



COTA

COTA IS TRANSFORMING
THE WAY CENTRAL
OHIOANS MOVE

Account-based fare management is on a roll

286%

increase
in account top ups
in one year (2022)

235,027

riders made
purchases through
the app

11 months

from contract
to deployment

INTRODUCTION



Mode: Bus



Columbus, Ohio

In less than 11 months, COTA's account-based fare management system is transforming public transit in Central Ohio, making it more accessible, affordable and equitable.

FEATURES AND BENEFITS

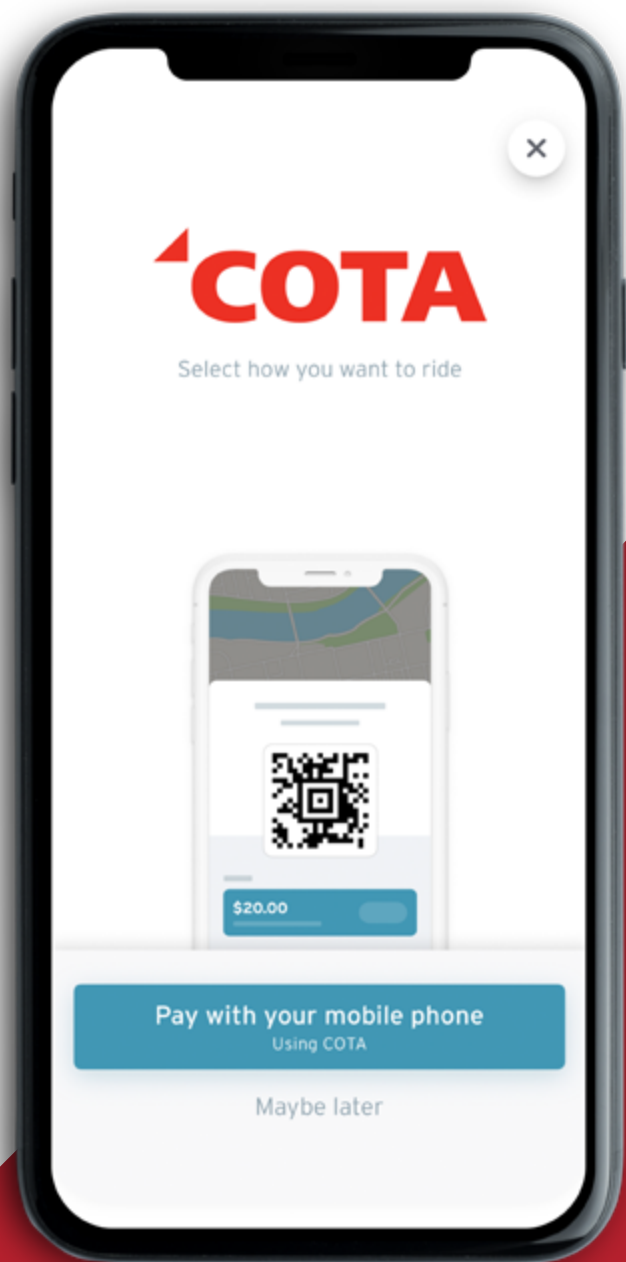
- Rapid rollout through integration with Transit app
- Account-Based Ticketing enhances convenience, removing the need to buy tickets or select fares before traveling
- Fare capping improves affordability and fare equity
- Increased number of partnerships with retail networks and self-service outlets
- Automated validation solution on board buses significantly speeds up boarding
- Engaging marketing campaigns to drive uptake and user acceptance

The Challenge

The Central Ohio Transit Authority wanted to adopt an account-based fare management platform to make it easy for all riders to embrace digital payments and reduce the number of cash transactions on transit vehicles.

COTA also wanted to increase the number of ticketing outlets via a network of retail partners and making self-service functionality more widely available while automating the validation process.

Instead of designing and building a bespoke AFC system, COTA partnered with Masabi and Transit to migrate regular riders to stored value accounts linked to the Transit app or smart cards.



THE SOLUTION

COTA already had an established mobile fare-management platform that allowed bus riders to buy pre-purchase passes and store them in a wallet on their smartphones and wanted to enable more riders, including those who preferred to pay cash for their tickets, to adopt app-based smart ticketing.

To facilitate this, COTA partnered with Masabi and mobility app Transit to implement a fully digital account-based fare management system — one that offers ease, convenience and security — for riders to locate and pay for rides using the Transit app or a COTA smart card, eliminating the need to purchase passes or select fares before boarding.

Powered by Masabi's Justride back office Hub, the Account Based Ticketing platform also extends access to the best fares to all riders – regardless of whether they can afford to pay upfront for discounted period passes.

Prior to the new digital system, customers who didn't have the means to purchase monthly passes up front, or were unsure of their travel needs, ended up paying more by purchasing single fares for their travel and were unable to benefit from the discounts available through period passes.

Now, Masabi's fare capping technology empowers everyone to ride COTA for the same fares, regardless of their financial situation. Riders pay for what they use, when they use it and will never pay more than \$4.50 per day or \$62 per calendar month.



The new system also makes transit more accessible for COTA's cash-only customers with the launch of a retail distribution network of more than 400 locations throughout Columbus and Franklin County neighborhoods – made possible by T-CETRA's VIDAPAY and InComm Payments' VanillaDirect.

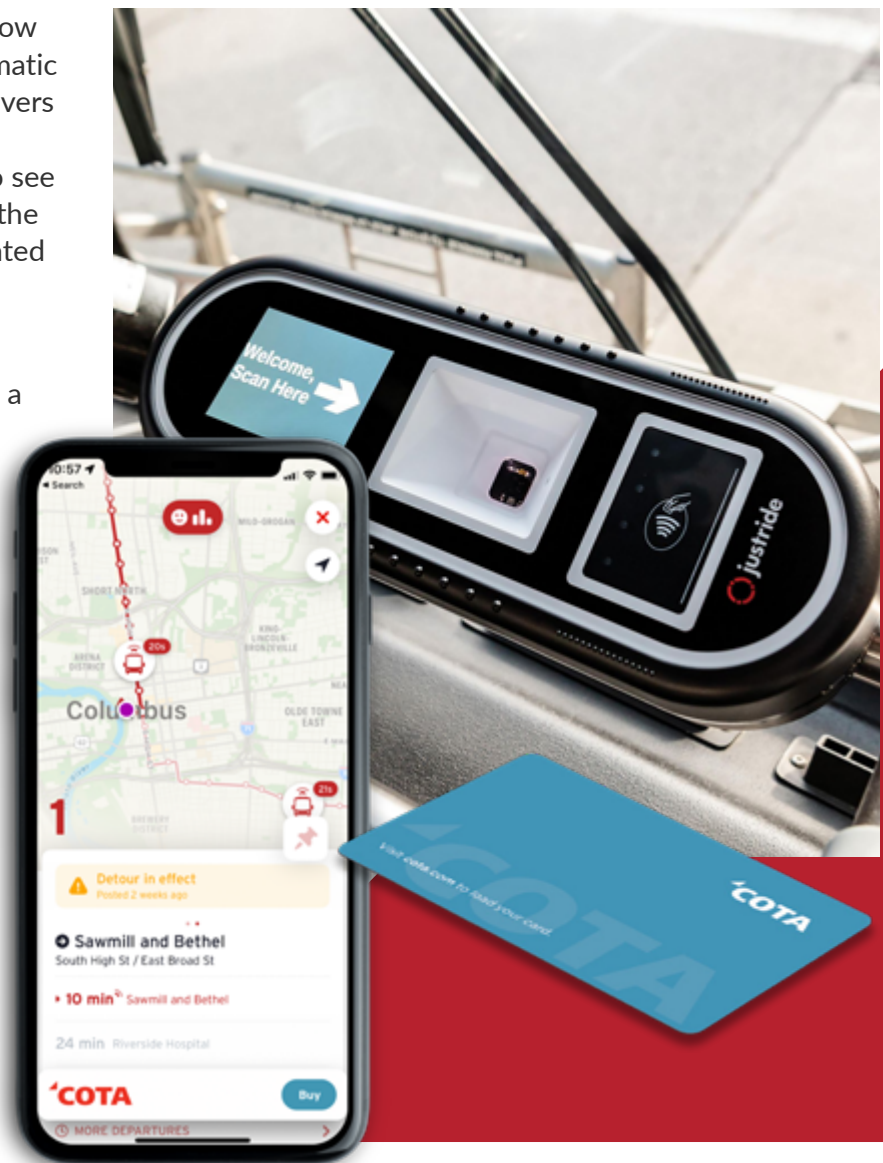
Riders can add cash to their account balance at any of these locations and also top off their accounts at point of sale devices and a Masabi-powered portal in COTA's Customer Experience Center.

COTA already offered a mobile fare management option to credit card holders. Riders who prefer to pay by credit card can add funds to their stored value account and travel using the Transit app.

The rollout of more than 300 automatic validators across the COTA fixed-route fleet allows riders to board quickly by simply tapping their smartcard or a QR code in the Transit app against the onboard validator.

The system is also configured to allow integration with a third party Automatic Vehicle Location plug-in, which delivers detailed live service information to Transit app users, enabling riders to see where their transit vehicle is along the route in real time and get an estimated arrival time for their stop.

The new system effectively creates a seamless one-stop mobility shop for COTA riders in Central Ohio, allowing Transit app users to access real-time timetables, plan and pay for journeys and book first- and last-mile connections with third party mobility providers.



To launch the new fare structure and build awareness of the new smart ticketing options, COTA developed a two-stage marketing campaign.

- 'Ride on us' offered riders discounts for setting up their accounts in Transit or requesting a free smartcard.
- 'Ride with us' emphasizes how riding COTA is less expensive than driving a car.

Building on the success of their Account-Based Ticketing system, COTA partnered with Uber in 2023 to broaden their digital reach. Thanks to Masabi's integration of transit tickets in the Uber app, COTA provides real-time transit information, journey planning, and ticket purchasing options directly within the Uber app. With this service, COTA creates an additional sales channel for transit and delivers passenger convenience by offering a seamless travel experience from planning to payment from the mobility app their riders are already using.



THE RESULTS

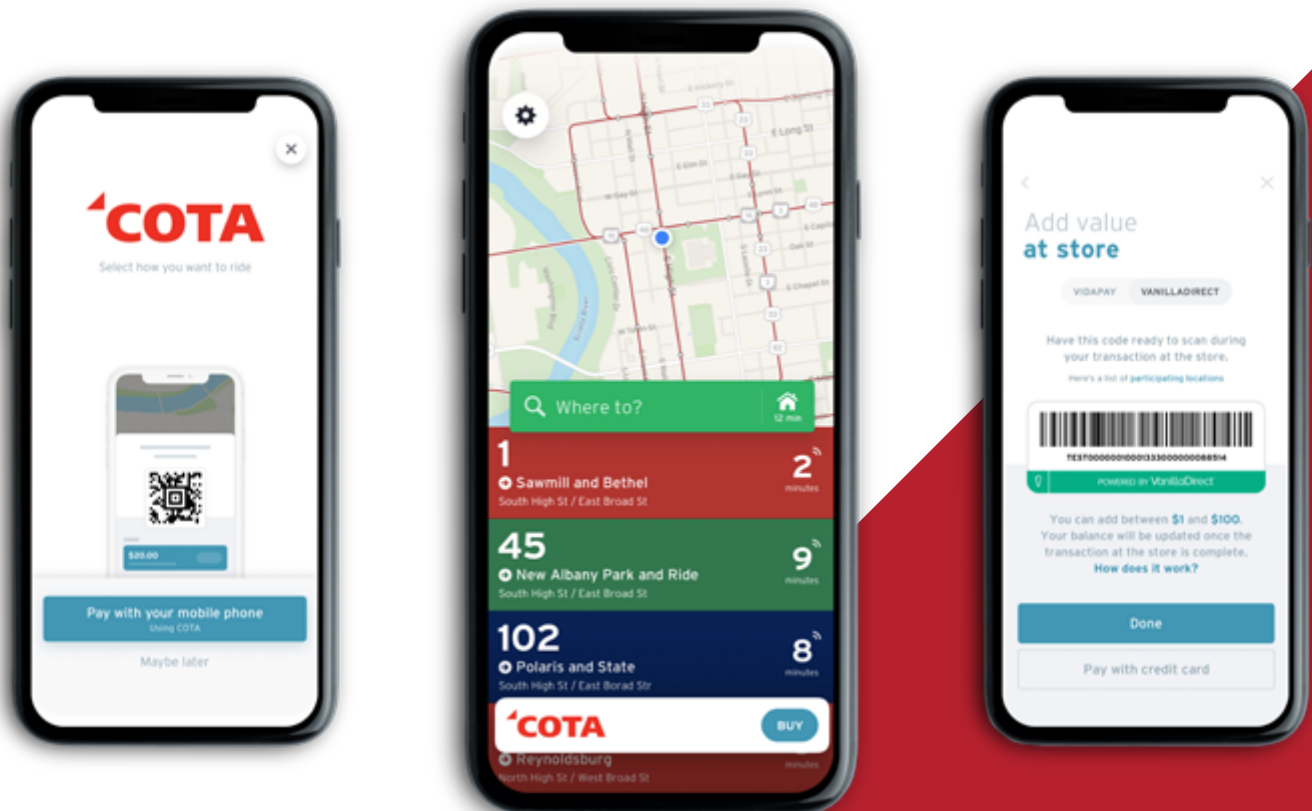
Since the system went live, the feedback from riders has been overwhelmingly positive with robust adoption increasing month-on-month.


The mobile app has been the most popular sales channel, followed by smart card adoption, with plans to extend the system through partner programs among other innovations being considered.

Thanks to the marketing launch campaign, the number of COTA riders using the Transit app increased by almost 30% in the first month alone, with more than a quarter of Transit users in Columbus tapping the 'Buy ticket' button on the home screen.

Since then, growth has been steady, and the first quarter of 2022 delivered just short of a 70% increase in the number of riders using the Transit app in Columbus, while in-app fare transactions nearly tripled.

COTA's new solution has been extremely popular with riders seeking greater fare flexibility with travel habits disrupted by the shift to more home working and flexible office hours. The new system has also helped COTA receive comprehensive rider data to optimize services as well as the new validation devices deliver a contactless and speedy boarding process reducing dwell times.





“We know that transit is at the heart of ensuring economic mobility for all in our region and advancing this new digital fare payment system is truly the right thing to do. By correcting this inequity in our transit system, COTA is taking the next step in guaranteeing all of our residents have equal access to food, jobs, healthcare, the arts, and entertainment throughout our region.”

COTA President/CEO Joanna M. Pinkerton.



Masabi's Justride Platform

Masabi delivers ticketing innovation quickly and cost-effectively by bringing the benefits of Fare Payments-as-a-Service to public transit agencies and authorities of all sizes around the globe, through its Open Platform, Justride. Powering smarter fare payment solutions to over 250 agencies across 5 continents, the plug-and-play Account-Based Ticketing platform delivers Smart Card, Open Payment (cEMV), Mobile Ticketing, Barcode and Mobility-as-a-Service solutions that are easy to implement and operate. Masabi champions best-in-class solutions through its open ecosystem of over 100 'Justride Ready' partners, helping reduce vendor lock-in, powering innovation, and giving agencies greater control and choice.

