

# Capital Metro Transit Authority

Drastically improves public outreach & participation with SpeakUp<sup>SM</sup>



Capital Metropolitan Transit Authority provides mass transportation services to the Greater Austin region — one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the U.S. On a daily basis, Capital Metro services 130,000 riders from 4,000 stops all over Central Texas which extends across more than 10 cities, 500 square miles, and includes nearly one million residents. Capital Metro is always striving to make decisions that reflect the needs and priorities of it's community, however, this is often a challenge because it manages such a broad service area.

In 2011, the Capital Metro Board of Directors faced a particularly challenging budget year due to the economic downturn. They prioritized an initiative to harness the web to encourage more community outreach and involvement than they ever had before. They quickly found success with Granicus' new SpeakUp<sup>SM</sup> application included in the Citizen Participation Suite. To date, Capital Metro has been able to engage and empower more than 300 citizens in their transit planning and decision-making process online.

“Public input is critical to our success of becoming a more efficient and effective transit system.”

- Linda Watson, President / CEO

## Success Highlights

- Involved 300+ citizens in transit planning and decision-making
- 150+ ideas have been generated to improve service delivery
- 18% of the ideas submitted are in progress
- Involved 1,700 people in their annual budget development efforts
- Attracted targeted public input, over 2,000 votes/replies

### Fast Facts

**Agency Type:** Transportation Authority

**Citizens Served:** 130,000 daily

**Solution:**

Granicus Platform

Citizen Participation Suite

**Active Since:** 2011

Capital Metro's services are vital to the community. Its train and bus lines connect people to their jobs and families, fuel regional growth and development, reduce traffic congestion, lead to a healthier environment, and make transportation more affordable for everyone.

For all of these reasons, Capital Metro continuously wants to improve customer service to ensure riders have a reliable, safe, and positive transit experience. In order to achieve this, they depend heavily on community outreach and involvement. "Public input is critical to our success of becoming a more efficient and effective transit system," said Capital Metro President/CEO Linda S. Watson.

Despite the importance of public input, Capital Metro's ability to collect feedback from riders was limited. They did an exceptional job engaging residents through email, mail, social media, phone, and even in-person at public hearings or at transit locations; yet these feedback channels oftentimes lacked depth, quality, and measurability. When faced by decreasing revenues and unstable economic conditions, the Board quickly realized it needed to improve the ways it solicits input from the public to help them prioritize and make tough decisions on their 2012 budget.

"Centering our annual budget planning on the priorities and initiatives that our community felt was important would help us build the trust and satisfaction of our riders," said John Michael Cortez, Assistant Director for the Capital Metro Transit Authority. "We started researching online public participation tools that would make our process more accessible and meaningful for everyone involved," Cortez added.

With limited time and staff, Capital Metro appreciated that SpeakUp was easy to implement and manage. They also liked that it provided them with powerful, user-friendly tools to quickly survey customers, host idea forums, and gather targeted feedback on services in a ways they never had before. "We now have the tools to productively listen and take action on the priorities of our customers," Cortez added.

In July 2011, they successfully launched SpeakUp as part of a broader campaign to gather public input on Capital Metro's 2012 budget development and strategic planning. Within two months, they engaged 1,700 citizens and they generated more than 100 ideas and comments were submitted to help Capital Metro cut expenses and increase revenue in 2012. "Traditionally, it's hard to get people to comment on how to spend the budget. The fact we got so many people engaged was really exciting," said Alissa Schram, Community Involvement Coordinator for Capital Metro. "It also showed us that our community has a lot of good ideas."

Since launching the site, the community response has been overwhelmingly positive. More than 300 citizens are participating online, over 150 ideas that have been generated and 18% of them are in progress. In fact, Capital Metro successfully used the feedback they generated to formalize the transit authority's official 2012 budgetary goals and they continue to use it to help them address service needs as they arise. For instance, riders requested that Capital Metro expand service operations during evenings and on weekends. In response, Capital Metro prioritized this in their 2012 initiatives and even planned on creating a strategy to fund it through partnerships.

**37**  
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Have the metrorail run later. Especially on weekends.

by **Heidi Dixon** 7 months ago 

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Because SpeakUp provides residents with an opportunity to stay informed and involved in the decisions that impact their transit system, it's also helping Capital Metro improve transparency and accountability.

“Citizens no longer have to attend public meetings to provide feedback. We can actually have conversations with people and show that Capital Metro is listening to their input,” added Schram. “Also, the data we’re collecting is easy to analyze and share with our board members. This is helping us speed our response time and cultivate decisions that align more closely with the needs of our community.”

“ We now have the tools to productively listen and take action on the priorities of our customers. ”

- John Michael Cortez, Assistant Director