Case Study

Florida Atlantic University & ETA Transit Systems, Inc.

Florida Atlantic University (FAU) boasts an enrollment of almost 30,000 students between their undergraduate and graduate programs. The campus, in beautiful Boca Raton, Florida is spread across approximately 2.2 square miles along the Atlantic Ocean. The University is in a constant state of growth.

A Division I University, FAU takes immense pride in their image and consistent growth. Since 2010, with the initiation of the 'Innovation Village', the campus has been growing at a very intense rate. The expansion plan includes new residence halls, a student apartment complex, a wellness/recreation center, an alumni center, restaurants, stores, a third parking garage, and a 30,000-seat college football stadium.

With expansion and growth at this level, it is no surprise that a successful and dependable transportation system is extremely important to the university. Transportation Coordinator Kimberly Valinski understands the need for a reliable transportation system, she says "With a constantly expanding university, we face the unique task of complimenting a solid parking system with a reliable campus shuttle. Students must understand that there are many options to use when traveling to and from different campus buildings."
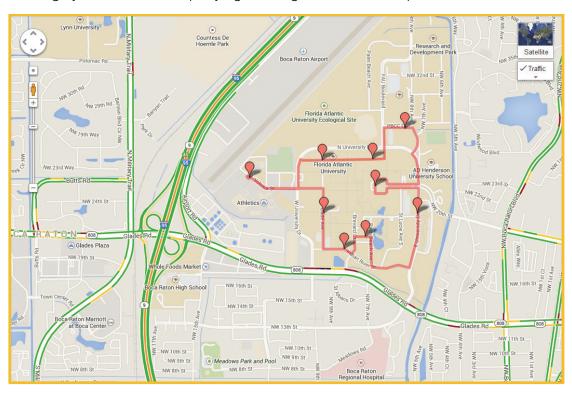
Challenges in Transportation: Owl Express Shuttle

"I received 10–20 calls a day … almost every call was a complaint on shuttle arrival times."
— Kimberly Valinski, Transportation Coordinator

With two fixed routes and six shuttles total, FAU's 'Owl Express' shuttle system seems small in the eyes of larger transit agencies and universities. However, anybody at FAU could tell you how important a role these shuttles play in making university life run smoothly for students and staff alike.

In 2012, with FAU bursting at the seams, it was apparent that the headway times provided by the university were becoming unreliable and it was time to bring the shuttle system in to the 21st century in terms of reliable tracking technology. "I would receive 10-20 calls a day," Valinski mentions in 2012, "almost every call I received was a complaint on shuttle arrival times." It was clear that campus transportation reliability had hit a crucial point.

In the fall of 2012, the university began searching for a reliable CAD/AVL (Computer Aided Dispatch / Automatic Vehicle Location) system. The university's Department of Parking and Transportation had made it clear that offering their students a reliable tracking system using modern technology had become crucial to the continued success of the Owl Express. "We needed a system that not only gave a tracking option for riders, but also provided administration and dispatch tools that would allow us to improve operations by analyzing data on a more

granular level." It quickly became clear to the university that many of their inbound call issues and scheduling and dispatch difficulties would be solved with the implementation of a working GPS tracking system and accompanying tracking website and dispatch software.

ETA's real-time route mapping provided up-to-the-second updates on transportation status and times of arrival.

Vendor Selection: Why ETA Transit Systems?

"We had to find a vendor whose service and product matched the integrity of our university … ETA Transit Systems was the perfect vendor."

— *Kimberly Valinski, Transportation Coordinator*

Choosing a vendor for a shuttle tracking system can sometimes be a stressful one. In a somewhat crowded marketplace, it can be difficult to differentiate between products and software packages. FAU needed a system which started with the basics and allowed opportunity to easily expand as the University's transportation needs changed and grew.

ETA Transit Systems offered a solution that aligned with FAU's highest priorities. Transportation Coordinator Kimberly Valinski explained the university's selection process: "We had to find a vendor whose service and product matched the integrity of our university. We also wanted to

find a solution which would grow with the University. It became clear to us very quickly that *ETA Transit Systems* was the perfect partner to address our needs."

In addition to 24/7 individual and customized support with monthly project management calls, *ETA Transit System's* flagship ITS Solution, S.P.O.T. (Spatial Position On Transit) was exactly the upgrade that the Owl Express needed. On the basic level, S.P.O.T. provides reliable vehicle location information to both students and transportation staff. More importantly though was that *ETA* offered a fully integrated technology package—at any time FAU can add additional transit-style technology as their budgets and needs expand. These additions come at a fantastic value without headaches, finger pointing, or mismanagement.

Project: Installation and Support

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— *Kimberly Valinski, Transportation Coordinator*

Initial Installation

At the end of 2012, Florida Atlantic University installed GPS tracking devices on their 6 shuttle fleet. In addition, *ETA Transit Systems* provided a website and mobile applications for students to track their buses at any time. The reliable web-based and cloud-hosted tracking provided accurate to-the-minute estimated times of arrival and allowed students to watch their buses move smoothly about the fixed routes on a live map. On the backend, *ETA's* software allowed dispatch and administration to easier manage the daily shuttle operations including route assignments and scheduling as well as receive daily reports which analyzed on-time performance, geo fence infractions, service revenue, and headway times.

Expansion

Just as expected, after using a reliable tracking system and accompanying student trackers for 2 years, the university's needs changed. In 2014, FAU decided to add *ETA Transit's* flexible and integrated Mobile Data Terminal touchscreen units (MDT's) and powerful Automatic Passenger Counters (APC's) to the fleet. "Our experience with *ETA Transit Systems* services the first two years of our contract was second-to-none. We quickly realized that investing in this type of technology was extremely important to a successful campus transportation system. The students embraced the tracking application and rely on it heavily. The expansion is necessary so we can start to analyze ridership statistics and passenger counts by route, stop, and area. This expansion is the next step to increasing our already substantial return on investment," Valinski mentioned in regards to the expansion.

Results: A solution that works

"Our inbound calls almost ceased completely."

— Kimberly Valinski, Transportation Coordinator

The results for Florida Atlantic University were extreme and almost instant. Valinski couldn't be happier with the results, "Our inbound calls almost ceased completely, we now have instant accountability when it comes to shuttle performance and arrival times. I no longer have to make guesses about on-time performance, I have quickly populating PDF reports which give me all the data I need. It's an extreme relief to be able to take pressure off of our team at parking and transportation and allow staff to use their time to improve services rather than put out fires. The service has also added a brand value and confidence in our system which we didn't have years ago. Students take pride in the Owl Express Shuttles and the shuttles have become a way of separating ourselves from surrounding universities, giving us even more bragging rights."

It's clear that *ETA Transit Systems* has installed a system at FAU which provided a quick return on investment while instilling confidence and pride in the university transportation. The university's Transportation Department now focuses on improving their service and expanding technology. They use *ETA's* accurate and powerful reports to improve their system on a weekly basis. Inbound calls complaining of service have stopped and the shuttle tracking has become a staple for the University. "Expansion to the technology system is a no-brainer for us," Valinski mentioned regarding the expansion. "*ETA* was the clear choice for additional technology because of the value and service that is provided. The shuttle drivers love the flexibility that has come with the touch screen software. The passenger counts we are getting are being compared to paper counts and are extremely accurate. We are excited to see what this data brings to our route analysis."