

In Corpus Christi, Training Is Just the Beginning

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The training process is so much better than it was eight years ago. What new operators go through now would have helped me tremendously back then. Even now, in retraining, the instructors pick up on the little things and offer minor adjustments that can prevent an accident," according to Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (CCRTA) bus operator Camelia Wehring.

Part of the change Wehring speaks of is how the CCRTA responds to accidents involving its fleet. Following an accident, the bus operator and training instructor review its cause and anything that could have prevented it from occurring. Such training is mandatory.

"We train our staff consistently, focusing on safety and reiterating topics that may not be at the forefront of their mind," said Melissa Ruiz, training instructor.

Responsive training is not the only classroom experience CCRTA bus operators gain. Before operators can get behind the wheel and be assigned one of the CCRTA's 35 fixed routes, they must spend eight weeks in training—a 33 percent increase over previous programs. The extra two weeks of classroom sessions speak to the attention to detail the instructors offer. "Safety is the priority, and some things can't be rushed," said Natalie Grady, training instructor.

Trainees also spend two to three weeks working directly with a seasoned bus operator in a training effort called "Behind the Wheel." An increased emphasis on preparation has led to an increase in operator confidence.

"Operators used to be nervous, afraid that they'd go 'blank' on their first day. Now the confidence can be seen on their faces and in their body language. They can't wait to pick up a route," said Carol Flowers, transportation supervisor.

The increased level of confidence in operators parallels a decrease in collision rates for CCRTA. In November of 2017, the agency reported a collision rate of 1.45 per hundred thou-

sand revenue miles. One year later, the collision rate had dropped to just 1.03, a significant 30 percent decrease.

With safety at the forefront of CCRTA's efforts, the goal is eventually to lower the collision rate to zero. Part of the challenge is the growing pains of an expanding city. Almost 40 percent of all fixed routes are facing construction detours stemming from Corpus Christi bond projects and a new bridge on the horizon. Still, the organization is confident that advancing technology on buses, in combination with the emphasized training, will lead to a safer community.

Training doesn't end in the classroom, either. Grady said, "We love spending time out in the field, acknowledging our operators, thanking our customers and offering positive feedback for a job well done. They enjoy seeing us out there and we relish showing them that we are in this together. Our efforts don't end in the classroom; in fact, the classroom is just the beginning."



CCRTA's Natalie Grady and Carol Flowers in the field.



Cincinnati Metro riders can now use a mobile payment app for their bus fares.

In Cincinnati, Riders Speak; Metro Listens

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IN CINCINNATI, when riders asked for improvements to their service, Metro began working diligently to respond and get more people on board.

A year ago, we launched a Wi-Fi pilot on select buses. Since then, we have added dozens more buses with Wi-Fi connectivity. The effort has been a huge success among our riders, 88 percent of whom told us that the addition of free Wi-Fi made them more likely to take the bus. More than 91 percent of riders told us the change made them more likely to recommend riding the bus to their friends and family.

In March, we began a bus stop balancing project aimed at improving the reliability of our service and creating a faster, smoother ride. Working with the community, we identified for removal a number of stops that were redundant, as well as those lacking in accessibility, safety or amenities. While we await

results from the first few months of the project, we hope we can expand it to the remainder of our system to improve the ride for all our customers.

We're also working to improve riders' experience off the bus, placing 50 new benches at high-ridership stops and getting ready to break ground on a new transit center—complete with real-time information signs, off-street park-and-ride spaces and a ticket vending machine—in one of our highest-ridership neighborhoods.

These changes join a host of other improvements Metro has made over the past several years in answer to riders' requests:

- Cincy EZRide, a mobile payment app;
- Cincy EZAlerts, a text and email service alert system; and
- Real-time arrival information at selected bus stops, online and via smartphone apps.

As we look forward to the rest of 2019 and the years ahead, we at Metro hope to make even more improvements for our customers, providing them with a public transportation system built for today's world.

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