DART Steps into Action

Agency puts riders' safety first during the coronavirus

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, DART launched a campaign that addressed customers’ most frequently asked questions and encouraged riders to “Ask DART.”

Cleaning and disinfecting
Face masks and social distancing
Service levels and capacity restrictions
Contactless payment
Reporting concerns with DART Say Something app
The agency launched the “DART Steps Into Action” campaign on paid and owned media to reassure the community that robust cleaning and safety protocols make DART safe to ride during the coronavirus pandemic.

Riders have experienced firsthand the agency’s immediate response to the coronavirus pandemic. Since March, customers have watched as DART adjusted service, encouraged social distancing, installed larger bus operator shields, promoted contactless fare payment, required face coverings, and added face mask and hand sanitizer dispensers to vehicles.

Yet these efforts were visible only to customers who continued riding DART. Customers who weren’t traveling as much or used another means of transportation were unaware of DART’s actions to keep them safe.

In July, the agency launched the “DART Steps into Action” campaign to welcome back riders who were undecided about returning to DART due to concerns about the cleanliness and safety of public transportation in general. The campaign encourages customers to “Ask DART.”

All components direct people to visit DART.org/Ask, a new Ask DART section on the DART Daily blog. Articles and videos address customer concerns through a question-and-answer format and behind-the-scenes looks at the agency’s activities.

The 26-week marketing-communications campaign started the week of July 6 and is scheduled to run through late December, with the flexibility to extend.

Paid advertising in English and Spanish is running on social media, streaming video and streaming radio channels to reach customers who are spending more time at home. Signs inside buses and trains and at rail stations inform current riders of our efforts. Content on DART’s owned digital and social media channels communicates to DART followers.

“We hope by being transparent about our practices, we can build trust, humanize the agency, and address those factors that impact customer satisfaction,” Chief Marketing Officer Nevin Grinnell said.

DART also has signed on to the Health and Safety Commitments Program from the American Public Transportation Association. The program is the public transportation industry’s overarching pledge to passengers that our systems are operating safely as North America recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learn more: DART.org/Ask
"DART Serves" Transports Hope

Agency delivered food and resources to help families in need

DART got involved in COVID-19 relief efforts in early April by doing what it does best – providing transportation. Through eight unique programs and many partnerships, DART helped deliver more than 188,000 meals and care packages as of mid-September.

“We began looking for innovative ways to use our excess capacity from emergency service reductions. We wanted to address equity gaps that emerged due to the pandemic,” DART Chief Innovation Officer Gregory Elsborg said.

The agency created the “DART Serves” platform to give a name to the new outreach efforts and formalize existing corporate social responsibility activities.

Paratransit vehicles bring groceries to seniors and people with disabilities

When many customers stopped traveling, the agency’s Paratransit Services added grocery pickup and delivery to its roster of services. Since the pandemic began, DART Paratransit drivers have made almost 700 grocery delivery trips.

Existing paratransit riders can place orders with the grocery store and the agency’s drivers will pick up and deliver those groceries for free.

DART Paratransit also helped the Dallas Park and Recreation Active Senior Adult Program, Catholic Charities Dallas Senior Services and Richardson’s Network of Community Ministries by delivering meal packages to seniors and families needing food support.

School districts aid student families

The agency assisted the Dallas, Garland and Richardson independent school districts by using available buses and vans to deliver more than 75,000 meals to families who relied on their schools’ food programs.

For example, Garland ISD partnered with DART and Good Samaritans of Garland, which provided the groceries, to distribute meal kits containing a week’s supply of food to 200 families each week of the spring COVID-19 school closure. Garland ISD and DART staff members prepared, loaded, unloaded and distributed the food boxes at four schools located in the areas with the greatest need.

“Our partnership with DART was a tremendous help. Everyone from the bus drivers to DART administrators treated our families with respect and compassion,” said Dr. Babetta Hemphill, Garland ISD executive director of student services.

Partnerships provide fresh produce to southern Dallas

The University of North Texas at Dallas – through its Community Basket Mobile Farmers Market initiative – partnered with Toyota Motor North America, Oak Cliff Veggie Project, Lone Star Human Services, GROW North Texas, and DART to provide fresh produce to families living in three apartment communities with no nearby grocery stores. The North Texas Food Bank and other organizations donated food and baby supplies.

DART assisted the Dallas, Garland and Richardson school districts with transportation and distribution of meal kits to families who rely on the school districts’ food programs after the coronavirus shut down in-person classes last spring.

Continued on Page 6
Restored Service Supports Increasing Ridership

Improved frequency increased bus, rail and GoLink service

DART restored nearly 90% of pre-pandemic service levels beginning Oct. 19, based on increasing ridership and the continued reopening of the North Texas economy.

The agency implemented temporary adjustments to both rail and bus service in April to reflect decreased ridership demand resulting from the Texas governor’s stay-at-home orders and temporary business closures. The changes, made to weekday service only, also helped address passenger and operator safety.

The DART Board of Directors approved the service restorations after determining that operating costs were within the proposed FY 2021 budget and 20-Year Financial Plan allocations.

“As more people begin to return to their normal activities, the bus and train frequency will be there to help them get to their destination,” said Todd Plesko, vice president of planning and development.

The agency does not expect to make any significant adjustments during 2021. DART has tentatively scheduled three minor bus service changes for January, May and September of 2021.

DART now is focused on ”DARTzoom: A New Bus Network,” the agency’s bus network redesign initiative. Following DART Board adoption of a new plan, the agency plans to begin implementation with a major service change in January 2022.

Learn more: DART.org/mod

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OCTOBER 2020 SERVICE RESTORATION BY THE NUMBERS

65 Bus routes have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

48 Bus routes remain at emergency frequencies.

7 Core frequent bus routes and 4 light rail lines operate weekdays every 20 minutes from start of service to 7 p.m., then every 30 minutes off-peak.

2 Bus routes were replaced with GoLink.

1 Bus route was shortened.

1 TRE schedule was restored to pre-pandemic levels per joint action between DART and Trinity Metro.
“DART Serves” Transports Hope  Continued from page 3

“The partnership with DART was essential to the success of our three events,” said Dr. Kelly Varga, executive director of the UNT Dallas Community Basket Mobile Farmers Market. “Having a DART bus made it efficient for us to transport the food from the staging area to the apartments.”

A $268,000 grant from Toyota is supporting the UNT Dallas initiative that will sell fresh produce in food-insecure communities in southern Dallas while creating a real-world learning experience for its students. Most recently, Toyota provided grants and logistical insights for nonprofits in DFW to provide produce and other essential items to families impacted heavily by COVID-19.

“When Toyota and nonprofits in southern Dallas came together to support families in need, we knew distribution was a critical piece of the puzzle. DART played a huge part in helping us accomplish our goal,” said Yumna Bham, Toyota Social Innovation program leader.

DART partnered with several organizations to provide fresh produce to southern Dallas families who were impacted financially by the pandemic.

Learn more:  
DART.org/DARTserves