



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration



Limited English Proficiency Accessibility Program: Demonstration Program

Background

Over the past decade, many transit agencies have been trying to find more effective ways to meet federal requirements to address the needs populations, particularly who have limited ability to read, write, or speak English and who are highly dependent on public transportation. In June 2005, TriMet formed an interdivisional workgroup to assess the informational needs of TriMet's LEP (Limited English Proficiency) customers to ensure that members of this community have full and meaningful access to all TriMet services. LEP persons are those individuals ages 5 years and older who report speaking English "less than very well," as classified by the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2006, Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet) secured grant funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that enabled the agency to launch a creative and ambitious LEP demonstration program.

Objectives

The objectives of the research were to evaluate the current status of TriMet's LEP demonstration program, including:

- Program accomplishments over the duration of the grant
- The decision-making frameworks developed through the program to address LEP issues
- Successful methods and strategies developed through the LEP program
- Lessons learned throughout the life of the program

Findings and Conclusions

The combination of language-specific personal outreach and culturally-appropriate communication approaches can enhance the transit experience for individual LEP customers, LEP community groups, and front-line TriMet staff.

Spanish-speaking LEP persons were chosen as the primary audience for the demonstration project as they were the largest (65%) of the LEP populations in the TriMet district. Program activities included hiring an LEP Outreach Coordinator, developing standard operating policies and procedures for translating and interpreting vital documents and providing notice of second language services, training staff, and, using qualitative and quantitative methods, evaluating the effectiveness of the program before and after implementation. This evaluation included input from the general population, LEP community partners, LEP individuals, and TriMet personnel.

TriMet's internal and external communications activities were reviewed, and key areas were identified that could be improved to enhance staff's ability to provide better access to LEP riders. These included Web pages, customer service information, signage, printed materials, and ticket vending machines. Also, a major emphasis was to deliver travel training to new LEP riders. Input from members of the LEP community was solicited on intercultural communications issues, the quality of TriMet's written materials, the proper distribution channels for these materials, appropriate media, and awareness and use of TriMet trip tools.

This report demonstrates a progression of improvements made by TriMet to better serve LEP customers. The initial investment afforded the agency the opportunity to focus more on meeting the needs of diverse populations, resulting in the development of practical guidelines and protocols. As part of the project, LEP Access Plan Implementation Guidelines and an LEP Access Toolkit, both presented as part of the final report, were developed to assist transit agencies to better meet the needs and demands of LEP riders.

Benefits

The findings of this demonstration project will be useful to other transit agencies around the U.S. Over the course of this demonstration program, FTA's effort to assist all transit agencies to better meet the needs and demands of riders who are LEP has led to referral of some of those agencies to consult with TriMet. TriMet has provided its LEP plan and ongoing learning to transit agencies embarking on developing a plan.

Project Information

FTA Report No. 0068

This research project was conducted by Martín González of TriMet. For more information, contact FTA Project Manager Brian Whitehead, Administrative Officer, at (202) 366-3051, brian.whitehead@dot.gov. All research reports can be found at www.fta.dot.gov/research.