

Improving Intercity Bus Service in Missouri

Business Issue

Transportation needs of the citizens of Missouri vary. While many citizens travel by automobile to reach a destination, many who are unable to drive or do not have access to an automobile must rely upon other means to travel. One option available to citizens who want to reach a destination in Missouri or elsewhere in the country is intercity bus service. Over the years, however, the level of ridership on buses has declined. In 1970, intercity bus ridership in the United States peaked at about 130 million passengers per year. Today, ridership is estimated to be around 40 million passengers.

As ridership declined, the number of access points available to bus riders has also decreased. In Missouri, the greatest impact of the declining number of bus stops is felt in rural areas and communities that are not along the interstate

highway systems where bus service is concentrated. When citizens in these areas lose service, they often travel greater distances and incur additional costs in order to board a bus at another stop—or they forgo traveling at all.

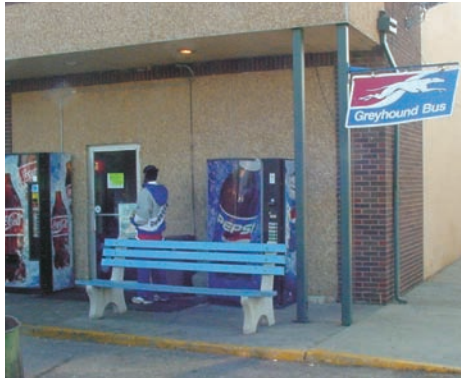


Background

Beginning in 2005, Greyhound announced that it was streamlining its operations. As part of this process, it announced that it would be reducing stops and eliminating routes across the country. In 2003, Missouri had 50 bus stops available for riders to access intercity bus service. By 2005 that number declined to 39, a loss of 11 stops over this two-year period. In some instances, routes that were no longer profitable were eliminated. In other instances where a route was profitable, a stop along that route may not have been warranted because the number of outbound passengers was not sufficient to justify a stop. One particular route that was eliminated had been in service for decades. Some routes and stops were spared from closure as other service providers took them over, where it was feasible for them to do so. As stops were being closed, citizens looked to MoDOT and their elected representatives for assistance to keep more stops from closing or to reopen stops and routes.

Approach

To address the decline in intercity bus stops, MoDOT undertook a study to determine the level of ridership at Missouri bus stops and to determine the needs, characteristics and perceptions of Missouri riders. The results of the study would aid MoDOT's Multimodal Division in understanding the role of intercity bus service and, if justified, reverse the trend of bus stop closures. To effectively complete the project, the study required an extensive amount of field research. It was important to have the cooperation of the intercity bus companies operating in Missouri as much of the research was conducted with their passengers both at bus stops and onboard the buses.



Using a survey tool that was created for the study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with passengers. The interview process had three components: current trip information, previous bus trip experience, and demographic information. Missouri residents were the primary targets of the study; but the prominence of non-Missouri residents on the bus indicated there was an interstate component that should be included in the study. The interviews were conducted both at bus stops while passengers were waiting to board and on-board as the bus continued along its route. From the study, MoDOT was able to identify passenger characteristics related to demographic information, their frequency and use of intercity bus service and their perceptions about the current level of service.

Bus passenger counts were also taken at most of the bus stops along routes. Passengers boarding and getting off the bus were counted in the study, and information about their trip origin, trip destination and trip time within Missouri was collected. The bus counts helped MoDOT identify gaps in service between the locations of need (origins and destinations) for intercity bus service or feeder bus service and the current inventory of bus stops in Missouri.

Conclusions

Access and Security: Missouri citizens that travel between Missouri's major cities on intercity bus benefit greatly from this service. In the major cities, the bus stops are located along local transit routes. Citizens in rural, or less populous, areas, often find it difficult to locate a bus stop or to find local transportation. Often they cannot purchase a ticket at these stops.

Bus stops in Missouri's major cities also offer waiting areas and are open for business nearly round the clock. Citizens boarding

or getting off at rural stops usually do not have this convenience. Bus company agents, who also operate one or two primary businesses at the stop (such as a convenience store or a restaurant), operate many of these stops in rural areas. There is often little or no waiting space, insufficient lighting and no security in place.

National Significance: Another key finding is that most riders on buses operating in Missouri are interstate travelers. The stops in Missouri's major cities usually accommodate out of state travelers who are waiting to transfer to another bus line, route or mode of travel. The majority of Missouri riders are traveling from or into Missouri's major cities, primarily, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Springfield.

Distinct Groups of Riders: Certain population groups rely more heavily upon intercity bus travel than others. Among the population groups identified in the study are: people living in Amish settlements, people of Hispanic origin, college students, military personnel, and persons recently released from incarceration. The companies providing intercity bus service in Missouri recognize these groups as target markets and have located stops in areas near to their centers of population.

Rider Satisfaction: Riders are generally satisfied with the level of bus service available in Missouri. They were some concerns expressed about personal safety and bus stop accommodations, among others. These concerns varied among the respondents.

Recommendations

With its intercity bus service partners, MoDOT can improve intercity bus service by implementing recommendations that include:

- Develop an intercity bus website within MoDOT's website.
- Develop outreach activities that target market segments using intercity transit.
- Place signs along routes that carry intercity service to direct citizens to an intercity bus station or stop.
- Partner with local communities to use their facilities as stations/stops for intercity bus providers or establish stations/stops near local transit stops.
- Continue to develop and maintain feeder services that connect people in rural areas that are not as well served.
- Work with other units in MoDOT or local transportation agencies to ensure that adequate night lighting is available at bus stations/stops
- Assess the needs of communities that are not currently being served by an intercity bus provider.

Further Information:

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