ELERTS
COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INTELLIGENCE

TRANSIT SAFETY INTELLIGENCE · SUMMER 2026

When the Whistle Blows, *Is Your System Ready?*

The FIFA World Cup puts a spotlight on an industry-wide gap in how transit agencies receive — and act on — reported concerns from riders.

This summer, **78,000 fans per match** will converge on MetLife Stadium for eight FIFA World Cup games, arriving almost exclusively by transit. They will speak dozens of languages. They will be entirely unfamiliar with local station names, route numbers, and system geography. And if something goes wrong on board, some transit agencies' primary channel for receiving rider-reported concerns — a Text-a-Tip number — will be asked to do something it was never designed to do.

Text-a-Tip lines are a genuine and well-intentioned safety tool. Most were established in the early 2000s — over twenty years ago — funded by Homeland Security grants, and built for a specific purpose: allowing a regular commuter to silently flag a suspicious package or unattended bag to a police dispatcher. While more modern solutions are widely available today, Text-a-Tip works reasonably well for that original use

case. The challenge is that transit systems increasingly face a very different one.

78K	40K	30+
Fans per match at MetLife Stadium	Boarding transit on each match day	Languages spoken by World Cup fans

> ***Major events, tourist corridors, airport connectors, university campuses — every transit system regularly carries riders who are unfamiliar, stressed, and in an environment where knowing a Text-a-Tip number is not a reasonable expectation.***

Where Text-Based Reporting Reaches Its Limits

Text-a-Tip systems share a common design assumption: the reporter is a regular rider who knows the system, knows what to look for, and is calm enough to compose a useful message. When those assumptions hold, the tools perform as intended. When they don't — during major events, service disruptions, or incidents involving unfamiliar riders — several structural gaps become operationally significant.

CHALLENGE	THE REALITY ON THE GROUND
No Reporter Guidance	CRITICAL GAP — A blank SMS field gives the reporter nothing: no instructions, no prompts, no indication of what information is needed. Can I send a photo or video? Who knows. Unless a rider happens to be standing in front of a posted sign in their language, they are entirely on their own. Most will not know what to say or how to say it usefully.

Location Unknown	SIGNIFICANT GAP — There is no automatic geolocation. A rider who does not know the station name, route number, or vehicle identifier — typical of any visitor or tourist — cannot provide a usable location. Dispatchers receive "I'm on a train" or "I'm on a bus" with no anchor.
No AVL Integration	SIGNIFICANT GAP — Transit agencies operate real-time Automatic Vehicle Location systems, but text tip pipelines are separate and unconnected. An inbound report cannot be automatically correlated to a specific vehicle's known position.
No Incident Clustering	OPERATIONAL BURDEN — In any crowd incident, many people report the same event simultaneously. Each text arrives as an independent thread. Dispatchers must manually recognize that dozens of separate messages describe the same situation — a time-consuming task at exactly the moment speed matters most.
Language Barriers	SIGNIFICANT GAP — Text tip systems have no built-in translation capability. A report submitted in Portuguese, Arabic, or French has no documented path through a dispatcher who may speak only English. Valuable information is simply lost.

CONSIDER THIS SCENARIO

A crowded transit vehicle experiences a serious problem during a major event. **Dozens of riders want to report it simultaneously.** Some speak English. Many do not. None know the route number or vehicle identifier. They open their phones — but to do what, exactly? Call a number they've never heard of? Text a Text-a-Tip number printed on a sign they haven't seen? Dispatchers, meanwhile, receive an unlinked flood of messages, many in

languages they cannot read, with no automatic location, no incident grouping, and no picture of what is actually happening or where. **The system that should be their early warning is effectively starting from zero.**

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What About Asking Riders to Call?

The instinctive response from many transit operators is that riders can always call a customer service line or emergency number. That is true — and those channels remain essential for genuine emergencies. But for the broad category of concerns that fall short of a 911-level emergency, phone calls carry real friction that Text-a-Tip was designed to reduce, in a limited way.

Think about it from the rider's perspective. *You are on a crowded vehicle. Something is wrong — not a life-threatening emergency, but real. To call, you need to know the right number, speak loudly enough to be heard over the noise of a moving train or bus, describe your location in a system you've never used, and wait on hold. Making a phone call is not discreet. On a crowded vehicle, announcing that you are reporting a problem to authorities could make you the next target of the very person you are trying to report. For riders who don't speak English, the barriers are even higher: there is no guarantee the person who answers will speak their language, and no way to know before dialing. Silent, guided digital reporting is not a convenience — in many situations, it is a safety necessity.*

The question is not whether phone lines should exist. They should. The question is whether Text-a-Tip — designed over twenty years ago — is as capable as it needs to be for the environments transit systems now

routinely operate in.

The Answer Is Already in Every Rider's Pocket

Here is the encouraging part: every gap described above is solvable with technology that is mature, widely deployed in other industries, and — critically — runs on the smartphone that virtually every rider already carries. The device is there. The question is what it is being asked to do.

A purpose-built mobile reporting application — or reporting capability integrated directly into an agency's existing fare ticketing or trip-planning app — transforms the rider's phone from a passive communication device into an active, intelligent safety tool. The limitations of Text-a-Tip disappear entirely:

What Modern Mobile Reporting Delivers

Each of these capabilities is available today, deployable as a standalone app or embedded within an agency's existing rider-facing application.

GUIDED, PROMPTED REPORTING

The app walks the reporter through a structured form — what type of incident, where, what happened. No knowledge of the system required. The interface does the work.

MULTILINGUAL INTERFACE

The app presents in the rider's language — instructions, prompts, categories, and confirmation messages. A fan from Brazil, Morocco, or France can file a complete, useful report without knowing a word of English.

AUTOMATIC GEOLOCATION

The reporter's GPS coordinates are captured at submission. No station names, no car number

AVL VEHICLE IDENTIFICATION

GPS coordinates correlate with the agency's AVL feed, automatically identifying

decals, no local geography knowledge required. The system knows where the reporter is.

which specific vehicle the report originates from — pinpoint situational awareness for dispatchers.

PHOTO & VIDEO SUBMISSION

Reporters submit visual evidence with a tap. Dispatchers and responding personnel receive ground-truth context — what is actually happening, not just a description of it.

INCIDENT CLUSTERING & DE-DUPLICATION

Multiple reports about the same event are automatically recognized and grouped into a single incident record. Dispatchers see scope, not noise — one clear picture instead of dozens of disconnected threads.

REPORT TYPE & INTELLIGENT ROUTING

Reporters choose a category — security, medical, maintenance, service issue. Each type routes automatically to the right team. Police get security concerns. Operations gets maintenance. Customer service gets service issues. No dispatcher triage required.

None of this requires a rider to download a separate application if the agency prefers otherwise. Reporting capability can be built directly into the fare purchasing or trip-planning app riders are already using — surfaced at the moment it is needed, with no additional friction.

Not every agency has even reached the Text-a-Tip stage. Among those that have, approaches vary widely — some use a dedicated short

number that riders must already know, others rely on a ten-digit phone number for their texting service, adding one more thing an unfamiliar rider has no reason to know. And a review of rider-facing safety resources across some of the 25 busiest transit systems in America finds that several do not prominently promote any text-based reporting channel for safety or security concerns at all.

The only thing less effective than relying on Text-a-Tip is offering nothing but a phone number. Yet that is precisely where some of the nation's busiest transit agencies stand today. A phone call is not quick. It is not discreet. It is not relevant in 2026 as a means of leveraging the eyes and ears of thousands of riders to give authorities early warning about a live situation that is escalating in real time. The riders are there. The smartphones are there. The only missing piece is a system worthy of both.

ELERTS builds purpose-built community and transit incident reporting for agencies ready to move beyond the limitations of Text-a-Tip — geolocation-aware, multilingual, AVL-integrated, and deployable as a standalone app or embedded in an agency's existing rider application. We would welcome the conversation.

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SEE HOW IT WORKS