

Atlanta Department of Watershed's fleet sharing and automation project saves taxpayer dollars, improves efficiency and greens the fleet



By ED SMITH | Agile Fleet

The city of Atlanta's Department of Watershed Management automated the management of its vehicle fleet to reduce cost, improve utilization, enhance service to employees and to further green its fleet. Fleet vehicles are a critical tool used by the Watershed to provide core services such as treatment and delivery of safe drinking water, treatment and collection of wastewater and management of stormwater in the city of Atlanta.

The objective for the city's fleet management automation initiative is to achieve the efficient management of fleet vehicles and ensure that safe and well-maintained vehicles are available for staff to carry out essential functions of the Watershed. The agency's fleet manager, Robert Horton, explained that prior to launching its fleet automation and vehicle sharing project, costly city vehicles were underutilized.

"There are over 50 different city offices in the city of Atlanta's Department of Watershed. Each office has its own pool of vehicles. There was very little sharing between the different offices. This led to some vehicles being rarely used while others were used daily and past their normal life cycle. The underutilized vehicles were also cumbersome to maintain due to overdue preventive maintenance, dead battery issues and poor overall appearance. We needed a way to get these underutilized vehicles into the



Robert Horton, fleet manager for Atlanta's Department of Watershed Management, launched his fleet's automation and vehicle sharing project, which promises to save the city \$30,000-\$65,000 annually. (Photo provided)

hands of individuals who needed them, and the over-utilized vehicles replaced with newer, more efficient vehicles. Centralizing and automating maintenance functions was also a goal," said Horton.

The city of Atlanta's Department of Watershed's motor pool

The Watershed currently has two self-service motor pool operations that serve employees who require city vehicles to conduct business. By sharing vehicles and allowing employees to easily schedule them via an online vehicle reservation system, the agency has increased the use of existing vehicles while reducing the overall need for vehicles dedicated to individuals or departments. Providing 24/7 pickup and drop-off of vehicle keys using the automated self-service kiosk makes physically accessing

LEFT: Having visibility into how and when vehicles are being used has enabled Atlanta's Department of Watershed Management to slash underused vehicles. (Photo provided)

the vehicles efficient throughout the department. As a result, vehicle usage for the shared fleet is rising at an astonishing rate.

With the Agile Fleet FleetCommander system in place, the city now collects usage metrics for each trip. FleetCommander produces preventive maintenance schedules via the automatic system, which provides an extra safety measure that benefits the fleet and city employees alike. The system also collects driver feedback on every trip so administrators are immediately notified of any occurrences that may arise.

Cutting costs, collecting metrics and greening the fleet

Having visibility into how and when vehicles are being used enables the city to slash underused vehicles. Horton said, "The city initially envisions cutting about 10 vehicles."

According to Agile Fleet estimates, this will save the city a minimum of \$30,000-\$65,000 annually in maintenance, depreciation, insurance, parking and other costs. Having usage metrics will also enable the department to fine-tune the fleet's composition to best meet the city's needs.

Horton said, "We are moving toward offering small SUVs, electric sedans and some pickups within the department's pool of vehicles. We will have Explorers for executive staff when their vehicles are in for service, and we will be able to switch over from hybrids to electric vehicles, which will further reduce costs, increase efficiency and green our fleet."

The Watershed is also adding EV ARC charging stations and will use solar power to charge vehicles. "I am especially interested in the emergence of new sustainable fleet technologies. I look forward to the future with the growing demand for electric vehicles, autonomous vehicles, alternative fuel vehicles and advanced fuels," said Horton.

"With the new automated system, we can run usage reports, see the status of our fleet with an online fleet dashboard and other fleet status screens and reports. This gives us instant visibility into what has happened, what is happening and what will be happening with our vehicles. Having all of the data we need in one system has been a game-changer to getting our city fleet under control," Horton said.

Horton stated the city's internal communication system helped it spread the word about sharing vehicles via the self-service motor pool. He said the system is being adopted by city drivers because of word-of-mouth and ease of use. "Folks seem to like feeling like they are 'part of the club,' and we are working with Agile Fleet to enable our employees to easily access the system using RFID (radio-frequency identification) badges. People are learning that the shared vehicle fleet is better for them because they now have access to more types of vehicles, whereas in the past they were limited to the types of vehicles that were offered by their department."

From key chaos to secure accountability

Managing vehicle keys in the past was inefficient. Horton said, "In the past, we kept keys in folders in the fleet offices. This was not ideal because individuals did not have access after work hours and tracking who was loaned the key was also a problem. We had a sign-out sheet, but it was not always used or filled out completely. Numerous times the keys would go missing without anyone knowing who had taken them or needed to

City of Atlanta's Department of Watershed Fleet and Motor Pool Management Quick Facts

- Serves drinking water to 1.2 million people each day
- Transformed manual fleet management processes to fully automated system
- Manages keys via secure, centralized key control system that does not require staffing
- Has automated system for managing preventive maintenance schedules
- Provides 24/7 pickup and drop-off of vehicle keys in two city locations
- Has 100% accountability for vehicles
- Maintains all user and vehicle data in one place
- Tracks vehicle usage by department, trips, hours and miles
- Collects odometers to manage timely vehicle maintenance schedules for a safer fleet
- Optimizes parking space
- Communicates and enforces policy automatically
- Can restrict access to certain vehicles to selected users via the automated system

bring them back. Key replacement is costly and time-consuming. With the secure, self-dispatching key box that is part of the motor pool solution, there is complete accountability. Our goal of eliminating lost keys and having 100% accountability for all key transactions is being realized through automation."

Fleet policy communication and enforcement

Having, communicating and consistently enforcing a policy can dramatically reduce fleet costs. The new system communicates fleet policies to drivers of fleet vehicles and requires them acknowledge policies online. Along with communicating policy as a part of new employee onboarding, the automated system requires drivers to reacknowledge policy every year. Over time, Horton expects to be modifying vehicle use policies to stay current with best fleet management practices. His automation system will automatically require drivers to acknowledge the new policy as he releases changes via the fleet management information system. Better policy will have a big impact on the organization's bottom line.

Looking ahead

"We are looking forward to achieving our short- and long-term goals of fleet efficiency and optimizing the system to its fullest potential over time. Word is getting out how easy the system is to access, and people are learning how it actually serves them better than the way things were done in the past. That's a win-win both for Watershed and for city taxpayers," said Horton.

For more information about the Agile Fleet management information system FleetCommander, visit www.agilefleet.com; email info@agilefleet.com; or call (408) 213-9555, ext. 1.