



Ventra poses barriers to providing transit support to low-income Chicagoans August 2014

In 2013, the CTA implemented a new fare card system and several employment service providers raised important concerns and questions about what kind of impact Ventra would have on their ability to assist low-income job seekers find employment. After several months of talking with service providers, program administrators and the CTA, the Chicago Jobs Council (CJC) conducted an online survey in May-June 2014. The 11-question survey was intended to collect information from a range of service providers about how the Ventra fare system is working for them and the job seekers they serve.

The Survey
*The survey was emailed to agencies that provide workforce development services, education, after school programming, housing, and a range of other services to low-income residents in Chicago and Cook County. 63 individuals from 48 agencies completed the survey. Some agencies with multiple program divisions or site locations asked more than one staff person to complete the survey. **Seventy percent of respondents have been using Ventra for 6 months or more.***

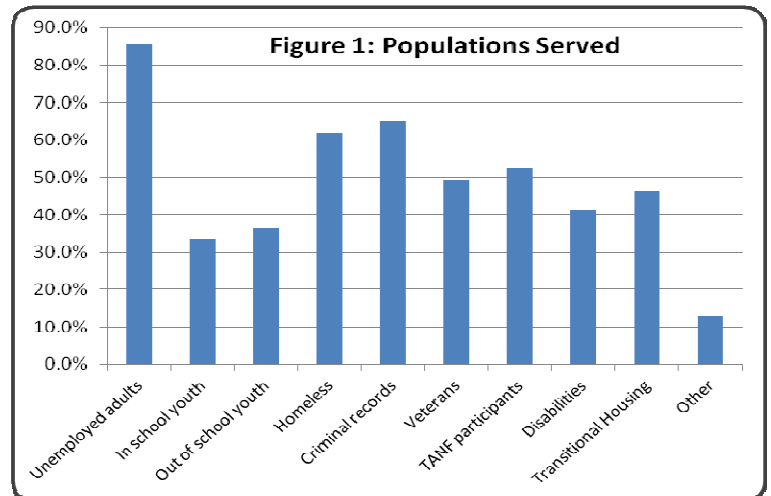
THE NEED

Survey respondents help the most vulnerable Chicagoans with transportation needs.

Eighty-six percent of respondents reported helping low-income, unemployed adults with transportation needs. Seventy percent are helping youth with transportation. Many of the individuals served struggle with homelessness (over 60%), have criminal records that make finding a job challenging (over 60%), or are veterans (50%). See, Figure 1.

Transit assistance is provided to support employment, education and stability.

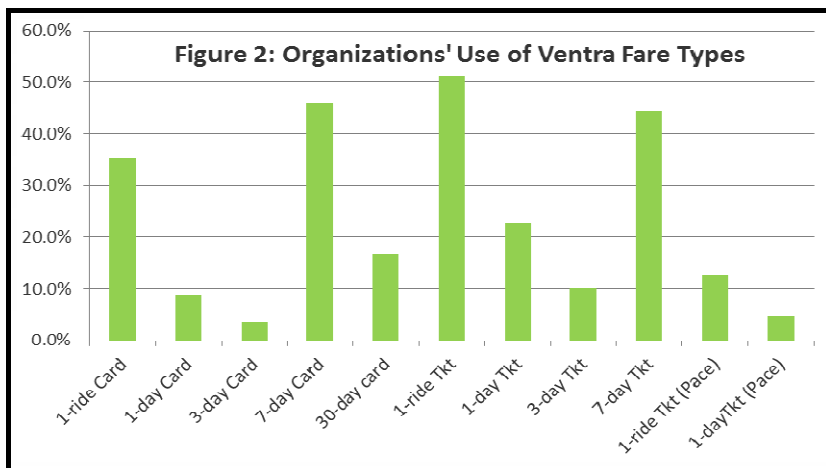
Nearly all of the survey respondents (97%) use transit support to help their program participants gain access to employment-related opportunities (i.e. training, interviews, new job). Forty-nine percent use transit to help individuals maintain stability during their job search--securing housing, getting counseling and substance abuse treatment, and attending medical appointments. For 44 percent of respondents, transit assistance supports the completion of a GED or other literacy program (see Appendix for additional information).



VENTRA USAGE

Service providers purchase both tickets and hard cards; they rely on single ride tickets, as well as 7-day options, to support job seekers.

The majority (57%) of survey respondents reported purchasing only tickets. Agencies shared several reasons why tickets are their best option to provide transit support. The significant staff time required to register and load hard cards, especially when providing services to large numbers of people, makes it challenging for agencies to use the hard cards. Many agencies serve individuals who are transient. Almost one quarter (24%) of agencies purchase a combination of hard cards and tickets and 19 percent purchase only hard cards.



Agencies reported the percentage of their total Ventra fare spending allocated to each fare type. The most commonly purchased fare types are the single-ride ticket (51%), 7-day card (46%), and the 7-day ticket (45%). See, Figure 2.

Although the new Ventra system emphasizes the convenience of the hard cards, it is clear that after nearly a year of implementation, service providers working with job seekers rely most heavily on the ticket options.

THE CHALLENGES

The \$0.50 fee on Ventra tickets results in reduced transit assistance for low-income Chicagoans

Fifty-four percent of agencies that purchase Ventra tickets report that they reduced the level of transit assistance as a result of the \$0.50 fee on Ventra tickets. When asked to quantify the reduction in transit assistance resulting from the \$.50 fee, respondents reported purchasing a total of 1,780 fewer tickets per month, and thereby served 559 fewer individuals per month.

The transition to Ventra cards also reduced the level of transit assistance

Twenty-one percent of survey respondents who purchase Ventra cards reported a reduction in transit assistance as a result of the transition to Ventra. Respondents reported 550 fewer passes purchased per month and 285 fewer individuals served per month as a result of the transition to the hard cards. The considerable administrative capacity required to register and load cards has led to this decreased transit support. Agencies also reported that the inability to immediately use the \$5 refunded card fee toward the purchase of a pass and the ability for cards to accrue a negative balance are financial burdens that have resulted in service reductions.

The bulk purchase process is inefficient, costly, and requires significant administrative capacity

Several respondents indicated that the bulk order and delivery process for tickets is inefficient and lengthy, limiting agencies' ability to respond to client needs. Agencies said that an online bulk purchase option would considerably improve the bulk purchase process for both tickets and cards, as well as the ability to register and load cards in bulk. Adding a pick up option for orders was also recommended as a way to increase efficiency and reduce the financial risk of delivery.

To prevent reductions in transit assistance provided, CTA should:

(1) Eliminate additional cost for agencies serving low-income residents by:

- Waiving the \$0.50 fee on tickets
- Ensuring that the \$5 refunded card fee can be immediately used toward the purchase of a pass
- Not allowing cards to acquire negative balances

(2) Improve efficiency and accessibility of bulk purchase process by:

- Offering online bulk purchase of tickets and cards and providing multiple payment options (credit card, ACH)
- Allowing online loading of multiple cards at one time
- Reducing turnaround time between order and delivery
- Providing a pick up option for orders

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