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Executive Summary

Ensuring the Security and Perceived Security for the Elderly Passengers of Tren Urbano

by

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Executive Summary

The construction of the Tren Urbano project implied a great effort in planning and designing an efficient and reliable mode of transportation for the people on the Metropolitan Area. Tren Urbano will serve a large amount of people, being the only system of its kind it is implied that the population of possible customers is very high. The percentage of persons over 65 years of age on the townships of San Juan, Guaynabo and Bayamón, where the first alignment of the train is located, is very high. In our island according to the 1990 census 13.5 percent of the population of San Juan are persons over 65 years of age. The projected increase in the percentage of persons of this age result on an approximate 18.7 percent. For the township of Bayamón the actual percentage is approximately 8.9, and the increase in the projection is similar to the one for San Juan, for the year 2025 the percentage will be almost 18%. In Guaynabo the same behavior can be identified on the projections. The percentage on the year 1990 was approximately 9.3, and for the year 2025 this percentage will increase to about 19 percent according to projections of the Census Bureau. This fact is important and indicates that this population is considerable and that their specific needs should be considered as part of the process of defining and designing for the possible users of the service.

As people age, having a way to move from one place to the other becomes more of a challenge than a mere common activity. It is known that mobility is a very important issue for older people, much more now that the older population is a more active and dynamic one. Still, finding a mean of transportation that is reliable and secure and at the same time simple can be a formidable task.

One aspect of the actual conditions in the San Juan Metropolitan Area (SMJA) that draws attention is the actual crime statistics. In San Juan the total number of cases reported of type I crimes were 20,741 cases. The numbers of cases in San Juan are considerable enough when compared to Bayamón and

Guaynabo. In Guaynabo the total number of crimes reported were 1,631. And in Bayamón were 9,389 cases.

Fear of crime can be an important and significant element in forecasting the ridership and use of a transit system. In a world where crime is a reality that can affect almost everyone people are very sensitive and try not to put themselves in situations where they could be victimized. This situation worsens in the case of elderly people because they can feel helpless and they experience the environment that surrounds them less actively (Ward, 1986). The same author states that fear of crime contributes to perceptions of the environment as less secure and satisfying.

In spite of the fact that criminal victimization is lower on the older population, due to life styles that present less opportunity of victimization, research in that area indicate that older people express greater fear of crime than other sectors of the population (Ward, 1989). Fear of crime in conjunction to other factors acts as a barrier to the use of public transportation and understanding and recognizing this can provide the means for us to recommend strategies to treat this barriers and obtain and retain ridership.

Fear of crime is fueled by personal, social and environmental factors. These include perceived safety, personal characteristics, social resources, environmental characteristics, subjective wellbeing and lifestyle (Ward 1986). All of these interact to affect the experience a person has with public transportation.

Knowing the actual levels of crime in the areas near the stations will enable us to make a better assessment later on as to whether the Tren Urbano has an increased effect on crime. Also it will enable us to compare the reality of the crimes committed with the perception of crimes the population of people over 65 years of age has on crime. A way to work with this problem is to identify the factors that lead to fear and all the other factors that intervene with the perception of crime. By doing so we can provide the elderly population with an alternative of transportation, Tren Urbano, that can satisfy their necessities for transportation and mobility while taking into consideration the issue of fear of crime and perceived security.

The study of the issue of perceived security and crime fear on the elderly population consists of defining a tool that would provide answers to the questions mentioned by means of a survey. This survey will be administered here in Puerto Rico by me and in the Boston area by Lora Blackman from MIT. The idea of conducting the project on different sites is to make a rich comparative analysis of the findings of the survey and thus providing for more analysis and better results. The survey was prepared taking in consideration the information gathered from the literature review and it will provide information about demographic characteristics, frequency of use of transit (and which mode), factors that lead to fear, factors that lead to comfort, most feared types of crime and past experience with crime. That information after the pertinent analysis will be used to develop suggestions for improving the perception of security on Tren Urbano.

The survey will be administered on selected areas along the alignment considered from the areas already identified as having a high proportion of elderly. This was accomplished using the program Landview III from the U.S. Census Bureau, this program uses the census information to create thematic maps showing a particular aspect defined by the user. In this case the proportion of people over 65 years of age in San Juan, Bayamón and Guaynabo was plotted and over that map the TU stations were identified. In San Juan there is an important population near the Roosevelt, Domenech, Piñeiro, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras and Cupey Stations (18.9% of elderly). In Bayamón the stations with the highest proportion (13.2%) of elderly near site are Bayamón and Deportivo Stations. The only station that is located on the municipality of Guaynabo is the Torrimar Station and it is located on an area with a proportion of 8.9 percent of people over 65 years of age.

The agenda for the next phase of the investigation is to conduct the surveys on selected communities on the areas already identified to have the highest proportion of elderly. Once the surveys are finished the information will be compiled and analyzed, the results from Boston and San Juan will be compared and conclusions will be made according to the findings on what can be

done to make the elderly passengers of Tren Urbano feel more comfortable riding the new system and how the system can obtain and retain ridership from this sector of the population.

Being able to assess existing necessities and the attitudes of older people towards public transportation and the perception of crime would allow to make recommendations and suggest specific strategies that would provide a better service to the population of persons older than 65 years and to obtain and retain ridership. These strategies can be offering information, help and advise to that population, provide security and confidence of use by using uniformed officials, cameras of other means, and if necessary to provide other special services or others. These and maybe other areas of concerns could be identified and recommendations could be made based on what the study shows.