

TRANSIT'S RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

BRITTNEY M. FARR, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF ENGAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION
DENTON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (DCTA)

BRAD J. CUMMINGS, VICE PRESIDENT OF PROCUREMENT
DALLAS AREA RAPID TRANSIT (DART)

CHANGING THE PERCEPTION

- Homelessness is a pervasive issue facing the entire nation, including North Texas
- Transit and our customers have seen a direct impact
- In 2020, the DART Board of Directors instructed staff to evaluate and present a recommendation on a programmatic approach to addressing individuals experiencing homelessness and mental health issues on the system
- DART began by evaluating what the agency was currently doing to address the issue
 - Primary focus on enforcement with DART Police
 - Initiative to clear encampments on the Right-of-Way
 - Partnership with Union Gospel

DEFINING THE POPULATION

- ▶ Addressing individuals experiencing homelessness and mental health issues is not a one size fits all approach.
- ▶ The National Coalition for the Homeless identifies 3 distinct groups:
 - ▶ Transitional Homeless
 - ▶ Episodic Homeless
 - ▶ Chronic Homeless
- ▶ Each group requires their own unique response
- ▶ Shift from enforcement to engagement based on the needs of the population

BUILDING COLLABORATION

- DART began by embarking on a series of virtual meeting with government agencies and homelessness service providers
- Service providers shared what transit agencies were doing that worked such as the Day Pass Voucher Program and entry level job programs
- Transit as a 'mobile shelter' especially during COVID 19 restrictions
- Agreement on a need for comprehensive, long-term approach using outreach, funding and education
- Continued collaboration with service providers would be crucial to solving our collective issues

DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER TRANSIT AGENCIES

- DART evaluated programs across several agencies across the country including:
 - Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)
 - Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)
 - Regional Transportation District (RTD)
 - Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)
- Transit, as an industry, is still working to identify best practices
- Creation of the Transit Homelessness Working Group as a forum to share ideas, experiences and recommendations
- Despite no formal industry standards, commonalities existed across different programs

COMMON PROGRAM ELEMENTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

- Maturation of Programs
 - Initial data collection
 - Pilot Implementation
 - Program Refinements
 - Scalable response
- Cross-functional Outreach Teams
- Strong emphasis on continual data collection
- Partnerships with Social Service Agencies

ESTABLISHING A LONG-TERM PROGRAM

- Following ongoing conversations with service providers and fellow transit agencies, DART embarked on a new pilot program in the Fall of 2021
- Staff identified the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute as a partner to assist DART in documenting the current state of riders, review and analyze DART Police data, assess best practices and connection to care within the region, and creating the initial pilot design

DART'S THREE-PHASED APPROACH

- Phase 1: Data collection and recommendation
- Phase 2: Policy/process drafting, collaboration agreements, beta program test
- Phase 3: Refine based on lessons learned through the beta program test and 12-month pilot program

PHASE I: DATA COLLECTION AND RECOMMENDATION - COMPLETE

- DART contracted with the Meadows Institute to research and collect data on DART's interactions with those experiencing homelessness and/or behavioral health issues.
- Meadows Institute utilized the following data and analysis to design the program:
 - Research successful programs across the state and country
 - Review of three years of DART and City of Dallas Police data
 - Stakeholder interviews and feedback
 - DART employees
 - Community organizations

MEADOWS INSTITUTE PILOT RECOMMENDATION

- **DART Multi-Disciplinary Response Team**
- **Mobile Teams at data-informed locations to include:**
 - Street Medicine community health paramedic (contracted)
 - Licensed, master's level mental health clinician (contracted)
 - Tenured law enforcement officer (DART)
 - Other collaborative team members from partner agencies
- **Rail Teams on data-informed train routes to include:**
 - Street Medicine community health paramedic (contracted)
 - Tenured law enforcement officer (DART)

PHASE 2: POLICY, FORMAL AGREEMENTS, AND BETA LAUNCH – IN PROCESS

- Proposed tasks for the next 7 months:
 - **Short-Term Objectives**
 - Immediately address DART's current resource connection needs
 - Work with community partners and create ILAs for how we will all work together.
 - **Intermediate Outcomes**
 - Create and beta launch the pilot program
 - Monitor and test metrics for the beta launch
 - **Long-Term Objectives**
 - Review of the beta launch, retooling, and full implementation of a proof-of-concept program

PHASE 3: PILOT PROGRAM

- Duration: 12 months
- Monitor the success of helping those experiencing homelessness and/or behavioral health issues from DART's system and the resources that are in place to help/assist with immediate and long-term needs.
- Monitor ILAs with community partners for any changes that need to be made
- Review all metrics and data related to the Pilot Program to recommend a permanent or long-term program solution.

DALLAS CONNECTOR PROJECT

- Partnership with Austin Street Center
- Austin Street Center will shuttle those experiencing homelessness to key resource locations where housing, medical care, and food needs can be met.
- DART will provide the funding needed for Austin Street Center to mobilize the connector project, identification of hot spots at DART train and bus stations for Austin Street to pick passengers up; resource and marketing management to ensure those who are experiencing homelessness understand this option.

DART CLEAN INITIATIVES

- United Community of Faith Partnership
 - On-board Porter cleaning service of LRVs shall be performed on both the day shift, which is between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. and the night shift, which is between the hours of 2:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- In the process of contracting with another nonprofit shelter to help provide elevator concierge services at stations with elevators and escalators to help keep areas clean, provide service information and alert DART services of any issues with those experiencing homelessness and/or behavioral health concerns.