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RTD RIDERS TALK ABOUT
TIMETABLES

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RTDMR

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The District prints and distributes thousands of timetables each month. The annual cost of the printing only is about \$300,000. However, this is just a small fraction of the cost of providing the public with free timetables. Are the costs justified? This study looks at the justification from the users' viewpoint. Specifically:

- How important or necessary are timetables to the users?
- How legible and understandable are timetables to the users?
- Where are timetables obtained and how long are they retained?

These are basic questions, which nevertheless need to be addressed. Also considered are questions concerning who the timetable users are in terms of their demographics and bus usage levels.

METHOD

This report deals with the first stage of a proposed two-stage study. This stage consists of a qualitative study using two focus group sessions. Focus groups are a technique whereby a small group of 9 to 12 persons are brought together to discuss a topic in depth. It is a relatively unstructured interview situation where participants are encouraged to express their opinions, ideas and suggestions freely.

The two focus groups used for this study were held as follows:

Session I: Canoga Park, October 26, 1982 - 7:00 P.M.

Session II: Los Angeles CBD, October 27, 1982 - 1:30 P.M.

Each session lasted approximately one and-a-half hours. Sessions were taped and two cassettes of each taping were obtained. Both groups were moderated by Jackline Matosian, RTD's Market Research Manager. The second session was observed by one other RTD staff member.

The second stage, as described in the original study proposal, was for a quantitative study. It was to consist of a structured, self-administered, mail-back questionnaire to be distributed at a stratified sample of timetable outlets.

A copy of the moderator's discussion guide is in the appendix.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS

- o Perhaps the most important finding from these two groups was that timetables are considered to be "very important", even "vital" to the users.
- o The map is considered an integral part of the timetable. It allows users to calculate the approximate time a bus will be at the stop they board the bus, when that stop is not one of the time points shown on timetable.
- o As they now stand, RTD timetables are considered to be fairly easy to read and generally easy to understand. Although some panelists indicated a need for larger type and more time points, the consensus was that this would necessitate a larger timetable, making it too cumbersome "like a folded street map."
- o By the same token, the concept of having a booklet which contains timetables for all RTD lines received little support. Again, panelists felt such a booklet would be too bulky to carry around.
- o For the most part, panelists agreed that the RTD timetables are "just fine" as they are. Suggestions for improvements or changes related more to the distribution of timetables, rather than to their actual format or content.
 - The suggestion gaining the most support was to show transfer points and certain major landmarks on the map.
 - In one of the groups, the idea of an oversized timetable,

displayed as an interior car card, received considerable support.

- The most frequently voiced criticism was that timetables were not available on the buses.
- Both groups, spontaneously, introduced the subject of bus stop signage as an alternative or supplement to timetables.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Focus groups, by definition are not quantitative, hence not generalizable to the population from which they are drawn. However, their very nature makes them a good vehicle by which to discover areas of concern.

These two focus groups were intended to provide insights as to the problems that users have with the timetables. It was discovered instead, that users have little trouble with the timetables themselves. Rather the problem that surfaced was one of finding the timetables.

As a result, the second stage of this study as it was proposed makes little sense now. Accordingly, it is recommended that stage two not be done. Instead, it is recommended that the feasibility of including transfer points and major points of interest on the timetable maps be investigated.

Furthermore, a renewed effort should be made to ensure the availability of timetables on buses.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Participants

A total of 19 persons, 12 males and seven (7) females, participated in the two group sessions.

All participants were recruited by the independent research firm of Integrity Research. To qualify, panelists had to have made at least one round trip by RTD bus in the past seven days.

Ages of panelists ranged from 17 to 83, with an average (mean) of 42.

Socioeconomic level, as indicated by annual household income, varied significantly by group. The Canoga Park group was composed of more affluent participants than the CBD group.

Similarly, the Canoga Park panelists all had at least one motor vehicle in the household, while among the CBD group only two had motor vehicles.

Bus Usage

In both groups, most of the panelists had been bus users for more than five years. Frequency of riding ranged from once a week to daily use.

Panelists ride the bus primarily for work or school trips. However, in the CBD group, the bus is the only transportation for most of the respondents.

Importance of Timetables

The question of whether a timetable is important or necessary received considerable discussion. Although the overall consensus was that they are needed, the intensity of agreement ranged from "very much" to "it depends." Those who qualified their responses, gave the following reasons:

- "I felt basically that (buses) never run by the timetables anyway, so I just hang out there (at bus stop) and wait."
- "I take the same bus every day, so I don't need a timetable anymore. If I'm going somewhere different, then I call RTD."

Calling RTD information as a substitute, or supplement, to the timetables is quite prevalent. Most panelists obtained the information they needed by first calling RTD. But, as one panelist summed up, "I don't think there is anything that could possibly replace having a timetable. I mean, calling on the phone you have to waste... time." Thus, even when they call information, most people will pick up a timetable -- when they can find them -- for the lines they use most often.

Where Timetables Are Obtained/How Long Retained

Panelists named a variety of locations from where they obtain timetables. Mentioned were libraries, City Hall, from RTD by mail and school.

Respondents also varied on how long they keep their timetables as well as where they keep them. At one extreme were two male

panelists who pick up a timetable, obtain the information they require, then throw it away. At the other extreme were respondents who keep their timetables in carefully arranged files, replacing them as new timetables become available.

Most panelists fell somewhere between these two groups. The tendency is to keep timetables long enough -- two to four weeks -- until they become familiar with the route and schedule. If the line is one they use frequently, they will keep the timetable longer.

Those who save their timetables, usually keep them by their telephone at home. Timetables for a particular day, or ride, are carried in purses or pockets. Men tend to keep timetables for a shorter time than do women.

Legibility/Understandability of Timetables

Nearly everyone agrees that timetables are easy to read as well as easy to understand. The map is considered very important and an integral part of the timetables.

- "You can judge (by comparing maps) whether one line will be closer to where you're going than another one, or if you think you can transfer."
- "It's very helpful if you're carpooling and you're going to meet at a bus area, then you know exactly where the bus is going to stop by having the map."
- "It helps to see where (the bus) is going."
- "The stop where I take the bus isn't on the schedule, so I check the map to see where the nearest (timepoint) is,

so I know when the bus will get to my stop."

To make timetables more useful to them, panelists suggested that the number of timepoints shown of the timetables be increased.

- "They don't list every stop, which I guess they couldn't possibly ... but some of the key ones should be listed."
- "... (the bus) also stops in between (the timepoint shown) and some people don't know that ... therefore they miss their stop."

Although they consider having more timepoints desirable, panelists are also cognizant of the fact that showing too many timepoints would make timetables too large and unwieldy. The compromise agreement is to show at least those timepoints which are transfer points. Similarly, for the map, they feel that showing the transfer points, with the appropriate connecting bus numbers, would be useful to them.

Also for the map, several suggested that major landmarks be shown to assist in their trip planning.

Additional Suggestions/Discussion

Besides the aforementioned suggestions, some discussion was held on the desirability for larger type or a larger timetable.

- "... the senior citizens are people who are a little harder of seeing, the print is too small."
- "It should be bigger ..."
- "... make it a little wider, the map too."

The concept of a timetable booklet, containing timetables for every line in the RTD system, was received with little enthu-

siasm.

- "I think it's a little cumbersome to have a large book to carry."
- "Most people would not use 80% of the lines (in such a book). I think it would be more economical (to get timetables for the individual lines one requires)."

On the question of whether they would be willing to pay for the timetables they obtain, panelists were nearly equally divided.

- "If you use the bus all the time, you have to buy the timetables."
- "I don't think I would buy. I think I would just call RTD and ask them the information I need and just pay for that phone call."

Several other panelists pointed out to this respondent that the cost of the phone call could exceed that of the timetable!

- "I would certainly buy it (timetable) ..."

Both groups suggested some form of displaying timetable information at the bus stops.

- "... have a big sign on a pole ... show the fare and the way it goes."
- "I would like to see the RTD and their architects and their strategists, figure out some way ... for this information to be at the stops."

Panelists from the Canoga Park group mentioned the bus stop signs that "used to be out there, but they took them out."

One complaint which surfaced more often than any other was the

lack of timetables on the buses themselves.

- "... they used to have these timetables accessible on the bus."
- "I saw them (on the bus) a year ago. I haven't seen them since."
- "They have other stuff up there now (in Take One Boxes)..."

Respondents' Profile

	<u>Group I</u> <u>Canoga Park</u>	<u>Group II</u> <u>Los Angeles CBD</u>	<u>Total</u>
Male	5	7	12
Female	$\frac{4}{9}$	$\frac{3}{10}$	$\frac{7}{19}$
 <u>Ethnicity</u>			
Caucasian	9	2	11
Black	-	4	4
Hispanic	-	3	3
Asian	$\frac{-}{9}$	$\frac{1}{10}$	$\frac{1}{19}$
 <u>Age</u>			
Under 21	2	-	2
21 - 30	1	3	4
31 - 40	2	3	5
41 - 50	-	1	1
51 - 60	3	2	5
61 +	$\frac{1}{9}$	$\frac{1}{10}$	$\frac{2}{19}$

Respondents' Profile (cont'd)

<u>Income</u>	<u>Group I Canoga Park</u>	<u>Group II Los Angeles CBD</u>	<u>Total</u>
Under \$5,000	1	3	4
\$ 5,000 - 9,999	-	3	3
\$10,000 - 14,999	2	4	6
\$15,000 - 24,999	1	-	1
\$25,000 +	<u>5</u> 9	<u>-</u> 10	<u>5</u> 19

Number of Motor
Vehicles in
Household

None	-	8	8
One	5	2	7
Two	2	-	2
Three or more	<u>2</u> 9	<u>-</u> 10	<u>2</u> 19

DISCUSSION OUTLINE
TIMETABLE FOCUS GROUPS

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- A. For how long have you been riding RTD?
 - About how often do you ride an RTD bus?
- B. How many different bus lines do you ride in an average week?
- C. How did you figure out which bus you needed to ride?
- D. What is the main purpose of your riding the bus?
 - Where do you go by bus? Where else?
- E. What is the most helpful thing to you in figuring out bus lines to take, what time to get to the bus stop, etc.?

II. AWARENESS & USE OF TIMETABLES

- A. Have you ever picked up an RTD bus schedule (timetable)?
 - When was the last time you picked one up?
 - How many different schedules did you pick up?
- B. From where did you pick up your timetable(s)?
 - Is that where you usually get timetables?
- C. How long do you generally keep a bus schedule?
 - Where do you keep it?
 - Do you still have the last one you picked up?

III. OVERALL ATTITUDE TOWARDS TIMETABLES (have samples)

- A. Overall, what do you think of RTD's timetables?
- B. For what do you use the timetable?
 - Do you need a timetable?
 - Why or why not?
- C. How easy or difficult is it for you to read the RTD timetables? Timetable map?
 - How easy or difficult is it for you to understand the timetables? Timetable maps?

- D. How would you improve the timetables?
- What would you change? What would you keep the same?
 - Are all the time points on the timetable necessary?
 - Is the map necessary?
- E. What do you think about RTD printing a booklet which would have timetables for every RTD line?
- Like idea? Why?
 - Dislike idea? Why?
- F. If such a booklet were available, would you be willing to pay for it?
- How much do you think it would be worth?
 - How much would you be willing to pay for it?

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