ITS Solution for Crowd-Management at Hard Rock Stadium, Miami

Bethany Bazemore, Lotte Notelaers, Kaya DeMarco, and Joshua Frye

University of Virginia

DOT Transportation Technology Tournament 2025

Problem Statement

The chaos that unfolded during the 2024 Copa América final at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami highlighted serious vulnerabilities in managing large-scale events. Despite the deployment of over 550 law enforcement officers, the venue was overwhelmed by tens of thousands of fans—including many without tickets—who breached security gates, bypassed ticket scanning, and flooded the stadium. This led to a delayed kickoff and raised significant safety concerns.

With the United States set to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup—and Hard Rock Stadium in Miami designated as one of the official host venues—it is essential to take proactive steps to avoid similar incidents. A more coordinated and data-informed approach to managing events of this scale is needed to ensure safety and operational efficiency.

This report analyzes the challenges exposed by the Copa América incident and translates them into actionable recommendations, presented in the form of a Concept of Operations (ConOps) document.

The disruption was mainly driven by the convergence of large crowds, limited access control, and insufficient real-time information sharing. Therefore, this effort focuses on how transportation systems—particularly ITS technologies—can be leveraged to support crowd control, enhance public safety, and improve the overall event experience.

Proposed Solution

The core of our solution focuses on managing both the inflow of crowds to the stadium area and the distribution of people within the surrounding environment. The envisioned operational concept combines physical planning measures with ITS to create a safer, more efficient, and more enjoyable experience for all attendees—including non-ticketed fans, who played a significant role in the challenges observed during the 2024 Copa América final.

Figure 1

Figure 1 provides an overview of the envisioned situation around the stadium. The area surrounding the stadium will be **closed off to through-traffic.** This minimizes traffic congestion around the stadium ensuring **optimal accessibility for emergency services and shuttle buses.** On-site parking will be **highly limited**, reserved primarily for **ADA-accessible vehicles and premium ticket holders**. The unused parking frees up space for emergency stations near the stadium and A **dedicated drop-off lane for Transportation Network Companies (TNCs)** to streamline arrivals.

Access (with car and TNC) to stadium parking will be restricted to a **toll road exit**, with **dynamic pricing** that increases as game time approaches. This pricing strategy is designed to **discourage last-minute driving** and encourage the use of alternative transportation options.

To support this shift, **satellite parking lots** (a similar concept used for the F1 grand prix in Miami) will be established in strategic locations, each connected to the stadium via **shuttle services**. These lots will be situated near **mixed-use districts** featuring sports bars and entertainment venues, offering fans a place to gather, socialize, and enjoy the pre-game atmosphere. This not only enhances the fan experience but also helps **distribute crowds more evenly** across the neighboring areas.

An additional innovation is the creation of a **"Fan Village"** in an unused parking lot near the stadium. This space will cater to **unticketed fans**, providing a safe, interactive environment where they can engage with the event.

ITS technologies are essential to integrating and coordinating the various elements of the proposed operational concept. The following sections outline how ITS supports two key access modes: **shuttle bus operations** and **private vehicle/TNC access.**[1]

A. ITS for Shuttle Bus Operations

Shuttle services are the cornerstone of the proposed transportation strategy, designed to reduce private vehicle traffic near the stadium and manage the safe, efficient movement of large crowds. The ITS technologies discussed below will be used to optimize shuttle operations in real time, ensuring a smooth and responsive experience for both fans and operators.

1. Dynamic Drop-Off Point Monitoring

To enhance crowd management and reduce congestion during major events, a dynamic shuttle drop-off system will be implemented. This system uses real-time crowd data to guide shuttle operations, ensuring that passengers are dropped off at the most appropriate locations based on current conditions.

1.1 Operational Concept

Shuttle buses will operate on a continuous loop around the stadium and fan village (e.g. as in figure 1). Rather than being assigned to fixed stops, buses will receive **dynamic drop-off instructions** based on real-time crowd density data collected through Bluetooth sensing technologies. Bluetooth sensors detect pedestrian volumes at each entrance, and routing platforms automatically adjust the drop-off locations to balance crowd inflow.

The stadium and fan village will be divided into **zones**, each with associated shuttle stops. Depending on the event's scale and security needs, different zoning strategies can be applied:

- **Flexible Zoning (Non-Segregated)**:
  In this design, shuttle stops are not tied to specific zones within the stadium. Any stop can serve fans from any zone. While this offers maximum flexibility, it can lead to inefficiencies—such as fans

[1] Be aware that this report focuses on ITS related to the shuttle bus operations. To give a comprehensive overview, the ITS for private vehicle/TNC access are also included although not discussed in-depth.

disembarking at the east entrance while their seats are on the west side—resulting in unnecessary crowd movement and congestion around or within the stadium.

- **Guided Zoning (Soft Segregation)**:
  A more structured approach involves assigning multiple shuttle stops, each strategically placed to serve a subset of adjacent zones. This improves alignment between drop-off points and seating areas, reducing cross-stadium movement while maintaining some flexibility.
- **Strict Zoning (Physically Segregated)**:
  For high-stakes matches or where crowd separation is critical, zones can be physically segregated, with no inter-zone movement allowed. For example, the stadium could be divided into two primary zones, each designated for one team's supporters, along with areas for neutral fans. Each zone has its own dedicated shuttle stops (and routes) and entrances, ensuring complete separation and enhancing safety.

This system ensures that passengers are directed to less crowded entrances, helping to balance foot traffic, while also minimizing walking distances and ensuring safety.

1.2 Key ITS Technologies

- Bluetooth and Wi-Fi-based crowd density sensors.[2]
- Real-time shuttle routing platforms (e.g., BusGenius[3], TransLoc[4]) (using the same dashboard or communication app for the anti-bunching ITS component discussed in the next section).
- Zoning-based drop-off logic.
- Integration with mobile apps and digital signage.

1.3 Case Study: Vappu Festival, Helsinki (2022)[5]

The City of Helsinki implemented Bluetooth sensors during its largest annual event, Vappu, which attracts over 100,000 attendees. These sensors:

- Identified pedestrian hotspots
- Tracked crowd drift between subway stations and public squares

[2] Bluetooth Crowd Sensing and Bluetooth Censors

[3] BusGenius

[4] TransLoc

[5] Case Study: Vappu Festival

- Integrated with real-time public transit dispatching to divert trains and buses accordingly

The system provided live dashboards for event coordinators and post-event analytics that informed improved street layouts and crowd funneling strategies. A similar approach at Hard Rock Stadium could enable predictive crowd heatmaps throughout the event cycle—from tailgating through egress.

1.4 Implementation Considerations

- Compatible with existing shuttle tablets and routing dashboards.
- Uses off-the-shelf Bluetooth beacon detectors (e.g., RetailNext[6], VenuIQ[7]).
- Can be layered into existing fan-facing apps.
- Includes fallback routing in case of signal loss or network issues.

1.5 Expected Outcomes

- Reduced congestion at stadium gates and fan village entrances.
- Improved shuttle efficiency and fuel use.
- Enhanced safety through crowd balancing and density alerts.

2. Shuttle Anti-Bunching Strategy

To ensure consistent and reliable shuttle service, anti-bunching technology will be deployed. This system maintains even spacing between vehicles, minimizing wait times at satellite lots and preventing clusters of buses from arriving simultaneously, and causing delays or uneven passenger loads.

2.1 Operational Concept

Anti-bunching replaces traditional fixed schedules with a dynamic system that adjusts in real time. Each shuttle is equipped with a tablet interface that provides visual cues:

- **Green**: On time
- **Yellow**: Slow down
- **Red**: Hold position

These cues are based on the shuttle's position relative to others on the route and current traffic conditions.

2.2 Key ITS Technologies

- Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD)

[6] RetailNext
[7] VenuIQ

- Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)
- Portable tablet-based driver interfaces
- General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) integration
- Real-time traffic and passenger load monitoring

2.3 Implementation Considerations

Anti-bunching systems rely on **Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD)** and **Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL)** technologies to monitor shuttle positions and maintain even spacing. These systems can be implemented in two primary forms:

- **Hardwired systems**, ideal for fixed-route fleets, use integrated devices (e.g., Pep wave routers) installed directly into vehicles.
- **Portable tablet-based systems**, better suited for chartered or mixed fleets, offer flexibility and can be easily transferred between vehicles.

For the Hard Rock Stadium context, a **portable implementation** is recommended. This allows the technology to be deployed across multiple shuttle providers and reused for future events. However, portable systems rely on cellular networks, which may experience slowdowns during high-traffic periods. Mitigation strategies, such as network prioritization, local signal boosters, or vehicle hotspots, should be considered.

Potential technology providers include:

- **TransLoc**[8]
- **BusGenius**[9]

Both systems are well-suited for large-scale events and can be integrated with user-facing apps.

2.4 Case Study: UVA Transit Service

A real-world example of this technology in action is the **University of Virginia's (UVA) Transit Service**, which uses TransLoc's anti-bunching system across its bus and van fleets. Drivers receive real-time visual cues—green for "on time," yellow for "slow down," and red for "hold"—based on their position relative to other vehicles. This system has proven effective in maintaining consistent service and reducing wait times, particularly for shuttle-style operations serving satellite lots.

[8] TransLoc
[9] BusGenius

2.6 Expected Outcomes

- Consistent shuttle intervals and reduced passenger wait times.
- Improved load balancing and fuel efficiency.
- Enhanced driver coordination and service reliability.
- Reusable system for future events at Hard Rock Stadium.

3. Additional components

On-Site Supervision and Boarding Control

At each shuttle stop, **trained supervisors** will manage boarding processes using real-time data and communication tools. Their role is to ensure orderly loading, prevent overcrowding, and coordinate with shuttle drivers and control centers to respond to changing conditions on the ground.

Pre-Boarding Ticket Scanning

To enhance security and streamline stadium entry, **ticket scanning will occur at satellite parking lots** before fans board the shuttle buses. This ensures that only ticketed individuals are transported to the stadium, reducing congestion at stadium gates and minimizing the risk of unauthorized access.

Real-Time Passenger Information Systems

Fans will have access to **real-time shuttle information** through mobile apps such as *Passio* and *TransLoc*. These platforms will provide:

- Live shuttle tracking.
- Estimated arrival times.
- Route updates.
- Available seating information.

This transparency empowers fans to plan their journeys more effectively and reduces uncertainty during peak travel times.

A. ITS for Private Vehicle and TNC Access

While shuttle services will serve as the primary mode of transport for most attendees, a significant portion of fans will still arrive via private vehicles and ride-hailing services. To manage this inflow effectively and reduce congestion near the stadium, ITS technologies will be used to regulate access, guide traffic, and enhance the overall travel experience.

1. Toll Road Access with Dynamic Pricing

Access to the limited on-site parking at the stadium will be restricted to a **dedicated toll road exit**, managed through ITS-enabled tolling infrastructure. This system will implement **dynamic pricing** (with exceptions for ADA-vehicles), where toll rates increase as game time approaches. The goal is to:

- **Encourage early arrivals**, reducing peak-time congestion.
- **Deter last-minute driving**, shifting demand to shuttle services or TNCs.
- **Prioritize high-need users**, such as ADA-accessible vehicles and premium ticket holders.

Dynamic pricing will be communicated in real time through navigation apps and digital signage, allowing drivers to make informed decisions before committing to the toll route.

2. TNC Integration and Geofenced Drop-Off Zones

To streamline ride-hailing operations, **designated TNC drop-off and pick-up zones** will be established near the stadium and fan village. These zones will be **geofenced** and integrated with platforms like Uber and Lyft to:

- Direct drivers to approved access points.
- Prevent unauthorized drop-offs in restricted areas.
- Reduce traffic circulation around the venue.

Partnerships with TNC providers can also be leveraged to **inform fans** about available shuttle services at satellite parking lots which they can offer as cheaper alternative to a drop-off at the stadium. As such these platforms can serve as communication channels to promote the shuttle services by informing about the restricted access and the access toll, and offering an alternative drop-off at the satellite parking lots.

3. Dynamic Message Signs and Navigation App Integration

ITS will also support **real-time traffic management** through:

- **Dynamic Message Signs (DMS)** on major approach routes, displaying parking availability, shuttle options, and access restrictions.
- **Integration with navigation apps** (e.g., Google Maps, Waze) to reroute drivers based on live traffic and crowd data.

Solution Architecture

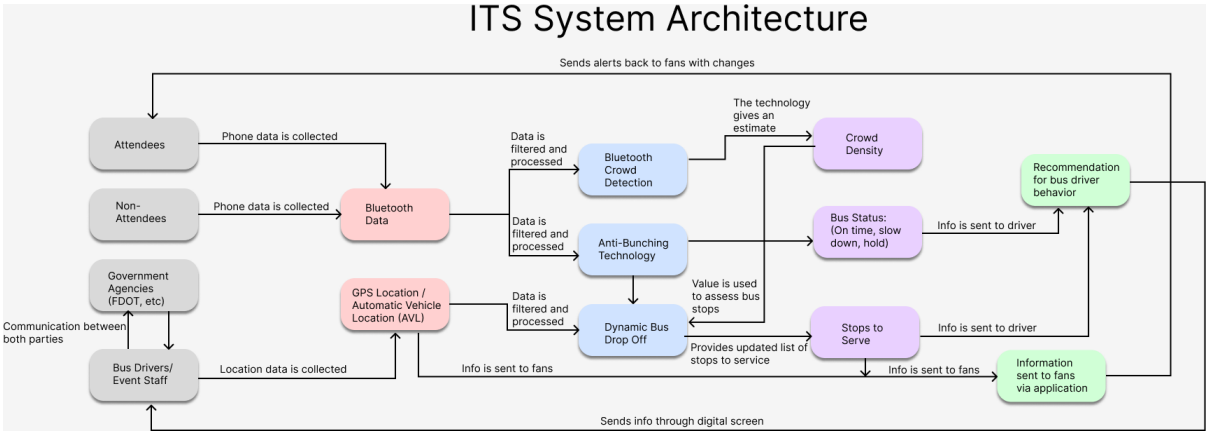

Figure 2

Figure 2 identifies the interconnected system which combines all three ITS solutions (blue). The system works from data (pink) to ITS (blue) to operation recommendation (purple) to output (green) and ultimately loops back around to the user experience for stakeholders (gray).

Anticipated Impacts

Overall Implementation Benefits

- Centralizes data sharing between DOTs, event staff, and shuttle services via shared routing and crowd information platforms.
- Enables rapid response to conditions, such as re-routing shuttles or closing off full parking lots via integrated mobile apps and sensors.
- Scalable and reusable system architecture, with portable hardware and flexible software that can be applied to other major events.

Mobility & Traffic Efficiency

- Reduces vehicle congestion immediately around the stadium by closing streets around the stadium and diverting a significant portion of traffic to satellite lots with shuttle access.
- Improves shuttle flow through anti-bunching technology, reducing passenger wait times and enhancing overall service reliability.
- Shortens entry time for ticketed attendees by dynamically routing shuttle drop-offs based on real-time crowd density at the entrances.

Safety & Security

- Provides ample space for access to emergency service stations.
- Limits traffic in the immediate vicinity of the stadium, thus creating smoother entry processes for fans.
- Prevents perimeter breaches and overcrowding at gates by controlling access through secure shuttle boarding with advanced ticket scanning at satellite lots.
- Allows early detection of crowd buildup via Bluetooth and pedestrian signal data, enabling preemptive action by law enforcement or staff.
- Separates ticketed and unticketed fans, reducing friction and potential flashpoints near entry gates.

Economic & Community Benefit

- Reduces the burden on public infrastructure, especially police and emergency responders, by spreading arrival patterns and reducing crisis potential.
- Supports local businesses around satellite lots (restaurants, bars, gas stations), driving economic activity beyond the stadium.

- Enhances long-term ITS investments, creating a blueprint for future event planning across Miami-Dade and Broward counties.
- Improves visitor experience by making event access smoother, more predictable, and less stressful — boosting the city's reputation for hosting major events.

Quality of Life & Equity

- Expands access to fan experiences through Fan Villages and watch zones for unticketed guests, enhancing equity and public engagement.
- Encourages early arrivals and alternative modes (e.g., public transit, biking to nearby lots), reducing carbon impact and traffic frustration.

User Frustrations (Shuttle Concerns, Delays, Unfamiliarity, Reliability)

- Fans may perceive satellite lot system as inconvenient, especially if used to parking on-site or tailgating in lots adjacent to stadium.
- Transfer time and general shuttling introduces uncertainty for users who value direct access to stadium but are unable to for this event.
- Reliance on external charter companies adds logistical risk. If delays/mishaps are present, user experience can sour.
- Circling/confusion in locating satellite lots with non-local users.

Conclusion

While this is a solution proposal for Hard Rock Stadium, it can also be used as a model for other stadiums with high volume events. Each component of this design, from the shuttle bus ITS solutions to private vehicle solutions and fan villages, can be modified to accommodate event needs such as rivalries or pre/post traditions. The design accommodates pre- and post-game traditions to facilitate a safe transit experience.