<u>PRTC Executive Director's Time</u>

INFO   Executive Director Report

- Brand Refresh – [Verbal]
- Article The "Choice vs. "Captive Transit Rider Dichotomy Is All Wrong
- OmniRide Fuel Gauge Dashboard

Summary: "The Choice vs. Captive Rider Dichotomy is All Wrong"

Original article by Angie Schmitt in Streetsblog. Appeared July 2016.

Transit agencies often separate customers as either "choice" or "captive" riders. As the name implies, choice riders are those who choose transit over other available modes, most typically driving. Captive riders are those who must take transit because they do not own a car. However, a July 2016 Transit Center survey of 3,000 transit riders in the US—summarized in a Streetsblog article in the same month—dispels this simple dichotomy.

Why "Choice" and "Captive" are wrong:

- Many car free riders, even the poor, are not really "captive" to transit, with almost 2/3 having used another mode during the surveyed month.

- The report also found that in neighborhoods with fast and frequent transit, both car-owning and car-free households ride more often than their counterparts in transit-poor areas, indicating that the service quality matters more than the rider's status.

Because it's wrong, it leads to bad planning: Since the "choice" vs. "captive" separation is erroneous, it can lead to money wasted on frivolities like Wi-Fi and new seating catering to effervescent "choice" riders. Instead, limited budgets should focus on the basics of frequency, speed, and reliability, which are the real drivers of ridership.

If riders are not "choice" or "captive", why do they ride? The Transit Center report found that riders generally fit into three categories:

- <u>Occasional:</u> Ride every now and then, but not regularly.

- <u>Commuters:</u> Ride regularly, but only for work.

- <u>All-purpose:</u> Use transit for all occasions.

Even in places with low-transit use, like Tucson, AZ, a large percentage of households (20% in Tucson) are occasional riders. Improving service basics could capture this latent ridership.

So how can agencies entice riders? Transit Center found three factors that influence the number of high-use riders:

- <u>Walkability:</u> More people use transit if it is easy to walk to. Building sidewalks and crosswalks as well as zoning to ensure that residents are within ¼ mile of stops can boost ridership.

- <u>Frequency:</u> Surveyed riders listed frequency as one of the top 3 ways to improve service. Buses that come often but cover a small footprint are preferable to many riders over buses that come on the hour (or less often) but cover a large area.

- <u>Speed:</u> Frequent service means nothing if the trip takes forever. Off-board fares, bus-only lanes, signal-priority, and consolidating close stops can speed up travel.

So what? How a "back to the basics" approach can help PRTC

When transit agencies reorganize to grow ridership, they are often tempted to focus on flashy amenities like Wi Fi and new, upscale branding. But while these niceties may create a luxurious feel, they ignore the fact that most riders—even affluent commuters—are more worried about time, reliability, and access. As PRTC restructures and reforms itself to win back riders, it will be important to stay focused on improving the service in ways that will draw the most customers. The Transit Center report and accompanying Streetsblog article gives several ways for agencies to do that.

1. **Back to the Basics**
   The Transit Center report found that riders choose to use transit for three main reasons: the ease of getting to the stop, the frequency of the service, and the speed of the trip. This finding suggests that focusing on improving such features is the best way for PRTC to grow.

2. **Grow the ridership that exists**
   One of the main points of the Transit Center report is that riders use transit on a continuum: some use it a lot, many use it infrequently, others just for the commute. With that finding, the best way to grow ridership isn't to target non-users, but to try to get the infrequent riders to use the service a little more, the commuters to use it outside of work, and so on.

   For instance, PRTC could look at why many OmniRide customers don't use OmniLink in the mornings, evenings, and weekends. Clearly OmniRide lives up to their expectations—what would entice them to use to OmniLink? Can they be enticed to OmniLink at all? There are also many people who occasionally use OmniRide but more often slug or drive alone. What could PRTC do to get these folks to ride our service more?

3. **OmniLink riders have other options**
   As Transit Center points out, few people are actually completely dependent on transit. Those without cars have other options—walking, getting a ride from a friend, etc.—and many people use those options, even in a heavily car-oriented place like Prince William County. Building service to attract these people, rather than "lifeline" service would mean more rides by more people—including from those who own cars.

4. **The land use around the bus stop matters too**
   Since most riders get to local transit stops by walking, access to sidewalks and safe routes to stops can block folks from riding. This is especially true in suburban areas where sidewalks are often limited. By working with stakeholders to put in sidewalks and crosswalks, PRTC could help extend service to neighborhoods that would use it heavily.

5. **Technology and branding still matter, but only once the basics are done**
   A strong brand identity and technical improvements like real-time information and mobile ticketing are necessary. However, they are really only valuable after the basics are covered.
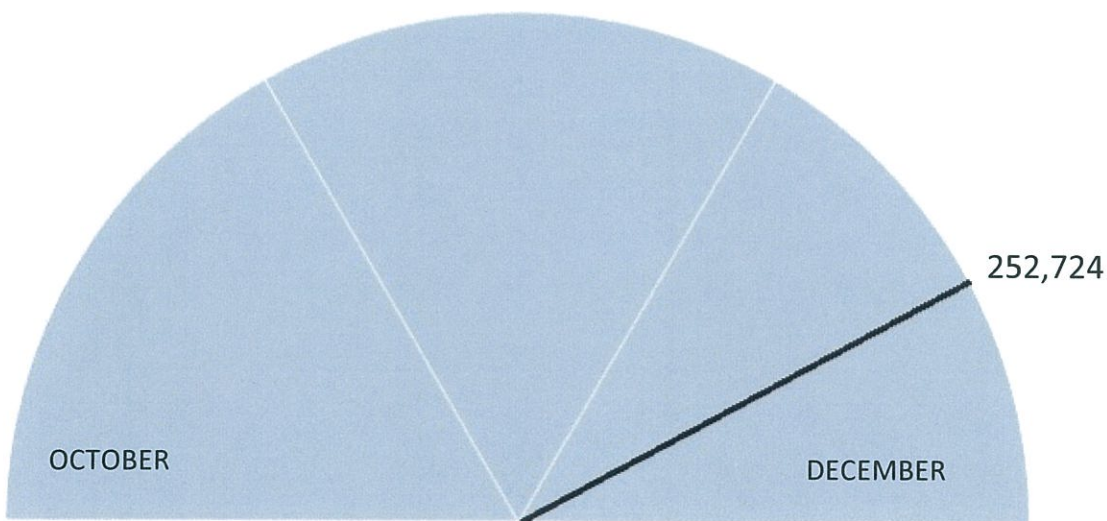
OmniRide Fuel Gauge

Quarter Two: October 1, 2017—December 31, 2017

FY2018 Q2	Fuel Delivered		FY2017 Q2	Fuel Delivered	
Average Per Gallon	$ 1.90		Average Per Gallon	$ 2.02	
Total Gallons	252,724		Total Gallons	248,003	
Total Cost	$ 480,362		Total Cost	$ 501,692	

Delivered Fuel vs Budgeted Fuel Delivery (FY18 Q2)

252,724

OCTOBER

DECEMBER

Fuel Expenditures vs Budgeted Fuel Expenditures (FY18 Q2)

$480,362

OCTOBER

DECEMBER