Maintenance Transportation – “Beam Me Up Skeeter”

Maintenance transportation is an interesting topic to discuss and address because it rarely gets the attention it deserves. The majority of all maintenance organizations whether it be facilities, manufacturing, municipalities, schools, or health care; the number one type of loss or what I call it...“non-valued added” maintenance labor time. Now I will admit that we have to figure out a rapid method to transport maintenance technicians from one job to the other. Travel time is something we will have but the key is to minimize it as much as we can. In most organizations who are housed in one building or location the travel time is in the 15-20% range of an eight (8) hour work day. If you work in a campus environment or have multiple locations across a significant geographical area your travel can easily be in the 50-60% range of the maintenance day. Think about it, that is half of your maintenance budget!

Even with that I still see technicians and craftsmen traveling in pairs looking like they are on a date, no sense of urgency, no meaning to the mission, just moseying along. So why are most organizations not spending a significant amount of their management time trying to figure out ways to reduce the amount of travel time? Most of you that I have worked with over the years know that I am seldom without an answer to questions or problems. But honestly I don’t have a clue why organizations don’t spend more time and energy monitoring and trying to reduce travel time.

So I guess you got the point that travel time is eating your lunch and much of it is useless time just walking and riding around. So before we talk about ways of reducing it lets talk about “safety” that is the most common excuse I hear of why we have maintenance personal working in pairs. Get ready for it...that is Bull....! In rare and infrequent situations like working in the dark, on a roof, troubleshooting live electrical panels, etc. of course we need to work in pairs but not to go look at a complaint of a toilet not flushing properly on the third floor. So enough of my tirade....How do we improve it?

1. Begin tracking the percent of one-man jobs compared to all jobs
2. Review transportation equipment, how many trucks or buggies do you have available. Vehicles are cheap when you compare their cost to the cost-per-day of an experienced electrician or HVAC technician. Don’t forget the loaded number (benefits, health care, insurance, training, retirement, etc.)
3. If you work in a large geographical area consider assigning work by using a map and creating routes. Even in single building environment routes can be an improvement in travel time
4. Begin the work planning and scheduling process of work. The more planning and scheduling effort you put into your work the more efficient the work will be completed including the travel time element.
5. Look into the amount of parts and supplies you stock onsite for reactive work and also the routing and respective work you complete on a regular basis.

Keep in mind, if you can reduce a crew of two down to one, for that respective amount of time you have doubled your crew size. Even if they each have their own buggy or truck, it will still be cheaper in the long run. You will even see a rise in customer satisfaction, increase in the amount of work you accomplish, improvements in morale, and many more.

Until the point in time that “Skeeter” can Beam us up from one place to another instantaneously with our tools and parts of course, we will always have travel losses. Let’s just try to control them.