

NCMM Webinar - Mobility on Demand Pilots

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

service, transit, mobility, services, area, project, vehicles, trips, runner, southwest, pilot, people, next slide, community, pilot project, mobility management, micro, rides, ridership, ride

02:03

thanks. Alright. Thanks, everyone. Good afternoon, everyone and welcome to today's webinar, mobility on demand turning innovative pilot project and sustainable long term programs. My name is Brandon Rocio I'm a project associate for the National Center for mobility management Technical Assistance Center at Easterseals.

21:43

Before we get started, I just wanted to take a few moments go over a few session housekeeping items, please add your name and affiliate in the chat box. Remember to mute yourself if you're not speaking. Our recording will be made available on the MC mmm website. Please add your question to the question box during the panel q&a. Closed captioning is turned on for this session. And please enjoy and learn from one another. In CMM, the National Center for mobility management management was founded in 2013 is a National Technical Assistance Center funded through cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration and operated through a consortium of three national public organizations which include the American public transportation Association, the community transportation Association, America and easterseals. The center works to promote cross sector partnerships and assist in supporting innovative and integrated transportation services by building capacity in communities and improving transportation options. And this includes planning implementing implementing grants, customized technical assistance, training for mobility management professionals, facilitating collaboration among transportation and non transportation organizations, and providing expertise on a number of various subjects related to mobility management. Part of our mission is really to bring together mobility managers from across the country to engage one another on best practices, to share insights and collaborate on issues important to them. But really make management Connections is just that mobility management connections otherwise known as NMC, it's a platform to share ideas and mobility management strategies related to building transportation connections, and identifying mobility solutions. In this community is for mobility man, recovery management practitioners. We're actively advancing mobility management in our communities, regions and states. So please, if you haven't already, sign up for MMC at Learn dot p y.org. Tell us what your role is mobility manager and your areas of interest. Share your experiences network learn from your peers. We've recently added additional added additional member benefits courtesy of partners for youth with disabilities on resource library, such as elearning courses, access to webinars and other informational toolkits and guidebooks. MMC is proud to have three mobility management champions who support and advance our mission. Amber Simmons grants in budget coordinator for plan hills borough in Tampa, Florida, Sheila haubrich, white mobility coordinator, Washington County Community Services, and Sarah had doggo cook General Manager of the Southwest Area Regional Transit District, and all of them are experts in their field who work to strengthen communities to coordinated transportation. So now I'm pleased to introduce today's moderator Sheila, Sheila Holbrook, right who's one of our MMC champions, Sheila.

24:45

Good morning.

24:49

Thanks. Thank you, Brandon very much for that. I'm Sheila hopper quite as Brandon mentioned on the mobility manager for Washington County in the great state of Minnesota and probably one of the three National mobility management champions. I am so thrilled to be part of this webinar, and particularly to introduce our panel members. Each of them bring years of experience to the critical topic of mobility pilots, and who have accrued significant lessons on the challenges of sustainability. We have three great speakers for today's webinar met fighting, Penny grolier and Alan Benedict, and I'm pleased to introduce our first speaker, Matt phyton is the chief Operations Officer for Southwest transit, where he oversees driver operations planning it dispatch vehicle and facilities maintenance. Matt has spent his entire 12 years with Southwest transit. Having started as a planning intern in 2009. Matt is a graduate of the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, where he received a master's in Urban and Regional Planning. He is a member of the American Institute of certified planners, and a member of the American public transportation associations leadership apt a class of 2022. As we move into our first presentation, I want to encourage you to add questions in the chat. After each of our presentations, Brandon, I will use your quick questions to prompt additional conversation with our speakers. And so Matt, it's my pleasure to turn the webinar over to you.

26:31

Great, well, thank you so much, Sheila and Brandon, for all thank you, Sheila, for the introduction and Brandon for helping getting this all together. Brandon, like you're running the slide deck, is that correct? There we go. So again, I'm Matt phyton, Chief operations officer with Southwest transit here to talk about Southwest transits really pioneering micro transit service that we call Southwest prime. You know, next slide.

26:58

So first, a little bit about Southwest transit ourselves. So we are a public transit provider for the southwestern suburbs of the Minneapolis area. The communities we serve are primarily denser suburban third ring suburbs. Eden Prairie, Chaska chanhassen, makeup, our board of the three communities that created us, and we also serve more ex urban communities of Carver and Victoria, under contracts, and that is for our selfless prime service. We are governed by a commission consisting of six individuals appointed by the member cities again, Eden Prairie, Chaska chanhassen, and we do have one rider representative that sits as the seventh member of our board. We are suburban provider, which is a little unique compared to a lot of areas of the country, we were established by the Minnesota State legislative action in 1983, due to back then the fact that the existing structure was not overly responsive to meeting the needs of the growing suburbs and the Twin Cities metropolitan area. So communities have the ability to essentially opt out of the main transit provider who would be Metro Transit in our region, and had a choice to create their own provider. And that's how Southwest transit came to be. We were formed in 1986. Obviously, there's a caveat of pre COVID, we operated over approximately 160 trips per day with 75 buses on our fixed route services. We are primarily a commuter service Park and Ride based commuter service, bringing our commuters to downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota being our main two markets that we serve on the fixed route. We've been recognized as a national leader in innovation technology, we were one of the first implement transit oriented development in a suburban area. I'm here to talk about Southwest prime, we were one of the first if not the first, to introduce micro transit operations for public transit back in 2015. We were the provider of choice to many special events in our service area, primarily sporting events. Those who have visited Minnesota, you may want to check out the Minnesota State Fair, that's one of the biggest events in our state, and we provide a significant amount of rise to that event as well. Southwest transit has over \$60 million in assets. And pre COVID, we annually provided about 1.2 million rides between our fixed route services and micro transit services. Next slide. But I'm here to talk about our micro transit service, Southwest

prime. So what is Southwest prime? Again? Well, the first of its kind shared ride micro transit services in Minnesota. I'd like to think probably in the US I haven't really heard of many of that word before us. Service began operating in 2015. It is a service where the general public can request a ride on demand only a little caveat to that but it started as a on demand only service we have now evolved to allowing scheduling of trips for certain areas of our service and certain service types as we've continued to leverage micro transit platforms and push some of the capabilities of what The service is able to do, it is a curb to curb service. For those who are familiar in the mobility world, we're not door to door we're more of a general with kind of old fashioned dollar ride. But I like to say we're the new version of dollar ride. So curb to curb service. We serve our entire service area, plus select locations outside of our service area. So our service area started as an entirely the communities I listed at the beginning. So five communities using the political boundaries of those communities. To define our service area. We use a Microsoft the software spare Labs is our provider. They are second software that we utilize, we started off our micro transit service with a vendor called ride sell. And then two years ago, switched our software to spare. Just some information, the current fares on the service. general public rides are \$4 a trip one way so \$8 round trip, we do have a transit Assistance Program for those who qualify for economically disadvantaged persons. And also senior days, those trips, senior days are on Mondays very popular day in our service. And both the TAP program and senior days are \$2 a ride, we go to the Mall of America, obviously a large attractor of rides in our service area that \$6 will go to the airport, Minneapolis St. Paul airport, that's \$8 round trip. And then we also have a non emergency medical component to our micro transit service, that we allow scheduled rides to medical appointments that we call Southwest prime MD. And that is \$5. A ride all those trips one way. Next slide.

31:43

So why did we start prime in the first place, really in our world where again, kind of think third, fourth ring suburbs of a metro area. And not surprisingly, suburban land use has always been difficult to serve efficiently. From a public transit perspective, especially when you're looking at local fixed routes, our service areas over 80 square miles that's larger than the tire city of Minneapolis buy quite a bit. But far less dense. We need to lower we needed had a need for a lower cost local service option because again, those fixed route suburban local type services that we were providing in the past, they just were cost prohibitive. Our subsidies for passengers would be well over \$100 per passenger whenever we would want to try and make one of those little services operate efficiently, just something that wasn't working for us. We saw there was an increase in demand for first mile last mile services to our Express services. We were fielding more requests. But again, we were looking for how can we do this more efficiently than your standard dial a ride service or demand response service. Again, we really had a need for a local service with minimal support staff. Back in the old days, you know we had your dispatch setup where we had multiple dispatchers I think we had up to six or nine reservationist when we used to operate dollarized in the late 90s. And that just wasn't sustainable from a staffing standpoint. So technology has evolved to the point and after the, you know, 21st century where we discovered this micro transit service capabilities that hey, we can actually start to provide the service in a more efficient, efficient fashion. We also have a fairly tech savvy service area, and population. So that was one component we were considering when watching the service. Southwest transit has a long track record of service innovation, we were the first to introduce coach vehicles in our in our region for commuter bus service Wi Fi on vehicles, we were the first to use a phone app for our fixed route services for people to utilize. And I think the one of the most important lessons we have here is that we had a board that has a track record and a willingness to take a risk on a new service something like the as micro transit or Southwest prime in this case, so we had political champions on our side, and we had a culture that was already established, where this was not ultimately a difficult decision to implement to begin with. Next slide. I just want to include a couple of pictures. So people get a feel for what types of vehicles we actually operate multiple types of vehicles on the southwest prime fleet can range from anywhere to passenger style vans or cutaways, like you see on the top there will operate consumer just SUVs on the service. Again, the service itself is accessible through the app, and that riders can select whether or not they have a mobility device in terms of needing lift assistance. But not all of our vehicles are lift equipped, but the service itself is accessible. So I'm going next slide. Just quickly so how to book a ride on Southwest prime you can see a picture of our application that we use for Southwest prime where it's pretty simple just you just ask it asks you where you want to head to It knows where you are. So you put in the information and select how many riders and essentially book your ride that way, and the bus is going to be there generally within 20 minutes you get takes about 20 seconds to book a ride, your your rides are confirmed automatically via SMS text message, you are able to track your vehicle location live and see

where it is using the application so that you have an idea of how long the pickup time is going to be. And no debate notifications are sent to individuals automatically upon vehicle arrival, as well as when they booked their rides. And again, we are an accessible service. And we do allow bookings by phone. And that's just simply calling our number nine five to SW prime, we got reservationists just one that's handled our entire system for a phone call lens. And they essentially go through the same process that the individual would use on their phone app to book a ride. Next slide. I just want to show everyone a quick, this is what our service area ultimately looks like geographically. This is a LIVE SHOT not currently live. But what our dispatchers would be seeing live for the service showing you the real time location of all vehicles, different color coding, suggesting what is the status of that vehicle green would mean that they're active and available for service gray would be they are paused for service or taking a break. You can see a yellow vehicle on the map I believe that is when we are having some connection issues with vehicles. So something where you know there's an issue with the connectivity with that vehicle that we're able to address quickly. And next slide.

36:36

Just another example of our dispatch software with spare that you're able to add a lot of micro trends, the software's have this capability where you're able to select individual vehicles and get an instantaneous live update of that vehicles itinerary showing you pickup and drop off locations and how that vehicle is going to be utilized in real time. Next slide. I just want to provide some performance numbers. Again, this is the caveat of it being pre COVID. So these are 2019 numbers. But our numbers today, we're operating at about 65% of pre COVID ridership. But some of these numbers are relatively similar in terms of average ride time that a passenger is on a vehicle is a little under 10 minutes. average wait time for our service, we try to keep somewhere under 20 minutes. But more than 15. We found that to be somewhat of an efficient time frame for average wait time for passengers. Once you start getting over 20 minutes, we find you get some pretty large wait times over an hour or so which we'd like to avoid. We have average daily ridership of little under 400 trips per day average trip distance of five miles, our passengers per in service our little above two. That's generally Our goal is to be above 2.0. To be considered efficient service in our region. We were using 14 vehicles per peak both am and pm. But really the service became so popular we had 14 vehicles out throughout the day. I want to say today we're at about 10 vehicles, as we continue to build back from COVID. Our average subsidy per passenger under \$10. Back in 2019. That's this is roughly about where we are now still about \$8.63. In terms of ride booking method by our customers. It's about 65% booked through the app or online and about 35% through the phone, we do have a customer review function of all rides. And about we receive an average rating of 4.8 out of five stars. Next slide. So just quickly, some lessons learned that we've learned by having an established and sustainable, really sustainable micro transit service that has become a significant part of our operations and something that ICB and with partner Southwest transit for years to come. For us, we discovered that the algorithm is incredibly important behind the software, not a lot of a lot of software vendors will tell you that, you know their algorithm works in all situations. I'm here to tell you that is not the truth. There's a very different circumstances when you're looking at suburban versus urban areas and that the same algorithm decision making is not going to be the same and a suburban road network versus an urban road network. In terms of service area, we found by having a larger service area lent itself to more opportunity, obviously for demand and for us to be able to service. I think at times I've seen some micro transit pilots that tend to be a little too restrictive in their scope, and then they don't have to garnering the ridership that they were hoping so obviously you know just simply opening it up to more individuals to take the service is a one strategy that we found was helpful. operating on demand and scheduled rides together can be problematic. As I mentioned, we're working on that we have certain areas where we will scheduled rides, really longer trips that are heading outside of our service area involve America airport. And that's really for our batching purposes that we can start better managing those vehicles, so that we're not sending multiple vehicles out of our service area for a long period of time. But within our main service area, it's still completely on demand. And we found that to be the most efficient for providing these types of services. On the administration front, we have increased, we've seen an experienced, I'll say, unfortunately, some increased negative customer interactions, that leads to a little bit more admin time and dealing with some problem customers. But that's fairly typical with demand response services.

40:39

We have found, as I mentioned, less staff required compared to traditional dial ride services, that's certainly a cost saving measure. And then we also noted that make sure that you have ensure that there's proper fraud protections are in place, especially if you're doing online payments, you can store credit card within our Southwest prime app, and pay that way. And we have had to have had a couple instances of fraud. So just making sure that you have insurance set up in a way that allows for fraud protection on that front. We found that ridership demographics for our micro trends of service are similar to really say most allied demand response services. The advanced technology doesn't necessarily mean you see much of a demographic shift in terms of usage who's using the service, we say don't let first mile last mile be the only consideration. I think a lot of pilots look at micro transit as being a first mile last mile solution. And it certainly is. But also point to point trips are the vast majority of our trips. And there's plenty of demand out there that micro transit can also service. We do not allow standing orders on our service we will allow allow scheduled rides, but not standing orders. So so we don't allow someone to book the same trip on a daily basis, they have to call and book each trip individually. We have strict notional policies that help with efficiency. So if a person no shows our service, we do not allow them back on the service until they pay the fare that they know showed four, which helps keep our vehicles ensuring that we're picking up passengers and not having no shows, which hurts our efficiency. I always like to make the argument that micro transit can be the public transit form of TNCs, or your Ubers, or lifts. You know there are those out there that I think view microtransit as somewhat competitive towards Uber and Lyft. Again, we're serving an area that really in our service area doesn't have much Uber and Lyft available and Uber ride, average Uber rides in our service area is going to be north of \$15. If you go to the airport, for example, it's going to be 30 plus dollars, we're at \$4, we're providing an affordable transportation option, it may not be as convenient, you may have longer wait times, you may be on bus a little bit longer because of the shared ride service. But really think about you know, dollar ride was essentially two taxis what micro transit is to TNCs. And then finally be willing to take risk. For us. You know, we have that embedded in our culture here at Southwest transit, where we don't have all the answers necessarily when we start a service like this. But if we've done our due diligence on the front end, and feel confident that we can provide a quality level of service with the with what we have available to us, we're willing to put that service out there, and lets us essentially, you know, do some trial and error within reason and see what we can do to improve it. And that's certainly something that we've done over the last six years with our selfless prime service. And last slide. So what's next for us, we eventually are going to be launching electric vehicles onto our Southwest prime service. Right now we have one of our vehicles actually getting retrofitted to become a fully electric vehicle that we hope to have on our service next year. We have some funding for electric vehicles. I show a Tesla here because that's what we proposed for some grant funding that we were awarded. So we hope to have a couple of Tesla's operating on the service and hopefully demonstrate some of their autonomous capabilities as part of the service. Within this next year. We're going to continue to look at expansion in the suburb to suburb markets, again, a difficult market to try and serve as efficiently. We think that micro transit is an ideal service type to finally crack that suburb to suburb service nut, we'll see how well we're able to do that. And then within the industry I know mobility as a service is a large talking point. And that's something we'll be looking at as well how can we better integrate our micro transit service with fixed route services making for just a one stop shop, kind of kind of mobility hub from an app perspective where people can book from point A to point B within our entire region and get a multimodal trip plan for them instantaneously that they can book so that's what we're looking at with the future Southwest prime. I think I've ran out of time here so I will I will leave it at that

44:56

map. What a great presentation. Thank you so much. That was stellar. The we have a lot of questions going on. My video won't start. Okay. We have a lot of questions during your presentation. And so I'm going to hold some back for the panel conversation that we did have a couple that I think you might be able to directly answer may carry into other discussions by Alan Homan from Scott Carver asked why did you change software? Because you mentioned that you've used two different ones. Yep,

45:28

yep, no, that was a with our first microtransit software that we had, it wasn't quite working as automatically as we were

hoping in terms of the software, being able to automatically batch rides and automatically route rides simply by inputting the rides individually having the system do the rest, we found that, you know, I mentioned the algorithm as a lesson to be learned on our world. And that's where we found all these in our minds on routing decisions were being made by the software. And we're saying, Well, how can we're not picking up Person B, when Person A is just two minutes away, and we can easily pick them up and they come back? No, the algorithms working, don't worry about it. We said, Well, no, it's not really working. And so we eventually kind of worked with our provider rides all the time to allow our dispatchers to essentially manually assign rides, which kind of just turned it into more of a higher tech version of your standard dollar ride service, which worked in the short term. But as the service got more and more popular, I think we were going to end up killing our dispatcher having to manually assign over 400 rides a day. So we needed something that was going to be able to automatically dispatch the way micro transit is intended to. And that's, that's what really drove us to go out. This was probably years three or four of our service. So the micro transit world had evolved. And there's many more players and vendors out there. So we put out an RFP for microtransit software. And that's how we went with spare because they had the really the algorithm flexibility to more effectively service our service area, which we found to indeed be the case.

47:03

And then one final question before we go on to our next presenter, but we are going to bring back some of the questions because there was a lot of chatting during your presentation that we'll come back to for our panel conversation. And what is again, would you remind us, what's that ratio of people who are calling into book versus using the app? And what recommendations might you have for other agencies who are considering how to offer a phone option? Or how do they help riders use a new app that may be new to them?

47:35

Oh, those are great questions. And something that we definitely have put a lot of thought into over the years. And certainly when we started, just from an accessibility standpoint, we understand you know, we have a large senior population that utilizes our Southwest prime service and they don't feel overly comfortable booking a ride on a phone app, I'm you know, some are very tech savvy, but the majority do still call in. And for us, it's just like, we have it set up where our dispatcher can serve as a reservation as well, because because the software now works so efficiently in terms of the dispatching piece, you're able to really combine those functions of taking the reservation and also monitoring the service at the same time. So that's one efficiency that we found again, it's very simple to book a ride for the for the dispatcher slash reservationist when people call in, and so that's something I would definitely consider when you're looking at these types of pilots here. From an accessibility standpoint, we have found there's certainly a large segment out there that wants to use the column feature. And for us, it was about 6535 in favor of online bookings versus phone calls. I will say during the pandemic that has actually shifted a little bit and probably more 5545 still in favor of the the app bookings. But I think having a phone call reservationist is very important in these types of services, or at least we found

48:57

Fantastic. Thank you, man, I want to, again, thank you for your dynamic presentation and your follow up questions. I'm going to now move us to our second speaker, Penny grolier, community development administrator for Pierce transit, and Lakewood, Washington. Penny works on fostering internal and external communications. She connects with businesses and organizations to design transit benefits for employees, student groups and clients. She has facilitated partnerships to support transit, active transportation and shared use mobility options, and to develop new approaches to innovative services. Penny managed the Pierce transits limited access connections project, which was a mobility on demand sand box funded pilot with lift that was funded through the Federal Transit Administration, and has used lessons learned from that project to develop a

first and last mile micro transit pilot and I think this is going to be a great setup and background for the conversation that she's going to lead us through. As we get prepared to turn it over to Penny, again want to encourage you to please feel free to add questions in the chat. And we I'm pleased now to turn this webinar over to Penny.

50:17

Thank you, Sheila. All right, Penny grolier from Pierce transit in well today rainy Washington State What a surprise. Let's see may I have my first slide please. So today I will be talking about our on demand services from pilot to permanent. I have been lucky enough to be involved in some rather creative solutions to service needs in our particular transit service area. And so today I'll be giving you kind of an overview of what those services have looked like and then look like now. Next slide, please. So just to give you an idea of the Pierce transit service area, we cover 292 square miles in the Puget Sound area in Washington State. There are 13 cities and towns as well as portions of unincorporated Pierce County. We also have a very large military establishment Joint Base Lewis McChord in our service area. And we reach about 70% of Pierce County's population, we do not cover the entire county with our services. We have 342 buses, 90 shuttle or paratransit buses, and 360 vanpools in our fleet. And we operate all three of those services. We also operate Sound Transit, which is a regional provider, the express service buses going from our area up to the Metropolitan Seattle area. Next slide, please. So for those of you that aren't familiar with the part of the country that we serve, we have a number of challenges to providing fixed route transit service, the first being a lack of infrastructure, away from our main transit routes, the infrastructure is poor, we have a lack of streetlights, and sidewalks and accessible ways for people to get around. There are also a lot of neighborhoods that are designed more for cars than pedestrians. And these includes a lot of developments with cold shacks, and know them through ways to get to main routes. And as we are famous for we have inclement weather, which can be a challenge not only for providing fixed route in a timely fashion, but also for pedestrians trying to access our fixed route service. And because we are relatively far north, in the winter, we can have anywhere from maybe eight to nine hours of daylight. And if it's gloomy out that daylight doesn't feel too bright at all. So we we have a lot of our service happening in hours of sort of Twilight or darkness. And then we also have a large employment center that is actually very industrial in nature. So while there are a lot of job opportunities in that area, it's congested a lot of times with truck freight traffic, and it's not pedestrian friendly. So all of these issues combined to make certain parts of our service area difficult to provide bus service to Next slide please.

53:47

We were lucky enough in 2016 to be given one of the Federal Transit administration's mode or mobility on demand sandbox grants, we received \$205,000. And we're one of 11 projects that were given the funds to test out working with a transportation networking company to come up with a service model that would feed into fixed route service. So our goal then was to deal with some of those issues I just mentioned, by partnering with Lyft and providing first and last mile connections to our transit hubs and designated bus stops in certain areas and at times of limited service. So our project ran from May the 15th of 2018 through December 31 2019. We were testing different kinds of access issues. Some of the colored areas on the map that you see indicate the zones of service that large yellow zone did double duty not only providing a connection for commuters to a busy train station, but also providing right Home rides home at night to college students. The other areas provided service to busy transit hubs throughout each day of the weekend on weekends. These were fully subsidized trips. The grant funding allowed us to give these trips to riders for free. And we felt that was the best model in this particular circumstance to get more people to try the service. Because we're a public transit agency access to our services must be equitable. So we provided not only app based service, but phone access, and the partner who provided our service as I mentioned, with lift. One note about the phone access over the course of this pilot project, less than 5% of the requests were made using the phone line, the rest use the app. Next slide, please. So the results of our project were that we provided 8827 trips in the I think it was about 18 months of service, there were 330 unique users, the average trip duration was about 10 minutes, and the distance was about four miles, the average cost per trip was \$11.47. And actually, these outcomes met our projections as far as trip duration, distance, and pleasingly to our leadership the cost per trip. Next slide, please. So we learned quite a number of lessons. This being the first time we made a foray into the world of on demand transportation. In

partnering with a transportation networking company, we found that we did not have access to a lot of data that would have been helpful in measuring success, we were not given access to the users of the service simply because that was considered personally identifying information by the provider. This meant that we were not able to survey the users, which was something we really would have liked to have done. After the project ended, we were able to send a survey out to users through the Lyft app in conjunction with Lyft. But it would have been nice to do surveys throughout the course of the project. We also learned that the trip data that was made available to us was very generalized. So instead of knowing exact dates and times of when trips occurred, we had sort of two hour brackets of time in which the trips occurred. We didn't have the exact start and end points. We had census block level data and those kinds of things, which made it difficult for us to pinpoint where hotspots for service were beyond that kind of higher level

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map that we receive, we can make heat maps, but they weren't very exact. And we were hoping to find out, you know, very specific points of data because we wanted to be able to take those lessons learned and apply them to future service design. We did not receive data on wait time. Other than comments we may have received from customers, we did learn that it was important to make sure that the service was were accessible, not only having that phone line available, but also a wheelchair accessible vehicle for those who need it in our area that lifts vehicles are not accessible. And so we ended up having our paratransit vehicles on standby in case we received requests for wheelchair accessible vehicles. We also noted that people would have liked to have had use of the service within each zone. We made it so that either the start or in point of the trip had to be at one of the transit hubs. But we heard from some folks that they would have liked to have had the on demand service to travel within the zone, not necessarily making the transit connection immediately. And then we also learned that we would like to prioritize shared rides. This software did not allow for shared rides during the pilot project. But that was something that we wanted to do, again, from the perspective of being a public transit agency shared rights are important. Next slide please. So what came next? Well, we took the lessons learned, and we decided that we would like very much to continue some kind of similar service in the top limited access connections zone. So the top zones from that pilot, we thought deserved an ongoing service at some kind. We also thought about taking that on demand model and applying it to other heart to serve areas within our service area. We had to think about what Kind of a service model we'd like to use? Would it be something in conjunction with an transportation networking company? Would it be something we contracted for or will we provide it in house. And so we kind of weighed the pros and cons of all of those scenarios. And then of course, we had to find funding for this service, if we were to carry it forward. Next slide, please. So we designed our next pilot, kind of phase two of on demand experience for agency, and that was the runner. So the Pierce transit runner was built from those lessons learned of our limited access connections pilot, we chose a completely different zone. Another part of our service area that, for a few different reasons, is not well supported by fixed route service, we had tested a summer time trolley service using a 30 foot coach in this zone a couple of years. With that, not great success, it's kind of geographically limited. There's property ownership issues as far as putting accessible bus stops in and it's a two lane road that gets very busy at time. So all of those things made us to select it for something more flexible, and that's where runner came in. So we chose this waterfront corridor, it's very much a local and out of area tourist attraction. There's a lot of recreational activities, as well as restaurants and entertainment options along the corridor. We actually contracted with a company called medstar. And medstar is traditionally a medical services provider, but they do a lot of on demand services now, and they have their own in house app called going. We decided that again, we would like to encourage people to connect with transit hubs because we do not want to use our on demand service to take away from transit fixed route. But more to the point we would like it to feed our existing services bring people into and out of those transit hubs. So we also decided that we would like to use our standard Pierce transit fare payment methods, so folks can't use cash on the rudder, but they can show their Orca regional pass card or local all day pass. They can also use our mobile ticketing app to pay the fare. The pilot launched August the first of 2020 right in the middle of the pandemic, hoping for better times. And then we did actually have to cut the pilot short so we ended it February 28 of this year, just because low ridership due to pandemic impacts was affecting the service. Next slide.

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Now however, I am pleased to announce that the runner has his comeback and is bigger than it was before so we relaunched the restaurant runner at the first of this month. We also rebranded an existing service to and from the Joint Base Lewis McChord area. It was previously called the connector but we brought it under what we are now considering our runner umbrella of services. So it's now called the jblm runner, and is used for Department of Defense and military ID holders. It connects the points on the base to one of our transit hubs outside of the base. We also have a tide flats runner, which is in that large industrial area I mentioned at the beginning of my slideshow, we received a Washington State Department of Transportation region regional mobility grant for four years funding there. And we partner with the port of Tacoma, which is a very large employer in the industrial area, and other employers there too. And then we will be in the next few months launching another runner in the Parkland spanaway Midland area down south. That is an area that was very successful during our lift pilot. And we received state funding again, a special needs grant for four years of funding. And we plan a bus rapid transit corridor that goes right through the middle of that zone. So we expect it to be a good feeder for connections to that BRT service. Next slide. So our goals with this service are again to feed our fixed route transit to provide equitable access to services and I think I failed to mention that the runner vehicles that we use are fully accessible and they are modified vans with low floors that have a ramp out the back of them so that folks with mobility devices can ride as well as people with bicycles or strollers. Having a need to put those in the vehicle to, we want to use this, these projects as a test Mark market for fixed route potential. So if we have really well utilized render service in a certain area, we may be able to look at that as a place for future fixed route where there hasn't been fixed route before. And then just another kind of menu item in the buffet of services that our transit agency offers. I think that using an on demand option will bring people who maybe haven't considered using transit into the fold to try this service, and then maybe kind of get them to use our other services as well. Next slide. Here's my contact information, as well as a little promotional picture there of a bus shelter decorated with one of our runner posters. So if you'd like to follow up later, with any questions, please feel free. Thank you.

1:06:04

Penny, thank you for that brilliant presentation. And congratulations on the relaunch the rebrand. And the two new runners. I tried to find something clever if it meant to with an R but couldn't come up with one. Thank you for that presentation, we had a couple of questions that I'd like to go ahead and pose to you that I'd be curious about your feedback on. So you recognize in your presentation that you have limited access to data through the agreement you have with Lyft Steven Johnson asked however, did you notice a significant difference in driver quality among customers when they were comparing Lyft drivers to your in house, paratransit and demand response? drivers? So you mentioned that you manage all that in house? Did you see changes or differences?

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Well, I think we had to rely on customer comments for kind of quality assurance during the partnership with Lyft. Because we couldn't contact people directly. So I think that, you know, we, when we started that project we had, it was slow, slow to get writers and I think there was a hesitation that some people had, who are probably used to writing on our shuttle or on one of our fixed route buses, knowing that those are professionally trained drivers. And if they weren't familiar with how lift works, they may have been hesitant to give something a try. Cuz, you know, we there may have been the thought that well, that's not a Pierce transit driver, you know, or, you know, what's that going to be like I'm getting into someone's car. So I didn't have any kind of trend in comments where people were making complaints about the drivers. I think, for the most part, the people who tried the project, were just so glad to be able to have a way to access our services. That, you know, they they threw caution to the wind tried, tried lift if they had been hesitant to do so. But yeah, generally speaking, we didn't have any, you know, customer complaints or anything about the lift drivers, other than one or two where the lift driver couldn't find the person, for example, things like that. Thank you, Penny,

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a follow up question coming from Mike spatter for who's asked has the runner changed the way you operate your hub and spoke fixed route service? So with these new options, has that changed your sort of existing family of services?

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It's, it's a little early to tell, you know, we had the initial pilot in the Reston area. And then that was quite short in duration because of pandemic pause. And so now we've just been relaunched for, I guess, 30 days exactly today. So you know, the the ridership was fairly low on the pilot, so we didn't really have a chance to build it up like we did with the lift project, and really get a sense for how it was impacting service. I think that now we have more than one runner going, you know, simultaneously, we can get some idea of how people are making their connections using runner. And then as we get more data in on that, we will consider that as we look at our service plan right now. And we make service changes twice a year. And so the next one, we just made one this month, and so we'll make another one next March. So by then we'll have more understanding of how runner interacts with fixed route schedules and service.

1:09:43

Fantastic. Thank you Penny, so much for sharing your experience with a group this afternoon. By the way, for those of you who may have seen Penny's contact information, it was because we both Brandon and I saw Penny at another webinar that we reached out and So really appreciate your willingness to participate in this discussion today. I'm going to move us to our third and final presenter for this afternoon's webinar. Alan Benedict who is the director for learning for Learning Center and accessibility programs at the shared use MOBILITY Center. He is responsible for managing several national projects to evaluate opportunities and economic and environmental benefits related to shared mobility and integrated transportation systems. He holds an MA in geography with an emphasis in urban planning from the University of Akron, and a BA in psychology and Environmental Planning from the University of Wisconsin whitewater. And so again, with another gentle encouragement to add your questions to the chat, which has been bubbling with questions today. Al, I'm pleased to turn the webinar over to you.

1:10:55

Well, thanks. Thanks, Sheila. And it was it was great learning about the other the other projects, actually Next slide. And you can scroll right to the next one. That's just the title slide. So before I get started, just a little bit about the shared usability center. We are a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Costa Rica multimodal transportation system that works for all, we see transit as the backbone to that system, and in other modes help to support it through first last mile connections and meeting other travel needs. And we do this primarily through our work with the Federal Transit Administration and the California Air Resources Board. Those are two separate initiatives, but for both of them provide technical support to provide for mobility pilot projects. And antennae was one of the first MIT sandbox pilots that we were involved in. And so we learned, we learned along the way and in our, our job is to kind of take the lessons learned and try to share them with, you know, beyond the pilots themselves. So there's a we work on other projects, too. A couple of those I might draw on through this presentation. One in particular, we're working in a project in it's a community micro transit program. In Clarkston, Georgia, which is an ethnically diverse suburb just outside of Atlanta, the Atlanta, the Atlanta Regional Commission is leading that effort, along with the Center for pan Asian community services. And this project in particular has a regional scope is we are working to, to test the transactional data specification to integrate to mobility operators. So learn from that test case, and, and with the help of a regional deployment at some point down the road. Understanding that payments or transactions are, are really the key to any, you know, wide scale system integration. Next slide, please. So we, you know, thinking about pilot projects, and what it takes to bring them to scale, I wanted to step back just a little bit and think through some initial steps of the project and some considerations that can help to make it more successful in the long term. And really starting from from that, from that sort of basis, starting from square one, you know, revisiting these and and learning from them. And because

really, you know, gravity as pilot projects are really aimed at, you know, learning, you know, learning experience. And I'm glad this is a zoom meeting, I hope we have some time for questions at the end. because that'll give us versus a webinar, there'll be a little time to, to have some dialogue and conversations, not just about these considerations. But the of course, the other two great projects that were featured earlier. The so these are some of the program planning goals, evaluation, building partnerships, community engagement, those are kind of at a high level kind of touch on those pieces. Next slide, please. So in planning, I think it's important to really think about the complete trip and the service being proposed asking questions like, this is replacing an existing service or creating a new service, how people access it, if they need to walk on their sidewalks, you know, the sidewalks in good condition, the in what is the service area? Is it is it big enough to draw enough people to really test a pilot, but to largest service area could have the opposite effect where we put strains on the budget. So in the pilot really never has a chance to take off or succeed. So those are all kinds of considerations, you know, just to kind of think about, you know, the mode and and understand too, that the mode is sensitive to, to, to the, to the to the trip need and and also land use plays a significant role in that two, instead of having, you know, looking through your community and what are your mobility needs, and what are you trying to address and sort of thinking through the different options and how you know what work fast. Next slide, please. So this is a really long list, I put it out there more is more is a concept that this is these are some of the some of the things that are really helpful to think through in the planning stage of the project. And really kind of upfront in the initial initial, you know, stages of a project. And it also can work through these with the project team. So that everyone kind of has a thorough understanding, and revisiting the list and being flexible, updating, you know, updating your project along the way, as you as you learn lessons, you know, what's working, what isn't, is that, as I mentioned earlier, that really is the purpose of the pilot project. And some of these I'll kind of touch on in a little bit in a few of the later slides.

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Next slide, please. So goals and evaluation, it's also it's really important to upfront and project, discuss what your goals are early on with the project team, and then revisit them to make sure that your project is staying on track. And also understanding that this is an iterative process. So a pilot project might start out one way, but through the lessons learned, while operating budget, it's just it's just focus. And we saw that with with Penny's example, for example. But but but being flexible in learning from learning from the pilot itself and in in adjusting the pilot as it as it as it grows, and in understanding to then you know, there's a evaluation, that must happen too. So thinking about what data you need to evaluate a project, and then making sure that those, you have the necessary data and tools for that evaluation. If there's a private partner involved, then of course, you know, making sure those are, are in the contract and sort of upfront so that you have had some, some position going forward to and, and work with your your private partner as well to, to have a good relationship. Next slide, please. So the you know, partnership building can can't stress enough how important that is. and building trust among the project partners is really important. thinking through the project needs, and what are the holes, there might be other other government agencies that you could call into to help fill those holes. Ultimately, this will help to make the project more successful, because it can create the necessary support across the government agencies and allow for better coordination amongst services. Mobility is one of those pieces, but you know, think about what other services or agencies then sort of use that mobility service such as employment or use service agencies, can you work with them and build them into a project to really create a stronger, a stronger, more sustainable project. And then, of course, there's, there's private partners, working to establish a relationship, I think, being honest upfront in what your needs, you know, getting the project and at the same time, making sure you know, the contract really is, is really your is there for you to really sort of protect you and make sure that the project follows the your goals and that you set that you've established early on in the project. And then, you know, community partners that, that actually we can go to the next slide, because that's a, that's a slide, that's a slide in and of itself. But community engagement is critical to any project, and meeting the translators transit users on their terms and understanding their cultural needs. I think this is, it's really important not to not to resist conventional ideas for gathering as it really offers an opportunity to learn about the needs of the community, and if the search is going to meet those needs. For example, the last project that I mentioned earlier, we formed a steering committee with older adults and persons with disabilities, many of whom English wasn't their first language, or they spoke very little English at all. So, you know, that that presented some cultural,

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that, you know, just some cultural means that we need to kind of call upfront starting with what we call the group, you know, steering committee being a form, not a familiar term. And so we ended up calling it a leadership group, not just the term steering committee, but just the process of a steering committee and giving guidance to project is just not something that not everyone thinks about and understanding that and kind of, you know, thinking of ways to work around that is really is really important. So, the photos here show one of our community led meetings with C packs, shuttles, and given the COVID given this was COVID. It was a hybrid model, it was zoom. So each V in this was this was the leadership group. Each shuttle, there's a different language spoken, and we had translators that were able to talk with the appropriate language on each of the, each of the shuttles. And, personally, this was just a really rewarding experience to hear firsthand how important transportation is to, you know, to the leadership group and, and, and, and what they what their needs are and what they'd like to see in in a new system. And immediate on the shuttles to, you know, we were that itself, we were able to take advantage of familiar, Ceefax assets, but also a familiar environment. And so, you know, just kind of thinking creatively out of the box of how can you engage the community, and in try it and in your own MB, and being sensitive to, you know, different cultural needs along the way. So in this project, in particular, has the benefit of working with the Center for pan Asian community services, which is a strong community partner that runs transit along with other other social services, you know, if that isn't built into your project, inherently, then it's something that upfront, you know, you should really seek that out and try to find out, who's what community groups are serving the neighborhoods in, try to really work with them, because that they can provide a bridge to that community, so you can really learn firsthand and of course, you know, working with the community, you understand their needs, and and there's also a creates a sense of buy and your support for a project to so its increases its long term, potential for long term success. Next slide, please. So service integration is another aspect that I think is worth noting, in how all these services fit together, you know, there's the physical integration, which can occur through mobility hubs, they can be large, they can be small. But also, you know, where people can access those serve those serve as an opportunity for people to access multiple modes, and they have Wayfinding, and signage and but there's, there's also, you know, technically there's a this, this is a photo of kind of a, just a drawn up mobility hub, where all the all the nexus of services come together, and the trade, the car share vehicle, and the micro transit, Bike Share. So often, this is a large, you know, small one could just be a bench and a shelter and some signage. Yeah, so it's thinking what fits your community and But really, the idea is to integrate services. And then you know, of course, there's then it gets gets into the more technical aspects and integration also. And through data specifications and standards, you can really coordinate services across modes, thinking through what tools are available, how you might be elite, and how you might be able to use those tools to build a successful project. You know, that was I had a short presentation, I just have a couple of hard slides. Next slide, please. So the, you know, a lot of what we talked about here today, this is one of our, our Online Learning Center resource for where we try to share the lessons where the pilot projects that we work with, so please, please visit it. It's actually the site itself is actually going through and of the complete redo. And so we're in the process of that right now. But come from January, we hope to have a new site rolled out. So after using it, please let us know what you think. And given the ideas and how to improve it, we'd love to hear it. So. And I have one, one more slide. So this is also another resource that this is the transportation technical assistance coordination library. And this this, this site is is funded by the FTA. And it's really a place to pull the different resources together from the FTA TA Center. So please, there's the URL, I encourage you to visit that site as well. I think that's it. I think my contact information is on the last slide. So it's actually Elbert that Im, there's there's only a few of us out there. Yeah, but there's it's Albert at students that are so great. Please, please reach out if you have any questions.

1:24:21

Thank you so much, Albert, I so appreciate your time and your presentation. I've made sort of a weird executive decision. And I hope Brandon is ready to kind of roll through this. But I think we are going to bring all of our panelists back on and do our conversation together in these last few minutes that we have together. Because there are some powerful brains listening to this presentation and some serious power in our presenters today. So we've had a number of questions that have come through, and I'd like to kind of share what I think are the two groupings of them and then pitch them and we just move right lead through as best we can. So we have a lot of questions about what the planning process looked like, as you were piloting

your micro transit programs, things like did you test algorithms? And then similar questions about what funding sources did you use to pay for that planning of piloting, and those that you use for the operations of those services? So I'm going to, in the interest of time, I'm just gonna ask Matt, to quickly answer that penny. And then Albert, if you have something you want to add, go ahead, Matt.

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Yeah, in our planning process, it was a pretty small and nimble organization. So it was pretty much done all in house with existing operating funds and planning funds. Same with as a service grew, really some of the elimination of those fixed route services that we utilized, suspending those services and reallocating those funds towards this service. And then in terms of, you know, advanced planning for this, I can't like I kind of said in my presentation, a lot of it was trial and error. on our end, it was a putting together something we thought would work, which is probably for us about realistically, three to five month process, and then we threw it out there, and then we just started adapting. So I'll leave it at that.

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Perfect. Thank you, Matt, pin Kappa Chu, what planning process? Did you What did your planning process look like? And what funding sources did

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you use to tap?

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What did you tap into for that planning and piloting? And then for operations?

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Well, I guess ours was somewhat unique in that we had the mo D sandbox funding, I joined the agency about six years ago, and at that time, there were already discussions underway about what did what did transportation networking companies mean to, you know, fixed route transit, how can we partner and that kind of thing, so I, I was the new kid on the block, and it was like, Here carry on these conversations. And so that, that sort of shaped my duties at the agency for for the first year. And then with the sandbox funding, I was given the task of managing that pilot project. So you know, I obviously didn't operate alone, I had to do a lot of, you know, consulting with our, our planning department, our operations department, our service delivery, folks, marketing, communication, you know, such a new concept. You know, we did initial sort of customer outreach to see, you know, what, what we thought our customers would want this service to look like, and then, you know, consulted with a lot of other Well, not a lot, because there weren't many, but other sandbox projects, and others who've done similar projects. And I really do encourage you to check in with the shared use MOBILITY Center, talk about wealth of information, you know, we, we were the guinea pigs, the sandbox projects, and everything moves quite quickly in the world of micro transit. And so as we learned, others learned, and then our lessons became, you know, information for for others. So I think we took what, what we experienced in our initial project, and then that in combination with what our other local agencies were doing, as far as micro transit helped shaped the planning process for for putting the runner project together.

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Thank you, Penny, I'm going to ask a quick follow up question to Alan to Albert. So we have somebody who asked the question, Penny talked about it a little bit in her presentation. But I'd be curious, your national view. You there was some discussion about choosing that provider. And so there was a issue about making sure that algorithm is flexible, that it actually does work for the area that you're seeking to serve, and making sure that they will share data that you need and want. Albert, are there any Could you maybe identify two additional things that people ought to consider when they're looking to choose or contract with a provider for a micro transit project?

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notes? that's a that's a good question. We actually put out in the Atlanta project, we, we issued an RFP and and we just contracted with spare to provide that service that's on the learning Learning Center, the RFP and so I encourage people to look at it, but I mean, there's there's a lot. There's, I think, but part of the RFP that we created, I think we tried to, to really sort of simplify that and call it our project needs themselves. And in that case, we we in spirit has been it's been great to work with, you know, they agree, given SKIP AND Clarkston is such a diverse community. They agreed to translate languages in 10 different languages now with the support of C packs. Making sure that you know the answer Stand the performance metrics and the data that's needed. I see looking at the time, but you know, making sure that there's a point, a point, a point of contact that you will be able to actually call and talk to, and is that point of contact and be be available for trainings, and what kind of trainings are there? So that's all kind of those are all kind of considerations that you should think about when when entering into a contract. Working. But yeah, but knowing you're going to be working with them long term, really trying to establish a good relationship to you is critical.

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So we had one other question, but I know it's going to take more than four minutes to answer. But I'm just going to go ahead and do it anyway. And just throw it out there. And this is a question around who are the demographics of your customers? So Penny? Matt, if you would mind giving a quick answer to that. And then, you know, in that 40 seconds, you have, if you want to also integrate, what do you hear are those customer pain points relative to your services?

1:31:02

Yeah, I can certainly take a shot at that in terms of the service or customer demographics. As I said, my presentation, it's it's similar to kind of what we used to have for dollar runner, I think many systems, he would dalla ride services tend to be more of a transit dependent population, more or lower income, it's a more ethnically diverse, which we view as a positive, especially in our service area, we don't unfortunately have the most diverse service area. But we do see more diversity on our prime service. In terms of senior population 65. Plus, I want to say they make up about a third of our ridership, about the other third, being more or another third being our commuters that would utilize the service to get to and from work. And then the other third, just being kind of a mix of demographics using the service for really Aaron's one off type trips Point to Point trips at the service area. In terms of pain points for the customer, I would say the largest one in our experience has just been trying to get customers to feel confident with the service in terms of you know, we do go try to get out and provide travel trainings for the service, how to utilize the service, what to expect with the service, because it can be, I think, primarily nerve racking for customers, when they book a ride, not knowing exactly when that vehicle is going to show up, even though they get a time that shows up on their screen, or that our dispatcher will give to them. It's still, I think, especially the first time they use the service to trust that the vehicle is ultimately you know, and the service is going to work the way they want it to which we I think I've done a good job on and people people try it once and they realize it's a pretty slick service. But also just with the flexibility of the software, a lot of times people's arrival time will change. And so I think people are getting used to the idea that when you book a ride, we're not you're not going to get a guaranteed arrival time, you're not going to get a set

arrival time. So that's, I would say the biggest pain point, it's not necessarily a negative, it's just, again, I think people feel a little bit uneasy, how they're going to use this, if the surface is going to operate for them the way they need it to. But on the whole, I would say it does.

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Henny, you want to take a stab at answering that in the next minute. And then Brandon and I will wrap it up for today for today's call.

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You know, luckily enough, I can say ditto to what Matt just said, for the pain point. The idea of people, you know, transit is two people is I stand by this sign. And this bus pulls up at the time that my you know, book or app shows, and then the idea of something being on demand a small van, in our case, you know, in a parking lot, you know, it's that that sort of idea of Hmm, how is this gonna work? Are they going to be here when it says on the app and so forth? As far as the demographics with our lift program, it was kind of all over the place. You know, we had our zones tailored to sort of appeal to different kinds of folks was it students at a college was it commuters trying to catch a train was it people who needed to travel in the middle of the day for shopping and errands and we actually from the folks that we we ended up talking to we had a smattering from all those different populations and some of the best customer stories that I got from people were folks who made a habit of using it once they tried it. And they really liked the service we had a lot of folks who have maybe you know visual limitations or other sort of mobility limits who found it very helpful because the service would come right to their house practically you know and take them where they needed to go so I think it It opened up ridership to those who may be can't get to a bus stop easily which was exactly the point of our service and I think we'll see the same things with runner is that service builds ridership.

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Thank you again. And so on behalf of the other mobility champions, I want to thank Matt, Penny and Albert, you've given us a lot to think about. And I appreciate your honesty, and your sharing your experiences throughout your presentations. And in responding to questions from the audience, which was clearly the smartest group that's ever been on a webinar. And so to our folks that were participating, appreciate your questions, they were incisive, and appreciate your focus on looking at piloting as an option. Brandon has up on our screen currently, and evaluation, we want to encourage you to take part in that evaluation. Your input is critical. And so I want to remind you of that survey, We value your honest assessment and finally many things to Brandon, as always, for your leadership, your organization and definitely your technical expertise. Have a good rest of the day. Thank you for spending your time with us. Thank you, Brandon. Are

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you still on