



BACK TO TRANQUILITY:

Swiftly Restores Transit Calm on the Oregon Coast

Tillamook County Transit District provides transit service to one of Oregon's largest service areas. In the past, the team was awash with high call volumes, on-time performance issues, and persistent overtime payments. With Swiftly, TCTD has improved on-time performance, overhauled their vehicle schedules, and experienced sharp decrease in overtime.

BY THE NUMBERS

- // Call volume has decreased 90%, representing \$15,000 per year in regained productivity, by implementing accurate real-time passenger information
- // Overtime costs have dropped by \$18,000 per year by crafting more forgiving vehicle schedules at specific timepoints
- // Retrospective performance analysis has decreased from 3 days per inquiry to under 5 minutes

A rural agency with a massive service area

Situated on the majestic Oregon coast between Portland and Eugene, Tillamook County is a model of rural tranquility. But for the team at Tillamook County Transportation District (TCTD), the county's transit agency, life was anything but. For them, every day was a constant battle to keep their bottom line from running away from them.

"We're a county with over a thousand square miles and a population of only 25,000 people," says Doug Pilant, General Manager of TCTD. "Our number one goal is to provide quality service while keeping costs down and maintaining reasonable fares. Otherwise, there won't be any transit system to run."

And for an agency with such a large service area, it's no easy task. Residents often look to public transit to get them to faraway urban centers for everything from doctor appointments to air travel. "Some of our routes stretch 100 miles in either direction from our town center," Pilant explains.

For these reasons, TCTD needs to find cost savings at every opportunity. That's why they've invested in Swiftly, which has helped them streamline their services and ensure they always come out in the black.



A GM forced to play customer service rep

In the past, TCTD struggled to keep track of their vehicles, which had resounding effects on customer service, on-time performance, and ultimately their bottom line.

For one, Tillamook's customer service line was buckling under the pressure of enormous call volumes. Their transit network hadn't changed significantly in over a decade, and a gradual surge in boardings and alightings over the years had caused vehicles to consistently run behind schedule.

"Our phones were constantly lit up," says Kathy Bond, transit specialist at TCTD and Pilant's number two. "Worried riders thought the bus just wasn't coming. We'd usually radio over to the driver to ask their 20, but because of our topography, static was more common than the driver's voice! Most of the time, we were just guessing where the vehicle was."

With such high call volumes, it was all hands on deck, all of the time. "I'm the GM, and even I was consistently picking phones," Pilant remembers. "I spent at least an hour a day answering phones. I love to help, but I've got an agency to run!" Pilant's lost productivity alone cost the agency \$15,000 per year.

Driver confusion with new alignments

Beyond high call volumes, Tillamook's lack of vehicle tracking also made it difficult to train drivers on routes changes. Drivers were confused with new alignments, which only compounded ongoing difficulties with on-time performance.

"Last year, we added a medical clinic to one of our routes," Bond says. "But we started getting some complaints the bus wasn't stopping at the clinic. We just assumed that all our drivers were going, but the only way we were able to confirm was by asking the driver, or by pulling their onboard video camera." With such a lean team, it was impossible to get to the bottom all of the inquiries coming from the public. Many inquiries lingered for weeks; most were never resolved.

Tight schedules with \$18,000 in overtime

But the worst of Tillamook's performance woes were born out in the agency's payroll department. "Because our trips are so long distance," Pilant says, "there are a lot of things that can go wrong along the way. Consistently our drivers were in overtime — between 15 to 20 hours per week."

TCTD's imperfect schedule was costing the agency \$18,000 a year in overtime. This, coupled with the constant barrage of calls and sagging customer satisfaction, made it clear it was time for a change.





Swiftly

A 90% drop in call volume

That's why the team has enlisted the help of Swiftly. Swiftly has transformed the way TCTD handles customer service and manages overtime by giving the team a platform to analyze their vehicle location information.

With Swiftly, now the customer service team has an up-to-date understanding of every vehicle's location in their fleet. Instead of radioing their drivers with spotty signals, they now have dynamic maps that fetch precise location information every 5 to 10 seconds.

The team now points riders toward real-time transit apps so riders can answer their own questions before they need customer service.

"We don't get calls from our regular riders anymore because we've educated them to use Swiftly," Bond says. "There's so much less handholding, which I think the riders appreciate."

As a result, TCTD has seen a 90% drop in call volume since implementing Swiftly. "And I've got my General Manager time back too!" Pilant adds. "Now I only pick up the phone once or twice a month!"

Crystal-clear instructions for drivers

Time spent addressing driver error has plummeted as well. Swiftly's GPS playback feature allows the team to look back at on-time performance issues and understand exactly when and where issues arise.

And where it used to take at least 3 days to investigate a customer complaint, the team now addresses issues on the spot.

"We had a driver who wasn't driving the correct speed," Pilant says.

"We were able to use the GPS playback to show the driver in real time what they needed to do in order to operate the route on time."



Saving \$18,000 a year in overtime

All of this spells significant cost savings for TCTD. With the help of Swiftly, Pilant and Bond have overhauled their schedules to find bottlenecks along routes and timepoints that commonly put drivers behind schedule. “After 10 years, we finally added time to routes to accommodate increased ridership,” Bond says. “Beforehand, we didn’t know where to start. Now we can see exactly where we need to add a minute here or two minutes there.”

The cost savings from overtime is to the tune of \$18,000 a year, which Pilant noticed immediately. “I see it in our payroll every day,” he says. “We have significantly less overtime, plain and simple.”

“If you need to go, go Swiftly”

With these improvements, Pilant and Bond look forward to using Swiftly to find even more ways to improve on-time performance as well as TCTD’s bottom line.

Bond has become a Swiftly evangelist in the process. “I have my own marketing pitch and everything: ‘If you need to go, go Swiftly,’” she says. “I tell it to everyone I meet because everyone should know that Swiftly has made TCTD a better agency.”

