Organization Nominated: Hamilton Street Railway (HSR)

Program: Transit Customer Information Service Enhancements
(Bus Check, Bus Web and HSR Call Centre Integration)

HSR implemented a major customer service enhancement program in 2006 to better serve customers and to try to encourage the community to ride transit, by offering more convenient service via the web and telephone.

Development and Enhancement of Sustainable Urban Transportation & Degree of Innovation

Background

The Hamilton Street Railway Company (HSR) is the Public Transit Division of the City of Hamilton Public Works Department. HSR has been providing Public Transit services for the City of Hamilton for over 130 years! An integral part of HSR's ethic is a strong commitment to customer service.

In the mid 1980's, HSR implemented an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system called Bus Check to improve the ability of HSR's customers to access schedule information. This system was a great added convenience for customers planning their trips and had an excellent acceptance from riders. At its peak, the system received more that 20,000 calls per day. While this system was considered a great success by both transit users and the HSR, it did have some limitations. From a system provider viewpoint, the system was run on old, unsupported technology. Its upkeep required much duplication of effort to continue its use. Phone lines, backend computer and software had all long since surpassed their end of life dates. From the customer point of view, the system was not user friendly. A customer could not access any sort of help with the system, nor was there any operator assistance available. The system also required that customers know the individual phone numbers for their specific

stops in advance. Each stop had its own phone number. While the old system had many loyal users, it was not convenient for tourists or visitors to Hamilton who weren't already familiar with the system or the service offered by the HSR.

In an effort to increase accessibility to transit information and increase customer satisfaction leading to enhanced ridership, the HSR implemented a series of projects to provide greater transit information to the public. These customer service projects focused on providing as much information to the public through as many avenues as possible. The customer service projects enable riders to access up-to-the-minute information through the IVR system, on the Web and to connect easily with an information clerk when they require additional assistance.

 These projects include:

1) **Bus Check** - an enhanced and interactive telephone information service using Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology to provide schedule information to the public,
2) **Bus Web** - a new online trip planner, interactive schedule display and bus stop locator for convenient access to information by the public,
3) **HSR Call Centre Integration** – new processes and software for use by call takers to ensure that consistent information is provided to customers who prefer to speak with an information clerk.

Goals/Benefits of the Projects

To provide the best customer service possible, HSR wanted to ensure that all the information given to customers was consistent, whether it was through Bus Check, Bus Web or one of the Information Clerks at the Call Centre. Integrating the three different systems ensures that schedule information is consistent across the projects. As well, the HSR dispatch centre uses the same data to assign drivers and buses to the routes. All the information is current and consistent and available to the riders in advance. Customers can receive

information to plan for future trips they want to take using either Bus Check or Bus Web. Previously, only information about the next three buses was available.

1) **Bus Check**

The new Bus Check system includes a method to access schedule information over the telephone that allows greater flexibility to search for information to those who are not regular users of the HSR. It also keeps in mind the regular users of the previous Bus Check system and tries to balance the added options with speed of access for those who already know exactly what information they want to receive.

Great care was taken in the planning of the initiative to focus on simplicity for the rider. The new Bus Check system required assigning stop numbers for every bus stop. The new numbers reflect the last four digits of the previous system's phone numbers for the convenience of existing users and to smooth the transition to the new system, making it simpler for customers to remember their favourite stop numbers. As well, the new system uses one phone number to access all information. In an effort to provide as much service as conveniently as possible, HSR chose to have the phone number for the new automated system integrated with the existing HSR Call Centre phone number. This phone number was already known by riders as a means of receiving schedule and trip information. It now provides one number to receive information directly from the automated system or from an HSR Information Clerk. This approach allows the HSR to offer operator support to users of the new automated system which was not previously available through the legacy system.

Users of the new system can search through HSR schedule information with a very limited knowledge of the service. The new system offers a

search through the bus stops of a given route. The route can be selected either by knowing the route number, or from a list of all route names. These route names correspond to the major thoroughfares of Hamilton and even the newest visitor to the city should be able to navigate through the information available.

2) Bus Web

In an effort to enhance this information, the HSR also implemented a new service on the Web that enables customers to access schedule information and more. This new Bus Web service includes an online trip planner, interactive schedule display and bus stop locator.

It was important to the HSR that the system was simple to use: customers enter a starting point, a destination, a departure or arrival time, and itineraries are generated using the same scheduling and routing information used by the other customer service systems and the HSR dispatch system. Results can be sorted by total trip time, number of transfers and walking distances depending on the customer's preference. Like the IVR system, HSR wanted to ensure that service information is readily available to customers without requiring a great knowledge of Hamilton and also that existing customers very familiar the service are able to access their information quickly. Customers can enter a street address, or intersection, or select from lists of landmarks such as shopping centers, hospitals, parks, etc as their origin and destination points. Customers can also enter their 4 digit stop number also used by the IVR system that is posted on each bus stop as an origin or destination for the trip planner.

HSR schedules are also available interactively on Bus Web. Using this feature, a customer can select the stops on a route that are of interest to

them and print their own customized schedules showing only those stops for their convenience.

Both the Bus Check IVR system and the Bus Web online system are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

3) HSR Call Centre Integration

HSR recognizes that while self-serve interactive systems are an effective avenue for providing information to their ridership, they are not adopted readily by all. For those who prefer a more personal touch, a team of information clerks who are specialists in their knowledge of HSR's service are available from 7:30am to 8:00pm every day of the week. Outside of these hours, a dispatcher is available to take individual calls. These specialists can be reached using the same phone number that provides access to the Bus Check system. Customers can choose either the automated system or the personal touch by calling the same phone number for all their transit questions. If they choose to use the automated system, at any time they can select to transfer to an information clerk for more information or assistance.

The information clerks also received a new software system that integrates with the same schedule information provided by the Bus Check and Bus Web services. This helps to ensure that information provided to the public is correct and up to date.

Social, Economic and Environmental Component

This enhancement allows access 24 hours a day to individuals who need to find out information about our local transit system. It can be accessed by phone or by computer. The service does not cost the individual any fees or demand they log

in or sign up for the service. With all this information at their fingertips, we are hoping that less printed timetables will be needed and less paper information will need to be sent out through the mail system to our customers.

Previously, each bus stop had its own Bell phone line. This was very costly to maintain and a chore to ensure all lines were working at all times. This new system eliminates these problems.

Transferability to other Canadian Communities and Organizations

All businesses, large or small, public or private, want to give their customers consistent, up-to-date and reliable information. By tying all these components together, changes in our service are announced immediately, detour information can be given out and the 'after normal work hours' questions can be answered in most case by phone or on the web. All the information is coming from one source, keeping it current and consistent. Internally we benefit because information on our bus stops and bus stop areas can be stored by location. We can download photos of the area, document measurements etc. that help us with our customer contacts or when construction is occurring in that area. By putting all our service information in one system, various groups can access what they need and everyone is getting the same information. No more looking through reams of paper or tracking down emails.

Outcome

The results of the implementing the customer service projects have been very good. The new Bus check system is handling about 12,000 calls per day. While this is less volume than the previous system's 20,000 calls per day, the calls to the information clerks have not increased. Callers are able to access information for multiple stops and times with a single call resulting in fewer overall calls required to access more information. The HSR receives an average of 450 calls

per day for route, schedule and trip planning information through its Call Centre. HSR is also serving more customers, thanks in part to the Bus Web trip planner. The Bus Web interactive trip planner and schedule pages receive an average of 56,250 hits per day. Bus Web is accessible from the City of Hamilton's internet portal. Bus Web is consistently in the top 3 pages viewed within the City of Hamilton and is usually second only to the City's main page.

During a major snowstorm in the Hamilton area on February 14th, 2007, our web received 180,000 hits, Bus Check took 18,639 calls and our Information staff took 2,961 calls from the public. Customers and residents had many options to get quick and accurate information that day to ensure a safe ride home! We were very pleased that our system handled these high demands and customers were happy with the quick responses they got using our new system.

Appendix: Communication & Promotional Material

Bus News, Interior Cards, Fridge Magnets, Mouse Pads, Pass Holders, Brochures, Bus Stop Decals, Newspaper Ads and more!

Bus Check and Bus Web

Write down your bus stop number because finding the information you need is now quick and simple!

Simply call or click for information on scheduled bus times, our fare structure, or special events. Call Bus Check to speak to one of our helpful Information Clerks.

Call Bus Check:
905 527 4441
Click Bus Web:
www.hamilton.ca/hsr

One stop for all your transit questions...
Just a call or click away!

KEEP HAMILTON CLEAN

Don't leave litter on the bus, put it where it belongs - in the trash can!

Keep Hamilton Clean Committee
www.keephamiltonclean.com

REQUEST STOP PROGRAM

After dark, the Operator will let you off between bus stops. Simply ask the Operator at least one bus stop ahead of where you get off. The Operator will tell you if it is safe to stop there. If you use Request Stop, leave by the front doors.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

HSR Information................ 905-527-4441
HSR Lost & Found............ 905-528-4200
HSR Customer Services...... 905-528-4200
Accessible Transportation... 905-528-4200
DARTS.............................. 905-529-1212

THE BUS NEWS

Fall 2006

Last day for 9 - Rock Gardens
November 12th
Last day for 56 - Confederation Park
September 4th

Minor Changes effective September 3rd

10 - Beeline Express
55 - Stoney Creek Central
58 - Stoney Creel Local

Routes Returning to Pre-Summer Schedule

3 - Cannon
4 - Bayfront
6/7/8 - Aberdeen, Locke & York
21 - Upper Kenilworth
22 - Upper Ottawa
23 - Upper Gage
24 - Upper Sherman
27 - Upper James
33 - Sanatorium
34 - Upper Paradise
35 - College
41 - Mohawk

51 - University will resume weekday and Saturday service on Tuesday September 5th.

Sample of Page 1 of Bus News
Newsletter to Customers via HSR buses
10,000 distributed each quarter

One Address for all your Transit Questions.

Bus Web www.hamilton.ca/hsr

HSR

We're Just a Click Away.

Hamilton
Public Works

One Number for all your Transit Questions.

Bus Check 905-527-4441

HSR

We're Just a Call Away.

Hamilton
Public Works

Sample of Interior Bus Cards
1 of each style installed on all buses
Actual size is 11"x37"

Bus Check 905-527-4441

One Number for all your Transit Questions.

Bus Web www.hamilton.ca/hsr

One Address for all your Transit Questions.

Sample of Fridge Magnet & Mouse Pad
Handed out to Customers

One Number for all your Transit Questions.

$HR Bus Check 905-527-4441

We're Just a Call Away.

Call **905-527-4441** for information on scheduled bus times, our fare structure, special events or to speak to one of our helpful Information Clerks.

Make sure to write down your bus stop number to make finding information quick!

Hamilton
Public Works

**Sample of Pass Holders
Handed out to Customers**

How has Bus Web Improved?

Previously, our old website would give you times at major bus stops along the routes for a Weekday, Saturday and Sunday/Holiday schedule. It also had Bus Check numbers and route maps. Our new system will still give you that information but it can be customized to match your travel needs. You can find out what routes you need to get to and from your destination, what times the bus will be at your particular bus stop, how many transfers you need and the total length of your trip.

www.hamilton.ca/hsr is the one and only address you will need when looking for HSR Information. It is simple to use and the information is available 24 hours a day!

You can plan a trip, look at a route schedule, find out your bus stop number, see when the next few buses will be arriving at your bus stop or look up a location to see where the closest bus stop is.

How Easy is it to use the new Bus Web System?

Connect to **www.hamilton.ca/hsr** to plan your next trip on the HSR and explore the many options you have to find the transit information you need.

Trip Planning - If you don't know what route(s) you need use this option. You need to type in where you are starting from (Origin), where you want to go to (Destination), what day and what time. You can sort your results based on trip time or accessibility.

You can even plan your trip based on what time you need to be at your final destination. It will figure out when you need to leave your house to be at work for 9 a.m. for example.

You can type in a specific address (123 Upper Ottawa), an intersection (Main & Parkdale) or landmark (Fiesta Mall).

Once your information is complete, you will receive your results. It will show you what route(s) you can take, where to catch the bus, when to catch the bus, if you need a transfer & what time you will get to your destination. It will also show you a map and how far you need to walk.

Schedules - By using this option you can find out the entire schedule for a certain route. You can also narrow it down to a particular time of day or to specific bus stops along the route.

Next Bus - This option gives you specific information about your particular bus stop. By typing in your four digit bus stop number, you can find out what route(s) the bus stop services, where the bus stop is located, the direction of travel and the times the bus will be there. You can also change the date and time to get information on future trips.

Location Lookup - If you don't know where your closest bus stop is or what the bus stop number is, use this option. Just type in your location and bus stop location information will appear. From there you can plan a trip or look up bus times.

Bus Check and Bus Web are available 24 hours a day. Try these new systems and delight in the amount of information that is right at your fingertips.

Bus Check 905-527-4441

Bus Web
www.hamilton.ca/hsr

Bus Check & Bus Web

HSR's Interactive Telephone & Web Services for all your transit questions. 24 hours a day !

Just call HSR Bus Check at 905-527-4441 or click onto www.hamilton.ca/hsr

Providing Services that bring our City to Life!

Hamilton Public Works

How Easy is it to use the new Bus Check System?

905-527-4441 is the one and only telephone number you will call when looking for HSR Information. If you know your four digit bus stop number that you are starting your trip from, you can press that right away. If not, please listen to the message and choose what type of information you need to hear.

1 ➤ **for HSR Schedule Information**

2 ➤ **for HSR Fare and Pass Information**

3 ➤ **for HSR Detours and Special Events**

0 ➤ **for HSR Information Clerks**

If you need to speak to an Information Clerk, have the following information handy: where you are starting from, where you need to go and at what time you will be travelling. They can answer questions about bus stop locations, detours or HSR policies, help you plan a trip or even locate your closest HSR Ticket and Pass vendor.

What Happens when I Call for Schedule Information?

Call **905-527-4441** and listen to the instructions. For Schedule Information you press the number '1'. You have the option of finding current bus times, bus times for later that day or bus times for another day. Press the corresponding number you want. '1' for current, '2' for later today and '3' for another date.

If you want times for when you call, press '1' and then enter your bus stop number. You will be given the next three times.

If you want times for later that day, press '2', enter in the time, choose a.m or p.m and then enter in your bus stop number. You will be given your times.

If you want times for another day, press '3', enter the day ('1' for Monday etc.) or enter the date, enter the time, choose a.m or p.m and enter your bus stop number. You will be given your times.

Bus stop numbers are found on the bus stops, in the timetables, on the Bus Web and by speaking to an Information Clerk. If you don't know your bus stop number you can obtain it by pressing '#9' and following the instructions.

What if I want Information on Fares or a Detour?

Call **905-527-4441** and listen to the instructions. For Fare Information you press the number '2'. You will listen to a pre-recorded message that will explain our fare structure. For Special Services Information you press the number '3'. Here you will have options to listen to a number of news items that have been pre-recorded.

What if I want Lost & Found or Customer Services?

Call **905-527-4441**, press '0' to speak to an Information Clerk and ask to be transferred. Information Clerks are available daily between 8 a.m. & 8 p.m. except on Christmas Day. You can also call our HSR Administration line at 905-528-4200 & ask to be transferred.

What if I want to talk to an Information Clerk?

Call **905-527-4441**, press '0' to speak to an Information Clerk. They are available daily between 8 a.m. & 8 p.m. except on Christmas Day. Our friendly staff can help you plan a trip, explain detours and our policies or locate an HSR Ticket & Pass vendor.

How has Bus Check Improved?

Previously, our old Bus Check system would only give you the arrival times for the next two buses. Our new system will still give you information on your next bus arriving, but it has the capability of doing much more. It allows you to do future trip planning, talk to an Information Clerk, find out about our Fare structure and more!

905-527-4441 is the one and only telephone number you will call when looking for HSR Information. It is simple to use and the automated information is available 24 hours a day!

If you need information for your bus stop, just use your four digit bus stop number. This number can be found on your bus stop, in a timetable, on the website or from an Information Clerk. The good news is that your bus stop number is the same as your old Bus Check number. So if you previously called 905-548-1234, your bus stop number is 1234. It's that easy!

Sample of Brochure - Actual Size 8 ½"x 14"
Handed out to Customers and on Website

905-527-4441

HSR **Bus Check**

We're Just a Call Away.

Your HSR Bus Stop Number is: **1234**

Sample of Bus Stop Decals
Decals Placed on all Bus Stops

Bus Check & BusWeb

The most convenient way to ride transit!

So you can get things done...

...Without the rush!

Visit www.hamilton.ca/hsr or Call 905 - 527 - 4441
For more information

Plan trips.

Get Times.

Why rush?

Bus Check & BusWeb

The most convenient way to ride transit!

Visit www.hamilton.ca/hsr or Call 905 - 527 - 4441
For more information

**Samples of Newspaper Ad
Various Local Newspapers**