

2006-2008 Arlington County Commuter Services (ACCS) Program Research and Evaluation Plan

(Note: This is not a Primary Research Study)

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OVERALL PLAN PURPOSE:

- ☞ This plan outlines a research and evaluation process to collect and analyze data to assess the performance of Arlington County Commuter Services (ACCS) and to enhance ACCS' effectiveness in providing travel assistance services in Arlington County.
- ☞ The plan establishes a series of performance indicators related to objectives and expectations established for ACCS, defines data needed to assess progress in the indicators, recommends data collection and analysis tools, presents a schedule for implementation of the research and evaluation activities, and suggests protocols to report results periodically.

KEY INFORMATION INCLUDED:

The information in this plan is focused on collecting information useful for future decision-making. The plan has seven sections:

Introduction:

- ☞ Includes an overview of the research and evaluation process, the purpose and objectives of the plan, the scope of the proposed research, and the organization of the plan document.

ACCS Profile:

- ☞ The primary purpose of the plan was to establish the ACCS' service development and evaluation research approach. A secondary function of the plan is as an introduction to audiences unfamiliar with ACCS' functions, services, roles, and contributions to the County's transportation system and quality of life of citizens.
- ☞ This ACCS introduction section was included to acquaint readers with the context in which ACCS operates, the customer audiences served by ACCS, and the services offered by ACCS.

Overview of Customer-Centric Approach:

- ☞ Presents an approach through which ACCS can deepen its understanding of its customers, leading to a more effective program.
 - “Who are ACCS’ customers, how well are they being served, who is being missed, and what do they need?”
- ☞ Details a two-tier approach to incorporating meaningful customer-centric assessment techniques.
 - The first tier is strategic, that is, understanding how transportation and mobility are related to overall quality of life and how satisfaction with specific services and utilization of those services drive overall satisfaction with the transportation system.
 - The second tier is tactical, defining the specific features and performance of any service that drive the overall satisfaction with that service.
- ☞ Presents a “touch points audit” process that highlights key points at which ACCS service staff interact with customers and on which customer satisfaction is built.

Performance Indicators:

- ☞ Introduces quantitative and qualitative measures by which ACCS can measure its success in three broad areas.
 - How well is the program meeting customers’ and stakeholders’ expectations?
 - What contribution is ACCS making to supporting efficient travel within and to Arlington County?
 - Are there any areas in which the program falls short of its expectations and needs additional attention?
- ☞ Presents specific indicators recommended in five categories. The first four represent steps necessary for social behavioral change. The fifth category relates to external impacts resulting from behavior change:
 1. Awareness and attitudes
 2. Participation in ACCS services
 3. Satisfaction with services and repeated use
 4. Travel behavior change
 5. Transportation and air quality impacts
- ☞ Describes measurement levels, such as County-wide or by customer group, and timeframes for measuring each indicator.

Approach for Assessing Performance:

- ☞ Defines conceptual approaches to assessing performance and details specific methodologies to measure quantitative and qualitative performance indicators.
- ☞ Outlines, in conceptual terms, research efforts to collect data needed to measure the indicators.
- ☞ Details a new service development process based on a customer-centric approach to address ACCS’ desire to “identify new service opportunities to expand market share.” This approach brings both current and future customer into the transportation planning process to:
 1. Document existing satisfaction with transportation services
 2. Pinpoint unmet needs
 3. Assess the feasibility and potential for new service ideas – concept testing
 4. Explore different ways of packaging mobility choice in a manner that more closely aligns with how trip decisions are made beyond the conscious mind.

Data Collection Needs, Sources, and Tools:

- ☞ Recommends tools to collect performance indicator data.
- ☞ ACCS staff and other County staff agreed that ACCS needs better data on the reach of services, customers' satisfaction with services used, behavior change following service use, and the impacts of behavior change on community goals. The plan concentrates on collecting these data.
- ☞ Describes four basic categories of needed data, roughly paralleling the performance indicator categories:
 1. Data on travel awareness, attitudes, and needs of clients and non-clients in various audience groups: residents, employees, visitors, employers, retail businesses/hotels, and property managers
 2. Data on customer/client participation in and use of ACCS services
 3. Data on customer/client satisfaction with ACCS services
 4. Data on actions taken by travelers after using ACCS services
- ☞ Summarizes ACCS' existing service tracking activities and defines proposed new county-wide benchmark and follow-up surveys and customer feedback data collection activities, such as surveys of residents, employees, and business leaders, needed to collect additional data.
- ☞ Notes opportunities to utilize data collected by other organizations, such as the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, that compile data on Arlington as part of regional evaluations, and from developers/employers and others required to develop site plans.

Performance Reporting and Schedule:

- ☞ Outlines tools to convey information about ACCS' results to various internal and external/public audiences that could be interested in knowing of these results.
- ☞ Defines various audiences, including ACCS and Arlington County staff, funders and other regional and state organizations, and major traveler and employer customer groups.
- ☞ Proposes six categories of reporting tools that document and present data on satisfaction of customers with the services used, the behavioral change resulting from outreach or service use, and the impacts of behavior change on community-level goals such as vehicle trips and VMT reduced:
 1. Service Level Reports
 2. Program Annual Report
 3. ACCS Report Card
 4. ACCS "Best Hits"
 5. State of Arlington Transportation
 6. ACCS "Road Show"

OTHER RELATED STUDIES, PLANS & DOCUMENTS:

2005 Arlington Transportation Partners' (ATP) Fiscal Year Annual Report
2005 Arlington County Commuter Services (ACCS) Fiscal Year Annual Report
2006 Arlington County Residents' Satisfaction with Transportation Telephone Study

AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS:

Plan Document

KEY WORDS:

ACCS, Arlington County Commuter Services, ATP, Arlington Transportation Partners, Evaluation, Scorecard, Performance Measurement