

Part 1: The Santiago Bus System



Prior to the summer of 2005, Santiago, Chile was served by a unique bus system that was targeted for a major overhaul due to pollution and safety concerns. While Santiago is a thriving cosmopolitan capital city of 7 million, many of the passengers using this system are poor and depend on the system to get to jobs, schools, etc. Here are the facts regarding what the current system was as well as what was planned for the new system.¹



<u>Santiago's traditional bus system</u>	<u>Plans for Transantiago</u>
The current bus system had been operating for close to 40 years and served 4 million passengers each day.	In October, 2005 Plan Transantiago was announced – looking to accomplish nothing less than a total overhaul of Santiago's traditional bus system. The plan entailed a 4 month transition period with a total change over targeted for February 11, 2006.
Residents referred to the current buses as <i>micros</i> – they are “canary-yellow contraptions that circulate in the thousands, are a true Santiago trademark, every bit as much a part of the capital's urban identity as New York City's yellow cabs or London's double-deckers” .	The plan called for brand new buses, easily identifiable by both their green and white color scheme and their modern electronic route signs.
There were over 7,000 <i>micros</i> ...	At Phase One of the project 4 months before launch 300 brand-new green and white buses (half of them 150-passenger "accordion" buses) began circulating within the capital. Eventually there would be approximately 4,500 buses.
The micros were owned by more than 2,500 different entrepreneurial companies. An entrepreneur can own 1 bus or 10 buses.	Under the new scheme, ownership of the city's extensive bus fleet will be reduced to just 10 private companies.
The buses were mostly quite run down and very likely significantly contributing to Santiago's air pollution issues.	The new buses are more fuel efficient than their yellow predecessors as well as equipped with modern emission controls significantly mitigating the negative environmental impact.
The bus drivers actually competed for passengers – the fares are their livelihood. This leads to some dangerous situations. “Jostling for advantage along Santiago's congested streets and boulevards, micros often race at breakneck speeds, routinely cutting each other off and rarely coming to a complete stop when picking up or dropping off riders.”	The new buses are equipped with mechanisms that prevent drivers from exceeding speeds of 60 kilometers per hour and from moving their vehicles until all doors are completely closed.

¹ We are grateful to a TMS Network Member from Santiago who first told us this story as part of a presentation during an accreditation workshop.

<u>Santiago's traditional bus system (cont'd)</u>	<u>Plans for Transantiago (cont'd)</u>
<p><i>Micros</i> drivers also served as cashiers, taking money from passengers, making change and handing out tickets, all the while trying to keep one eye on the road as they maneuvered in an out of traffic. All transactions were cash transactions. One price of between 50 and 70 cents would take a passenger from one end of the city to the other.</p>	<p>Starting in February there was to be a new payment system. Riders board buses with exact change or pay their fares using prepaid electronic swipe cards. These new BIP cards, as they're called, are available at all banks.</p>
<p>There were no 'official' routes and nothing like a GPS. There were individuals called '<i>sapos</i>' who station themselves at the main intersections, observe traffic and buses and then help the bus drivers decide where to go next by telling them where the last bus went. The bus drivers tip the <i>sapos</i> about 35 cents each time.</p>	<p>Planners completely redesigned the city's existing bus grid, dividing Santiago into 10 color-coded and lettered (A to J) districts. Certain buses - namely the new green and white ones - will continue to operate along cross-Santiago routes, up and down the city's major thoroughfares. The rest will operate only within their specific districts.</p>
<p>There is a very modern subway system in Santiago – the Metro - that is not connected to the bus system. It serves 600,000 to 700,000 passengers a day</p>	<p>The new BIP cards will also work on the city's Metro, allowing people to more easily transfer from bus to subway. The bus and subway systems will be fully integrated.</p>

PLANNING

What actions will be very important in each work function to ensure *Project Transantiago* goes smoothly and effectively?

Part 2 ... Project 'Transantiago': What happened?

In the first week ... chaos!

One of our TMS Network members used the 'Yellow Bus Story' during an accreditation workshop to demonstrate the Types of Work Model. Here are some comments from people directly affected by this project:

"All of this 'felt' instantaneous to the people who used the system. On Feb 10, it was service as usual and on Feb 11 everything had changed ... most critically there were no more yellow buses to flag down.

- *The bus 'stops' – which were previously only suggestions – were now blocks and blocks away – some folks were walking 20 blocks.*
- *At first they might have been waiting for 2 to 3 hours for a bus – in the newspaper there were pictures of bus stops where there were between 300 and 400 people waiting at a stop.*
- *It took a few days for the new BIP payment system (plastic pre-paid cards) to actually 'work' on the new buses – that system needed to be fixed.*

It has taken years to resolve the issues ...

- *With the old system, there was very little 'evasion' (the term used when people slipped in the back door to evade paying the fare) ... the rate of evasion was 1-2%. The honor system was solidly in place. If someone could not afford the fare, the driver would usually just wave them onto the bus. With the chaos at first, people just got frustrated and started boarding through the back door – whatever they needed to do to just get on the bus. There was in excess of 12% 'evasion' ... a loss of millions of \$.*
- *The new card payment system created serious difficulty. People had to get the new cards and they were made available through banks – many of the poor did not have bank accounts - some were illiterate.*
- *Initially the 'sapos' were made instantly redundant but were quickly brought back to 'help' – they were used for about 8 months.*
- *Overnight the subway system went from handling 700,000 passengers to 1.3 million passengers/day.*
- *The Minister of Transportation was fired. It cost the government the next election.*

It has taken years to recover ... the buses are just now 'sort of' working."

DEBRIEFING

Looking back at YOUR planning, which actions and functions do you think were performed well and which were most compromised in the execution of Project Transantiago?