INFO 608 SUMMER 20-21

IND-01 Interviews

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A Better Public Transportation App

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# **1. Introduction**

The SEPTA app is a transportation application released in 2017(Iseptaphilly, 2017). As SEPTA service is being widely and frequently used by local people, we noticed the use of SEPTA app is not matching the huge passenging flow as we expected, based on our observations among people around. Our team’s goal is to analyze the reason behind this phenomenon, and help make meaningful and effective suggestions to help improve the SEPTA app.

In previous analysis and survey results, we found our opinions and insights are overall similar to each other, as survey participants are mostly friends of the same age or other students. This may be due to our similar background, and belonging to a close age group. Our generation are familiar with application related technologies since we grow up with them and using applications all the time, as well as willing to try new ones: we use similar applications as they become popular, while popular applications change frequently. It makes us form unique, subjective and extensive standards and feelings about them. Thus, we may have different experiences on applications than other people in their age groups: they may not be familiar with technologies, or have different understandings and experience than us when using them.

Therefore, the purpose of this user research is to jump out of this limited communication circle, try to talk with people with different backgrounds and age groups. In order to gain new insights, feelings, and opinions about the SEPTA app, or applications in general. More ideally, challenge our current inherent concepts about the SEPTA app based on further communications, revisiting technical details and use situations may be required. These new insights, information and ideas that we never thought of can be greatly helpful for our app analysis and improvement.

# **2. Methodology**

## **a. Interview design**

The first part of the interview is an introduction, it tells the subjects what I am trying to do, what do I expect to get from their responses, and their identities and answers are safe. I use the introduction to give the subjects some preparations and expectations about what questions, fields and directions are likely to be asked. As well as the sense of security for conducting this interview.

The second part is background information, such as age, gender, education background, occupation, and home location. These questions are designed to confirm the subjects have different backgrounds and belong to different age groups than our team members. As well as brief knowledge about their life and experience.

The third part is asking about transportation app usage, including SEPTA services. This helps me to decide if a demonstration needs to be performed, and the subjects’ experiences and goals with the SEPTA app or similar applications.

The fourth part is the core of the interview. It contains questions about feelings, preferences and ideas over all pages, tabs and features of the SEPTA app. One of the most important questions is in this part, which is to pick a goal and perform the process. These questions are designed to get subjects’ unique insights and feedback on the application. While this helps me to understand subjects’ thinking process and their behaviors.

The fifth part is the open-ended questions, including their suggestions and information not mentioned. These questions are designed to cover their improvisational opinions and complement topics not mentioned by me.

The last part shows my gratitude, tells subjects it is my pleasure to conduct this interview with them and their responses are helpful for our team studying and evaluating the SEPTA app and making improvement suggestions.

## **b. Interview method**

I noticed the similar backgrounds and age groups produced close, even the same opinions about the SEPTA app in our previous study. Therefore, I decided to choose people from different age groups other than our generation as participants. Naturally, their backgrounds are vastly different from ours due to the generation difference.

The interviews are performed face to face. I have close relationships with the participants and we are familiar with each other, the atmosphere and Q&A are easy going. The only thing that needs to be adapted is the short pauses after the answers, that I need some time to understand the responses, thinking or picking the next question, and take some notes.

I capture demographic information by directly asking them, and compare the differences between them afterwards based on the notes and recordings.

One thing I learned from this interview is the hands-on experience is really useful. Letting the user show how they achieve a goal or perform such a process and ask their opinions is a great way to understand how they think and their characteristics.

# **3. Interview Data and Findings**

## **User 1**

### **a. Participants characteristics**

Subject 1 is a 37 year old male user, he is an environmental engineer working in Philadelphia. The job requires him to travel regularly in or near Philadelphia local areas, including the local office. This requirement is mostly fulfilled by using SEPTA services. Although he uses SEPTA services all the time, the use of the SEPTA app is very rare. As he recalled, he only used it once in a special case and weather: pick up friends on a snowy day at a transportation station.

For off work time, user 1 uses Uber and lyft for personal use such as go shopping downtown, and as an emergency plan if needs to go to the office in a short period of time. Other than that, the SEPTA service is for commuting to work places.

From the interview, the participant shows a strong intention that he does not have full confidence in the SEPTA app. He thinks the application has some delay and information boards in stations are more credible. However, according to the technical details from SEPTA's official website, the application updates about every 30 seconds(SEPTA, 2021). Even so, he still explored the whole features, pages and tabs of the SEPTA app, and was familiar with it. He also has a clear preference on certain features and dislike on other features. Therefore, the characteristics of user 1 contains: traditional, conserative, suspicious and exploresive. User 1 has his own judgements on existing products but does not resist new developments.

### **b. User insight**

At first, user 1 did not think the SEPTA app was a transportation application, so he only mentioned Uber and lyft when the question “Do you use any transportation apps?” was asked. Then he realized that even without features like buying tickets or reserve seats, a data collecting and checking application can also be a transportation application as long as it is related to transportation information.

User 1 does not have any special feeling about the SEPTA app overall, he thinks the information board and route maps at the train stations are clear and easy to get information as needed, which makes the SEPTA app optional and less important.

He is satisfied with the home page and the operations could be performed on it, as well as the information. According to him, users should not expect too much information or more on the main page. However, user 1 thinks the next to arrive function is duplicated with the schedules feature, since it jumps to the schedules page when the next to arrive feature is not working. It causes confusion and produces unnecessary redundant operations for users.

The participant has not used the alert page, but he thinks it can be useful for planning and scheduling. For functions in the more tab, the user thinks the SEPTA app is missing payment or reload features, which is the main reason he thinks it is not a transportation application. Another criticism about the app is the trip planner, since it jumps to the external browser, there is not much link with the application and it is hard to use.

After that, the subject shared his preferences and dislikes about the SEPTA app. The evaluation of the overall quality is moderate, which means it can meet basic needs of customers. However, there are some flaws such as static maps and external jumps.

In the end, the subject expressed his opinion that he may keep using it in the future. He admitted the application is useful for scheduling, and checking service status in unexpected situations. The SEPTA app is a strong alternative for gathering related transportation information and designing backup plans.

### **c. Goals, needs, preferences and problems**

According to user 1, the goal of using the SEPTA app is for checking service status in special weather. Except for this situation, he does not use the SEPTA app in daily life or work time. However, during the interview, one question was letting him describe the sequence about how he uses the SEPTA app. He chose to demonstrate the homepage features, which means this may be his subconscious goal for using the SEPTA app.

For the needs he mentioned, although he can use the application to check unusual service alerts, the information boards can fully and easily meet these needs. Therefore, the SEPTA app did not change his riding habits or give him any motivation to use it.

The subject thinks the home page is the best part of the application, where favorite routes are being saved, shown and alerts are also shown as needed. The alerts feature is being ignored by him because he never used it and thinks it is not useful as expected, while the home page has similar functionalities.

One problem mentioned by the subject is the duplicate features. The alerts feature is part of the home page display, and the next to arrive feature often jumps to the schedules page. The alerts page is never visited by the subject due to this design. Another problem is the wrong impression from user 1, since the maximum data delay is 30s but the user thinks it is more. The third problem is the fares purchasing and money reload feature, the subject thinks the main reason he denies the SEPTA app as a transportation application is the lack of support for the online payment function. The last problem is. It causes confusion that users do not understand why designers design such a function if it can not be internally integrated.

### **d. Interview transcript**

Appendix 7.1

## **User 2**

### **a. Participants characteristics**

Subject 2 is a 42 year old female user. She lives in a suburban area where SEPTA services are covered and works for local Citibank as an accountant. She does not have to travel frequently or long distances like user 1 does, plus she has her own car to commute and travel. Therefore, she is not familiar with transportation apps and never used the SEPTA app before. However, one thing surprised me is her knowledge about the Uber application and her own standards about judging transportation applications based on the impression of Uber.

The subject presents obvious concerns on the complexity of the application operations during the demonstration process in this interview. If too many clicks or operations need to be performed in order to achieve a goal, the subject thinks such design is a problem, and this low quality process needs to be improved.

### **b. User insights**

User 2 stopped using SEPTA service after graduated from school and moved to a suburban area with her car. At that time, there was no SEPTA app and mobile applications. Now she thinks local SEPTA services are not convenient in that area: she still needs to drive home after reaching the nearest service station. Additionally, she mentioned the car changed her feeling about the definition of convenience, it is way more convenient and private compared to public transportations like SEPTA.

After watching my demonstration about each page and the features, she gave a positive feedback on the SEPTA app’s overall performance: good, concise, useful and informative. For the home page, she thinks it is good but different from other apps and her expectation: she expected to see transportation information such as operation maps or unusual status, instead of nothing by default. For the next to arrive function, she thinks it is useful but too many operations, which is inconvenient for users. The alerts page has a similar problem, it can be optimized just like the next to arrive feature. The schedules page is as expected, so is the fares, maps and views in the more tab. Another similar problem raised by the subject, just like user 1 did, is the trip planner. According to this user, the feature is unacceptable, makes her unwilling to use it and unable to understand how it works or connects to the app.

However, she also raised some negative points about some pages and features such as trip planner external jump and too many clicks on certain processes. In the end, she thinks she will not use the SEPTA app in the future because she is unlikely to use any SEPTA service in the near future. But she admits this interview and the application is a new experience for her, she likes the application and thinks it is useful for SEPTA customers. In the end, she did not suggest any features she wanted to add to the SEPTA app, and she mentioned she would rather use uber when she is not able to drive than using SEPTA services.

### **c. Goals, needs, preferences and problems**

The potential goal and needs for user 2 is to check the information about the next train, since I asked her to choose one goal she wants to achieve on the SEPTA app and she chose to further observe the next to arrive feature, as well as the operation process.

According to the subject, her preferred feature is the alerts page, the system and service status are good information to improve efficiency. The feature she likes the least is the trip planner in the more tab.

One problem raised by user 2 is the trip planner, it needs an external web browser so it is inconvenient for users. She even used strong words: unacceptable, unwilling, to describe this feature. Another problem is the tedious operations, she mentioned users need to perform 4 clicks in order to achieve their goals, while each click means to choose the right option among numerous service types, stations or routes.

### **d. Interview transcript**

Appendix 7.2

# **4. Analysis of Findings**

## **a. Similarities and differences**

One similarity of user 1 and user 2 is the same problem raised by them, which is the trip planner feature. It is so badly designed which attracted both of their attention during the use or demonstration. Another similarity is they are familiar with popular transportation applications, have their own judgement about a good application, even do not use them by themselves. Both user 1 and user 2 understand what to expect from the SEPTA app based on their impression and experience.

There are also some differences between two participants: user 1’s job makes him have to use the SEPTA service regularly, while user 2 has own car so she does not use any SEPTA services. Another difference is their attitudes towards the SEPTA app, user 1 has some concern about the correctness and timeliness of the application data, while user 2 cares more about the operation difficulty.

## **b. User segments**

According to our team leader’s identified user segments, and based on subjects’ background and characteristics: user 1 belongs to “Commuters who rely on the SEPTA service for daily work” user segment, and user 2 belongs to “People around SEPTA service zones but do not have to use public transportations for commuting” user segment.

## **c. Limitations**

Since two subjects are both working, while user 1 uses SEPTA services for commuting frequently and user 2 does not use SEPTA service for communing, the student group should also be considered as study objects. Therefore, to complete the study, people with a student background and characteristics need to be included.

# **5. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the overall evaluation of the SEPTA app is good, based on the feedback from participants. However, several problems are raised by the subjects, as well as the suggestions.

The duplication functions can be re-designed as user 1 suggested. The redundant part of schedules feature and next to arrive feature should be merged.

In the more tab, the trip planner should be integrated internally, while the fares sheet, maps and views should be interactive and dynamic.

The tedious operation problem can be fixed by using isometric service menus or Voice recognition. To help users perform fewer operations on the next to arrive page.

For the alerts page, a dynamic table can be used to optimize the information display method, in order to avoid unnecessary click operations.

I think these suggestions are good recommendations because they are practical solutions, so I recommend them as well except for the voice recognition and online payment ones. It is because the isometric service menu can effectively solve the tedious operation problem, there is no need to cost extra resources for the voice recognition feature, especially since it may cost a lot. For online payment, it is more about the business model instead of user experiences, so it is not an easy thing to change, not to mention the potential huge cost.

# **6. Personas and Scenarios**

## **6.1 Personas**

### **Persona 1: Ricky**

Age: 37

Occupation: Environmental engineer

Family: Married

Location: Philadelphia, PA

**Personality**

Introvert Extrovert(1-10) 8

Objective Subjective(1-10) 2

Organized planner Adaptive/flexible(1-10) 9

Concrete thinker Systemic thinker(1-10) 7

**Goals**

End goal: Go to the work location on time

Task goal: Check service status

Life goal: Have children, be a good husband

Experience goal: Monitor environmental data and retrieve samples at target location

**Frustrations**

Can’t understand how new technologies work

Doubt the correctness and timeliness of the app

Too much travel due to the work

**Bio**

Ricky is an environmental engineer in the Philadelphia area. He works for the government, his job includes collecting. Monitor and upload environmental data. He lives very close to the city, does not have a car, but his job requires him to travel regularly in or near philadelphia. So he uses SEPTA services regularly, for both commuting and short distance travel.

**User Attributes**

Technical competence(1-10) 7

Familiarity with internet & websites(1-10) 6

Information search competence(1-10) 7

Confidence with new apps(1-10) 1

Social motivation to use website/app(1-10) 6

Work goals motivation to use(1-10) 3

**Personality traits**

Suspicious

Traditional

Works hard

**Preferred Channels**

Traditional Written Reports & Memos(1-10) 7

Online & Social Media Personal/Verbal Communication(1-10) 4

Telephone & Video Conferencing(1-10) 6

Graphical & Interactive App. Reporting(1-10) 9

### **Persona 2: Luna**

Age: 42

Occupation: Accountant

Family: Married, has 3 children

Location: Trenton, NJ

**Personality**

Introvert Extrovert(1-10) 3

Objective Subjective(1-10) 5

Organized planner Adaptive/flexible(1-10) 6

Concrete thinker Systemic thinker(1-10) 3

**Goals**

End goal: Go to the office on time

Task goal: Check traffic

Life goal: Safe and happy

Experience goal: Deliver documents to nearby places

**Frustrations**

Busy work

Bad traffic

Tired of driving

**Bio**

Luna is an accountant at Citibank, located in Trenton, NJ. Her home is in a suburban area nearby. She drives to the work office in the morning and drives back home after work. She does not use any SEPTA services at all, even though in a SEPTA service covered area. When she was in school, she used SEPTA service a lot for going to school and local areas. There was no SEPTA app at that time, and she stopped using SEPTA service after she graduated from school.

**User Attributes**

Technical competence(1-10) 3

Familiarity with internet & websites(1-10) 6

Information search competence(1-10) 7

Confidence with new apps(1-10) 6

Social motivation to use website/app(1-10) 3

Work goals motivation to use(1-10) 4

**Personality traits**

Works hard

Optimism

Cares about details

**Preferred Channels**

Traditional Written Reports & Memos(1-10) 8

Online & Social Media Personal/Verbal Communication(1-10) 6

Telephone & Video Conferencing(1-10) 7

Graphical & Interactive App. Reporting(1-10) 9

## **6.2 Scenarios**

### **Scenario 1 - Ricky**

Ricky needs to pick up several friends from local areas tonight so he rented a car. It is a heavy snow day, his friends told him they will arrive at the 69th street transportation center at 6:00pm, now it is 5:50.

He knows it will take him 5 minutes to drive to the station, but he can’t park there. So he wants to know if his friends can arrive on time and leave home accordingly. He tried to call his friends but none of them picked up the phone.

Ricky opened the SEPTA app, he clicked the “Add Favorite” button on the home page, then clicked the “Rail” option, and chose the right starting station and destination station, then added the result to the favorite by clicking the heart button on the top right corner. He saw the train is delayed because a yellow mark is right above the time, and the new arrival time is also shown: 6:13. So Ricky decided to leave home at 6:05, five minutes later than he originally planned.

### **Scenario 2 - Luna**

Luna finished work at 5pm, she said goodbye to everyone and entered her car. She tried to start the car but it was not working. She called auto repair and it took her an hour to finish the process and send her car to the facility. She was the only one at the parking lot.

Her husband is on a business trip, and her friends live on the other side of the office. After a quick but comprehensive thought, she decided to take the SEPTA service to go home. The nearest SEPTA station was a 5 minutes walk away. Although she needed to walk 20 minutes to go home after reaching the destination station, it was the easiest and most viable way to go home.

She opened the SEPTA app, clicked the “Next-to-Arrive” page, and chose the nearest station and destination station, then clicked the button to see the result. The next train was arriving in 10 minutes. So she went to the nearest SEPTA station and took the train.

## **6.3 Description**

In these two interviews, the participants gave me a lot of information about their background, as well as their obvious and strong characteristics during the communication. Therefore, I decided to construct data-driven characteristics for the personas and scenarios. The construction process was following the information they provided, step by step, until fully completed, vivid personas and scenarios were built.

During this process, I found it is hard to build scenarios that were not mentioned by me or them. For the goals, features and demonstrations we discussed, operated or performed in the interview, it is easy to build related scenarios. But for other scenarios, I can’t imagine how they will behave or do with the SEPTA app. I think it is due to the lack of knowledge about their thinking process or operation sequence on the SEPTA app.

In order to gather these additional information, I might revisit them and ask more questions like letting them perform a simple goal on each page and then tell me their feelings and opinions. It may help me construct more scenarios and enhance more details on personas.

# **7. Appendices**

## **7.1 Interview Transcripts - User 1**

User 1 - Commuters who rely on the SEPTA service for daily work

Intro: I am Ben, trying to help improve a better transportation app for human computer interaction class. In this case my focus is the SEPTA app. This survey is about your experience and feelings about it. Your name will be anonymous, the record will only be used for this class assignment, and deleted as soon as I finish the assignment. Nothing personal will be shared or revealed to anyone else. Your response will be a great help for our SEPTA app analysis.

Q: What is your age and gender?

A: 37, male.

Q: What is your occupation?

A: environmental engineer, work for the government - collect, monitor and upload environmental indexes and data. travel regularly, almost anywhere near philadelphia - depending on the work.

Q: Where do you live? Urban or suburb?

A: 5 min drive from downtown, Philadelphia, urban, don't have a car.

Q: Do you use any transportation apps?

A: Yes, uber, lyft.

Q: How often do you use them?

A: go to work if hurry or go shopping downtown. never used them at work. Only use for personal use, when getting off work.

Q: Do you use SEPTA service?

A: A lot, go to the work office, go to sampling/monitoring locations.

Q: Have you used/heard of the SEPTA app?

A: Yes but only 1 time. Have spent some time exploring the app, familiar with the functions. Normally just go to the station without checking.

Q: What do you use the SEPTA app for?

A: Check the train to 69th street transportation center right before leaving home. It was a snowy day, needed to meet/pickup friends there. Make sure the train is not delayed or canceled.

Q: Can you describe how you achieve the goal? The sequence?

A: open the SEPTA app, go to the home page, click add favorite, choose subway, market frankford line, start stop is 30th st station, destination stop is 69th street, click next-to-arrive and then add to favorite and save. If there is any delay or suspended, there is a yellow or red mark shown right next to the time.

Q: What do you feel about this app?

A: No special feeling, saw the information board and route maps at the train station. They are clear and easy to get the information I need as well, the app is optional/is an alternative when need to plan ahead, heard the app has some delay so personally don't trust it, just for reference. It is not accurate/perfect, less credible than an information board.

Q: You said you are familiar with the functions, what do you feel about the home page?

A: home page is excellent, favourite schedules can be added and shown on home page, status indicators shows on time/delay/cancel. can’t expect more about the home page.

Q: How about the next to arrive function?

A: duplicate with the schedules page/function. Many times the next to arrive function does not work, auto jump to schedules page. Show schedules and next to arrive are the same thing. Is useful but should merge with schedules function.

Q: What about the alerts page?

A: never used it, but think can be useful, for planning/scheduling

Q: The functions in the more tab?

A: only show a fares sheet, cannot pay fares/reload money to the key card online. System map is static, no interactive map. Transitview and trainview have interactive maps, prefer using them if needed. Trip planner jumps to external browser, don’t understand why, is better if internal integrated.

Q: Which feature do you like the best?

A: homepage, the favorite routes.

Q: Which feature do you like the least?

A: alerts feature, never used, think not useful as expected.

Q: What do you think of the app overall?

A: moderate quality, can meet basic needs of SEPTA customers. Have some flaws such as static map and external jumps

Q: Any features you want the SEPTA app to have?

A: online reload or online payment for SEPTA service, on mobile.

Q: Will you keep using it?

A: Maybe, the app can plan in advance - time, route, etc. If scheduling is not required, then maybe just go to the station and look at the board. Or for a complex trip, need to switch to multiple SEPTA services, it is useful. Some unexpected situations: rain, snow, holiday, maintenance, protests, etc - check delay or cancel anywhere, at home or at work, no need to go to train station, look for other travel methods as soon as possible.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

A: No.

End: Thank you so much for your time, it is my pleasure to conduct this interview with you. I believe your responses will help me and our team a lot for doing analysis on the SEPTA app and making improvements. Hope you have a nice day.

## **7.2 Interview Transcripts - User 2**

User 2 - people around SEPTA service zones but don’t have to use public transportations for commuting.

Intro: I am Ben, trying to help improve a better transportation app for human computer interaction class. In this case my focus is the SEPTA app. This survey is about your experience and feelings about it. Your name will be anonymous, the record will only be used for this class assignment, and deleted as soon as I finish the assignment. Nothing personal will be shared or revealed to anyone else. Your response will be a great help for our SEPTA app analysis.

Q: What is your age and gender?

A: 42, female.

Q: What is your occupation?

A: Accountant at Citibank.

Q: Where do you live? Urban or suburb?

A: Suburb, in Trenton.

Q: Do you use any transportation apps?

A: No, but colleagues use uber a lot, have some impression about it

Q: Why not use any of them?

A: Has own car.

Q: Have you used/heard of the SEPTA app?

A: No, haven’t use SEPTA service for years

Q: Why not?

A: Graduated from school, moved to a suburb area, SEPTA service was not convenient in that area, still needed to drive, mostly because owned a car. Didn’t have the SEPTA app when in school.

(Did a quick demo on five pages and additional features in more tag)

Q: What do you feel about the home page?

A: Looks different than other apps, no information on main page, need manually add routes. Expected to see operation maps or unusual services.

Q: How about the next to arrive function?

A: Useful but have a problem – need swipe to trolley first, an extra operation, need to click and find correct option with 4 total operations, a little bit too much, not safe. Should have fixed/isometric service menu. Voice recognition is better.

Q: What about the alerts page?

A: Seems easy to operate, the information is clear. the choosing sequence should be optimized, show a dynamic table, make new alerts status on the top. unnecessary clicks. That's what other apps do.

Q: How about the schedules page?

A: as expected.

Q: The functions in the more tab?

A: fares, maps and views are good. Trip planner is unacceptable, unwilling to use. No idea how it connects to the app if it is in the browser.

Q: Which feature do you like the best?

A: alerts/system status. Efficient.

Q: Which feature do you like the least?

A: trip planner, inconvenient, need web browser.

Q: Can you describe one goal you want to achieve on this app? I will show a sequence demo and tell me about your feelings.

A: Check the next rail. Good: only need two clicks, interactive map, late info is shown.

Q: What do you think of the app overall?

A: overall good. concise, useful, informative. Some pages are not as expected, different from other modern apps.

Q: Any features you want the SEPTA app to have?

A: No idea. good for now.

Q: Will you use it in the future?

A: Unlikely, even if need to use SEPTA service, go to the station.

Q: Will you use other transportation apps in the future?

A: maybe uber, when not convenient /able driving

Q: Is there anything else you want to say?

A: a new experience, useful app, like it.

End: Thank you so much for your time, it is my pleasure to conduct this interview with you. I believe your responses will help me and our team a lot for doing analysis on the SEPTA app and making improvements. Hope you have a nice day.

# **8. References**

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