

**511 Transit Data Management:
Meeting Challenges and
Creating Opportunities**

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Executive Summary

The Bay Area 511 Program is a regional travel resource that provides up-to-date traffic, transit, ride-share, and bicycle information to the nine county San Francisco Bay Area. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week via Web and telephone.

Recent advances in technology have raised public expectations of information providers like the 511 Program. It is expected that information given will be timely, accurate, and reliable. In order to meet public demands, the Bay Area 511 Program must manage data as efficiently as possible. Although the Bay Area 511 Program has been effective at satisfying many public transit consumers, not all of the public's needs are being met. Not only are expectations high, but some important types of information are still not available to 511 Program customers. Meeting the needs of the public is a priority for 511 Transit.

This analysis looks at data acquisition and management procedures of the Transit mode of the Bay Area 511 Program, which provides information on the public transportation agencies in the region. This analysis includes a multi-pronged process designed to improve the 511 Transit system by exploring the three following questions:

- 1. What are the current data maintenance challenges that the 511 Transit stakeholders face?**
- 2. How are comparable regional transit providers meeting similar challenges?**
- 3. How can the existing challenges of the Bay Area 511 Transit system be met with better efficiency?**

In answering these questions, this analysis includes the following:

- background information on the Bay Area 511 Program;
- an explanation of the components of data management for 511 Transit;
- a discussion of issues affecting transit operators, including case studies of AC Transit, Golden Gate Transit, and County Connection;
- an assessment of challenges for current data acquisition and maintenance methodologies;
- a review of identified challenges against methodologies implemented by comparable regional systems in Chicago and New York; and
- policy recommendations that may facilitate adoption of innovative technical approaches for improving regional transit data collection and accuracy.

Routine Data Recommendations

The following recommendations will address the challenges associated with the acquisition and maintenance of regularly transmitted “routine” data in the 511 Transit system including data on schedules, routes, stops, fares, and landmarks.

- Promote the use of the XML format for transferring data from the transit agencies.
- Promote the designation of a single contact person to represent each transit agency in the data management process.
- Promote the coordination of a regular agency timeline for data processing in preparation for scheduled major service changes.

Time-Sensitive Data Recommendations

The following recommendations will address the challenges associated with the acquisition and maintenance of time-sensitive data such as alerts, weather-related service cuts, and construction notices.

- Integrate CMS training into any training planned for the launch of the upgraded 511.org website and trip planner.
- Explore possible ways to streamline the CMS data process.
- Explore the integration of a regional architecture system.

ADA Accessibility Data Recommendations

The following recommendations will address the challenges associated with the acquisition and maintenance of accessibility data for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), especially as it relates to bus stops.

- Establish a policy to bring public participation into the data management process in an organized and structured way.
- Coordinate and promote the survey of bus stops for accessibility through site visits.