



VALDOSTA
A City Without Limits

Valdosta On-Demand Public Transit



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Award Category: Transportation

Project Completion Date: April 27, 2021

Population of Jurisdiction: 57,000

Name of Project: Valdosta—Valdosta On-Demand

Agency Name: City of Valdosta, Georgia

Primary Design Consultant: River North Transit LLC (Via)

Total Project Cost: \$1,021,300

Construction Contractor: River North Transit LLC (Via)

“Valdosta On-Demand”

What is Valdosta On-Demand?

Valdosta On-Demand is a public, on-demand micro transit service. Think of us like a minibus that comes when you want, where you want — give us your pickup and drop-off addresses, and we’ll provide a few ride options. It is a technology-enabled shared public transportation service.

Passengers use an app or phone to book, pay and track their rides while drivers use the app to validate rider fares, including cash, passes, and contactless options, as well as receive dynamically routed pick-up and drop-off instructions. Driver manifests are continuously re-optimized based on rider demand and changing traffic conditions to ensure the most efficient route is taken each time.

Valdosta On-Demand has emerged as one answer. This method of shared transit uses mini vans to deliver transportation to the public. On-demand micro transit means that vehicles are only dispatched when there is a ride request.

How to book a ride:

Create an account. Download the Valdosta On-Demand app from the App Store or Google Play store and follow the simple signup steps.

Book a ride. Enter your pickup and drop-off addresses and choose the ride option that works for you — if you're ready to leave right away, tap Book This Ride. If you want to schedule a ride in advance, hit the Schedule button and choose the day/time you want to travel.

Meet your driver. Check the app to find out exactly where to meet the vehicle, which may be a short walk from the address you gave us.

In April 2021, the city entered into an agreement with River North Transit LLC (Via) to provide on-demand public transit across the 35 square mile boundary of the city limits of Valdosta. The Valdosta On-Demand fleet of mini vans serve the entire city, providing rides for rates of \$2 per trip per person, or \$1 for additional person in same group. The Valdosta On-Demand vehicle fleet consist of 9 mini vans, 3 of which are dedicated wheelchair assessable vehicles (WAV). The hours of operation are Mon – Fri, 6:00 am to 9:00 pm.

On 27 April 2021, the City launched Valdosta On-Demand a micro-transit platform providing on-demand public transportation services throughout the City of Valdosta. One of the primary goals of City leadership was to provide a transportation network for both geographic and demographic reach, seeking to reach populations that are low-density, low-income, and/or lacking other reliable transportation options. Bringing public transportation had been a goal for the City of Valdosta for many years. Numerous years of research in the needs as to the type of transportation whether it would be a fix-route, Flex route, vanpool, or Demand-Response, what would be the cost, where would funds be allocated from are just some of the many questions that needed to be answered.

The City of Valdosta utilized the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) competitive sealed proposal method to procure transit services for the City of Valdosta. Local and state procurement procedures for the State of Georgia require the basis of the initial selection of a service firm be qualification-based and not fee-based. During this time the City was fortunate enough to have the transportation and environmental director for the Southern Georgia Regional Commission as a City of Valdosta Transit committee member. The Director provided detail lists of data and

information to assist in making decisions on everything from the suggested type of service, funding source, grant application process, projected daily rider count, transit service boundaries and with the creation of the Title VI Plan. Using historical and estimated data to simulate how services might perform in advance of vendor selection and transit deployment provided committee members' invaluable information on the available options and type of transit platform needed for the City. Grouping all of the information gathered from City Leadership, Mayor Council, surveys and the transit committee a RFQ was developed. The RFQ was sent out July 10, 2020. The Transit Director assembled a selection committee as they were tasked with evaluating each interested firms' qualification submittal. The evaluation committee read and scored each of the submittals separately. The Committee met on September 22, 2020 and River North Transit LLC (Via) was determined to have the highest score. The Committee met again on September 30, 2020 to conduct a final interview with Via. Following the interview, the committee unanimously agreed to move forward with the recommendation of Via to provide transit services to the City of Valdosta. The Transit Selection committee chose River North Transit, LLC, a subsidiary of Via Transportation (New York, NY). On October 8, 2020 City Council approved the City of Valdosta to move forward contractually with Via.

Choosing Via was the best option for the City of Valdosta. Via's experience with micro-transit, their service platforms, and partnership were key in the committee's selection. Via offered options where they had the capability to provide the technology to support a transit agency's own micro-transit system, while in other cases Via could provide a full-service turnkey package (routing service including vehicles and staffing). The City of Valdosta chose Via's full-service turnkey option.

Coordination with all parties getting everyone to agree on the contract required the most attention to detail. Prior to entering a contract using Federal funds the City was required to receive a Notice to Proceed from GDOT. During this time the contract was created with input from the Transit Selection Committee, Via, GDOT/Project Manager, the Office of Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the City's Attorney. All GDOT requirements were met and therefore GDOT issued the City of Valdosta a Notice to Proceed. The purpose of these Terms and Conditions is to provide a framework under which the Service Provider will provide to Customer the Services. The contract contains the following compliance items required by GDOT:

- Title VI adopted plan – Board Adopted
- ADA Rider's Guide
- Drug and Alcohol Misuse and Abuse Policy
- FTA Compliant Procurement Policy

Some of the challenges were just the many unknowns on the management of a FTA 5307 Urban On-Demand public transit system. There were no other FTA 5307 Urban On-Demand Transit Systems in the state of Georgia. Georgia Department of Transportation provided project managers to assist and guide our transit team through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

Grant Process, numerous compliance requirements, mandatory training, and contract validation and resolution, however there were no other processes to benchmark from entirely. Initially these were challenges, but our goal was to bring public transit to the City so we worked through these challenges. Working with GDOT Project Managers and Via's teams made this vision come to light.

Most of all public transit systems receives financial assistance. While researching funding for Valdosta On-Demand I could not find any public transportation system in the U.S. that pays for itself entirely. Most of the systems depend on some form of federal or state subsidies. Fare box revenues on average account for only a small percentage of the system operating costs. Transit systems receive funds from the Federal, state, and local levels. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) through a grant funds 80% of expected costs for Valdosta's system, allocating \$1.1 million. The remaining 20% is funded by the Cares Act through the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. Looking beyond FY 2022 the City will pay for part of its share through advertising, additional grants, and service agreements.

With Via as our partner in the process advertisement was a major key in the successful deployment of Valdosta On-Demand. Keeping everyone informed on what's coming, when it is coming, how to use it. Using social media, FAQs and, having decision makers on the transit committees were also a big plus.

Valdosta On-Demand has done an amazing job connecting our citizens to the community and businesses. We have seen amazing community involvement from non-profits like United Way to Education Centers like Georgia Military College (GMC) and Wiregrass Technical College. United Way has purchased over 500 rides to distribute and continues to fund raise for more. GMC and Wiregrass are both testing giving student promo ride codes to get their students to and from the campus.

Since launch, Valdosta On-Demand service has surpassed its expectations. Currently there have been:

- 45,160 rides taken-averaging 315 rides daily
- 10% of the citizens have created an account
- 50% of passengers averages 3+ rides a month
- 80% of riders who have made bookings have used the App

Valdosta is a leader and innovator, being the first. Bringing Valdosta On-Demand a public transportation service to the City has been a major accomplishment. This transit service provides citizens that normally would not have a way or means to move about the City whether it is to go to a job interview, to work, a medical appointment, the supermarket or education centers have made these individuals quality of life so much better. This service puts individuals where there is a need for them to travel. Forty-four percent of riders use the service to commute to work, ten percent for healthcare, thirteen percent for education and eighteen percent for daily errands. Fifty-six percent of the rider's annual household income is below

\$25k. Since deployment VOD has completed over 50K rides, averaging 4.5K rides per month. The above stats outline the positive impact this service is having on this community and highlights how important it is to the City of Valdosta and its citizens.

It is for these reasons and many more that Valdosta OnDemand should be selected for the APWA SC/RC Transportation of the Year Award

Valdosta On-Demand News Stories and Articles

https://www.valdostadailytimes.com/news/valdosta-on-demand-launches-successfully/article_2e3f34c6-a9b0-11eb-b3d6-c761638b94fd.html

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/georgia/articles/2021-05-02/valdosta-launches-transit-system-after-years-of-debate>

<https://unitedwayvaldosta.org/2021/08/13/nonprofits-offer-valdosta-on-demand-vouchers/>

<https://ridewithvia.com/news/city-of-valdosta-launches-valdosta-on-demand-valdostas-first-on-demand-transit-service-with-via/>

<https://ridewithvia.com/news/city-of-valdosta-launches-valdosta-on-demand-valdostas-first-on-demand-transit-service-with-via/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CityofValdosta/videos/valdosta-on-demand-and-wiregrass/866026073992744/>

<https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/news/public-transit-on-demand-launches-in-valdosta/>