



Board Report

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EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE NOVEMBER 17, 2016

SUBJECT: VETERANS TRANSPORTATION & COMMUNITY LIVING INITIATIVE

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE this report on the **Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative**.

ISSUE

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) received a \$2 million Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) grant from the Federal Transit Administration to improve access to transportation services for veterans. The grant requirements have been completed and staff is presenting the results of the effort.

DISCUSSION

There are approximately 400,000 veterans who reside in Los Angeles County and it is estimated that this population will grow by 12,000 each year. For many veterans access to transportation continues to be a barrier affecting their quality of life. In light of this population and the barriers they face, Metro, working in partnership with the Los Angeles Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (LA SAFE) and Access Services (Access) applied for and received a \$2 million VTCLI grant to develop one-call/one-click transportation resources directly targeted to the veteran community.

This partnership, in addition to collaborating with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), resulted in the implementation of the following VTCLI projects:

- VetsGo511.com, a veteran-branded one-click web site for traveler information and community resources
- Automation of Access Services application and eligibility trip scheduling
- Automation of DAV ride scheduling for VA patients

VETSGO511

Metro and LA SAFE teamed up to expand the Southern California 511 traveler information system by developing and implementing VetsGo511.com, a one-stop source for veterans to obtain information on transportation and resources for work, education, healthcare and other vital services.

VetsGo511.com was built based on the core function to enhance connection - connection to the resources veterans need, then connecting them to the resources identified by planning their trip and providing transportation options. VetsGo511.com also piloted new and innovative enhancements that were not currently in use within the 511 program, including:

- **Multi-Modal Services:** The VetsGo511 map is interactive with multi-modal map layers including traffic, bus, rail and bike. Layers also exist for incidents, road work, Park & Ride locations, VA facilities, WorkSource locations and more. The trip planner is also multi-modal, providing directions for driving, transit, biking and walking.
- **Personalization:** VetsGo511 website provides personalization whereby users create a profile to indicate their site preferences. This enables users to define what information the website provides, save addresses and identify their branch of service. VetsGo511 also integrated with ID.me (previously TroopID), an online system that automatically verifies veteran status in order to determine eligibility for veteran fare discounts.
- **Gamification:** VetsGo511 piloted a strategy to “gamify” user activity and interaction in order to improve user engagement and retention.

The site hosted 27,232 sessions over the 18-month duration of the project and average monthly usage has increased throughout the project. VetsGo511’s average page per session utilization is 8.08 with an average duration of 8.36 minutes versus the industry standard average of 2 pages and a duration of 2-3 minutes. The pages per session and average duration means that users are more engaged with the website and its services.

ACCESS SERVICES AUTOMATED SCHEDULER

According to a 2015 study, conducted by the University of Southern California, approximately 40% of veterans need services for disabilities and 38.8% of veterans need transportation to services. Partnering with Access offered an opportunity to break down one of the barriers that restricts access to care for Los Angeles County veterans. An initial appointment-an Eligibility Appointment-is required by Access for all potential users of paratransit transportation services. Metro partnered with Access to improve their eligibility appointment scheduling process. The VTCLI project successfully implemented the automatic generation of a Rider ID number, which is needed to schedule appointments. This automated the existing process. The project was initially meant to serve as a pilot; however, due to overwhelming success, Access decided to include scheduling automation as a requirement in their new solicitation and will soon be offering automated solutions for all of their riders.

DAV AUTOMATED SCHEDULER

Metro collaborated with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), a veterans’ advocacy group that, among other services, provides free transportation services for VA patients to and from their VA healthcare appointments. Prior to the collaboration, DAV Transportation Coordinators relied on a paper-based process to schedule rides over the phone with veterans. Through the VTCLI project, Metro was able to build an online scheduling platform to automate ride scheduling. This automated system was deployed in support of the following VA locations:

- West Los Angeles VA
- Long Beach VA
- Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center
- Loma Linda VA

DAV has stated that this system is a success and has plans to expand the system nationwide as well as developing mobile apps to better serve their community.

NEXT STEPS

All projects have been successfully transitioned to their parent programs or organizations:

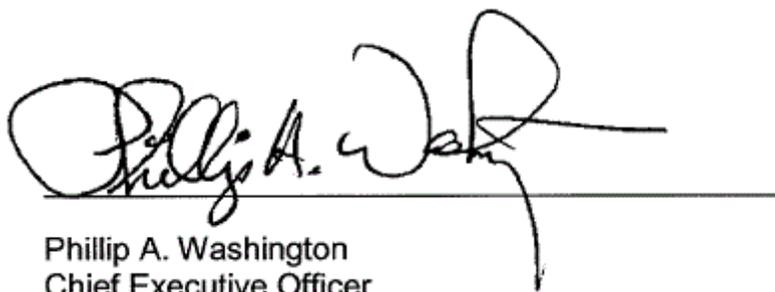
- Access Services has accepted the Scheduler and is building out the rest of the automated system with their new contractors.
- The DAV has accepted their Scheduler and Routing System and will be expanding the program throughout the state and eventually nationwide.
- VetsGo511 has been transitioned under the Go511 program and remains in Operations & Maintenance mode.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - VTCLI Close-Out Summary

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Project Close-Out Summary



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) grant process, led by the federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) was successful in securing a \$2 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Los Angeles Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies offered the required 20 percent local match, bringing the program budget to \$2.5 million. Metro and LA SAFE set out to improve veterans' transportation resources to the veterans' military and their caregivers can better access vital services such as healthcare, employment and education/training opportunities. ~~some of the projects to directly assist~~ by developing

There are over 400,000 veterans in Los Angeles County. Including spouses, caregivers, and other family members, there are well over a million residents that could benefit from improved information on available resources for veterans. LA SAFE and Metro used the VTCLI grant to implement one-call/one-click services to provide transportation resources to the veterans' military and their caregivers can better access vital services such as healthcare, employment and education/training opportunities.

Metro and LA SAFE, working with key partners such as Access and the DAV, implemented the following VTCLI projects to meet the transportation needs of veterans and military families:

- § VetsGo511.com, a veteran-branded one-click web site for traveler information and community resources
- § Automation of Access Services application and eligibility trip scheduling
- § Automation of DAV ride scheduling for VA patients

These projects have been fully deployed and are currently serving the needs of the veteran community on a daily basis. The VTCLI grant has been fully implemented and accepted by the FTA and the projects have been transitioned into daily operation by the respective partners.

BACKGROUND

The vision of the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) is to make it easier for U.S. veterans, active service members and their families to learn about and arrange for transportation services that will connect them to work, education, health care and other vital services. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) awarded \$64 million in competitive grants to help members in the military community by improving access to locally available transportation.

Veterans and military families are an important audience of focus because they are a traditionally underserved population, even when it comes to transportation access. However, projects funded under the VTCLI program may potentially benefit anyone living within the jurisdiction of a grant recipient, with or without veteran status. Drawing on existing federal resources, and in consultation with advocates for veterans and people with disabilities, projects were funded in urban, suburban, and rural communities around the nation to ~~cat/one-mlg it ch e "n ia m fd o rp m æ tmio d r e c' æ m t e e r~~ that convenient l Grant funds may only be used for capital expenses including hardware, software, in-vehicle technology, facility-related costs, engineering and design. Funds may not be used for the purchase of vehicles or transportation services.

According to its mission, "Metro is responsible for and the controller of the effective transportation system for Los Angeles County's home to the population of veterans, the majority of whom reside in Southern California. There are nearly 400,000 veterans in Los Angeles County alone, and each year an additional 12,000 veterans settle into Los Angeles County as they transition out of the military.

For this community in Southern California, access to transportation continues to be a barrier to care and quality of life. In 2015, the University of Southern California conducted a study of veterans in Los Angeles County. While the study focused on healthcare, education and employment, findings indicate that transportation remains an ongoing need and concern. Approximately 40% of veterans need services for disabilities, especially transportation services they need.¹

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) was successful in securing a \$2 million VTCLI grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Los Angeles Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies offered the required 20 percent local match, bringing the program budget to \$2.5 million. Metro and LA SAFE set out to improve veteran access by developing a portfolio of projects to directly assist veterans, the active military, and their families through new and existing channels including Southern California Go511, Access Services (Access), Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

¹ Carl Andrew Castro, Sara Kintzle, and Anthony Hassan. *The State of the American Veteran: A Los Angeles County Veterans Study*. 2015.

The purpose of the VTCLI grant is to bring together available transportation services with human service programs—especially for veterans and military families—to establish or expand a one-call/one-click transportation resource. Go511 which covers a five-county region, inclusive of Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. More than two-thirds of today’s veterans experience life, and many indicate that they do not know where to go or who to contact for assistance, including vital transportation services. Thus, Metro set out to determine how best to expand the existing Go511 system to facilitate the needs of veterans in the areas of transportation and human services. The result of this effort was the development and implementation of VetsGo511.com, a one-stop source for veterans and others in the military community to easily obtain information on resources for work, education, healthcare and other vital services in Southern California, and to provide transportation options to get them there.

Prior to any development, LA SAFE hosted focus groups to better understand the needs of the target audience. From these focus groups, the project team learned that the key concerns for veterans are housing, healthcare, education, and other social services. However, once veterans find solutions to those issues, their next concern is transportation and how to get to those resources. As a result, VetsGo511.com was designed based on this realization, and the core function of the site is to enhance connection—connection to the resources veterans need through the web portal (and helping them identify what they need), and then physically connect

I found it amazing that a site like this has been created to assist veterans and also that it was easy to navigate

need by planning their trip and giving them the transportation options to get there. VetsGo511.com is the first website of its kind that provides transportation and human services together. Additionally, ongoing user testing, focus groups, outreach activities, feedback from partners and stakeholders, and other opportunities to engage with the target audience allowed for many rounds of design improvements to enhance the intuitiveness of the website and to enhance the site through the development of new and innovative functionality.

While Metro chose to focus on millennial and post-9/11 veterans in order to target transitioning veterans and early adopters, VetsGo511 offers resources and information for all veterans and members in the military community. The site tested very well amongst GenX and Baby Boomer veterans and family members with the average age of registered users at 46. Increasingly, millennial internet access point is through a smartphone, and the analytics for our web use support this trend with 41% of sessions being conducted on a mobile phone. Thus, VetsGo511 is developed as a responsive design website that is supported on all modes of technology—computer, tablet and smartphone.

The design and functionality of VetsGo511 is simple, especially to click. “The site is intuitive and once the user finds what they need, they can click directly into the relevant page of the service’s website, rather than the homepage, to find more information regarding the subject matter of interest to the user. VetsGo511 also offers contact information, enables veterans to offer feedback and comments directly on the resource, and plan their trip—all in one location on one page.

The website helps me in ways I never knew existed to veterans.

The goal of this effort was to offer a sleek and easy-to-use resource with a high-tech look and feel. Existing online resources for veterans do not focus on design and often lack a sleek look, and user testing demonstrated enthusiastic response to our design, and expressed appreciation for the investment that was made in the site.

VetsGo511.com was used as a testing platform to test for Go511.com. The following are some of those components:

Multi-Modal: The VetsGo511 map is interactive with various map layers that can be enabled or disabled by the user depending on their preferred transportation mode. The traffic layer is enabled by default, but options are available for bus, rail and bike. Additionally, users can enable layers to show incidents, road work, Park & Ride locations, VA facilities, WorkSource locations and more. The trip planner is also multi-modal, providing directions for driving, transit, biking and walking.

Personalization: VetsGo511 piloted a concept for personalization which was envisioned to be a future enhancement for the NextGen 511 system. Users complete a profile to indicate their site preferences so that the website may curate only the resources that are meaningful and important to them. Through their profile, users can save a home address. When trip planning, users can streamline the process by typing "Home" to populate. Users may also indicate their affiliated branch of service and camouflage skins will change according to the selected branch on some pages. Finally, VetsGo511 partnered with ID.me (previously TroopID), an online system that automatically verifies veteran status in order to determine if users are eligible for veteran rider fare discounts.

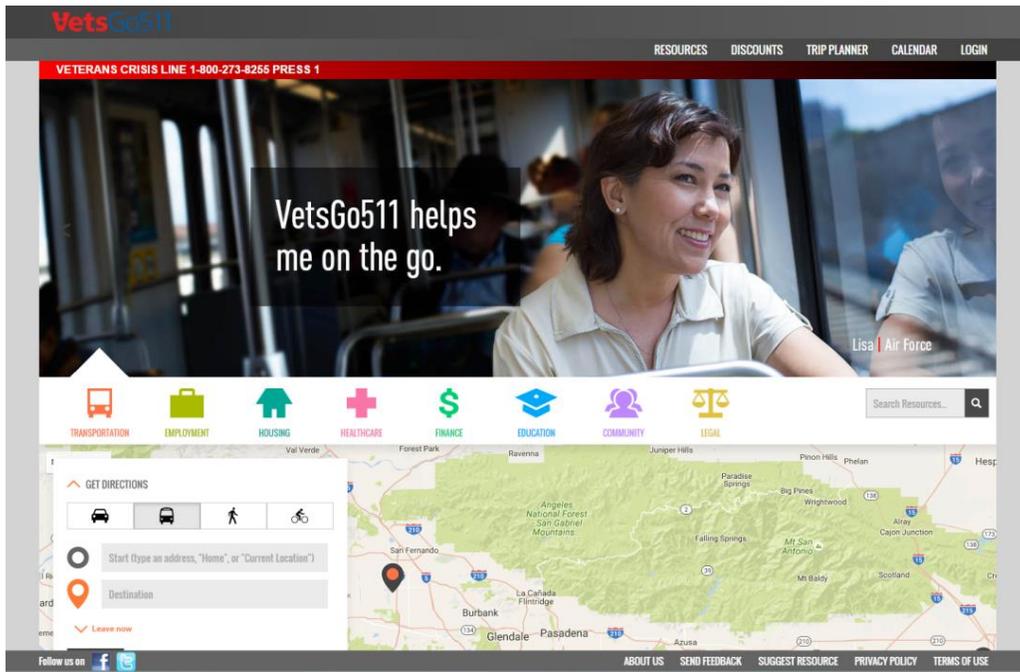
Gamification: In order to enhance user retention, VetsGo511 tracks user activity and interaction with the website. Based on activity level and site engagement, users earn points to "level up" to a higher rank. There are five ranks which are conveyed as military vehicles, corresponding to the branch of military with which they are affiliated. For example, Army vehicles progress from a jeep to a tank, Navy vehicles progress through different boats and water craft, and Air Force vehicles progress through different types of air craft.

I would say, Thank you! This is a great resource! I plan on sharing this with my coworkers, active duty Army Recruiters. A+

WEB FEATURES

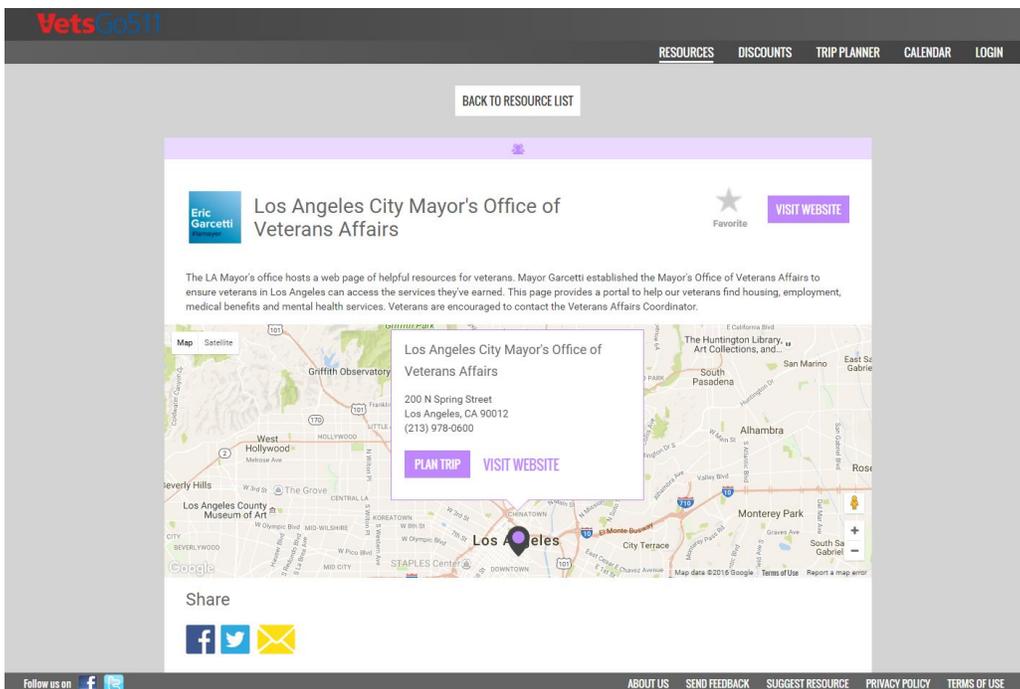
Homepage: When users come to the homepage, as shown in Figure 1, they are introduced to many of the ways veterans can seek help through the services offered on the site. Additionally, all service locations are dynamically pinned on the map interface.

Figure 1 – VetsGo511.com Home Page



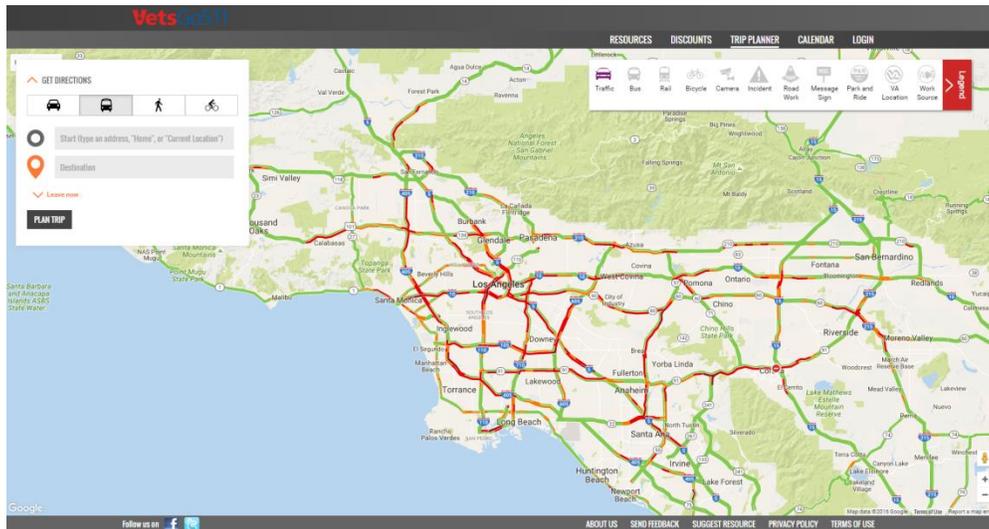
Resources: Resources are curated to meet the needs of all military demographics and are sorted across eight domains: Transportation, Employment, Housing, Healthcare, Finance, Education, Community and Legal. Each domain has a corresponding color identifier that is carried throughout the website. On the resource information page, as shown in Figure 2, transportation planning is provided for each resource that has a brick and mortar location.

Figure 2 – Resource Information View



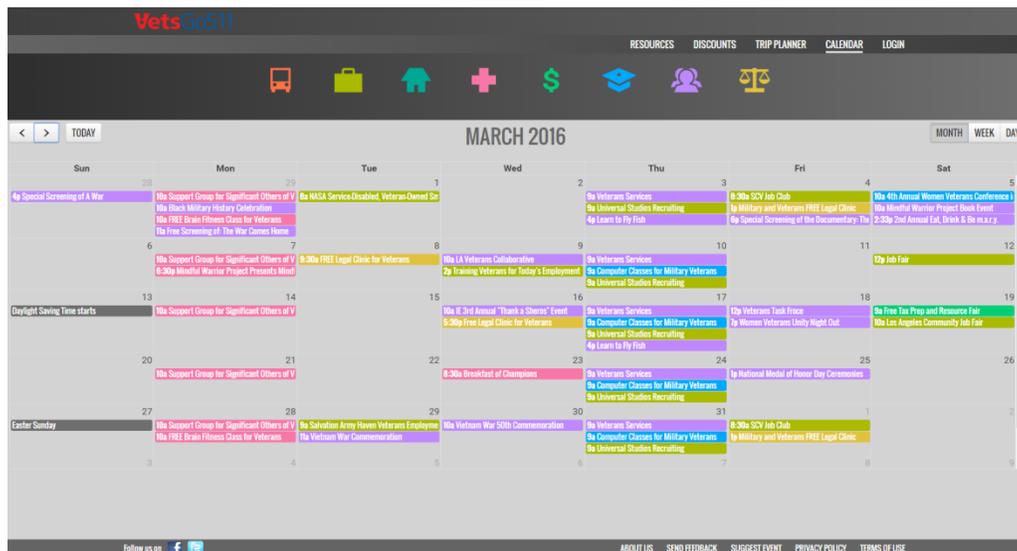
Transportation Resources: The Trip Planner and transportation map are multi-modal and provide information on all of the transportation providers that are a part of Go511, as illustrated in Figure 3. Data from Metro, RIITS, Go511 and Google are pulled together and presented in the map. Users can plan a trip for transit, driving, biking or walking directions and the route output can be printed, texted or emailed to the user. An interactive legend allows VetsGo511 users to select different map layers that are most valuable to them.

Figure 3 – Trip Planner and Transportation Map



Calendar: VetsGo511 has a unique feature that sets it apart from all other tools in the market—a calendar. As shown in Figure 4, the interactive calendar is organized by domain with the same color identifiers that are used for the resources, and users can search upcoming veteran-related events that are of specific interest to them, and then plan their trip to those events, or download the event to save to their calendar. This has proven to be one of VetsGo511's most popular features and has enhanced user retention.

Figure 4 – Calendar



USAGE STATISTICS

During the project, website usage statistics were tracked and evaluated using Google analytics. The following summarizes key findings of the activity levels for VetsGo511.com.

The site hosted 27,232 sessions for the duration of the project. Sessions were evenly distributed between desktop and mobile devices. Users on a desktop spent more time on the website, viewed more pages and clicked on more resources than those on mobile or tablet devices.

*I feel it's gone above and beyond
trying to fulfill everyone's needs.
Thank you, you've done a
wonderful job.*

Session durations have consistently increased throughout the project. The unofficial industry standard for average pages per session is two. any website, the goal is to keep users engaged and to foster their interest. Increased pages per session means that users are highly engaged and eager to explore more of the website. These analytics demonstrate that VetsGo511 users are highly engaged. The average session duration also conveys this. The industry standard for the amount of time a user spends on a website is two to three minutes;

V e t s

the VetsGo511 average session duration is 8:36.

The bounce rate for the website declined significantly during the project. Bounce rate is the percentage of single page visits where the user leaves the website from the entrance page without any interactions. The bounce rates in the first two months of the project were 86% and 67%. After some immediate design tweaks, the bounce rate dropped to 7.96% by the end of the project term. Having a low bounce rate indicates that the majority of users visiting the website are engaging with it in some way. To put this in perspective, website standards indicate that a bounce rate below 40 is considered excellent.

V e t s G o 5 1 1 ' s b o u n c e r a t e i s u n c o m m o n a n d v e r y i m p r

VetsGo511 experienced large increases in traffic during ad campaigns and periods of increased outreach. Bus and rail card campaigns proved to be the most successful at attracting users to the site, while online ad campaigns were not—and the online campaign referrals have the highest bounce rate.

ACCESS SERVICES

Access Services was a key partner identified during the grant application process in order to pilot an automation strategy for their Eligibility Appointment scheduling. According to a 2015 study of veterans conducted by the University of Southern California, approximately 40% of veterans need services for disabilities and 38.8% of veterans need transportation to services. Removing such barriers to care and quality of life are critical to enabling veterans offered a great opportunity to break down one of the barriers that restricts access to care for Los Angeles County veterans. An initial appointment—an Eligibility Appointment—is required by Access for all potential users of their services to evaluate their mobility needs and to ascertain their eligibility to use the services. Within the VTCLI program, Metro partnered with Access to develop an online application to initiate the paratransit eligibility appointment scheduling process.

The goal of the project was to develop a web-based application and user interface to support an online alternative to the current phone and mail scheduling processes. The online appointment scheduling application focused specifically on automating the process of scheduling the initial eligibility appointment for potential users of Access paratransit services by providing a web access portal. The application would allow for the prospective rider to enter the application user interface through local agency websites to obtain a Rider ID number.

Access did not have a centralized system for providing service across the region and, without centralization, progress proved difficult. During the VTCLI project development, Metro learned that Access uses three different reservation systems, four different dispatching systems and four different scheduling systems. Access conducted a comprehensive operational review of their Eligibility Centers while the initial project between Metro and Access was in development and revealed many opportunities for improved efficiencies in the Access process. Thus, priority was shifted away from automation toward centralization causing a readjustment to the project and timeline ultimately phasing the approach.

Phase 1 would focus on the automation of generating a Rider ID number and then prospective riders would call through the existing process to schedule their appointment using their Rider ID. This automated the existing process. A screenshot of the Phase 1 interface is displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Access Scheduler Screen (Phase 1)

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.scheduler.accessla.org/>. The page title is "Access Services Online Rider ID Request". The form is titled "Request Rider ID #" and includes a welcome message: "Welcome! You can request your Rider ID# online by filling in the form below." The form fields are: *First name, Middle initial, *Last name, * Type your street address, City, State and Zip - we are going to Google it!, I have a different mailing address, *Primary phone number, TDD, Mobile, Alternate phone number, TDD, Mobile, and Email address. There is a dropdown menu for "Select a format" and "CANCEL" and "SUBMIT" buttons. The footer includes the "access" logo and the text: "If you need help with this process, call the Access Evaluation Center at 626.532.1616".

Phase 2 would complete the automation, pulling all of the systems together in order to streamline the scheduling from start to finish in one easy and seamless user experience. The second phase was scheduled to begin in concert with the initiation of a new Access contract to centralize the systems and process. However, just as Phase 2 exploration and development was to begin, Access informed Metro that they were delaying their contract solicitation and would not be able to support the completion of Phase 2 within the grant timeline.

In response to these timeline constraints and changes that the project would not be completed with Phase 2 and Access agreed to build the second phase on their own once the new contractor was on board and centralization was complete. Some work and development was performed on Phase 2 before reaching this point, so the remaining funds were diverted to the DAV project and to VetsGo511.com for an additional phase of innovative customer-driven enhancements.

Once Phase 1 was deployed, a decision was made by both agencies to refrain from promoting or marketing this scheduling solution until Phase 2 could be deployed. Links to the Scheduler were included on Metro.net, Go511.com, VetsGo511.com and AccessLA.org. On many of these sites the link was buried deep within the site and not promoted on the front page. Since the launch of the Scheduler, more than 5200 potential riders have completed the online registration and 2085 have successfully

completed the evaluation process. The online option, without full deployment, currently accounts for seven percent of all riders who complete the evaluation process.

The project of automating the ride to the Eligibility Evaluation Center—the very first interaction a potential rider will have with Access—was initially meant to serve as a pilot. Access would evaluate the process and then assess the potential for expanding the technology to automate all rides that they service, which are currently scheduled through phone reservations. The response to Phase 1, without marketing, was so overwhelming that Access decided to include scheduling automation as a requirement in their new solicitation and will soon be offering automated solutions for all of their paratransit riders.

ENHANCED TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR VA PATIENTS

During the grant application process, Metro gained the partnership of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System to enhance the transportation options for veterans engaged with the VA. Both organizations considered the partnership as an opportunity to collaboratively enhance the transportation options and information available to veterans in Los Angeles County. Metro and the VA set forth on this effort to provide greater access to transportation information to veterans, service members, and their families within the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, and four projects were mutually agreed upon:

- Set up interactive kiosks to provide up-to-the-minute transportation information to patients at the VA
- Provide fleet tracking services for VA shuttles and other vehicles in order to provide more information and better service to patients
- Install static display screens in VA hospitals and clinics in order to present shuttle arrival and departure information
- Offer alternative transportation information to allow patients to explore transit options as an alternative to the VA's shuttle system for mor

During grant project execution, the VA experienced an inordinate amount of change and unprecedented turnover in their leadership. Over fifteen months, various points of contact were reassigned. At each transition, project agreement needed to be renegotiated and considerable time was spent trying to achieve project concurrence and partnership over that time. At the time of project initiation, the proposed projects brought excitement and enthusiasm to the VA team, but, by March 2015 the VA expressed a need to reprioritize their efforts to a number of logistical and service-related priorities. With one year until the project deadline, the VA could not lend the necessary support to the partnership in order to see these projects through to completion, and Metro decided to re-conceptualize a project that could still service the transportation needs of veterans for their VA medical appointments. Alternative opportunities were pursued in order to maintain the integrity of the initial project and deliver a transportation information solution for patients at the VA. The DAV provided such an opportunity.

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) is a veterans' a system across the nation. One service among many valuable programs that the DAV provides is a free transportation service for VA patients to and from their VA healthcare appointments. DAV operates a fleet of vehicles around the country to provide free transportation to VA medical facilities for injured and ill veterans. The DAV, as an eager partner in this effort, supported full accessibility for the project team to work with key staff and stakeholders in order to complete this comprehensive effort in a short amount of time.

Currently, Transportation Coordinators at VA facilities rely on a paper-based process to schedule rides over the phone with veterans. The ability to provide rides to veterans is currently constrained by limited operating hours and the lack of available volunteer drivers. Metro saw an opportunity to automate and improve on their process through routing and scheduling.

The project was initiated as a pilot at four VA medical facilities in Southern California:

- West Los Angeles VA
- Long Beach VA

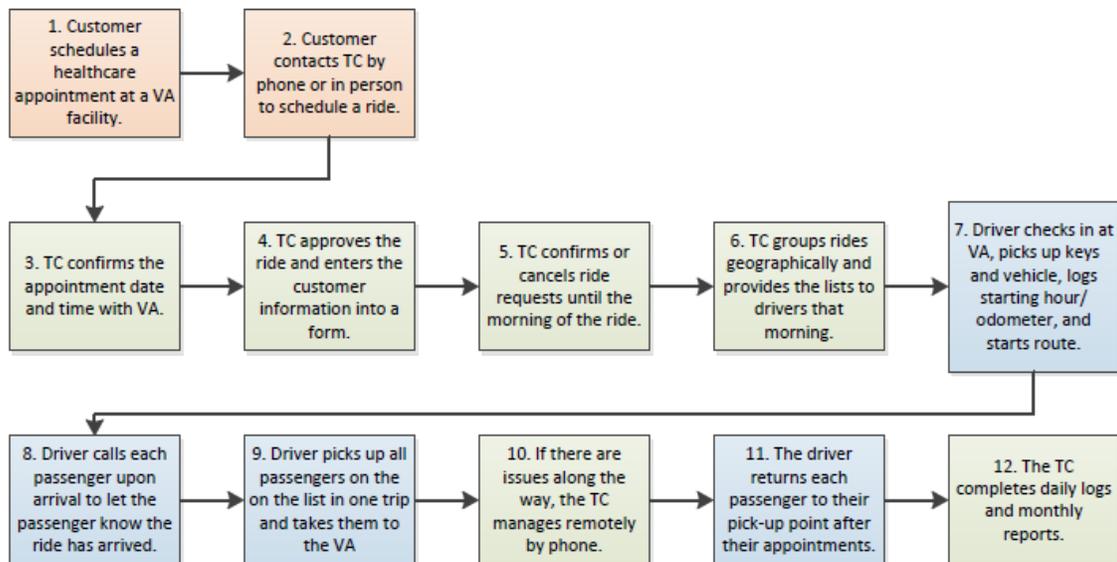
- Sepulveda Ambulatory Care Center
- Loma Linda VA

DAV operates transportation services at each facility independent of each other. A Transportation Coordinator runs the service at each facility and they are entrusted with the authority and leadership to adjust the program to best meet the needs of the customers and location. As such, while the basic process is the same, each coordinator has unique approaches to carrying out different parts of the process.

Most DAVs operate door-to-door shuttle-type service for passengers—multiple passengers are picked up from locations in close proximity to each other and passengers are all dropped off at the VA facility at the same time. The ride home works in reverse. Some DAVs (e.g. Loma Linda VA) also provide shuttle service at predefined pick-up points for rural patients.

Thus, it was important to develop a technical solution that captured the main business processes for each facility, allowed flexibility for different the door-to-door service and service from predefined pick-up points. The Metro project team met with each Transportation Coordinator to fully understand their scheduling process, business constraints, and distinct partnership coordination with the specific VA facility and scope of the area they serve. From this assessment, a common process was defined that served as the foundation of the design, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – DAV Scheduling Process



The goal of the DAV scheduler and routing system was to provide a flexible, online scheduling system to complement and streamline the existing workflow process. Metro and LA SAFE, in coordination with DAV stakeholders, initiated the development of the scheduling system which is aligned with the overarching goal of the VTCLI program to improve transportation access to services for veterans and their caregivers.

The project was conceptualized as a multi-phased effort, but only Phase 1 would be completed under the VTCLI grant.

Phase 1: Build an online scheduling platform for Transportation Coordinators to automate ride scheduling.

Phase 2: Build a mobile app for DAV drivers to download their ride schedule, get turn-by-turn directions on their route, contact the patient rider, and submit data for better tracking and performance monitoring.

Phase 3: Build a mobile app for regular passengers to schedule their ride, check the status of their ride, and communicate with the assigned driver.

Early in the project, the DAV realized the value of this effort and plans to expand Phase 1 statewide and eventually nationwide. They are also interested in pursuing Phase 2 and possibly Phase 3 on their own once Phase 1 is fully implemented.

The Phase 1 interface for the Transportation Coordinator utilizes a calendar to display vehicles, drivers and passengers currently scheduled, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 – Scheduler Screen

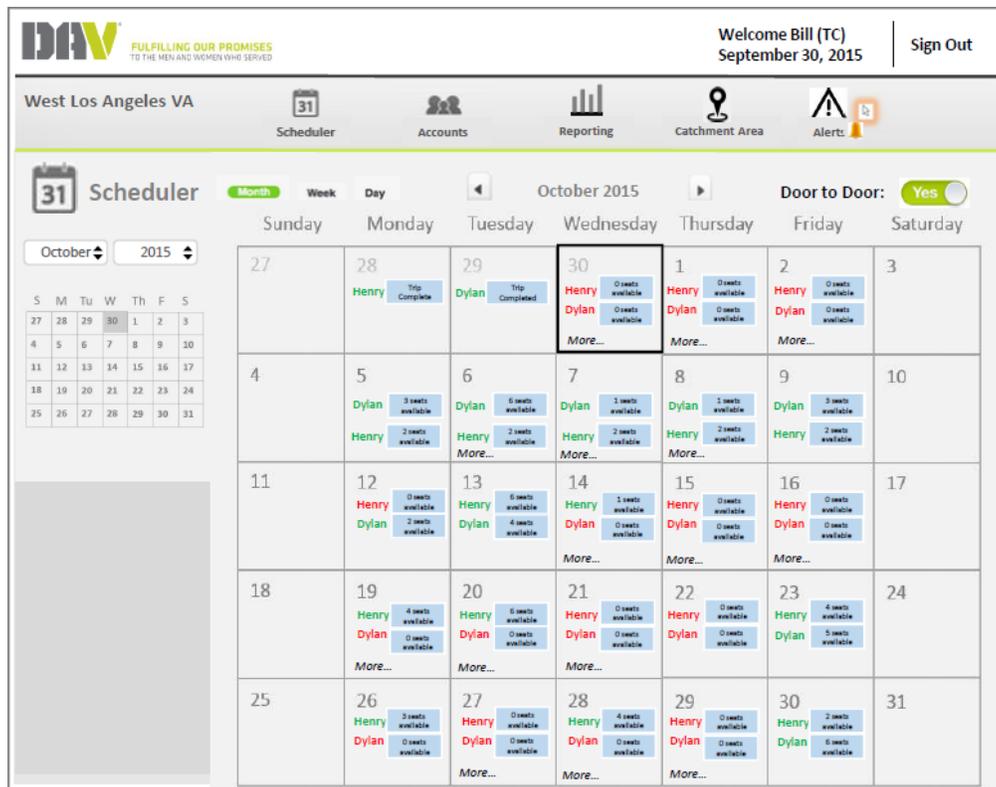
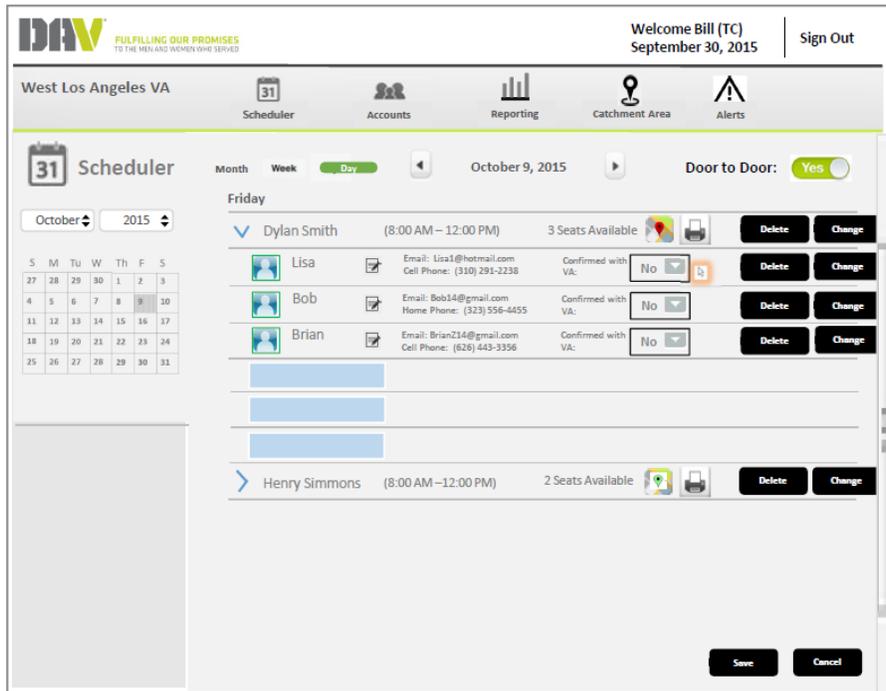


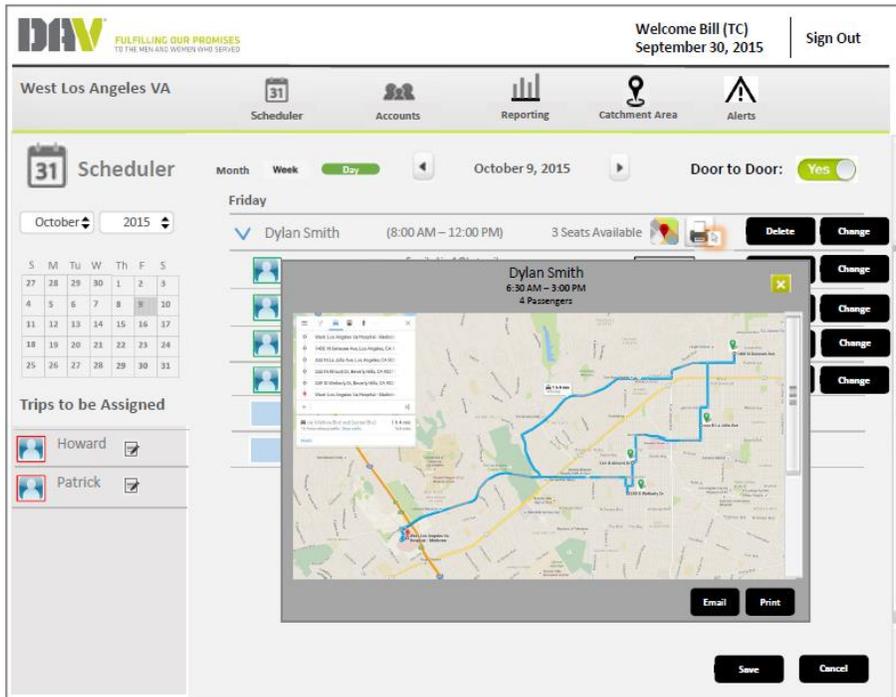
Figure 8 shows the screen that Coordinators use to schedule patients to a specific driver and vehicle. On this screen, Coordinators can edit the current as medical appointment has been confirmed.

Figure 8 – Ride Assignment Screen



Once all passengers in a vehicle have been confirmed the day before the appointment, the Coordinator schedules the trip for the driver and the Scheduler routes the passengers in the most efficient and logical pick-up order, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 – Routing



CONCLUSION

The Metro project team delivered three very successful and well-received products to provide veterans and the military community in Southern California with improved information and access to transportation. All projects have been successfully transitioned to their parent programs or organizations:

- Access Services has accepted the Scheduler and is building out the rest of the automated system with their new contractors.
- The DAV has accepted their Scheduler and Routing System and will be expanding the program throughout the state and eventually nationwide. They are looking to develop a second and third phase on their own to add driver and passenger functionality.
- VetsGo511 has been transitioned under the Go511 program and remains in Operations & Maintenance mode.

Successful project management can't happen behind a desk any more. Transportation, so this project required extensive effort to build relationships and identify key partners not just to understand the veteran demographic, but to cull and curate the human services resources for VetsGo511.com and to build the resource database.

The Metro project team met regularly with partners—typically monthly, but more often when joint community initiatives or events were nearing. Some of our partners included, but were not limited to:

- Go511
- The USC Center for Innovation and Research (USC CIR) – Los Angeles Veteran Collaborative
- CalVet
- LA Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs
- DAV
- Access Services
- VA
- The Salvation Army
- The Goodwill
- WorkSource
- TroopID

Grant funds were not permitted to be spent on marketing and outreach, but LA SAFE recognized the need for a marketing strategy and execution, so LA SAFE management provided an additional allocation of funds, in addition to the 20% local match. Marketing using Metro properties (i.e., bus and rail), radio ads and web ads proved successful to the VetsGo511 project by increasing brand and program awareness. The Metro project team also attended numerous veteran outreach events and partnered with other Metro departments for Metro-organized veteran events. Face-to-face communication with thousands of veterans and service providers through these venues increased the VetsGo511 user base and allowed for a continuous flow of user feedback.

The Metro project team faced significant challenges and obstacles in the development and execution of the VTCLI program. The project management team was able to respond to each issue, analyze potential outcomes, and overcome obstacles to deliver the full project within budget and schedule.

Throughout the grant process, the VTCLI team made every assurance to partners and stakeholders that the services would continue after the grant funds were expended. Within this community, existence of services is just as transient as the veterans seeking them. It is not unusual for services to come and go as funding is available, so stakeholders in this initiative have a concern. Since the completion of the grant, VetsGo511 has transitioned under the operation of the new NextGen 511 contract and will be maintained as a 511 product serving a specific segment of the population.

As a solution for a targeted segment of the population, VetsGo511 was an innovative pilot for the 511 marketplace. Due to this demonstration of innovation, VTCLI project management was invited to present and participate on panels at two different conferences—ITS (Intelligent Transportation Society) California and ITS Arizona. Additionally, VetsGo511 became the focus of conversation at a California statewide 511 roundtable in a discussion of market opportunities for targeted solutions for specific populations. One such population that could be explored in the future, if desired, is the student population.

LESSONS LEARNED

The VTCLI project was managed by a team eager to deliver a successful project and useful resource for a population of underserved individuals. Over the course of the project, the project management team learned valuable lessons that can be applied to future and current projects and programs.

User-Driven Design: The team quickly discovered the value and importance of user-driven design. Constant contact and feedback from users allows for continuous improvement and alignment with customer expectations. The initial VetsGo511.com design was ineffectually tested with potential customers and usage statistics failed to meet expectations. The team revised the strategy for user testing and Voice of the Customer and quickly implemented a series of focus groups to seek insight and feedback which led to a series of design and development phases to update and improve the website. User testing and focus groups were utilized with each phase and, due to this strategy, VetsGo511 usage statistics now exceed industry standards.

Mobile First: VetsGo511 was designed to be a responsive website, but functionality was perfected behind a desktop. Focus groups ultimately informed the project team about shortcomings in the mobile design. With 50% of all sessions being conducted on a mobile device, attention was turned to the optimization of the mobile experience, which ultimately improved customer experience with the site. Increasingly, mobile is becoming the device of choice for accessing the internet. Thus, all future websites should consider designing for mobile first, and then adapted responsively to desktop, rather than the other way around as is current practice.

Outreach: Project management for this project could not be done from behind a desk. A truly customer-driven initiative requires constant and continuous engagement with customers. This was done through regular meetings with partners and stakeholders, attendance at outreach and service fairs, and participation and partnership in military events. The project team learned the value of regular and ongoing face time with key strategic supporters in order to stay in tune with customer expectations and remain relevant with major communication channels through which to promote VetsGo511.

Transferability: The VTCLI project served to create three pilot demonstrations:

1. VetsGo511 was a test bed for future or “NextGen” transportation information technologies that could be utilized in the expansion of the Southern California Go511 program. Many of these

new features are currently being incorporated into the development of the NextGen 511 system. VetsGo511 also served as a pilot for designing tailored transportation information solutions for specific subsets of the population. This concept could be expanded to include students, seniors, commuters, tourists, and more.

2. The Access Automated Scheduler piloted the concept of ride scheduling through a web application rather than by phone. This pilot was so successful, that Access is expanding automation to their entire service.
3. The DAV Scheduler served as an opportunity to introduce a technical solution to a “paper and pencil” scheduling model. The DAV plans to expand this pilot throughout California and potentially nationwide.

These projects were identified because they had immeasurable potential in streamlining and expanding the business offerings and processes of three successful programs—and the transferability of these projects has far exceeded the team’s initial expectations.