.

These advantages can be realized whether you work with a vendor to deliver software and operations management (what we call “turnkey” service), or you just need microtransit software to use with your own vehicles and drivers. If you’ve already invested in vehicles or have a pool of drivers at the ready, procuring software alone may be a cost-effective way to proceed. Costs for turnkey services are typically assessed on a vehicle-hour basis, with very little capital expense required upfront, which can be a great option for cities or agencies looking to spin up new services quickly without a fleet at the ready.

Regardless of your operational model, careful planning before launch can maximize the chances of your new service’s immediate success, as well as provide more detailed insight into the likely costs and community impact.

Transit planner David Perlmutter, a member of our Via Strategies consulting group (more on that later), explains some of the most common applications for microtransit and how to know which model might work for your community.





David Perlmutter

Via Strategies

I've worked as a transit planner for nearly 10 years and watched as microtransit has grown from an experimental mode dominated by small pilot services, to a stable and critical component of multimodal networks throughout the country. As a member of the Strategies team, I consult for a wide variety of clients: from agencies conducting full network reviews, to small cities and rural areas looking to introduce public transit for the very first time.

We've seen microtransit used successfully all over the world, and in contexts as diverse as our partners. Here are three of the most common problems we've seen microtransit solve.

Need:

"I'm trying to improve mobility in a city or region with relatively low population density and little to no existing public transit."

Solution:

City- or region-wide microtransit.

Example: Arlington, Texas is a large but lower-density city where the sole public transit mode is microtransit. The service launched in phases, growing to encompass the entire city in early 2021. Microtransit has proven an effective way of delivering car-free mobility in a sprawling and previously car-dependent city.

Problem:

"My region has high-quality, high-frequency public transit, but not in every area. Some people living farther away from these hubs have trouble taking advantage of the infrastructure we've already built."

Solution:

First- and last-mile microtransit.

Example: In Seattle, King County Metro and Sound Transit offer a dense network of light-rail and bus lines — but areas to the south of the city were largely disconnected. Via to Transit, a microtransit service that limits trip origins and destinations to select transit stops and points of interest, extends the reach of pre-existing fixed-route options.

Problem:

"While my region does have fixed-route public transit, nobody rides it, and the cost-per-trip for running these services is getting way too high."

Solution:

Replacement of underperforming fixed-route service.

Example: After analyzing their fixed-route bus network, Hall Area Transit in Gainesville, Georgia found that many routes were underproductive and had high costs per passenger. The agency contracted with Via to replace these routes with microtransit zones, covering the same areas at a lower cost-per-trip.

Want to start exploring service design options for microtransit in your community?
Reach out to David at strategies@ridewithvia.com.

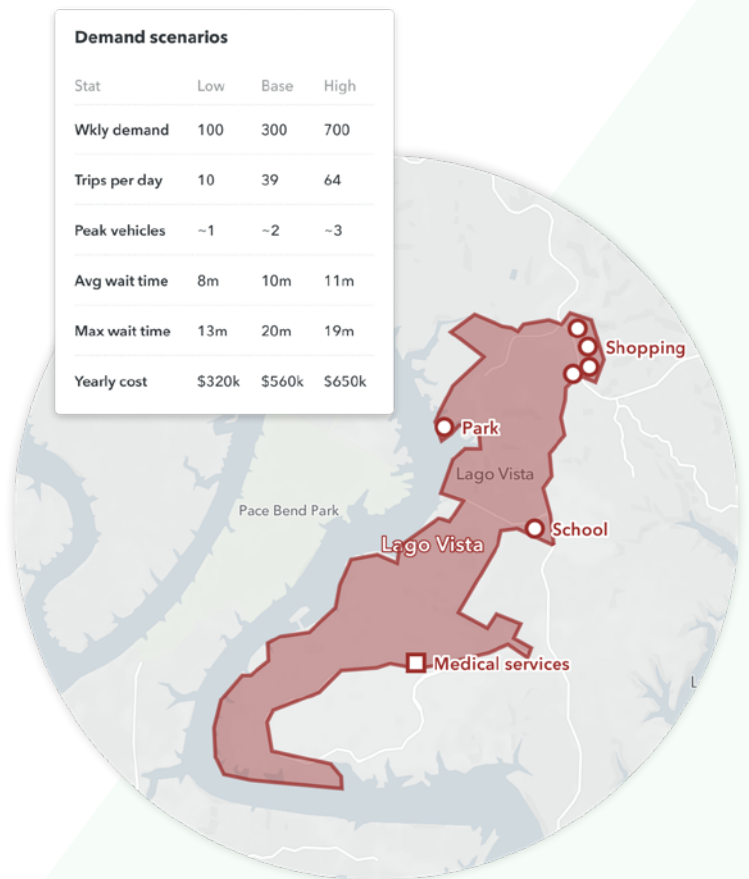
Via helps prospective partners explore their microtransit options in two main ways:

1. Transit consulting services through our Via Strategies team.

- David and his team begin with an evaluation of a community's existing transportation options (e.g. fixed-route modes, paratransit, or dial-a-ride). Wherever possible, they design microtransit to complement existing transportation networks by offering riders convenient opportunities to transfer between microtransit and other modes, so that together they function as an integrated transit network. This is especially important if the community has a frequent bus or train service nearby.
- The team ensures that microtransit effectively serves a wide range of community destinations that help to drive a balanced distribution of rider demand throughout the day. This includes places of employment, shopping and medical centers, schools, recreation areas, and other important community assets.
- Then the team runs extensive, localized simulations of potential zones by tweaking various features of our core algorithm, and offer operational insights gleaned from Via's global services.

2. On-Demand Planning in the Remix planning software suite.

- In the same way transit agencies use Remix to estimate the vehicle requirements and costs of new fixed routes, On-Demand Planning lets you draw proposed microtransit zones and assess the relationship between fleet size, service costs, and quality of service.



Secure your funding.

You've worked out how microtransit will fit into your existing transit ecosystem. Now it's time to plan a funding strategy for your new service. Like most public transit services, farebox recovery is a part of the funding picture for microtransit, but additional sources (local, state, and federal) are typically required to sustain the service on a long term basis.

If you work for a transit agency, you know how to fund a traditional transit service through formula funds, grants, and local taxes, but you might be unsure as to whether microtransit is eligible for these same pools of funding. If you're a city employee, you might not know where to start with funding transit.

Via's Grants Lead, Rachel DiSalvo, can take you through the basics of funding microtransit through traditional sources and offer a few alternative suggestions you may not have considered.



Rachel DiSalvo | Via's Grant Lead

As a member of Via's Policy and Grants team, I work with cities and transit agencies all over the country to help them identify and win funding for microtransit services. Our partners typically use a mix of the following funding sources:

- **Formula funds.** Microtransit has been eligible for formula funds since 2016. The mix of capital and operational expenses that are eligible — and the local match required — varies by the population of the area to be served by transit, but we have been able to find solutions for cities and agencies of many sizes and budgets.
 - The City of Arlington, Texas funds its on-demand service with 5307 funds for large urban areas, while the City of Wilson, North Carolina leverages 5311 funds for rural areas. King County Metro, the transit agency serving Seattle, also makes use of 5307 funds.
 - Operating expenses for turnkey services can be funded using money traditionally reserved for capital expenses through the FTA's "capital cost of contracting" policy.
 - **Competitive grants.** Many Via partners have successfully applied for competitive grants to launch or expand their on-demand services.
 - These grants are sometimes earmarked as innovation- or demonstration-focused, such as the Integrated Mobility Innovation Grant that funds the autonomous vehicles operating in Arlington's fleet, but we encourage partners to look at grants with a wide range of goals. Emissions reduction, workforce transportation, accessibility, equity, and academic research-focused grants have all funded Via-powered services. There's a lot out there, but don't worry. Sorting through all of the noise and finding the best grants for your potential service is what my team is here for.
 - **Ballot measures.** Conventional transit is often funded through local taxes, with ballot measures giving the public an opportunity to decide how their taxes are spent. Transit-related ballot measures typically have a high success rate — 100% have passed in 2021 — and have been increasingly used to fund microtransit projects.
- Outside of traditional government funding sources, we have also helped our partners establish novel programs and partnerships to support their ongoing microtransit operations:
- **Partnerships with hospitals, universities, and employers.** Transit can further the goals of many private entities, from transporting patients to clinic appointments to offering third-shift workers a viable option for late-night travel. Many Via partners have successfully worked with local businesses to subsidize a portion of the service cost in exchange for extended service hours, preferred bookings, free trips for employees, or other perks.
 - **Advertising on vehicles or in-app.** Vehicle toppers, in-app promotions, and even service naming rights sponsorships (à la "Citibike" in New York City) can help defray operational costs and increase long-term service viability.
 - **Community and business development groups.** Some Via services are funded as collaborative efforts between government entities and private development groups. These groups often have an interest in increasing mobility, whether to foster equity or facilitate access to local businesses.

Ready to look for funding options that could be right for your community? Reach out to Rachel at grants@ridewithvia.com.

Find your vendor partner.

Now that you have a preliminary service design and a plan to fund your new service, you're ready to solicit vendors. There are two main ways to approach this process:

- 1 Sole-sourcing, or contracting directly with a preferred vendor partner.
- 2 Issuing a competitive request for proposals (RFP) for services.

Via's partners have relied on both of these models to procure services. Regardless of which model you pursue, the first step for procuring microtransit services is determining **which aspects of service you plan to handle "in-house," and which you expect your vendor partner to deliver.**

For example:

A city official who lacks experience directly overseeing transit projects might prefer to procure a "turnkey" microtransit service that leaves operational management to an experienced vendor.

A large agency with spare vehicles and a robust driver pool may decide that all they need from their vendor is a software platform to manage the service, take bookings, and communicate schedules to drivers.

Or, in the interest of launching their new service as quickly as possible or conserving existing agency resources for other projects, agency leaders may seek a turnkey service.

Both the size of the contract and required vendor capabilities — two key factors when considering sole-source vs. RFP — will be determined by the scope of software and services you want to procure. While RFP is often the default procurement model, especially for transit agencies, we have seen successful sole-source procurements in situations like the following:

- **Low-cost, pilot-length projects.** Many jurisdictions have a contract size threshold, which means that many sole-source deals involve software only and may be structured as short-term test or "pilot" programs. Though adding in operations increases the cost of the contract and may reduce sole source eligibility, it does not necessarily drive up the overall budget for the service.
- **Complex services requiring unique vendor capabilities.** While many vendors offer microtransit software, fewer offer turnkey services, and even fewer are able to offer features like commingling microtransit and ADA paratransit, operating in low-connectivity or unmapped environments, and seamlessly integrating with transit planning software. If your proposed turnkey service may require something beyond pure on-demand software, you may be able to sole-source on the basis that only a single vendor is capable of delivering the contract.
- **Emergency circumstances.** If you currently operate a transit service that fills a critical need (ADA paratransit service, for example) and your current contractor is delivering suboptimal results that put your riders at risk, you may be able to replace them on an emergency basis without going through typical procurement processes.

Of course, your procurement and legal teams will be the best placed to determine whether a potential project is eligible for sole-sourcing in your state or city.

If your project is not eligible to be sole-sourced, your team will need to issue an RFP — or other formal bid mechanism, such as a request for quotes (RFQ) or sealed bid selection — and evaluate responses.

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We asked **Dan Schlaff, the leader of our proposal team**, to put together his top tips for writing a microtransit RFP that will solicit high-quality proposals and provide the information you need to make your decision.



Dan Schlaff | VP of Strategy and Business Development

As VP of Strategy and Business Development, I've led our proposal team for the past few years as we have responded to hundreds of requests for proposals (RFPs), requests for information (RFIs), requests for quotations (RFQs), and more. Writing an RFP is an art: we've seen requests that are overly vague, but also requests that are overly prescriptive, with compliance matrices that leave little room for creative solutions. We've assembled the following guidelines that can help you develop an RFP that will invite comprehensive responses that meet your specific transportation needs.

1 Take the time for intelligence gathering.

As a transit professional, you may already know that the current market is full of innovative technologies that seriously vary in capabilities, maturity, and price. Open, informative exercises typically allow cities and agencies to develop better RFPs that encourage more competitive responses from vendors. This discovery stage can help you shape and refine your exact needs, leading to a more efficient process and fewer project delays down the road. So whether it's by way of a free-flowing conversation or even a more formalized request for information (RFI), don't be afraid to ask for information that may help you develop an RFP.

2 Describe the problem, not the solution.

When you're clear about the problem at-hand — whether its limited transit coverage in predominantly low-income areas or city buses that aren't adequately serving people with disabilities — vendors are able to use the full scope of their resources to brainstorm creative solutions. An RFP that goes into exhaustive technical details about the required software or service will ensure compliance with a very specific vision, but may prevent vendors from proposing a holistic solution based on their experiences. When given the freedom, vendors can suggest solutions that you (and your consultants) may have never imagined. Be bold with your vision, but give vendors the opportunity to chart the path toward it.

3 Set high standards for your ideal collaboration.

Some cities and agencies seek a true collaborative partner with whom they can brainstorm ideas; others would prefer an experienced player who can quickly execute a specific, articulated plan. RFPs should establish clear guidelines for the partnership: from implementation, to ongoing support. We've found that cities and agencies who aren't afraid to ask for broad-based support (like a robust launch team and a point of contact solely devoted to the service's success) naturally attract more multifaceted firms, with a diverse set of experiences and services to bring to your project.

4 Look for a partner that can back up its claims.

It's vital to discern the difference between a shiny sales pitch and a partner who actually knows what they're doing. In developing your scoring criteria for RFP responses, we recommend giving a higher grade to real-world experience. If a vendor is claiming they can do detailed transit planning, deliver on-demand transit, incorporate fixed routes into a multimodal app, offer call center support, and integrate with your network's payment methods.... Where? With which partners? If they claim it, they better be able to back it up.

Planning an RFP and curious to see examples or get personalized recommendations? Reach out to Dan at procurement@ridewithvia.com. Or, if your project is eligible for sole-sourcing, reach out to partnerships@ridewithvia.com to discuss how we can work together directly.

Develop your brand and market your service.

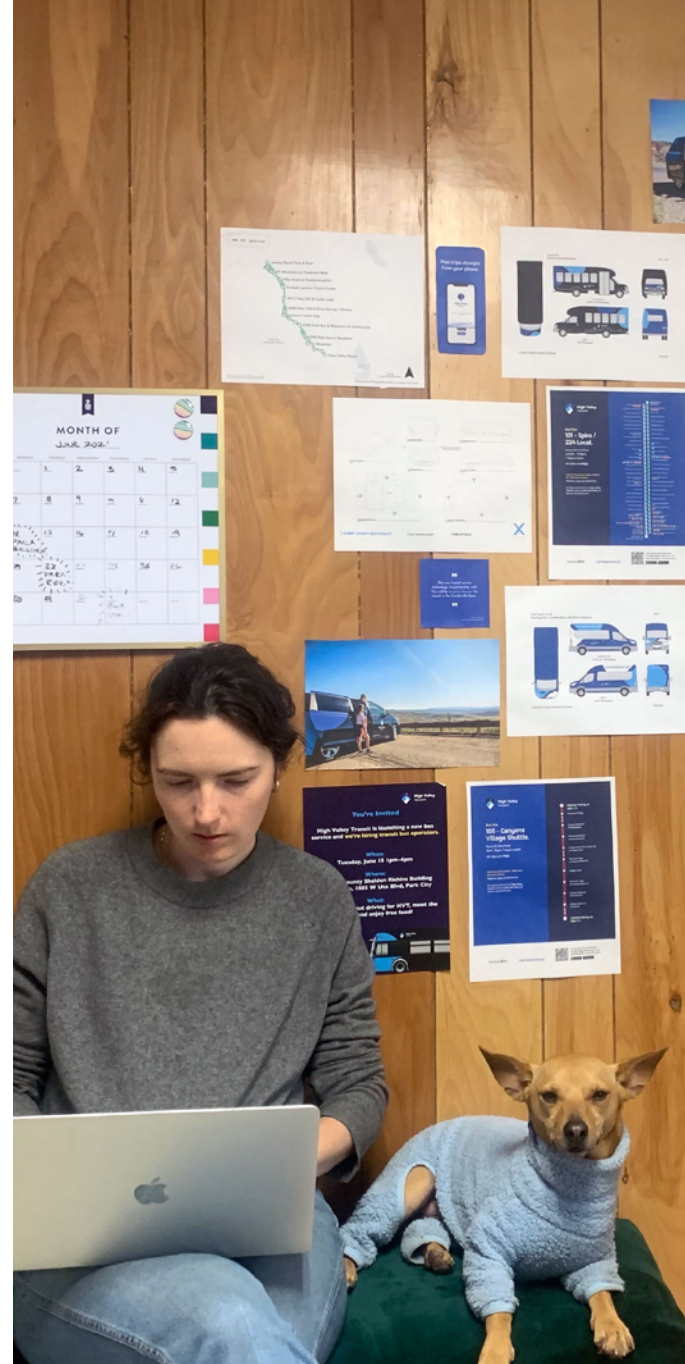
You've chosen a vendor partner and are excited to get your driver and vehicle operations up and running and launch your new microtransit service. But wait. What if you get everything ready for launch... and then riders don't turn up? Your work on service design has demonstrated that your new service is needed, but if riders aren't aware of the launch, or don't know how to book trips, or don't understand why a new service is being introduced, they'll never be able to see how it helps.

Marketing your new on-demand transit service is key to ensuring a successful launch. Though any new service — a new bus line, a new subway stop — would benefit from marketing efforts, microtransit's novelty, and its patent lack of fixed stops and schedules, makes thoughtful marketing even more essential.

At Via, we approach rider marketing with three primary goals:

- 1 Establish a coherent brand to drive service recognition and guide asset creation.
- 2 Engage with community groups to refine service messaging for specific rider categories.
- 3 Grow ridership through multiple marketing channels.

Read on for a quick introduction to how we approach each goal, along with examples from our marketing team.



Brand your service.

Successful branding can help riders immediately understand what your new service is and how they can use it. Is microtransit the first form of public transit ever available in your community? Is it replacing a fixed-route bus, or supplementing an existing network? Branding decisions can help reinforce your service's identity.

When working with new partners, our in-house creative team begins by asking the following questions:

- 1 What, if any, agency or city branding already exists?
- 2 What kinds of transit services are available in the area and how are they branded?
- 3 What primary use case is your new service going to meet?
- 4 What is the relationship between the new service and existing transit?

With answers in hand, they create a set of assets ranging from logos and vehicle wraps to posters, in-vehicle flyers, digital banner advertisements, and more. On the next page, we share branding for two Via partners approaching very different problems: a completely new service, and one entering an existing transit ecosystem.



A new brand from scratch, for multiple new service types.

High Valley Transit, Summit County, Utah

When High Valley Transit, a new transit agency serving Summit County, worked with Via to implement an integrated fixed route, microtransit, and paratransit system from scratch, they needed a new brand to match.

Via's in-house design team got to work to create a logo that would instantly distinguish HVT services from those operated by Park City Transit, which had previously served the area.

Microtransit service logo



We carried the colors, fonts, and mountain-themed graphics through assets that were unique to microtransit, paratransit, and fixed route services, yet clearly a part of the same larger network.

Paratransit service logo



Fixed-route service posters



A brand extension for a new microtransit service in a thriving transit ecosystem.

GOConnect, Miami-Dade County, Florida

Before partnering with Via, Miami-Dade County already offered extensive bus and light-rail services, branded in a signature green and blue.



Light-rail logo



Bus service logo

GO Connect, the microtransit service launched in late 2020, connects riders to these existing transit services.

To convey to riders that all services are a part of an extended network, our design team carried Miami-Dade County's existing brand colors — as well as the ombre effect — into the new GO Connect logo.



Microtransit service logo



Logo mark

Bus shelter posters further emphasize the interconnected nature of the services, both in branding and copy choices.



Engage with community groups.

We know all communities are diverse, and that one rider's needs may significantly differ from another's. That's why our dedicated Community Affairs team works with our partners to develop specialized communication plans for groups that may be especially vulnerable or sensitive to changes in the transit system. In collaboration with additional local stakeholders like NGOs, social service groups, community colleges, healthcare facilities, and senior housing organizations, we work on strategies to reach:



Seniors



Riders with accessibility needs



Riders who are unhoused



Unbanked or cash-preferred riders



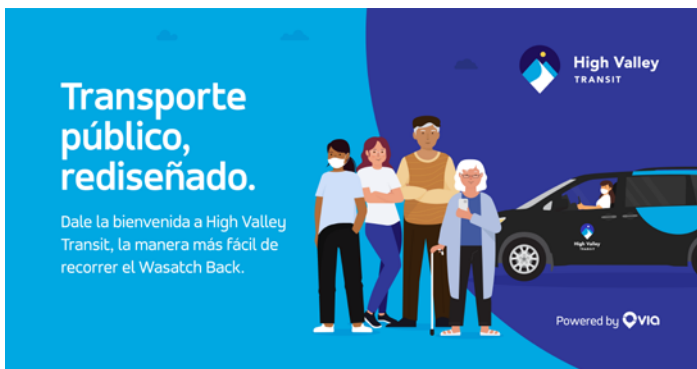
Riders without access to smartphones



Non-native English speakers



Microtransit / Fixed-route service awareness flyer



Service introduction social post

Whenever possible, we involve local government leaders in outreach efforts that affect their constituents.

Ideally, your service design should already account for these rider groups' specialized needs. Communicating the benefits of the new service to these riders — and taking their feedback — is critical to ensuring that your service is inclusive.

Sometimes this can be as simple as ensuring that all rider-facing materials are available in multiple languages, as in the High Valley Transit poster shown on the left.

Other times, we may hold informational sessions or focus groups with potential riders to help with app adoption and ensure app accessibility — outreach events at senior centers, for example, or focus groups with riders with disabilities. To reach potential riders without smartphones or computers, we emphasize out-of-home materials like posters in transit hubs or flyers in utility bills.



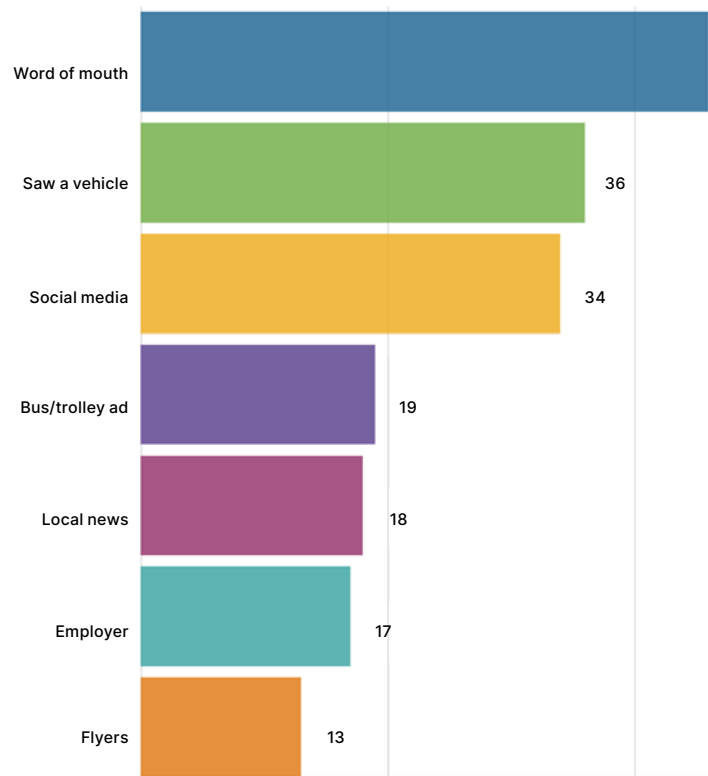
Grow ridership through multiple marketing channels.

We have a specialized Rider Growth team dedicated to helping riders take that first trip — and bringing them back to ride again and again. We use a combination of physical and digital marketing, along with public relations and social media, to spread the word.

Once a rider has downloaded the Rider App, our team tailors in-app messaging to encourage repeat trips. Riders who have never taken a trip might receive a free ride and riders who have taken a first trip might receive information about multi-trip passes to encourage them to integrate the service into their routine. Referrals are always encouraged with free trips for both the current rider and the family and friends with whom they share the app.

We also regularly survey riders on how they heard about our service to make sure we're reaching a wide audience.

Sample survey asking riders how they heard about a service.





Recruit and coordinate with driver partners.

A successful microtransit service relies on a consistent, committed, and engaged team of drivers. Drivers are the face of any transit service: beyond making it run, they are also brand ambassadors and the first point of contact for customer service.

If you work for a transit agency, you already know how to recruit and manage drivers for fixed-route services. But your existing driver pool may not be the best-suited to staff a microtransit service, which has several key differences that affect driver availability. For example:

- Unlike with larger vehicles, drivers may not need commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) for the smaller vehicles (6-8 passengers) typically used in microtransit services. This licensing difference, which varies by jurisdiction, opens up a wider pool of potential microtransit drivers, including independent contractors who may have experience with transportation network companies (TNCs).
- Microtransit demand, like all transit demand, can vary significantly throughout the day. Microtransit service providers precision-tailor supply to match that demand in order to conserve resources, but this can result in short or otherwise-irregular shifts, which may be difficult to fill using traditional transit recruitment methods.
- Drivers must be comfortable using technology for more aspects of their daily activities than required for many traditional transit systems. They follow algorithm-driven turn-by-turn directions that guide them to each pickup and dropoff; they view and select available slots online; they unlock vehicles using Bluetooth connections to a driver app. It's crucial that your drivers are ready (and excited!) to work with the latest TransitTech.

Whether you're an experienced transit recruiter, or you've never staffed a service before, Via can help develop and implement a strategy tailored to your region.

Our **Director of Driver Operations, Sriram Trikutam**, can take you through the basics of recruiting, onboarding, and coordinating with drivers that maximizes their effectiveness for microtransit.



Sririam Trikutam | Director of Driver Operations

I work on everything from recruitment to fostering ongoing driver satisfaction and engagement. After onboarding tens of thousands of drivers, Via has developed a playbook for coordinating driver operations — below, find some of our best practices.

Driver recruitment.

We approach driver acquisition with a toolbox similar to that of our Rider Growth team: digital marketing, physical flyers or posters, and referral programs are all key recruitment channels. But rather than targeting continual growth, our team works with partners to set highly specific goals for:

- Size of the driver pool.
- Pace at which drivers move through the acquisition funnel.
- Acquisition cost per driver.
- Rate of driver churn and ongoing acquisition post-launch.

Of course, these goals are often in conflict with one another. To grow a large pool quickly, the pace of acquisition must be sped up — which is typically accomplished by introducing various conversion incentives, like signing bonuses, which in turn raise the overall cost per driver. What's more, our partners each have unique circumstances which affect how these goals are set. If there is little competition for drivers, the size of the pool may be smaller than in a location where drivers are likely to be “multi-apping” among TNC services. These complex scenarios are where our years of expertise come in handy.

Driver onboarding.

Depending on our partners' needs and circumstances, driver onboarding can be conducted in a variety of formats, including in-person sessions with Via team members, peer sessions with current drivers, virtual training materials and quizzes, and more. Content is customizable to our partners' wishes, as well as any regulatory requirements, but typically includes the following:



The technology. We offer an introduction to Via's tools for starting shifts, unlocking vehicles, and accepting and delivering rides.



Safety and customer service. Drivers' conduct on the road is critical to service success. We cover safe driving and respectful, empathetic customer interaction.



The nuts and bolts. When and how will drivers get paid? What performance incentives are available? How can drivers contact support with questions or issues?

Ongoing coordination.

A robust driver pool is vital to a microtransit service — but so is properly designing, scheduling, and incentivizing driver slots. We work with our partners to answer three key questions:

- When do we expect demand to peak, and more drivers to be needed on the road?
- What kinds of times do drivers prefer? Do they want to work longer, 8-hour slots, or shorter slots that they can take in between other commitments? What fraction of our drivers are part-time vs. full-time?
- What incentives are we willing to offer to get drivers on the road for “less desirable” slots? Can we offer differential pay rates for certain times of day or days of the week (e.g. nights and weekends)?

We also work to establish a program of town hall meetings, office-hour sessions, and other opportunities to keep driver excitement and engagement high.

Want to learn more about how Via approaches driver acquisition, or what strategies we might recommend for your region? Reach out to Sriram at partnerships@ridewithvia.com.

Managing vehicle operations.

The goal of every transit service is to move people from one location to another — and an adequately-sized fleet of well-maintained, service-appropriate vehicles is critical to keeping up smooth operations. We think of successful vehicle operations as consisting of three main stages:

- Sourcing the right vehicles and readying them for service.
- Keeping the fleet clean and well-maintained.
- Evaluating vehicle needs and adjusting as service evolves.

We spoke to **Sean Sauter, an Operations Director at Via**, about how to select and maintain the ideal microtransit fleet.





Sean Sauter | Operations Director

As a member of Via's Operations team, I oversee a number of Via partnerships in which our team handles vehicle operations, and have worked to develop a standard playbook for selecting, acquiring, and maintaining vehicle fleets for microtransit services.

The size and composition of your fleet will vary based on your service needs:

- **Match supply to expected demand.** Have solutions in place to ensure that vehicle downtime, whether for inspections, cleaning, or unexpected breakdowns, does not significantly impact availability.
- **Align vehicle type to service type.**
 - Most deployments will do best with a minivan solution that seats 6-8 passengers.
 - For deployments with higher demand density or longer trips, a larger vehicle may be appropriate to support greater passenger aggregation.
 - Consider the proportion of wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs) needed to serve your population. Remember that WAVs will need their own spares to ensure continued availability.
 - Consider the trade-offs related to including low- or no-emissions vehicles in your fleet: lower fueling costs and reduced environmental impact, for example, weighed against more limited availability of appropriately-sized EVs.

Additionally, you will want to consider how your fleet composition may affect vehicle maintenance and availability.

We work with our partners to monitor their service needs over time and adjust their fleets as needed. For example, a transit agency might develop new sustainability targets and require a higher proportion of EVs, or a city may find that a higher proportion of WAVs is required to serve passengers with disabilities. With a flexible fleet model, these changes can be easily accommodated.

- A homogenous fleet could make it easier to implement a standardized maintenance solution.
- Conversely, having a fleet with multiple vehicle types can protect your service against part recalls or supply chain issues affecting a particular model type or manufacturer.

Once you know what kind of vehicles you need, and the size of your fleet, you will need to procure your vehicles and develop protocols for regular cleaning and maintenance.

- Unlike traditional fixed-route transit operations, microtransit fleets are typically leased. This gives us more flexibility to scale the fleet up and down as needed.
- Vehicles can be quickly customized to your service using full- or half-wraps designed to make them stand out.
- Depending on the size of the fleet and the capabilities of our leasing partner, we develop a cleaning and maintenance solution that leverages local cleaners and garages.

Support your riders and your team.

Riders know all about your service, and your drivers and vehicles are ready to take them where they need to go — but what happens when riders have questions? Or if your own team members need technical assistance or help resolving a service issue?

Though you've put best practices in place to ensure smooth service, there will come a time when your riders or your team needs to get in touch with support to resolve a problem. Our Support Operations team is dedicated to helping your riders and your staff so that any issues that arise are resolved quickly.



Rider support.

If you work for a transit agency, you may already have a customer support team that handles rider questions, comments, and complaints for your existing services. Many Via partners with customer service teams in place choose to leverage them for microtransit support as well, so that riders have a consistent experience: calling the same phone number or visiting the same web portal for every service in the network.

Others choose to outsource microtransit-specific support to Via's in-house support team, who specialize in monitoring live microtransit service and helping customers resolve common questions like "where's my vehicle?" Our Rider Support team develops and runs robust training programs, agent development programs, and agent resource databases to ensure that we can offer top-notch support in-app, by phone, and by email. Our team can work with yours to establish ideal response times for each channel and arrange a regular feedback review, so that your team stays in the loop on rider sentiment.

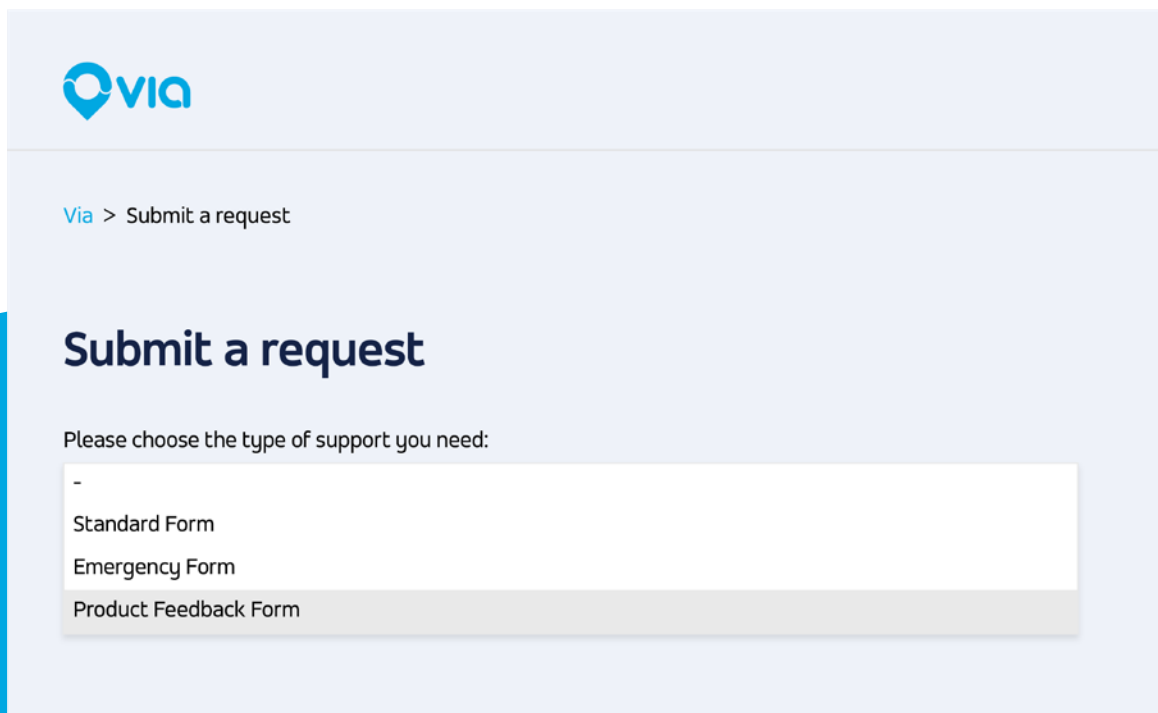
Partner support.

Though we've worked hard to develop an intuitive product for service management, we know that sometimes, our partners just need a bit of help! Whether you're struggling to remember how to add and modify driver shifts, or want to more closely investigate an incident that happened on the road, our Partner Support team has developed a dedicated portal to connect your team with experts ready to help.

The portal features three "ticket" types to route you to the right support:

- Standard support request, for regular day-to-day issues, including driver, rider, and customer service complaints.
- Emergency support requests, which is immediately escalated to our 24/7 Emergency Support Team.
- Product feedback form, to collect partner feedback on the usability, efficiency, and overall satisfaction of our tools.

We also pair every Via partner with a Partner Success Manager, who can coordinate additional support from various Via teams as needed.



The screenshot shows the 'Submit a request' page in the Via Partner Support portal. At the top left is the Via logo. Below it is a breadcrumb trail: 'Via > Submit a request'. The main heading is 'Submit a request'. Below the heading is a prompt: 'Please choose the type of support you need:'. A dropdown menu is open, showing three options: 'Standard Form', 'Emergency Form', and 'Product Feedback Form'. The 'Product Feedback Form' option is currently selected and highlighted.

Analyze your service.

Whether you're an old hand at submitting NTD reports, or new to the world of transit analytics, microtransit data can unlock new kinds of insights for your agency or your city. Because microtransit trips are requested and booked with software — a rider app, or a dispatcher interface by way of a phone reservationist — service data can reveal highly granular information about transit demand patterns in your community.

We encourage our partners to keep an eye on their data in order to improve their services in the short-term, with algorithm tweaks and adjustments, and the long-term, with data-driven transit planning.

Isabella Olea, a Strategic Operations Principal, can take you through the basics of how we help our partners unlock the potential of their data.





Isabella Olea | Strategic Operations Principal

I'm on our Strategic Operations team, and I've helped hone Via's best practices for service analytics while developing better systems for communicating with Via partners about data. We see our role as helping our partners fulfill three critical functions important for the long-term success of their services:

Analyze KPIs and iterate service.

Each of our partners has different goals, related to the transit challenges of their particular community. In a first- and last-mile service, for example, passengers might be more sensitive to wait times — so we encourage our partners to monitor that metric and, if it creeps upward, test out service and algorithm adjustments to keep it stable. We might try:

- Increasing our walking distance parameters that allow passengers to walk a bit further to their pickups, so that drivers can take more direct routes on shared trips.
- Re-allocating driver hours across the day, if ETAs are increasing at specific times.
- Dynamically directing more drivers to “terminals” in particular parts of the zone, if ETAs are increasing in certain areas.

Whichever KPI is most important to you, we have many different kinds of adjustments we can make to improve it.

Plan for future transit.

A microtransit service can be a wellspring of fine-grained data about travel behaviors and preferences in your community. We encourage our partners to think about their service data not only as a guide to improving operations right now, but as a blueprint for future service development: additional or expanded zones, new or adjusted fixed-route service, new transit hubs, and more.

With microtransit, you can analyze not only where people go, but where they want to go:

- Are people trying to request trips to a transit hub outside your current zone? Think about expanding the zone to include the hub.
- Are multiple people making the same trip from a point of interest to the end of a fixed-route bus line? Consider extending the bus line to that point of interest.
- Is there a hotspot of Rider App downloads outside the current microtransit zone boundaries? It might be worth expanding the zone to include riders who are eager to use the service.

Whatever your plans for transit evolution in your community, microtransit data can inform or even reshape them to best reflect your riders' needs.

Satisfy reporting obligations.

Your team and stakeholders aren't the only ones interested in your data: reporting to the FTA, funding bodies, or other entities is often required. We make this as easy as possible by offering intuitive data dashboards, downloadable datasets, and specialized reports tailored to common requirements like NTD reporting.

Up next.

Excited to get started with a new microtransit service, but still not quite sure where to start?

- 1 If you have specific questions and want to get in touch with any of the experts featured in this guide, we've provided contact info in each sub-section.
- 2 If you want to start a broader conversation and learn a bit more about what Via has to offer, you can reach out to **partnerships@ridewithvia.com**.
- 3 And if you're interested in consulting with our Strategies team to plan and scope your service, you can reach out to **strategies@ridewithvia.com**.

We look forward to hearing from you!