NEORide's EZfare & EZConnect
Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, Arkansas, & West Virginia

Key Dates & Project Owner

What began in 2013 as a three-county effort to jointly procure software for a one-call center quickly evolved into [NEORide](#) - a member-based non-profit organization supporting state-wide and cross-state initiatives spanning 20 transit agencies across five states. In 2019, fourteen (14) transit agencies across Ohio, Kentucky, and Michigan launched the [EZfare app](#),[1] a payment and mobile ticketing system that enables users to purchase fare products from all participating agencies. As of late 2022, 17 NEORide agencies participate in EZfare.

In 2021, five member agencies of NEOride secured funding to conduct a feasibility study for a one-call center. As of 2022, two regional centers are being planned – one in SW Ohio and one in NE Ohio. Seven agencies are involved in the effort.

In fall of 2022, a group of NEORide members jointly procured a mobility-on-demand vendor, Via, to provide microtransit and paratransit software-as-a-service, laying the foundation for pooling resources and better coordinating cross-jurisdiction trips.

With microtransit service and EZConnect call centers still under development, this case study focuses on the already-deployed EZfare project. Additional details on this project can be found on SUMC's 2020 article, ["Trip planning/ticketing app launched for 13 transit agencies, OH and Northern KY"](#)[2] and APTA's 2020 article, ["Ohio's NEORide and EZfare Multi-Agency Mobile Ticketing Agency."](#)[3]

Geographic Context

This project serves five states in the US: Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, Arkansas, and West Virginia. The members of NEORide[4] span a variety of geographic contexts, from rural to suburban, to urban. Larger cities within the NEORide service area such as Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio and Ann Arbor, Michigan are involved, as are smaller cities such as Dayton, Ohio and more rural areas such as those served by South East Area Transit (SEAT) in and around Zanesville and Cambridge, Ohio.

Project Goals

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[1] https://www.ezfare.us
[2] https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/overview/trip-planning-ticketing-app-launched-for-10-transit-agencies-oh-2019/
[3] https://www.apta.com/ohio-neoride-ezfare/
[4] https://www.neoride.org/members

According to NEORide Board President Ben Capelle, the EZfare project has several key goals, including:[5]

- Improvement of the rider experience and convenience by shifting away from cash-based payment and paper ticketing to mobile payment and ticketing
- Improvement of the rider experience through ease of county-to-county transfer by enabling regional and state fare coordination
- Leverage rider experience improvements to help retain existing transit riders and attract new ones
- Reduction in fare collection costs for NEORide members

Beyond these important efforts, others hope EZfare can illustrate how regional collaboration can work to reduce costs in government.[6] Brian Falkowski from Laketran added that "the cost of technology can often be a barrier for smaller transit systems, but by working together on projects such as EZfare, we can provide modern amenities to our customers."[6]

Longer term, NEORide hopes to accomplish the following:[7]

- Multi-State regional mobile Maas system
- Feasibility study for Ohio Medicaid transportation dispatching coordination
- Statewide/regional procurement coordination

Governance Model
NEORide and its 20-member transit agencies have led this project from its conception. With regard to standard MaaS governance models, NEORide played the role of 'MaaS promoter' on this project. Find out more about this public sector governance role, and others, on the MaaS Governance Models page.[8]

Private sector collaboration was also key to the project's success. According to NEORide, Masabi, a global leader in the development of software-as-a-service ticketing platforms, was a critical partner in making their vision a reality.[9]

Funding
In 2019, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) awarded $3.3 million to ten (10) transit agencies in Ohio to further develop the system around EZfare.[10] In March 2020, $1,997,500 was awarded to Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA), based in

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[5] https://laketran.com/transit-agencies-launch-regional-mobile-ticketing-app-to-modernize-fare-collection/
[6] https://laketran.com/transit-agencies-launch-regional-mobile-ticketing-app-to-modernize-fare-collection/
[7] https://www.neoride.org/about
[8] MaaS Governance Models page
[9] https://laketran.com/transit-agencies-launch-regional-mobile-ticketing-app-to-modernize-fare-collection/
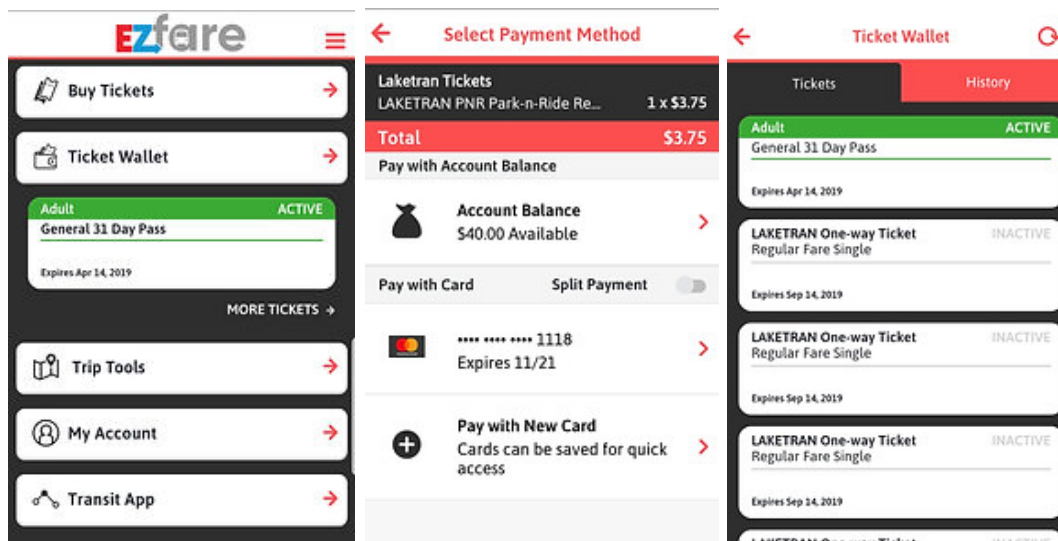[10] https://tarta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EZfare-OTP2-Release-2019-FINAL.pdf

Canton, Ohio, through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI) grant.[11] There were several online announcements of this grant.[12]

Project Components

As EZfare expands from the app to supportive infrastructure and other elements, it includes the following project components:

- **EZfare app:** The app enables purchasing mobile tickets for the transit agencies who have chosen to participate through NEORide. Multiple payment forms are accepted such as credit card (Visa, Mastercard, Discover and American Express), Apple Pay, and EZfare Account Funds. Cash can be added to the account by visiting participating transit centers and retail locations. Mobile tickets should be "activated" just prior to boarding, and the passenger either shows the bus operator the ticket as they board or, on some vehicles, they can scan the barcode on the EZfare ticket validators. Images of the EZfare app are shown below, and more details are available on the EZfare app website.[13]

  1. Users easily purchase mobile tickets for multiple agencies in the EZfare App[13]

- **Transfers between agencies:** The project includes at least several transfers between geographically adjacent agencies at no additional cost. The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA), a central connecting point between agencies, states inter-agency connections policy as "passengers transferring to RTA from a transit system outside Cuyahoga County (the primary area served by RTA) receive

[11] https://www.transit.dot.gov/research-innovation/integrated-mobility-innovation-imi-fiscal-year-2019-selected-projects

[12] https://www.metro-magazine.com/10118241/sarta-neoride-land-1-9m-fta-grant, https://www.sartaonline.com/sarta-and-neoride-are-awarded-1-9-million-from-the-fta-imi-program

[13] https://www.ezfare.us

one free ride on RTA, if they present a valid transfer from an adjacent transit agency. Conversely, once a fare is paid on RTA for their return trip, there will be a credit offered to customers transferring to these agencies, in the amount of the RTA fare paid." RTA references transfer details with five (5) other NEORide members.[14] Laketran also mentions how its transfers are facilitated with RTA through the reciprocal transfer agreement.[15]

- **On-board mobile ticket validators:** When EZfare first launched, passengers showed their mobile ticket to the bus operator; the operator would confirm the ticket visually and allow the passenger to begin their trip. Due to ODOT's grant in 2020, on-board validators have been purchased and installed on some vehicles in the EZfare network. Using validators, the passenger scans the bar code on their mobile ticket, allowing the bus operator to be less active in the process and facilitating a touchless payment option.

- **Future planned developments:** In 2022, EZfare agencies plan to begin offering EZfare smartcards which can be loaded at any transit center and select retail locations.[16] Fare capping will also allow passengers to easily 'tap and go' across multiple transit agencies, while the lowest fare will be calculated for them automatically.[16]

Related Efforts

Users can directly access the EZfare app, or they can connect to the payment and ticketing app after first using the Transit app or the Moovit[17] app to accomplish other MaaS-related tasks such as trip planning and checking real-time vehicle arrival data. For more details on how the Transit and Moovit apps generally work, see SUMC's 2020 article, "The Transit App and Private Sector MaaS Approaches".[18]

The way the public, non-profit, and private sector collaborators work together at NEORide to enable users to complete multiple MaaS functions is a concrete illustration of how MaaS is moving forward in the US.

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[14] http://www.riderta.com/fares/outofcounty
[15] https://laketran.com/riding-laketran/rta-transfers/
[16] https://www.neoride.org/post/projects-ezfare
[17] https://www.sartaonline.com/ezfare-passes-on-moovit
[18] https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/overview/the-transit-app-and-private-sector-maas-approaches-2020/