

Design sprints in transit

A faster way to
solve operational
challenges

Across North America, transit agencies are working to meet the expectations of riders, employees, taxpayers, and politicians. Challenged with inadequate funding, aging rolling stock, and crumbling infrastructure, they routinely confront a growing state-of-good-repair backlog, stakeholder finger-pointing, insufficient geographic coverage, performance-killing traffic congestion, and unsafe crowding on vehicles and at stops and stations.

Such challenges present themselves at exactly the moment that new mobility services are making it easier for customers to bypass public transit altogether to get exactly where they want to go, quickly and on demand.

As a result, mass transit faces a significant challenge: unsatisfactory service will drive ridership away, which will lead to further cuts to transit funding, which will further diminish service, which will reduce ridership. It is a potentially vicious cycle.

In this context, transit agencies cannot afford to wait for new funding, new capital construction, new technology, a new collective bargaining agreement, or a game-changing solution to the first mile/last mile problem. They must improve service, elevate the customer experience, and operate more efficiently with the resources they have *today*.

What can your agency solve today?

Within every transit agency, there are longstanding elements of internal operations and service delivery that are widely perceived to be broken. These tend to be issues that come up repeatedly in customer satisfaction surveys, employee engagement programs, or media reports. They are areas where everyone agrees “there must be a better way,” though nobody seems to agree on what that might be. Here are just a few examples.



Many of these problems are not dependent on capital investment or technology. They are symptomatic of a breakdown between people, processes, and desired outcomes: between employees and customers, or between management and unions, or between departments such as planning and operations, or between municipal and regional partners.

Because transit agencies often operate in highly politicized and contentious environments, solving problems like these can be particularly difficult. It's not surprising that "analysis paralysis" is often the result, extending implementation delays and driving up costs.

It's here that design sprints can be particularly powerful.

What is a design sprint?

Bridgeable has evolved design sprints—a methodology first developed by Google Ventures for the rapid development of digital products and features—to quickly solve operational challenges for large transit agencies. Our clients have successfully used sprints to address everything from creating comprehensive corporate plans with stakeholder input to improving the payment experience for customers.

A sprint can solve in four to six weeks what would normally take nine to twelve months. And it does so in a way that effectively aligns stakeholders and jump-starts implementation.

Sample project plan (4–6 weeks)

Stakeholder engagement

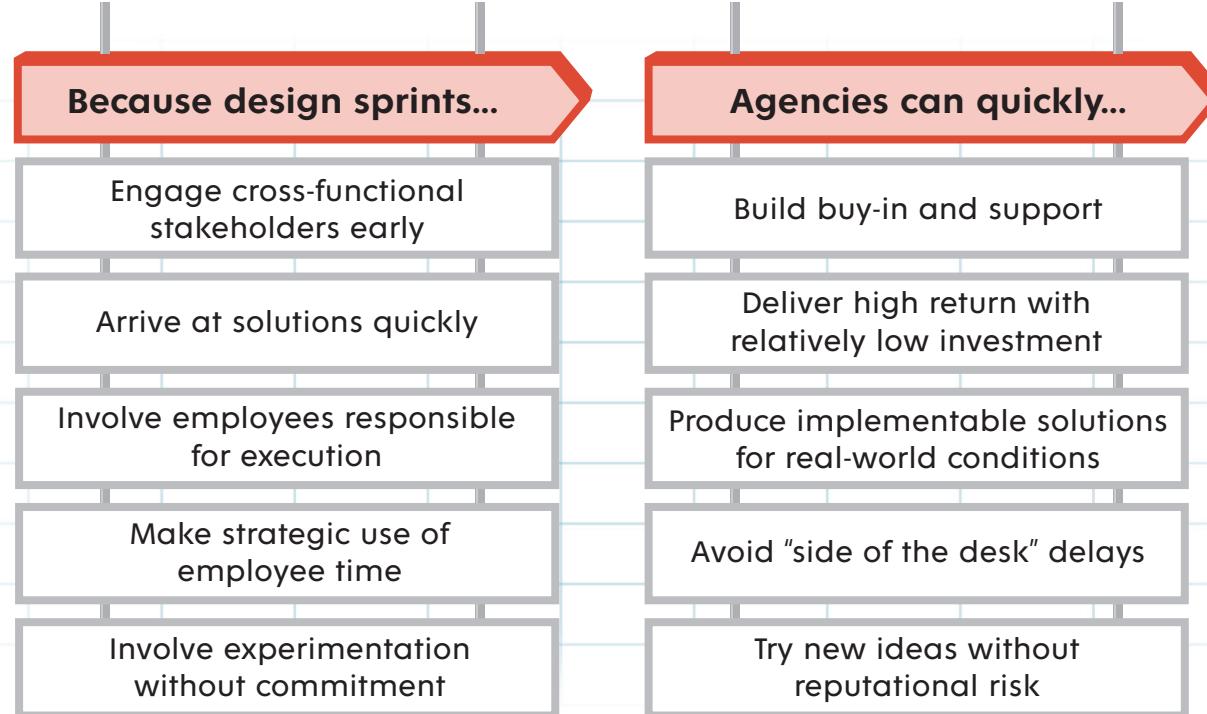
Immersive sessions and in-field research with customers and/or employees to generate insight and initial ideas

Prototyping and iteration

Stakeholders work directly with Bridgeable designers to rapidly prototype, test, and iterate solutions until they clearly show desirable results.

Implementation planning

Stakeholders, including those directly responsible for implementation, co-create an execution plan that they can own, complete with timelines and accountabilities.



How do design sprints alter your culture?

Because design sprints plunge agency employees into creative problem-solving, customer (or user) focus, cross-silo collaboration, and agile operations, they provide a model for how transit agencies will *have* to evolve if they are to remain competitive. Using multiple design sprints to solve pressing problems that involve different departments and functions can be a powerful tool to break through bureaucracy, defuse skepticism, and build momentum for a more agile, customer-focused future.



Bridgeable is a Toronto-based service design consultancy that works with major transit agencies to improve the customer and employee experience. Focusing on inclusive stakeholder engagement and rapid execution, we have helped some of North America's largest transit agencies redefine customer service, develop comprehensive operational and capital plans, optimize the payment experience, and improve paratransit.

Our work with MTA on the rapid development of the Fast Forward Plan to Modernize New York City Transit was awarded first place at the Design Value Awards by the Design Management Institute. New York City Transit President Andy Byford applauded our work for its "highly impactful stakeholder engagement, strategy, and design."

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