Customer Satisfaction Rates at Commuter Stores in Arlington, Virginia

Executive Summary

October 2018
Introduction

In its efforts to help reduce traffic congestion and pollution, Arlington County in Virginia does something unique: it operates various brick-and-mortar shops called The Commuter Store. These are actual shops near various transit centers where people can buy transit passes and get free travel information, like bike maps and bus schedules.

A new study by Mobility Lab – in collaboration with WBA Research – found that these stores are many people’s only method of buying transit passes.

There are five Commuter Stores and four “Mobile Stores” that spend most of their time in Arlington’s “Urban Villages,” connected neighborhoods and shopping centers. The Commuter Store is one tool of many in the transportation demand management toolbox operated by Arlington County Commuter Services.

In a series of surveys, Mobility Lab found that 60 percent of The Commuter Store’s customers exclusively purchase their bus, Metrorail, and commuter rail tickets at the stores. The majority of customers (47 percent) are baby boomers, and most rarely – if ever – purchase tickets online or through their smartphones, according to the surveys.

Do you typically purchase fare through any sources other than The Commuter Store®?

- No: 60%  
- Yes: 33%  
- Don’t Know: 7%
Nine out of 10 customers are likely to recommend The Commuter Store to others. WBA used this information to find the stores’ Net Promoter Score (NPS), a metric commonly used by large businesses to measure their ability to grow sales through word-of-mouth. The Commuter Store earned a 75. (For comparison, Apple earned 72 and Netflix 62).

The Commuter Store has always been popular among its customers. In 2012, the last time this survey was conducted, 87 percent of customers would recommend the stores to others, as opposed to 90 percent this year. In addition, this year’s survey found that 83 percent of customers can be considered “loyal,” which means that they are highly likely to both return to the stores and recommend them.

However, along with being loyal customers of The Commuter Store, baby boomers are Metro’s most loyal riders. According to a recent analysis of Metro ridership by the Swiss firm Teralytics, baby boomers and Gen X’ers – The Commuter Store’s second largest customer group – ride Metro the most, with ridership sharply declining among Millennials.

Only 7 percent of Commuter Store customers drive alone to work. This is a huge difference compared to the percentage of commuters in the entire DC region who drive alone, a much higher 61 percent.

Thirty percent of customers changed the way they traveled to work after visiting the stores. This finding suggests that The Commuter Store helps people drive alone less, but we cannot say this definitively because the response rate was particularly low for this section of the survey.
Methodology

There have been three prior benchmark studies measuring The Commuter Store's performance. These were conducted in 2007, 2009, and 2012.

This study compiles information from two different surveys. The first was a brief intercept survey conducted at four brick-and-mortar locations and one Mobile Commuter store between May 30th and June 25th, 2018 (the fifth permanent store at Pentagon City was not yet open at the time of the survey).

At the end of the intercept, participants were asked if they would be willing to complete a longer online survey to enter into a drawing for one of three $100 Amazon gift cards. Those who were willing to participate were emailed a link to the full survey the next day. Both the intercept survey and the online survey were available in Spanish and English.

Overall, 373 customers completed the intercept interview and agreed to participate in the study. Of this group, 112 went on to complete the full online survey, resulting in a response rate of 30 percent.
Additional Key Findings

Overall, the results of this research indicate that customers are very satisfied with The Commuter Store, with almost all customers (95 percent) rating their experience very highly, and the majority saying they are likely to recommend The Commuter Store (90 percent) and/or visit again (91 percent).

- Specifically, customers are very happy with the quality of customer service provided at The Commuter Store, citing this as the primary reason for their high ratings for overall experience. Staff members, therefore, should be looked at as a key component of The Commuter Store experience and current success.

- Eighty-three percent of The Commuter Store customers can be considered loyal. Customers who are very satisfied with their experience, very likely to recommend, and very likely to return are considered loyal.

About one-half of customers (53 percent) visit The Commuter Store once a month, but the Ballston and Shirlington locations have significantly higher proportions of customers who visit the store at least once a week. This suggests that the needs of people who frequent these locations may be different than others.

About one-third of customers (36 percent) first heard about The Commuter Store because they live or work nearby. Another 25 percent learned of The Commuter Store through a referral from a friend, family member, co-worker or employer. The third most mentioned channel was a website, with 20 percent of customers naming this as the first place they heard about The Commuter Store.

While customers are very pleased with their Commuter Store experiences, they are not clear on who operates the stores. While almost two in 10 customers (19 percent) mentioned an Arlington-related entity, just as many believe that Metro operates the stores (18 percent), and almost three in 10 (29 percent) are not sure who operates the stores.
Most customers (80 percent) came into The Commuter Store looking for a fare card, ticket, or pass. Fewer came in pursuit of information (11 percent), or maps, schedules or guides (5 percent).