

# COTA – accelerating access to financial intelligence



*Transaction handling*

*Analysis tools*

*Smarter processes*

*Expert services*

## OVERVIEW

COTA (Central Ohio Transit Authority) has selected accounting and financial management solutions from CODA Financials, Inc. , to provide it with faster access to data, for speedier analysis of accounts and optimum management of its \$70 million annual budget.

## AN EXPANDING MARKET

Fifty-five new people call Central Ohio 'home' every day; 48 of them bring cars with them. By 2020, this will mean that 400,000 people will have joined those trying to get around on the area's roadways.

The importance of public transportation in Central Ohio, therefore, has never been greater. Traffic congestion has become the number one issue on the minds of Central Ohio residents – and COTA is a critical tool in the fight against traffic congestion and air pollution in the area.

COTA provides 65,000 daily bus rides, as well as 500 daily rides on Project Mainstream, its service for people with disabilities who can't use fixed route services. With a fleet of 350 buses, COTA travels throughout the Franklin County area on 70 routes, with 5,500 bus stops, 373 bus shelters, 24 park & rides, and over one million calls annually to its Customer Information Center.

## USING RESOURCES WISELY

COTA has developed a strategic plan called Focus 005. This five-year plan identifies the transit and mobility needs of Central Ohio and reflects the steps needed to realize COTA's vision: 'To become the transit system for a great community of the 21st century with convenient, affordable and user-friendly mobility for every resident and visitor'.

Focus 005 will also help bring COTA closer to realizing its long-term goals of providing 24-hour bus services and rail.

But COTA is a public authority that gains funds from a sales tax on all non-food items in the area, and from assorted grants. So, it also needs the ability to plan for and manage an annual budget that varies each year – and to do so both accurately and flexibly.

To ensure it achieves its objectives – while maintaining the public's confidence that it is maximizing its use of the resources granted to it – COTA has worked towards preparation of a long term financial strategy. Part of this strategy involved the modernization of its financial IT infrastructure and applications to make certain that COTA could continue to control and plan its revenues and expenditure for the benefit of the local inhabitants.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT SOLUTION

For over 10 years, COTA had been a customer of CODA Financials, Inc. , using CODA's Financials accounting software solution on the VAX platform. However, Compaq's decision to end development of the VAX platform, left COTA faced with rising software and support costs and a lack of potential for system expansion and improvement. COTA therefore employed independent consultants Jefferson Wells to conduct a needs assessment and to evaluate the alternative financials software options.

COTA needed a modern Microsoft SQL-based application suite: flexible and accessible, with room for expansion; providing an intuitive and simple Windows interface for easy data retrieval and manipulation. The business requirements were for greater flexibility in terms of: account structure; the ability to integrate assets and project management\tracking in the ledger; report writing; and importing and exporting data.

After assessing a number of financials packages, Jefferson Wells made the recommendation that COTA implement CODA on an Open, Client/Server (OCS) platform. Jeff Vosler, Director of Financial Services and Administration at COTA, takes up the story: 'CODA's Financials solution was the best of the systems evaluated – it offered us easy conversion from our previous system, which was not surprising because that was also a CODA package. But the Financials OCS solution also gave us greater power and flexibility than the competition, in terms of account structure and reporting.

'Perhaps most important, however, is asset management. As a government agency, with funding coming straight from sales tax and grant monies, we need a very flexible grant management system that can give us complete visibility of our various revenue sources and help us forecast income for long-term planning. CODA's Assets solution is exactly what we were looking for, providing multi-company, multi-book functionality that lets us deal with complex assets.'

'We were also impressed by CODA's relationship with Cognos. The integration between Financials and the Cognos reporting and analysis products enables us to extract data from our systems, transform it into an analysis-friendly format and load it into a datamart. This means that we can generate real-time business metrics to report, forecast and analyse performance more accurately,' Jeff Vosler adds.

### SPEEDY MIGRATION

COTA signed the contract with CODA Financials, Inc. , in September 2001, with the implementation process beginning the month after. The company has installed Financials for its entire financial team from clerical staff to the Director, and also has Cognos Impromptu and Cognos Administrator users. Jeff Vosler continues: 'Although the project meant deploying the OCS system and transferring ten years of accumulated data into it, the migration went smoothly, and the process was completed within three months. We met all key project dates, thanks to the training and support given us by CODA, were able to issue financial statements from the new finance system in January 2002, and went fully live with Financials in February.'

### BENEFITING FROM CODA

'We began to experience the benefits of the Financials solution as soon as we went live,' says Jeff Vosler. 'Firstly, working in a Windows environment rather than our previous VAX system gives us increased user-friendliness, support and reliability. It improves integration with third party applications, enabling us to upload budgets from Excel or Access with ease. Moving to OCS and SQL has also cut our maintenance and support costs considerably, while giving us complete confidence that the solution is fully expandable, scalable and futureproof.'

'Financials also gives us quicker access to our financial data; the system's unified design means that our data is held in real time, so we are always looking at the most up-to-date, consistent information. CODA's flexible chart of accounts also enables us to contemplate a fourth or fifth element to the account string, and accomplish complicated fringe benefit allocation using the standard tools.'

This makes reporting and forecasting quicker and easier, giving us full visibility and control of our budgets for efficient asset and project management and ensuring we are flexible enough to deal with potential revenue fluctuations.'

### FUTURE PLANS AT COTA

Jeff Vosler again: 'We have been delighted with our relationship with CODA Financials, Inc. and with the benefits we have experienced. Looking to the future, we are already planning how we can expand our use of CODA solutions and are examining CODA solutions in the project management and purchasing areas.'

'We are also preparing to implement the latest version of Assets once it is released, and are confident that it will help us to improve the service we offer to the Central Ohio public in the same way as our Financials accounting solution has already done,' Jeff Vosler concludes.

### ABOUT CODA

**CODA is the choice for finance professionals who need business software and services they can count on.**



We provide award-winning solutions that help organizations to streamline and automate their finance processes (from accounting and procurement to reporting and analysis) and to achieve better compliance and corporate governance. CODA applications work seamlessly with each other or independently and they integrate with other leading operational systems to maximize the return on your broader IT investment too. And our products are all underpinned by expert consultancy, training and support services, delivered by teams of experienced accountants, business analysts and technology specialists.

Founded in the UK in 1979, the CODA Group now employs around 600 and has offices around the world to deliver easy, local access to sales, service and support. Around 2600 medium and large organizations, across all sectors, use CODA solutions to control costs, drive performance and ensure compliance, while remaining agile and responsive.

CODA is part of Unit 4 Agresso NV. Headquartered in the Netherlands, the group provides business software solutions to its customers internationally.