



SJSU Research Center
210 N. Fourth St., 4th Fl.
San José, CA 95112

Tel // 408.924.7560
Fax // 408.924.7565

transweb.sjsu.edu

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Long-Term Trends in Patron Satisfaction of DC Circulator

Errol Noel, Ph.D. and Stephen Arhin, Ph.D.

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The DC Circulator (Circulator) was incepted in 2005 as a public-private enterprise by the Downtown DC Business Improvement District (DCBID), the Washington

Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA) and DC Surface Transit Inc., and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT). The primary purpose of this local transit system was to facilitate travel to and within the central business area. The Circulator routes also provide access from fringe areas to Metro rail and bus services. As part of its performance management program, DCBID conducts surveys of patrons during summers to assess patron trends and feedback, including their satisfaction with the services provided. Although the data provided snapshots of consumer opinion and feedback, there was no analysis or surveys to examine how the observed variables changed over the years or whether there were seasonal variations. This study provided some of the trends in patron feedback and perception of the quality of service of the DC Circulator using survey data compiled over the seven-year period (from 2005 through 2011) in addition to data collected in summer and fall of 2012.

The Circulator helps promote the use of mass transit...with an average of 89% of riders completely satisfied with the service it provides.



DC Circulator

Study Methods

This research project conducted on-board surveys of patrons during the summer and fall of 2012 using the survey instrument previously developed by DCBID. The interviewees, who were Howard University students, went through two days of training at the offices of DCBID prior to the commencement of the on-board survey. The sample size needed for this survey was computed based on a 5% level of significance with three confidence units, based on annual ridership data. The summer on-board bus survey commenced in May 2012 and was completed in early July 2012, during which a total of 1,227 responses were obtained while the fall survey returned 554 responses between November and December 2012. The survey was conducted on five routes from Monday through Sunday. The survey results from 2005 through 2011 were also obtained from DCBID and analyzed.

Findings

An average of 99% of the patrons would definitely recommend the use of the Circulator

The results showed that from 2005 through 2012 almost all (an average of 99%) of the patrons claimed they would definitely recommend the Circulator to others. In addition, an average of 89% of the riders in both surveys in 2012 (summer and fall) said they “strongly agree” or “agree” that they are satisfied with bus service overall. The survey also showed that in 2012 (from both summer and fall surveys), an average of 81% of the riders were DC residents while the remaining were residents in MD, VA or elsewhere. This shows that, in addition to other transit available, DC residents also use the Circulator, which provides transportation to other locations that either the Metrorail or regular transit buses would not provide.

Circulator helps promote the use of mass transit

On average, 57% of the patrons own vehicles, based on the results from the 2012 summer and fall surveys. This shows that the Circulator is helping to promote the use of mass transit in the DC metropolitan area.

Policy Recommendations

In order to reduce annual personnel cost of the manual on-board surveys, the survey instrument could be placed on the bus for riders to or could be made available online. Both survey methods could be explored on a pilot basis to reduce cost.

About the Authors

Errol Noel is a Professor of Transportation Engineering at Howard University while Stephen Arhin is Assistant Professor of Transportation Engineering at Howard University.

To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1138.html