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Community Services for more
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MATT

Mobile **A**ccessible
Travel **T**raining
A Journey to
Mobility **F**reedom



Columbia, and other Virginia counties. It is not uncommon to receive correspondence from other entities, not just requesting its use, but assistance in how they can acquire a bus of their own. The addition of MATT has made the Fairfax Older Adults Travel Training program a model in the industry. As the program evolves and expands, the Mobile Accessible Travel Training bus concept is certain to continue its role in providing a low stress environment for all populations to learn and become excited about transit.



NOTE: *The MATT program originated in the Fairfax County Department of Transportation; however, in July 2011, this program was transferred to Human Services Transportation in the Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Services.*

WHAT IS TRAVEL TRAINING?

Travel Training is a short-term one-on-one or group-oriented instruction that teaches participants how to safely and independently use public transportation in their community. Today travel training programs are being offered throughout the country and the world as a means of finding alternative and more affordable transportation options. With the cost increase in running paratransit services, jurisdictions are increasingly making improvements to the public transportation infrastructure to ensure that their systems are accessible to all. As this happens more and more, individuals will need to be trained on how to successfully navigate their community transit systems. From older adults to people with disabilities to school systems' offering transitional programs travel training is becoming a necessary tool in the transit options arsenal.



Older adults in training learning to read a bus schedule

THE BEGINNING

In 1990 bus #7754, a 35-foot Orion I, was built in eight weeks. The frame was built in Mississauga, Ontario, and the final assembly



Mississauga Truck and Bus offices

was completed in Oriskany, New York, at cost of approximately \$187,000. Bus #7754 was then put into revenue service as a Fairfax Connector bus.

While attending an American Public Transportation Association conference, a Fairfax County Department of Transportation employee came up with an idea to transform a regular Connector bus into a mobile classroom that would educate passengers and transport them at the same time. Consequently, in April 2003 when bus #7754 was identified for outsource and retirement from the fleet, the bus was scheduled to be transformed into the new mobile transit classroom to be used by Fairfax County staff in the Older Adults Travel Training program.



Bus #7754 rebuild process



Removal of old parts: siding, seats, lights, etc.



Replacement of floorboards



Replacement of windows and front grill



From left to right, introduction of MATT to special needs students at Lee High School, Bike to Work Day 2007, WMATA Accessibility Day, WMATA Accessibility Day participants touring the bus.

MATT has been used at Celebrate Fairfax, Fall for Fairfax, regional Street Smart kickoff events, the Lorton parade and fair, Bike to Work Day, Bring Your Child to Work Day, regional Big Truck events for children, and as a transit introduction to children who have special needs in Fairfax County.

From the beginning MATT has been a model of transportation innovation. There have been requests for MATT to be used to assist other jurisdictions in New Jersey, Maryland, the District of



From left to right, introduction of MATT to special needs students at Chantilly High School, regional Street Smart campaign kickoff, training of Work Awareness and Transition participants at Chantilly High School, Lee High School therapeutic recreation summer program

RECOGNITION

MATT has been recognized both on the local regional level and nationally. The bus was exhibited at the 2005 American Public Transportation Association conference in Ohio where it was featured as a hands-on demonstration to conference participants. The year 2006 was important for MATT and for the Fairfax County Travel Training program. The Virginia Transit Association presented the Older Adults Travel Training program with the Innovative Program Award. In that same year the bus was exhibited at the AARP Conference in Richmond, Virginia, at which former Virginia Governor Tim Kaine was a keynote speaker. Also in 2006 the bus was exhibited during the annual conference of the Association of Travel Instruction. In 2008 MATT was again featured during a break-out seminar on transportation at the Aging in America NOCOA-ASA conference in Washington, D.C.



MATT bus stationary set up

ADDITIONAL USES

MATT has also proven to be an asset to the Department of Transportation in many other ways. Because of the uniqueness of this vehicle, it also serves as a mobile transportation marketing piece since it has its own audio set up and has the ability to show videos and computer presentations.



MATT bus drop-down screen

The bus, called MATT (Mobile Accessible Travel Training), was completely renovated and rebuilt to current safety and fuel efficiency standards.

MATT is used to educate older adults through a hands-on learning experience. The Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) staff coordinates travel training trips in which older adults travel by bus and rail transit to and from a destination of their choice. The travelers-in-training identify a bus stop near their residence, learn to read bus schedules and route maps, learn how to pay the fare, learn how to signal the driver to stop, and learn other bus travel skills.



Fairfax County older adults participating in a group travel training orientation

In November 2004 Fairfax County Board of Supervisor Catherine Hudgins, Hunter Mill District, and FCDOT introduced the unique Fairfax Connector bus that had been renovated and designed for training older adults to travel safely and independently on regional transit systems.

TRAVEL TRAINING IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Travel training has proven useful in allaying the fears of older adults who are reluctant to use transit and in providing service to those who have no other



A regular Fairfax Connector in service bus

means of transportation. The Fairfax County Special Populations Transportation (SPoT) team has been offering travel training to older adults for the last few years, using regular in-service Fairfax Connector buses.

With MATT, this training is enhanced with state-of-the-art technology and a virtual classroom inside the bus. It features all of the same characteristics as other transit buses and can be used to transport as many as 30 passengers, but the most unique



A rear view of the inside of the MATT bus

feature of the bus is a special area in the rear for classroom-like instruction. The classroom area includes audio and video components that can play VCR tapes, DVDs, and computer-driven programs. These programs are shown on four LCD (liquid crystal display) television screens, two of which are mounted on the ceiling of the bus, one that can be displayed on the exterior of the bus, and one that is mounted in the rear section of the bus.

MATT has been especially successful in teaching non-English speaking older adults to learn how to travel by transit. When these groups have approached the Department of Transportation with requests for a travel training seminar, the agency has responded by taking the bus to a set location and then working through translators to explain fares, schedules, and other related transit issues. This learning experience is something that cannot be offered on a regular in-service fixed route bus. In the past this



Travel training older adults from the Vienna, Virginia, Korean Community Center using the MATT bus

training was only done in a classroom setting without a hands-on component. MATT allows for this hands-on interaction while at the same time allowing the chosen audience to take as much time as it needs to become comfortable with the bus experience.

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY EQUIPMENT

MATT has been equipped with two battery systems: one that runs the mechanical side of the bus while the other provides power to the technology system in the classroom area. The separate batteries enable the technology to be used without the bus engine running, so no fuel is burned and no exhaust fumes are dispensed.



One of two separate battery systems on the MATT bus