



OPERATIONAL REVIEW OF THE RTA'S TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTER

-Prepared by Audit & Review Division-

November 6, 2009

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INFORMATION CENTER**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Audit & Review Division conducted an operational review of the RTA's Travel Information Center (TIC) and its new TIC Administrator. The TIC responds to telephone requests from the general public for information on using CTA, Metra or Pace services to travel within the six-county northeastern Illinois area.

Our review resulted in ten recommendations to improve the overall operational efficiency of TIC. RTA and Cambridge management have accepted and agreed to implement each of the recommendations. We thank and appreciate the cooperation of the staffs at both the RTA and Cambridge.

Catherine M. Clark
Manager, Internal Audit & Review Division

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INTRODUCTION

The Travel Information Center (TIC) is located at 175 W. Jackson, Suite 250, Chicago, Illinois. The TIC responds to telephone requests from the general public for information on using CTA, Metra or Pace services to travel within the six-county northeastern Illinois area. TIC operates 20 hours a day, 365 days per year, between 5:00 a.m. and 1:00 a.m. The RTA contracted with Cambridge Integrated Services Group, Inc. (Cambridge), Chicago, Illinois to staff and operate TIC. Cambridge's current contract runs from January 1, 2009, through December 31, 2013, and it is administered through the RTA's Planning & Regional Programs Division.

The RTA is responsible for the overall management and operation of TIC. The SDED, Planning & Regional Programs recently filled the position of Manager, Customer Service & TIC. The individual hired will work in conjunction with Cambridge management to oversee TIC.

The RTA also provides the computer equipment, telephones and fully furnished office space required by TIC. The specific objectives of the review were:

1. To evaluate RTA's management and operation of the TIC and recommend possible changes, if any.
2. To review the RTA's and Cambridge's compliance with contractual requirements.
3. To recommend changes the RTA and Cambridge should consider to enhance service.

BACKGROUND

Contractual Terms

The contract the RTA has with Cambridge provides that Cambridge will be responsible for hiring, training and managing its own work force while serving the public in the name of the RTA. In turn, the RTA provides Cambridge with office space, a computer system and a telecommunications system. The RTA's five year contract with Cambridge provides for a rate of \$320,501 monthly (\$3,846,012 annually). The contract provides an estimate of the volume of calls TIC will answer in each month during the term (referred to as the Monthly Call Cap). The total Annual Call Volume Requirement is 5,393,000 calls. For the first nine months of 2009, the calls captured by the Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) totaled 4,026,984. Per the contract, the estimated call volume for the first nine months was estimated to be 4,014,000.

Telecommunications System

To handle the call volume, TIC has 50 work stations, 83 incoming telephone lines, and a staff of approximately 110 CSRs. Currently, callers reach TIC by dialing 836-7000 from any one of seven area codes: 312, 630, 708, 773, 815, 847, and 224.

The RTA's telecommunications system is based on an automatic call distribution (ACD) system which automatically distributes incoming calls among a number of answering positions. The ACD system can only receive calls. If more than 83 calls are received, the caller receives a busy signal. The calls are served in the order they arrive and distributed so that the workload at each answering position is approximately equal. If the number of calls exceeds the number of manned workstations, the excess calls are placed in a queue where they wait until they are answered in the order in which they entered the queue.

An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system is also a feature of the telecommunications system. This system permits certain questions to be effectively answered with a voice response system rather than a CSR. IVR allows callers to retrieve information on Metra schedule information, lost & found phone numbers, CTA & Pace construction and detour information, and RTA program information. The system also allows callers to order schedules and maps.

Computer System

The RTA is responsible for ensuring that the computers provide up-to-date information on all CTA, Metra and Pace services. New high speed computers were installed in all workstations in July 2009.

The Itinerary Planning System provides schedule and routing information without the need for the CSR to be a transit expert. The CSR is responsible for entering the address destination of the caller and the system displays the travel route.

Quality Control

It is Cambridge's responsibility to monitor agent performance in terms of the quality of travel information and customer service offered to the public. For this purpose, Cambridge has a staff of quality control auditors (Q/As) that monitor agent phone calls. Their observations are recorded on Quality Monitoring Forms which provided for numerical ratings with a maximum score of 100. Agent supervisors also monitor the agents they manage and prepare observation forms. Q/As submit monthly reports to the agent supervisors and the Manager of TIC operations, summarizing their monitoring activities.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The scope of the review included the following activities:

1. Interviews with RTA and Cambridge staff.
2. Review of RTA's current contract with Cambridge.
3. Review of the processes followed by RTA staff to monitor Cambridge's performance.
4. Review of Quality Monitoring Forms.
5. Review of reports submitted by Cambridge management to the RTA.
6. Review of Cambridge's Compliment/Complaint file.
7. Monitoring of TIC telephone calls.
8. Review of our recommendations for improvements with RTA and Cambridge management.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, we found that sound internal control practices were in place in the processes that we examined at TIC. However, we do offer 10 recommendations that will strengthen the operations of TIC. The recommendations are grouped as follows:

- Six concern specifically the RTA.
- One concerns specifically Cambridge.
- Three concern both the RTA and Cambridge.

RTA

1. Relocate TIC

Observation: As stated in the contract, there is the possibility of relocating TIC. We agree with this point as our tour of the TIC area found the current location to be a tight working space in need of extensive remodeling. Since the termination of the contract with the previous administrator of TIC in December 2008, no additional funds have been utilized to improve the TIC area in anticipation of the move.

Recommendation: We recommend that RTA management finalize its decision on whether to relocate TIC. An improved working environment will allow Cambridge to more effectively operate the TIC. The design of the new TIC area should include the necessary equipment upgrades, work station accommodations, and security features for Cambridge TIC employees to be able to adequately perform their duties.

Response (Provided by RTA senior management): RTA senior management has determined it would be cost effective to relocate the TIC area. RTA senior management will present its recommendation to relocate TIC to the RTA Board to obtain final approval.

2. Collect Busy Signal Data

Observation: TIC can accept up to 83 calls at one time. If more than 83 calls are received at one time, AT&T's central office switch determines there is no space available to handle the call and the caller receives a busy signal. The number of callers receiving busy signals is available only by paying AT&T to track this information. It was noted during staff calls to the TIC area (to be discussed further below) that calling TIC during the noon hour and in the evening rush hours increased the probably of receiving a busy signal.

Recommendation: We recommend that the RTA periodically obtain busy signal data from AT&T to monitor this situation.

Response (Provided by the Manager of IT): IT management agrees with the recommendation and will proceed to secure a contract with AT&T for conducting a busy signal study.

3. Implement Error Resolution Timeframe

Observation: Cambridge's TIC management informs the RTA's IT Department when there are problems with the computer equipment and when incorrect travel data is loaded into the computer system. This information is reported to the IT Department on two different logs, the Data Error Log and the Computer Maintenance Log. We reviewed both logs and found the errors were not always resolved in a timely manner. For the Data Error Log, it took as many as 68 days for the IT Department to resolve an error brought to its attention. We also found that not all entries on the log state the date the error was resolved. This includes when an error has to be resolved by an outside party. As noted on the Computer Maintenance Log, we found that it took as many as 46 days for the issue to be resolved.

Recommendation: Cambridge's TIC management now reports all errors through the RTA help desk ticketing system for better tracking purposes. However, the RTA needs to set timeframes for fixing the errors experienced by TIC. If the error can not be resolved within that timeframe, then an action plan needs to be implemented to ensure a prompt resolution. Furthermore, there should always be a record of when an error is resolved.

Response (Provided by the Manager of IT): IT management agrees with the recommendation and will work with the Manager, Customer Service & TIC when hired to develop a timeframe for fixing data and computer system errors. Additionally, IT will work within Planning & Regional Programs' budget limitations and act more accordingly to resolve errors.

4. Report RTA Monitoring to Cambridge

Observation: The contract issued by the RTA indicated that RTA staff, in addition to Cambridge's staff, would monitor CSR calls with an emphasis on the quality of customer service provided to the caller. Also, the RTA is to monitor call volume and staffing levels quarterly and provide input to Cambridge. We found that the RTA is not performing an adequate level of monitoring TIC agent activity.

Recommendation: We recommend the following:

- RTA monitoring should emphasize the quality of customer service provided to each caller.
- A weekly report should be submitted to Cambridge management identifying any unusual problems or trends.
- Cambridge should prepare a summary report for the RTA showing the actions taken to correct problems noted.

Response (Provided by the SDED, Planning & Regional Programs): The Manager, Customer Service & TIC will be responsible for monitoring calls and reviewing reports. The RTA measures whether TIC is properly staffed by using performance standards. Currently, this is done by looking at daily reports and averages. The RTA has the ability to look at smaller increments of time to determine if there are times during the day when there is a significant deviation from the daily averages. RTA staff will institute a policy to periodically perform this review.

5. Inform TIC Callers of the Current Estimated Hold Time

Observation: If callers to TIC must be put on hold until a CSR is available, they have no idea how long they might be on hold. Although the feature is estimated to cost \$20,000, it would be beneficial to callers to know how long the wait would be to obtain the travel directions they are seeking.

Recommendation: Technology is available for a recorded voice to tell callers what the current estimated hold time is before the caller is placed on hold. We recommend the RTA investigate the feasibility of obtaining this technology.

Response (Provided by SDED, Planning & Regional Programs): This feature is desirable and has been considered in the past, but was determined to be cost prohibitive. Staff will re-investigate the possibility of adding this feature to the Interactive Voice Response system.

6. Improve the Automated Telephone System

Observation: The introductory message of the IVR was rated as overwhelming and lengthy by some of the RTA staff calling in to TIC to ask for directions. The IVR system should also be reviewed periodically to ensure the features offered are

working properly. As an example, Audit & Review pressed the key to obtain CTA & Pace construction and detour information but that information was never provided. The system kept repeating the menu options available to select. If there is no information currently available under one of the menu options, the system should alert the caller to that fact. Furthermore, the message provides the caller with information on reaching the RTA online trip planner, but the information on the website is only available in English.

Recommendation: We recommend that RTA management review the message script of the IVR system to ensure it accurately and efficiently introduces the caller to the features of the system. Travel information should also be made available for individuals fluent in other languages. Furthermore, the options available for selection on the IVR system should be reviewed periodically to ensure they are working properly.

Response (Provided by the Manager of IT): RTA management agrees with the recommendation. The IT Department has resolved the error noted by the Audit & Review Division above. We will review the IVR system on at least a monthly basis to ensure the options available through the IVR system are working properly. The introductory message was scripted by the former Director of Regional Services and recorded by the IT Department as written. We will defer the TIC introductory message to the new Manager, Customer Service & TIC for review and to make any necessary changes.

Response (Provided by SDED, Planning & Regional Programs): Staff will investigate and work with the IT Department on establishing Spanish and other language translations on the trip planner.

Cambridge

7. Record Action Taken Consistently for TIC Complaints

Observation: The contract with Cambridge requires that they submit a monthly report to the RTA indicating the number, nature and resolution of complaints. It also requires that the report delineate the source or origin of the commendation or complaint, such as Cambridge, the RTA, service boards, or the general public.

TIC received 56 complaints (out of over 4,000,000 calls) during the first nine months of 2009. The complaints were reviewed and the following information was disclosed:

- 39 (70%) complaints were because of poor customer service.
- 17 (30%) complaints were because of inaccurate information.
- In 14 cases (25%) there was no evidence of any action taken to address the complaint.

- 16 complaints (29%) required follow-up action on the part of Cambridge's Manager of TIC to either discuss the matter with the CSR or contact the customer as requested. There was no evidence that any follow-up actions occurred.

Recommendation: When the caller is able to identify the CSR, it is imperative that Cambridge follow through with the agent to resolve the complaint and counsel the agent as necessary. The corrective action taken by Cambridge management should be recorded on the complaint form so it can be reported to the RTA.

Response: Cambridge management agrees with the recommendation. Follow-up does occur with the CSR as well as a formal apology to the customer. However, more attention can and will be given to documenting the follow-up that occurs.

RTA and Cambridge

8. Enhance Customer Service

Observation: To evaluate the quality of customer service provided by telephone, we utilized the Symposium Express Call Center (Symposium) and the Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) equipment that permits the tracking and monitoring of phone calls to TIC. In addition, staff members in the Planning, Regional Services, Communications, Legal, and Finance Divisions were asked to place phone calls to TIC requesting directions to two different locations of their choice. We also requested that RTA staff members fluent in Spanish request a translator to assess the translation service available. Phone monitoring conducted by Audit & Review and RTA staff of CSR interaction with the public disclosed that overall CSRs provide quality customer service. Areas where performance could be improved are listed below (comments relating to the performance of specific TIC employees were shared directly with Cambridge management).

- The travel itinerary provided seemed to not be the most efficient route information for the caller to get to their desired location.
- At times, CSRs would rush through the call as they gave directions. However, if the caller stated they needed any part of the information repeated, the CSRs repeated the necessary information in a professional manner.
- The TIC translator and CSR converse on the telephone while the caller is listening instead of placing the caller on hold to discuss the directions needed. Listening to this dialogue was found to be very confusing.
- The CSR gives the entire itinerary to the TIC translator to repeat to the caller instead of stating the directions line by line to make it easier for the translator to provide the directions to the caller.
- It was not understood why the CSRs state 'We appreciate your business' when ending the call when the RTA does not sell any type of product or service.

Recommendation: We found the information obtained from our sampling to be very helpful in measuring the quality of service that TIC provides to the public. The RTA's TIC management and Cambridge should utilize these results to discuss possible changes in the way CSRs interact over the telephone with callers.

Response (Provided by Cambridge management): The comments provided by RTA staff will be further analyzed and discussed with RTA management to make the necessary changes that ensure CSRs are giving the best possible service to the public.

Response (Provided by the SDED, Planning & Regional Programs): While sometimes cumbersome, both the translator and the CSR need to be on the line. The translator does not know the transit system; the CSR must provide the correct transit information to the translator. Staff agrees that itineraries should be broken down to pieces for translation and will work with the vendor to have this added to the CSRs training curriculum.

9. Provide Payment for Telephone Services

Observation: As stated in the contract, Cambridge is responsible for all telephone charges incurred by its personnel. The RTA's Telecommunications Specialist is responsible for reviewing the statement received from AT&T and preparing and forwarding to Cambridge management a detailed listing of the telephone charges incurred along with an invoice. We noted the invoices were not forwarded to Cambridge in a timely manner. In some instances, the invoice forwarded to Cambridge was incorrect. Furthermore, Cambridge was not paying the invoices submitted by the RTA, as the firm required the RTA to complete IRS Form W-9 (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification). It did not appear anyone at the RTA was monitoring this situation.

Recommendation: We recommend that the Telecommunications Specialist forward telephone invoices to Cambridge in a timely manner and ensure the invoices are accurate. Cambridge should promptly reimburse the RTA for the telephone charges incurred.

Response: RTA and Cambridge management agree with the recommendation. The Telecommunications Specialist will forward the telephone invoices to the Manager, Customer Service & TIC and to Cambridge management within two weeks of receipt from AT&T. The RTA's Manager of IT will review the telephone invoices before they are forwarded to ensure accuracy. The Manager, Customer Service & TIC will be responsible for ensuring that Cambridge provides payment for the invoices received.

10. Determine the Records to be Retained

Observation: The terms of the contract the RTA has with Cambridge states "The Contractor's records relating to the Services must be kept in accordance with

generally accepted principles of accounting consistently applied and must be retained by the Contractor for a period of not less than five years following the completion of the Services.” However, per discussion with Cambridge staff, the records to be retained have not been defined by RTA management.

Recommendation: We recommend that RTA staff determine the records to be retained by Cambridge to comply with the terms of the contract and to ensure an adequate audit trail exists. At a minimum, the Quality Monitoring Forms and Compliment/Complaint Forms should be maintained on file. Cambridge management should ensure these records are maintained in a centrally located file for easy retrieval.

Response: RTA and Cambridge management agree with the recommendation and will work to determine the appropriate records to be retained.

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