The Future of 511 Phone in the North/West Passage States

National Rural ITS Conference

October 22, 2018
Outline

- NWP Overview
- Background
- Project Summary
  - History of 511 Phone Service
  - NWP State 511 Phone Services
  - Trends for NWP 511 Phone Service
- Future of 511 Phone
  - NWP States
  - Other States
North/West Passage
Overview

• North/West Passage has been a Transportation Pooled Fund since 2003

• Members
  – 7 States from Washington to Minnesota along I-90 and I-94
North/West Passage
Overview

- States share common challenges
  - Commercial and recreational travel corridor
  - Extreme weather conditions
  - Road closures and transportation management

- North/West Passage vision is to develop effective **methods for sharing, coordinating, and integrating** traveler information and operational activities across borders
Since the advent of 511 in 2001, traveler information dissemination has changed:

- Web sites have evolved and added new dynamic information (e.g. travel times, speeds, images)
- Mobile applications provide information en-route
- In-vehicle navigation or infotainment systems provide real-time information
- Third-party services are popular with travelers (e.g. Waze, HERE, Google Traffic)
• 511 phone has decreased in use nationally and in the NWP states

• States are considering how 511 may change:
  – Change phone service
  – Deemphasize phone in marketing
  – Reduce funding for phone
  – Discontinue phone service
Background

• This project assessed:
  – Trends in 511 phone use in NWP states
  – The plans for 511 phone in NWP states
  – Why other states either discontinued or did not implement 511 phone service
    • Kentucky
    • Missouri
    • North Carolina
Project Summary

• Interviews
  – Interviews/surveys were conducted with all seven NWP states
  – Two non-NWP states were interviewed
  – One non-NWP state was used as a case study

• Data Collection
  – Call volumes by year, month and day
  – Call system characteristics
  – Costs to provide 511 phone
## Project Summary

### NWP 511 Phone Services

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Project Summary

- NWP State 511 Phone Use by Year
  - Decreased 34% from 2011 to 2016.
Project Summary

- NWP State 511 Phone Use by Peak Month
  - Decreased 35% from 2011 to 2016.
  - Higher volatility shows peak demand is still strong.
Project Summary

- Cost per Call for NWP States 511 Phone
  - Cost per call has risen 45% from 2013 to 2016.
Project Summary

• Changes in NWP State 511 Phone
  – States have updated advances in IVR and telecommunication technologies
  – South Dakota added alerts for potentially worsening road conditions
  – In general states have not invested in significant improvements
    • Investment is in other traveler info technology
    • Not significant demand from public for change
Project Summary

• Role of 511 Phone in NWP States
  – Serves rural areas with limited Internet and Cellular Coverage
  – Is used by older populations that may rely on landline phones
    • NWP states are comprised of 14%-16% 65 or older
  – Peak time demand (i.e. winter storms) for 511 is still strong
  – Provides redundancy in case of disruption in Internet traveler information
Future of 511

- States without Statewide 511 (in gray)

Source: https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/511/
Future of 511 Phone

Case Study – State that discontinued 511 Phone

Kentucky

- Conducted a study of current traveler information options
- Found travelers frequently use third-party information (e.g. Google, Waze)
- Saw a steep decline in phone use (40% drop in previous two years)
- Brought all traveler information data management in-house
- Discontinued 511 phone and mobile application in 2016, shifted website to internal staff, at a savings of $750,000
- Teamed with Waze to provide mobile traveler information
- Launched new traveler information web site
Future of 511 Phone

• Interviews with States without Traditional 511 Phone
  – Missouri
    • Had ad-sponsored traveler information in urban areas
    • Service provided free to the state
    • Could not find a vendor to continue the ad-sponsored service on a statewide or local basis
    • Provide traveler info through web site and mobile app
    • Travelers can call a 24/7 customer service line
Future of 511 Phone

• Interviews with States without Traditional 511 Phone
  – North Carolina
    • Discontinued IVR system in 2016. Did not want to deal with complexity and costs of procurement and operation
    • Uses inmates at women’s prison during the day to answer calls
      – Inmates can view traveler information web site
      – Each inmate is paid $1 a day
    • Customers are very satisfied
    • Because inmates can handle limited volume, NC has deemphasized marketing the 511 number
Future of 511 Phone

• NWP States will Continue to provide 511 Phone
  – FHWA study indicates it is still an important traveler information tool
  – States have legislative and funding support for foreseeable future
  – 511 phone complements other traveler information strategies
Future of 511 Phone

• NWP States will assess the impact of:
  – Generational shifts to younger, more tech-adept travelers
  – Shifting transportation patterns to transit, rideshare, decreased car ownership
  – Increased connectivity and access to Internet in rural areas
  – “Big Data” resulting in more tailored real-time information
  – Increased third-party traveler information
  – Connected vehicles and in-vehicle systems
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