

7 Common Mistakes

Made During Transit Software Implementations

(And How To Avoid Them)

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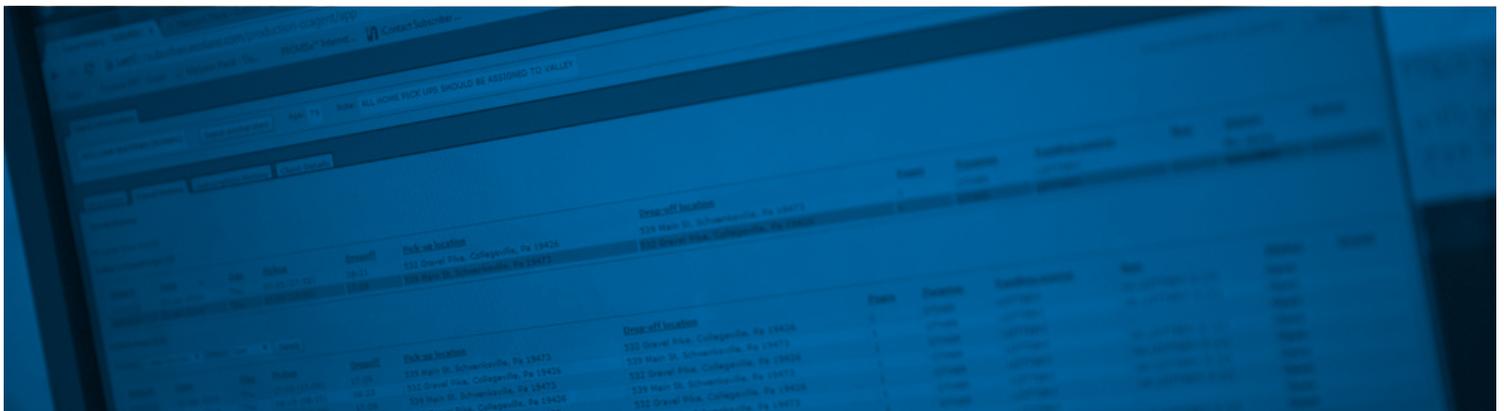
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Introduction

So you're considering implementing new transit software for your agency? Congratulations! With it you will be able to greatly improve efficiencies and make happier customers, but only if implemented properly.

Just like any other change within your agency, implementations like these are hard, and anyone who tells you otherwise may simply be trying to sell you something. Without the right knowledge and experience that accompanies successful transit software implementations, you could very easily be trading in your new software's benefits for poor adoption rates, unhappy customers and major headaches. Luckily for you, there are a number of very common mistakes that implementation experts are aware of and have listed throughout this resource. These include poor communications with stakeholders, improper data handling, ineffective training plans and disorganized go-live efforts. Continue reading to receive tips that will help you and your agency avoid the common pitfalls when implementing new products within your operations. In the end, you may be better prepared to realize your new software's advantages and be able to leave the aspirin at home.

**Implementations are hard. Change is hard.
Anyone who tells you otherwise is
trying to sell you something.**



1 Not Communicating With Your Customers

The proper communication of changes being made during the implementation of new transit software is crucial to the success of the project, and one of the most important groups to update is your agency's customers.

To assume your implementation project will be transparent to your customer-base is naïve at best. Prepare accordingly.



Spending the necessary time to understand what information should be shared with this group and when to do so is imperative.

Take a proactive approach to your customer communication efforts by:

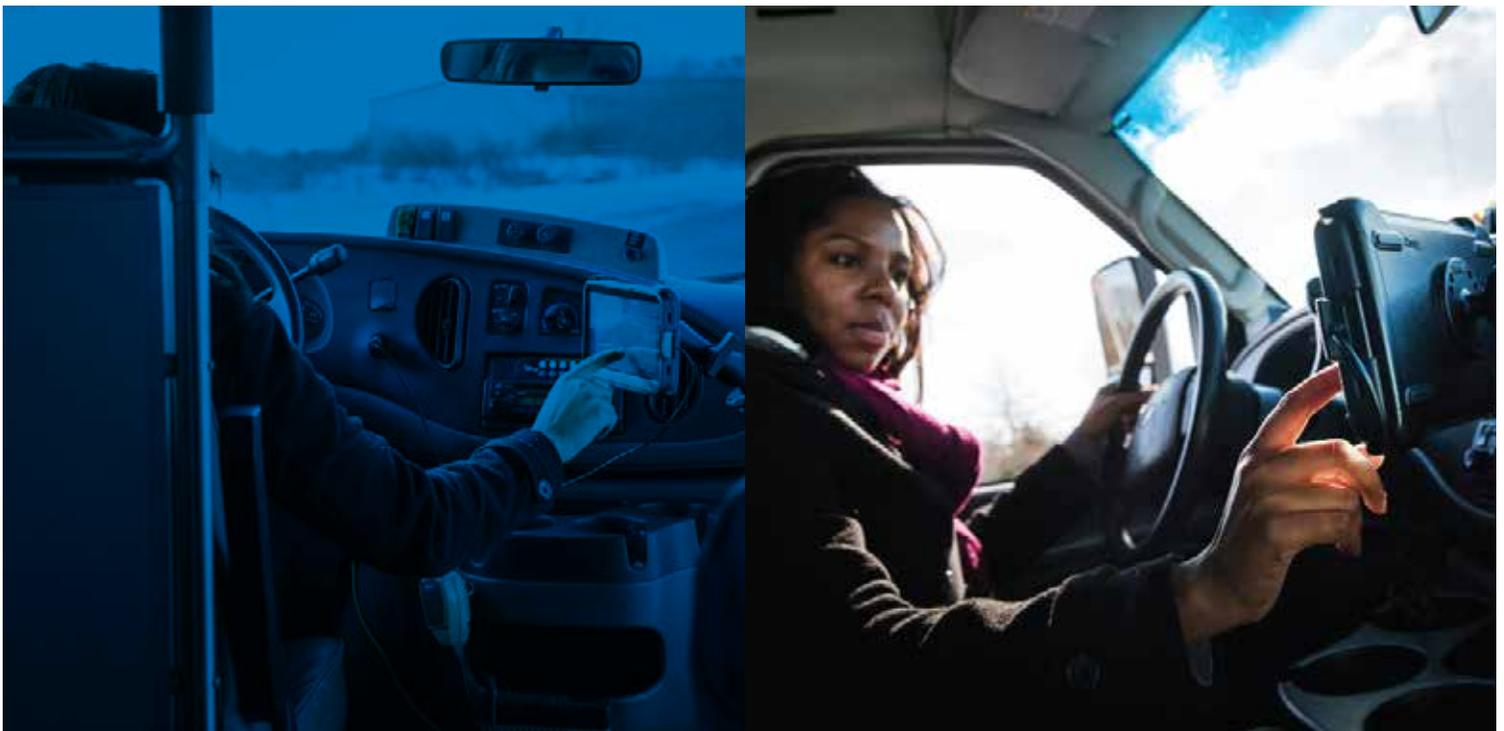
1. Working with your software provider to identify any potential changes your customers should expect. Examples include:

- **Changes in the reservation process** - One of the most important interactions between transit agencies and their riders is the reservation process. If the task of making reservations is different post-implementation, customers need to be aware of those changes ahead of time.
- **Changes in pick-up/drop-off times** - Assuming an agency's core activity is moving people from place to place, the management of pick-up and drop-off times cannot be altered without letting riders know. Do they need to plan their time differently? Sometimes the change management of making things more efficient can actually feel more difficult for some.

- **Changes in the enforcement of existing policy** - Every agency has a variety of operational policies that are documented for their riders. However, it's also true that as time goes by the enforcement of the policies can become inconsistent as exceptions are made. It's important that if you intend to begin enforcing those rules again that your riders are aware of it in advance. The initial step is to determine what internal exceptions are being made on a regular basis and incorporate that information into your communications.

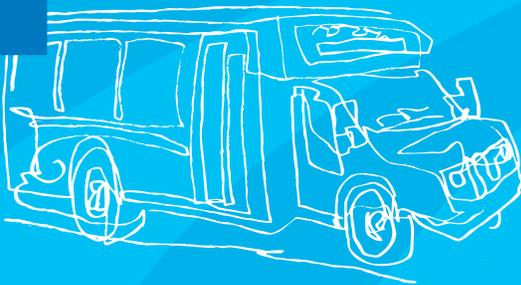
2. Implementing operational changes before the go-live process. Many new software implementations may require operational changes as well, even if it only involves the way that you communicate to your riders. These changes are the most likely to affect your customers and should be implemented proactively to allow them to acclimate to a new way of doing things. This type of communications allows for minor operational kinks to be ironed out and new processes to be adopted by the time the new system goes live.

3. Communicate your goals. It's so vital that your riders understand the benefits of your transition, so that they don't feel that change is being made just for change's sake.



2 Not Communicating With Partner Agencies

Partner agencies such as senior facilities and non-profits are organizations that you provide services to as well, and they should also be receiving proactive communications from your agency. It's important that the necessary time is taken to understand how system and operational changes connected with new transit software implementations may affect these organizations and to share this information with them. This type of proactive communication can help to improve partner relations, new operations and overall customer adoption of the new system.



It's important to remember that your riders are not your only "customers."

Examples of Changes to Communicate to Partner Agencies:

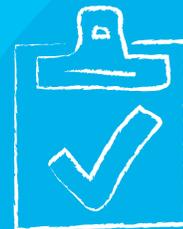
- **Senior centers and related facilities should be made aware of drop-off and pick-up scheduling changes at transit companies.**
- **Changes to the reservation process should be communicated to partner agencies as well.** Some facilities manage ride requests for their visitors, and even if they don't, it's important that they understand the procedures their visitors will be following in order to schedule service to and from their facilities.
- **If any driver changes are anticipated, this should also be communicated.** If a particular facility has always had a set of specific group of drivers providing service to their facility, any anticipated changes should be communicated in advance.

As with your riders, communicating the goals of your implementation with partners is essential.

3 Not Communicating With Drivers

Your drivers are your agency's ambassadors on the road and are ultimately responsible for enacting any procedural or technology changes in daily operations. Drivers should be included early on in the implementation process and allowed to address their concerns in order to identify and flush out major operational issues associated with the new system so it can be avoided or fixed before go-live.

The speed at which you go from your initial go-live to patting yourself on the back for a successful implementation is heavily dependent on how effectively you get buy-in and compliance from your drivers.



While conversations with drivers about the operational issues of a new system can appear to be an obvious activity to do during implementation, there are many other types of information that can be gathered in these meetings, including:

- Rider's reaction to new processes and new technologies
- Typical exceptions to policies that are made on the road that need to be accounted for in your implementation
- Identifying leaders among the drivers that can influence the project in a positive way

4 Not Reviewing Your Data

When implementing software, it is really tempting to just import your data as-is, and then clean it up later. This is a recipe for pain. Like all computer systems, the accuracy of your results is going to be completely dependent on the quality of the data being put into the new software. Regardless of what kind of solution your agency is coming from, there may be a number of data inconsistencies that have crept into your records over the years. As part of a major implementation, transit agencies have a huge opportunity to clean up and standardize data in order to future-proof their ongoing operations.

**Fix those errors before you import data.
Your life will be much easier.**

When collecting data to move to your new system, keep an eye out for the following errors:

- Do these clients still ride with us?
- Is this the correct address?
- Have we been consistently noting special needs for clients in a standardized manner?
- Is the rest of their profile information up to date with our current reporting needs?

Ensuring that only good data is transferred is a huge part of any successful software implementation.



5 Assuming Management Does Not Need Training

As with any new software or system implementation, staff training is required to introduce the agency to the new functions, applications and processes being put into place. Many “hands-on” employees such as drivers and dispatchers will receive the most intensive trainings while managers might express their desire for only minimal amounts of training. This can be a major mistake for many reasons.



Having a good overall understanding of the solution gives managers an important frame of reference when working with their staff and customers during the Go-Live.

It is very important for agencies to have managers who fully understand the software system being implemented so that they can clearly communicate new requests, tasks and explanations to both vendors and their subordinates in a way that takes into account new processes and applications. This clear understanding also enables managers to effectively respond to their community and partner agencies with specific data in addition to being able to communicate the goals of the project. The deeper their frame of reference, the better a manager can set expectations for service and plan for the future needs of the agency.



6 Not Having A Game Plan For Go-Live

So you've consulted your drivers, fully trained all of your staff and have proactively communicated with customers regarding relevant changes, and now it's time to take your new solution live! Rare is the Go-Live effort which runs perfectly smooth. The overwhelming majority face a number of both major and minor hiccups that can minimize the new software's effectiveness.



Make sure every staff member has a playbook for success.

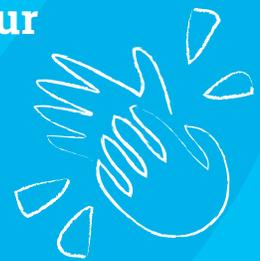
By creating a detailed game plan, agencies can effectively cover common issues including:

- 1. Staffing:** Implementation and Go-Live is no time for vacation whether you're a driver or a transit manager. Plan out and update target dates for go-live procedures and communicate this timetable with your staff to ensure that your agency has every staffing resource available and up to speed when the new system goes live.
- 2. Lack of Resources:** Your staff will receive a number of questions, concerns and complaints from customers struggling to adapt to new changes during a go-live procedure. It's important to equip them with the resources needed to efficiently and effectively manage these customers in a standardized manner. Work with your software vendor to build out a script filled with canned responses and procedures to follow that you can then distribute to your employees. This script should include:
 - Canned responses to common customer questions.
 - Lists of procedures to follow for specific or common service situations
 - A clear method of reporting unforeseen issues that enables transparent follow-up from management.

7 Conclusion-Forgetting To Cheer

Congratulations, your new transit software has been fully implemented and the Go-Live procedure was a success! You were able to avoid many of the common implementation mistakes other agencies ran into and both you and your customers are benefiting from the efficiencies brought on by your new software. You're still making one big mistake, though. With all of the time and energy put in to implement the new system, train the staff on it and communicate the changes, it can be easy to forget to celebrate a job well done at the end.

Make sure to take some time to celebrate your agency's victory and thank all of your staff for their input, hard work and dedication; they (and you) have certainly earned it.



Want to find out what specific benefits and efficiencies can be realized after successfully taking transit software live? Read our [Arlington Handitran Case Study](#) or [Estuary Transit District Case Study](#) to find out how implementation and go-live procedures can be customized by the right vendor to maximize results and savings.

Interested in finding out if your agency can benefit from new transit software? Request a [Transit Optimization Consultation](#) from Ecolane today to speak with a transit expert in a "no-pressure" environment.



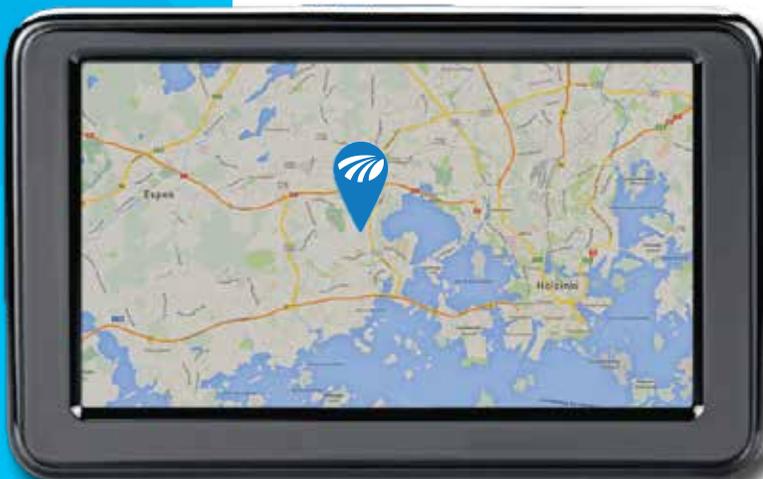
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