



# Regionalization in the Piedmont Triad in North Carolina

*How regional co-operation can help transit agencies improve their infrastructure!*

## BACKGROUND

In the Piedmont Triad Region in North Carolina, regional co-operation has long been a top priority. As a result, in 1991, the Piedmont Triad Partnership was created to promote the collective resources of the region to recruit new jobs and infrastructure investment. With a population exceeding 1.5 million, the Piedmont Triad closely resembles urban centers such as Nashville, Austin and the Research Triangle metro areas.

It comes as no surprise then that five transit agencies in the region, the Winston-Salem Transit Authority (WSTA), the High Point Transit System (Hi tran), Guilford County Transportation (GCT), the Greensboro Transit Authority (GTA) and the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART) work closely together and function as a regional system, sharing many of their technology solutions.

While WSTA, Hi tran, GCT and GTA provide fixed route and paratransit services in their respective greater city areas, PART is a regional provider connecting the cities and operating stops all across the Piedmont Triad Region.

## CHALLENGES

When WSTA, Hi tran, GCT, GTA and PART started discussing co-operation concepts in 2003, each agency had its own system in place. Hi tran, for example, utilized a scheduling system that was custom written in the 1980s and that basically equated to manual scheduling. Employees manually entered data, and schedules were printed out and handed over to drivers. Due to tight budgetary restraints, the agency could not afford to purchase its own fully automated

demand response and fixed route scheduling systems. The other agencies faced similar challenges. Only WSTA benefited from the automation of Trapeze PASS demand response and FX fixed route scheduling software.

At this point in time, PART operated fixed route trips between the cities of the region and was beginning to work on co-ordinating the transport of medical trips that went outside the region. However, the schedules of all five agencies were not co-ordinated, and it was very difficult to assign paratransit trip segments to different providers or give out bus schedule information when passengers had to cross city borders.

## SOLUTION

In 2003, the five agencies met and decided to collaborate and join resources and expertise to act as a regional transit system; thus sharing cost and making it easy to access information from everywhere in the region.

The transit agencies decided that the region's fixed route and demand response software solutions should all reside in a single database in Winston-Salem. This one database would host multiple systems and be shared, but each agency would continue to be run independently. Trip segments could be assigned to different providers, and GCT and PART would operate connection trips going to medical facilities in the Triangle area.

In a first phase, Trapeze's PASS-CT demand response solution was implemented. Dispatchers of all agencies can access the system through the Web using their client ID and password. In a second step, Trapeze FX, fixed route schedule building and

runcutting software, was implemented for all agencies.

For region-wide traveler information, the agencies installed various Trapeze solutions. INFO-Agent, INFO-Web and PASS-Web will soon allow demand response and fixed route travelers to access schedule and trip planning information via conventional call center and online. WSTA is using a third party Interactive Voice Response (IVR) solution to provide day before and day of reminders to demand response passengers. Hi tran and GTA are currently investigating using IVR to provide similar service to their demand response passengers.

## RESULTS/NEXT STEPS

Travelling within and between the cities of the Triad Region has been greatly improved.

The four agencies that provide paratransit services in the region have equipped their vehicles with on-board computers to allow for real-time vehicle tracking and interfacing with the PASS to begin providing electronic driver manifests and real-time scheduling and dispatching. In the future, the agencies plan to install region-wide fixed route Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) and real-time transit information systems.

By teaming up and streamlining resources, WSTA, Hi tran, GCT, GTA and PART manage to fund and implement transportation systems which each agency could not afford on its own. Today the transit system in the Triad Region is more customer-friendly and reliable than ever before. It is one cornerstone of the Piedmont Triad Partnership and an example of successful regional co-operation.

### SNAPSHOT: Piedmont Triad Region

<b>Basic facts:</b>	12-county region with a population of 1.6 million
<b>Transit Partnership:</b>	Winston-Salem Transit Authority (WSTA), High Point Transit System (Hi tran), Guilford County Transportation (GCT), Greensboro Transit Authority (GTA), Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART)
<b>Trapeze products used:</b>	PASS-CT, FX, INFO products, among others



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