

Catalog of Transportation Apps (What and Where)

Transcript of Podcast, October 2014

Sheryl: Good morning; this is Sheryl Gross-Glaser and I am very excited that we have on our broadcast today some folks from Ithaca, New York, one of my favorite places. We have Jonathan Madison, the Way2Go Program Manager from the Cornell Corporative Extension of Tompkins County, and Jennifer Dotson, Executive Director of Ithaca CarShare.

And I will talk about Jennifer a little further because she wears a few other hats and we have Shawn Fries, Way2Go Research Assistant and intern at Cornell Corporative Extension of Tompkins County. And they are going to be talking today a little bit about an Excel spreadsheet of apps (software applications) being developed and also about a transportation network that they have in the Ithaca area. Welcome everyone.

Jonathan: Thank you.

Jennifer: Thanks.

Shawn: Thanks.

Sheryl: So I realized it's not exactly brain surgery these days to create an Excel spread sheet for something, but what really got me excited when I heard about it from Jonathan in our LinkedIn group was that you were all taking the transportation apps that currently exist in many places around the country and categorizing them and figuring out what would work for your community. So I will talk to Shawn first because Shawn I hear that you did the leg work on this.

Shawn: So like this is the first project we started. I was just researching on the Internet find articles and things to look at what apps are out there because I believe some people in the community have talked about the possibility of making an app for Ithaca. But, at least, first we want to see what apps were out there.

One of the things we are doing is trying to categorize different apps because there are actually different categories, some fitness apps like mark my run and mark my ride, lots of navigation apps that will get you from point A to point B using GPS. One example of that it will just be Google because it will tell you where you need to go if you are using a car, walking, biking or transit.

And one thing about transit, actually, we can talk about it more later, perhaps, but in a lot of cities or even smaller towns now, like Google and other applications you can get a transit feed, which lets you navigate using the bus system or subway or whatever gets you where you need to go. We don't actually have that capability in Ithaca yet.

Because the buses in that area, in the Ithaca [area], have definitely yet to provide that but they will so in the future. So one of the things we were looking at these categories also was seeing which of these apps work in Ithaca now, which could work in Ithaca if we provide them more

information, such as with the transit feed, and which, perhaps, might not work for Ithaca, but can work in a different area. So it is just the kind of project out there and categorize it.

Sheryl: And Shawn what categories did you find, did you start out with and then did you find later? What transportation options did you cover when you were looking at these apps?

Shawn: Okay so and after meeting with Jonathan and Jennifer, we kind of talked about what we wanted to look at and what categories we might look at first. So some of the things, some apps out there that deal with car sharing; some, as I talk about, would just be navigation again from place to place.

Another category would deal with the taxis, such as we called them [here to there] taxi services, which includes Lyft, Sidecar, over some of those and some cities have car sharing available; like, for example, there is some program Car2Go in some cities which is using the smart car, I believe, and you can just pick up a car anywhere in the service area and also return it anywhere in the service area. So it is easy to return it, and also in some cities you can use bike sharing. Buffalo bike sharing is one of those, quite new; it just started so though there are a few that are out there.

Sheryl: Okay and then Jennifer and Jonathan, I will ask you to chime in about what you thought about this a possibility for these but I want to take a moment to talk about some of your different perspectives and where you are now. Jennifer, you, as I said before, you are the executive director of Ithaca Carshare. You are on the board of carsharing association.

You are on the board of the transit system and you are a former city council member for Ithaca. you certainly have a very broad community prospective and Jonathan can you explain for a moment what Cornell Cooperative Extension is and what Way2Go is?

Jonathan: So, Way2Go is a mobility education program and it initially started with the idea that we need to have a comprehensive source of information for transportation options in our community; and one of the first projects we did was educate helping professionals, people who are working at human service agencies about how to help their clients find transportation options.

But then we expanded it to include things like sustainable transportation education. We did host events like Bike to Work Day and an open street festival called Streets Alive, kind of get people excited about biking, walking and other active forms of transportation. And then another aspect that I think is really important is we provide a forum for local transportation professionals to talk called the Faster and Farther Network.

It's a network that meets monthly and part of the goal of the network is to share information and be a place where innovation can happen. So one of our hopes with this transportation apps spread sheet was that it kind of guide us towards what are some of the technologies to bring to Ithaca to improve mobility surfaces.

Sheryl: And Jennifer you must have a pretty broad sense of the transportation network and how it works in Ithaca. What was your purpose in looking at what the different apps that were out there and what they could do?

Jennifer: Well yes, so I have been looking at transportation locally from some several different perspectives, from working with parking whatever at the city council to being involved with the extra transit to working with the carsharing and to helping to start that organization and then I also see how transportation works in other cities when I meet with my colleagues who run other car shares.

So I see what is going on in the Bay Area and what is going on in Montreal and so I am constantly thinking how here in Ithaca what is going to work here; what of this they are almost like enablers in the apps, what is really going to help with the service that we have available at Ithaca because you know there is no subway here.

We didn't, we just don't have a lot of services that are available, but I can see when I see these apps I think trying to get across town if you have a navigation app that is going to tell you how many minutes to walk to that place; that could be huge in terms of just reducing the amount of money people are spending on tiny little car trips that they don't actually need it to take.

Or over long distances we have a lot of need to travel to neighboring cities, that, of course, we don't have a train here, let alone the subway. We don't even have the Amtrak service, so car pooling could be a huge benefit for people who need to get to Syracuse for medical reasons or Rochester or Binghamton [larger New York cities] for all sort of reasons, to reduce all those costs and also to have some access, not to mention reducing our emissions, which both our city and county have as their stated goals. So we like to work with them on that.

So, I am just thinking about how can we kind of take transportation kind of activity to the next level, given what we actually have here in Ithaca and Tompkins county and I really want to highlight that their network the Fast and Further Network that Jonathan mentioned has been sort of fertile ground for a lot of these ideas to come through. So it's sort of natural to think about how are we getting the apps and the navigation tools that are out there in that forum seemed very natural.

Sheryl: I love what I think Jonathan said it when he talked about your network, the Fast and Further Network, where innovation can happen and fostering innovations and fostering in a positive way because this is actually project but he was out there categorize it lets examine what works here. And did you find anything that you thought well this is a gap where we are or this is not necessary where we are or maybe this something we can share with others and discuss further from the spread sheet?

Jonathan: Yes, I mean one of the things that we realized is really important is to get our public transit data feed into the correct format, so we can go on Google transit so it can be used for some of this different apps that are coming out there for multi modal navigation, for example, RideScout.

If we provide them with the data then people can use that app to navigate transit, walking, biking and even potentially car share in Ithaca and compare the options, so we kind of reinforce, I believe, that getting that data onto some of these different apps it is really important and it also highlighted that there are a lot of apps that we can just start giving our data to and using them locally.

Jennifer: Yes, like with one phone all that we connection was made and that opens up the use of transit to a whole section of people who might not be simply aware that a bus route goes exactly where they need to go, exactly the route that they are travelling, and so opens up their options get that communication out there.

Sheryl: Right, and it seems from your work that you are focusing on two very important issues. One is sustainability; I should say three issues: improving transportation for everyone but also having equity component for transportation-challenged population.

Jennifer: Absolutely. And see, I think they work together because a strong system is available to everyone and, the more people that are using it, the stronger it is and therefore the better it can serve those who are really transportation challenged for various reasons.

Shawn: One of the things that also come out of it is the discovering of technologies or new ideas like Carma Hop, which is a formalized hitchhiking system, is a way to help people in our rural areas get transportation in a reliable way because currently, you know, transit is difficult for transit to serve those areas, and when we research this formalized hitchhiking system, which is now called Carma Hop, it seems that can be a high priority project for us to help expand access in those areas to transportation. It definitely reinforced those goals and ways to actually solve some actual problems we have here.

Jennifer: You know another thing that I didn't mention before about the Fast and Farther Network, I think it highlighted it, is how the issue really connect like for instance in lot of our rural areas I think in other rural areas one with older population that having an app is not really the right format but having something available on adopt computer could be really useful.

Or even just even identifying that as a whole that broad band access is really impacting transportation and then working with local 211 system to provide a call in option can sort of knit those things together so having the right people in the room and having that potential for innovation really connects things and solve some problems that you might not otherwise be aware of.

Sheryl: Right I love that you seem to be working so well together a cross roads and across population and even into kind of economic development issues and do you have any words of wisdom to others that have to get to the place where you are that it seems like there is not a lot of possessiveness or problems with working across these very kind different kind of organizations and different modes that operate in completely different ways; one may be nonprofit or profit making of public or private and do you have any words of wisdom for anybody out there?

Jennifer: Persistence [Laughs].

Jonathan: I don't know that is a challenging question I think it's part of nature of Ithaca in some ways it is very collaborative so I don't know if it's just something in the water here people just collaborate it's kind of in the culture here but we do some of the things that I think kind of make it successful are actually going out there and organizing these networks.

Trying to invite people in and having to be in an open discussion where people can bring their ideas in other communities maybe people are very busy so they might not have time so they just try to do that I think it so really important people to pull up and down go out the way to create these forums it can be really valuable I think some of the competition today shows that getting people on the table is very important.

Jennifer: I just want to expand on collaboration too and again I really say persistence because if it doesn't work one time twice three times four times keep trying we have had several shared ground application collaborative grant application from various level from little ultra small ones to local foundation to things that are going to FTA for lots of money some have been successful some haven't.

But building those relationship over time its huge its continuing to try and do that whenever an opportunity presents itself way to go has done a really great job centralized for that with the fast and further and with other initiatives because you are getting all the information and you are beginning to identify where those collaborations could happen.

Sheryl: And I want to praise you Jonathan for putting the spread sheet in an earlier iteration out on the LinkedIn group for partnership for the mobility management and a bunch of people wait in about where they saw maybe improvements could be made or I think we have been thinking about using something like that for themselves and then you shared what seemed like a more advanced iteration of your spread sheet which I think to really help others in similar areas.

Jonathan: Yes I really hope that it will be great if somebody could adopt the spread sheet at some point and just manage it but I think this will continue to evolve as we see all these apps still coming out and new ideas and innovation just keeping this spreadsheet up to date can be really useful and sharing with other areas that are similar to Ithaca other mobility managers so we can be educated and know what is out there I really felt that it share so the term of partnership for mobility management LinkedIn group felt like people could actually use that and feel more educated.

Sheryl: And one final things I would like to discuss is, is your work across so many issues which we touch down a little bit earlier I know that you have the community mobility education program that was funded through jock and you did coordinated planning; what is happening with that now that now expanding and shifting and how does that play into your vast and further transportation network?

Jonathan: Well luckily we work with a local transportation planner she is able to really provide us with pretty secure planning for at least mobility education component so that allows us to have some security and keep this network going, keep energy behind some of these ideas so I think that is really important.

I don't have a sense of how it actually changed with some of the changing funding patterns since we are continuing to have pretty stable funding I think other communities are facing different issues but I know our transit agency is also we are dealing with some funding issues that is different issue.

Jennifer: I am speaking from perspective of the transit agencies board I think that certainly it is very difficult for communities to carry out funding for this sort of community mobility education the stuff that the way to go program that we talked about being really important as a forum creating forum connecting for increased access to funding and collaboration that increases efficiency and all these beneficial thing it is really difficult to curve out funding.

When the funding that the primarily transit and transportation comes from the federal government and its extremely limited and it is constraint it is difficult when you are looking at do you cut a back stroke or do you fund something like that really challenging questions for localities.

Sheryl: Right and before we go Jennifer I just want to ask you a little bit more not only about the spread sheet but about this attitude of looking at transportation as a network and a system so not just transit and how do we improve that but car share and walking and biking and making them all work together for residents and workers in your community?

Jennifer: Well to me I guess it's just how I have to approach it if there is a way that we can use mobility and access to individual and for economic development purposes if there is a way that we can do that with less financial investment and meet our community goals then we need to do that and sometimes it is just a matter of pointing out to people how shot of our work something is.

Sometimes is a matter of looking at section transit and say hi this area is better served by demand response and cheaper served and sometimes is a matter of seeing these type of trips people are making and realizing that cheaper of transit is not going to make it but car share will we did a survey on car share usage a couple years ago and discovered that about third of our trip are to the grocery store which is a great use of car share.

That much more efficient use of any other public funding than a bus ride which maybe limited and time limited and service ban so it's a matter of stepping back and thinking about what the best to use of our local funding where I should say that Ithaca car share as a local nonprofit it doesn't get much federal funding we get a little bit of targeted funding for a low income program.

But we do really consider ourselves part of transit because it is the same goal that we are serving we are trying to increase access to those who are transportation disadvantaged we are trying to reduce cost for everybody we are trying to reduce congestion reduce and parking congestion support economic development employers that are running into issues in terms of TDM and really managing the commuter population we are trying to be there for them to provide a car during the day.

So that some of their staff people can be using bus so really I think that the fast and further group they are going to get back to that if we have a forum like that which we do locally then we have place to have a this conversation and a place to have creative solutions emerge.

So in terms of that I think that really we start looking beyond transit but what I would like actually say is that looking at transit as everything all sort of public transportation mode car share the form of transit we do round trip car sharing but Shawn earlier mentions one way car

sharing where you pick up prime location and you can return in another maybe it will work in a small city.

But lets start thinking about how it could ride sharing is something that ride sharing and van pulling for commuting is something that Ithaca has looked ahead way to go has been really helpful in promoting as have been the local employers like Cornell University so it's just looking at the spectrum as a spectrum and stepping outside the road of silos.

Sheryl: Well thank you so much because you just perfectly defined mobility management and the way to go about it effectively and thank you for all of you for sharing and for really being open with your spreadsheet and letting others look at it as it was being developed and we can talk more about keeping that up and maintaining executive resource well thank you for talking to us and I think a lot of others will benefit from this conservation.

Jonathan: Great thank you.

Jennifer: Great thanks I think we are all open to any further questions that anyone might have so definitely we will keep the conversation going.

Sheryl: Okay great thank you so much.

Jonathan: Thank you.

Shawn: Thank you.