

# Please Hold... Or Maybe Not

AI Voice & PSTA's Journey



# Your Co-Hosts



**Pat Gregory**

Senior Product Manager, AI Voice



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Director of Mobility Services, PSTA

# What you'll leave with

## How Spare sees call centres changing

Where AI voice fits in the future of paratransit operation

## PSTA's journey with AI Voice, backed by numbers

8 months of real data from a live production system

## A recorded call

What it actually sounds like on the line

## What's still hard – and how we're working on it

The honest list, not the polished one

# A few questions for the room...

**1**

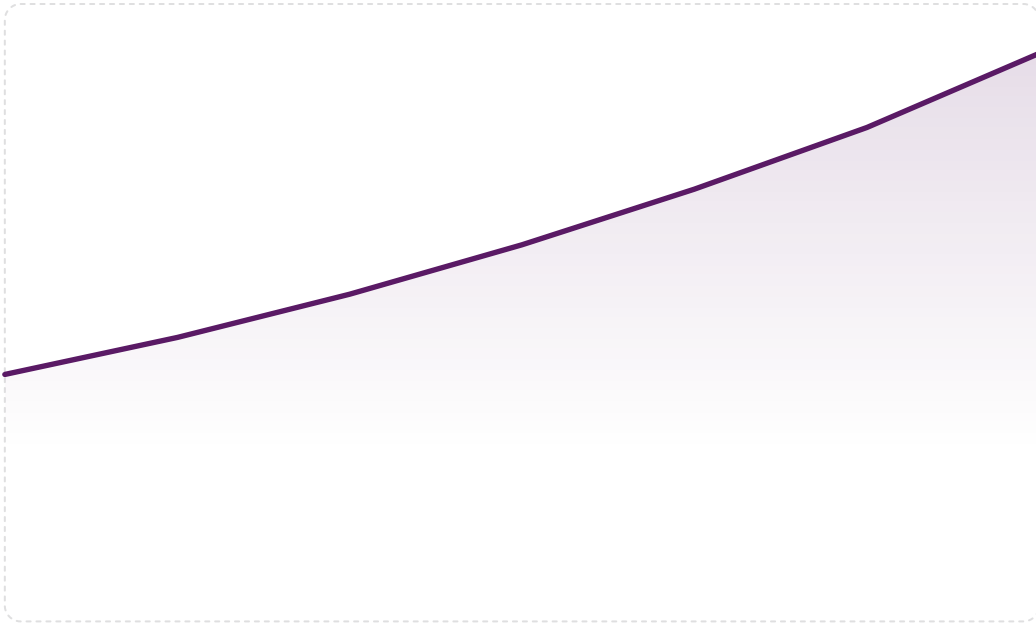
Who here has AI Voice deployed in their call centre?

**2**

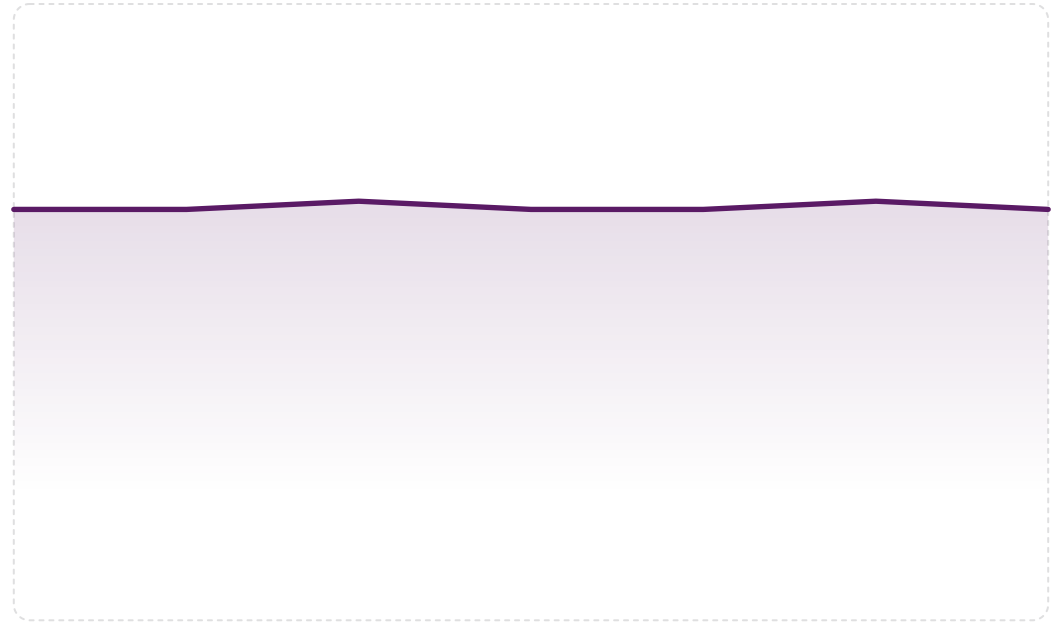
Who here has spoken to a real AI Voice product — as a caller?

# The structural problem in paratransit call centres

Paratransit demand ↑



Call centre headcount →



**Increasingly overloaded agents - particularly at peak**

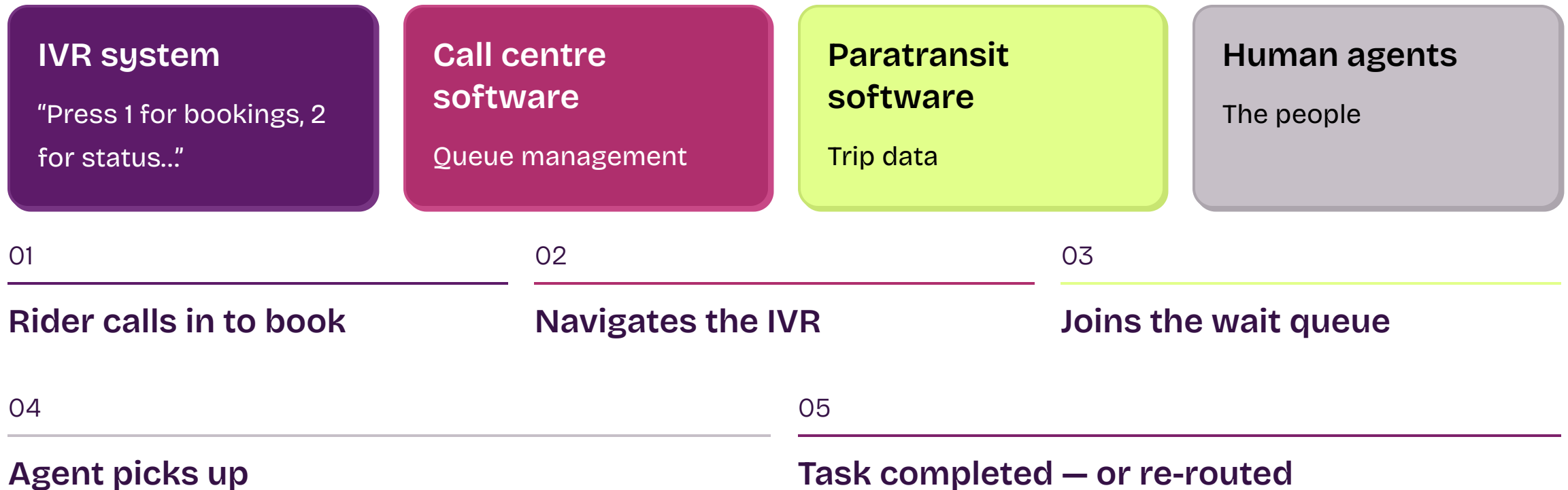
More calls, same headcount. Particularly at peak

**Longer hold times, more abandoned calls**

Leading to a degrading rider experience

# How call centres work today

## The stack



# How Spare sees call centres changing

## The stack

### One, unified platform

Call centre management +  
dispatch + paratransit software

### Virtual Agents

Handle routine problems with full  
context over your operation

### Human agents

Handle complex escalations

01

---

**Rider calls in to book**

03

---

**Resolved by AI, customized to your needs**

With your knowledge & context

02

---

**AI agent picks up instantly, no IVR**

04

---

**Escalated to a human – with full context**

# Works across every channel, 24/7

The same AI agent. The same Spare data. Wherever the rider reaches out.



## AI Voice

Answers calls instantly.



## AI Chat

AI-powered responses to notifications.



## Email & more

Coming soon.

# How AI Voice fits in

AI Voice can fit wherever your call centre has gaps as a **fully scalable, 24/7 resource**



## After hours

Facilitating cancelations



## Overflow

Calls that would wait  
get handled instantly.



## Weekends & holidays

Full service on days  
your call centre is  
closed or running lean.



## Front-door for high-volume lines

Repetitive intents  
handled at scale.

# Integrated across the Spare ecosystem



# This is live and happening now.

**8 months of real data**

From September, 2025 to today.

**One agency's honest journey**

What worked, what didn't, and what surprised us.

# Why AI Voice?



# 9 months in, the impact

**~40%**

**AI Voice handled calls**

Of all calls handled by AI Voice – zero hold time

**700**

**Actions per day handled**

Bookings, ETAs, cancels

# Getting ready to go live

Before a single rider call, five things had to be agreed.

- 01 **Authentication methods**  
How does the AI verify who's calling?
- 02 **Call tree**  
Where does AI Voice sit in the existing call routing?
- 03 **Capabilities**  
What tasks should AI handle?
- 04 **Character**  
How fast should the agent speak? What personality should it use?
- 05 **Forwarding rules**  
How should AI forward calls to?

📄 Once agreed, a thorough testing period followed

# A phased launch, not a big bang



**Phase 1**  
**Access (Line #1 & 3)**  
**Launched Sept 15, 2025**

**Phase 2**  
**MOD (Line #2)**  
**Live Sept 23, 2025**

**Phase 3**  
**AI Chat**  
**Rolled out early 2026**

# How did we know the launch was a success?



## Listening to calls

**Every call** is recorded and reviewable directly in the Spare platform



## Direct rider feedback

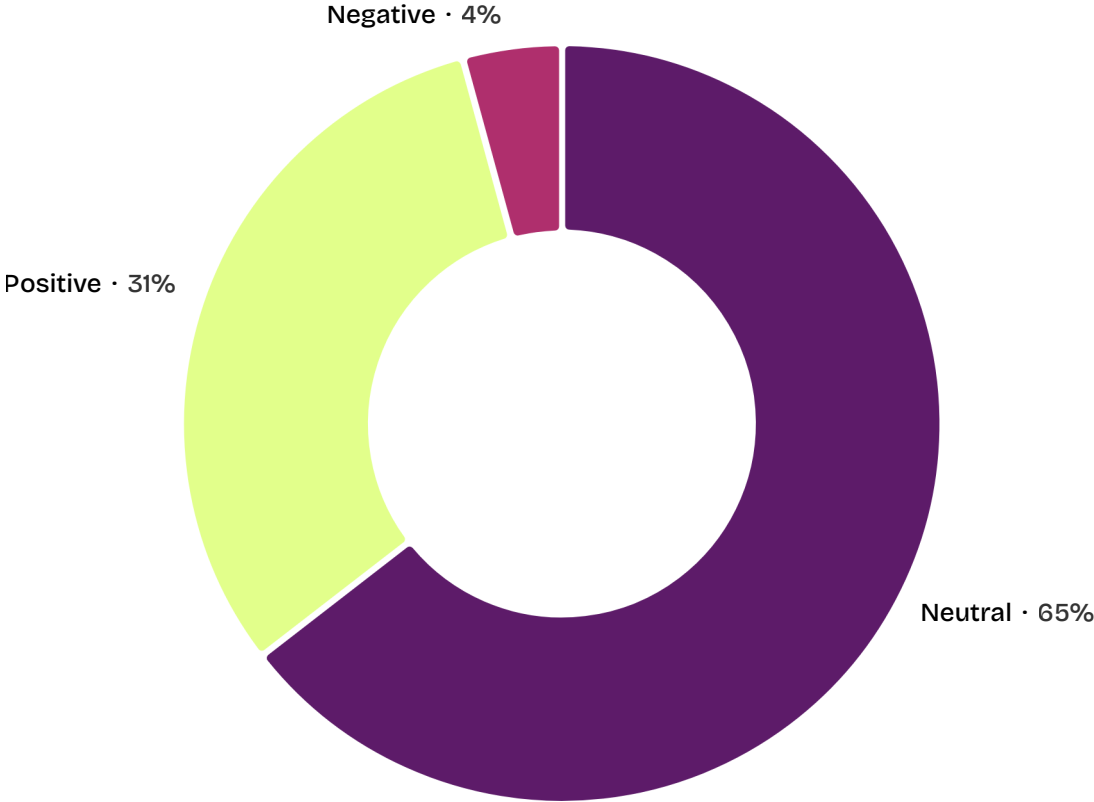
Direct conversations with engaged riders.



## Understanding the data

Handover rates, authentication rates, caller intent – all visible in Spare.

# 96% of calls end in neutral or positive sentiment



# Collin County Transit cut call centre demand by 58% with AI Voice

**Instant AI answering**  
Rider calls answered instantly by AI Voice

**Always-on support**  
24/7 phone support – even outside staffed hours

**Zero hold time, infinitely scalable**  
-7k riders per month served without hold time

**Smarter resolutions**  
Fewer transfers, faster resolutions for complex needs

**58%**

Avg. % of calls handled by AI

**33%**

Reduction in cost

**13K → 5K**

Lower number of monthly calls handled by staff

Source: Collin County Transit · AI Voice case study

**Demo: What it actually sounds like**



# Some things we're still working through



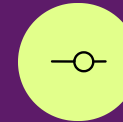
## Natural Cadence

Ensuring AI agents sound as natural as possible.



## Improved Styling

Adhering to local dialects, nicknames, and pronouciations



## Increased customization

Process customizations beyond our baseline

# Where we're taking AI Voice



## Expanding to Fixed Route

AI Voice is already integrated across Spare's paratransit, eligibility and CRM products.



## Increased agent customization

Increasing agency specific findr-tuned customisation – tone, edge cases, and intent logic.



## Agent triage

The AI doesn't just resolve – it triages - like an IVR.

# Questions



# PSTA was under pressure

Increasing board pressure

Riders waiting

Cost Efficiency

## Volumes, so far...

**275K+**

**Calls handled by AI Voice**

Since September 15, 2025

**140K+**

**Actions taken**

Bookings, ETAs, cancellations

**~36K**

**Calls per month**

At steady-state

**~700**

**Outcomes per day**

On average

# What the 5-month data actually says

August 2025 → January 2026 · All three lines

—  
**46% ↓**

Average hold times across all lines

—  
**~70% ↓**

Abandoned call rate across all lines

—  
**44%**

Of all callers got zero hold time

—  
**\$0.67 vs**  
**\$1.91**

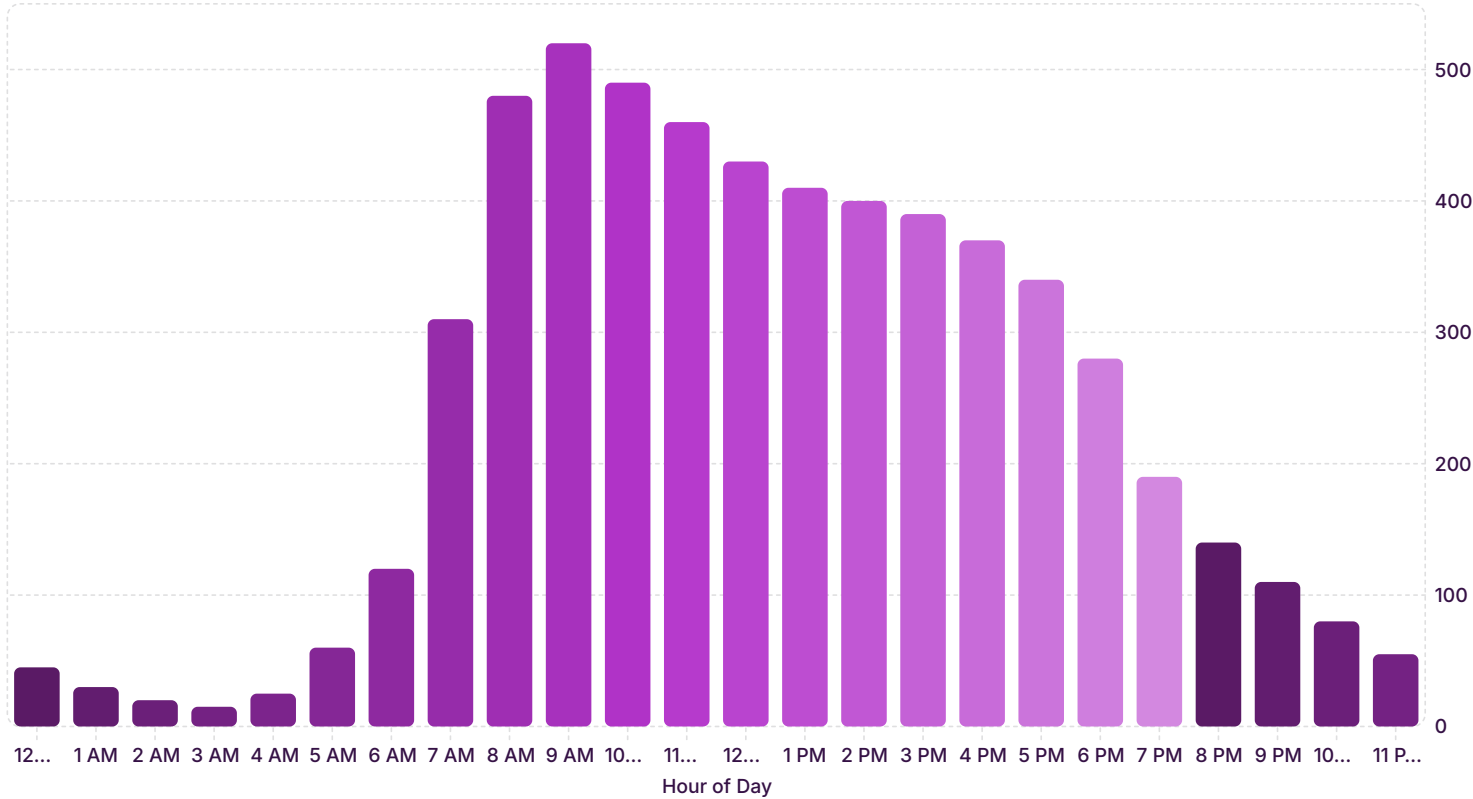
AI Voice vs agent cost per call

☐ Reservations line: abandoned call rate fell from 18.4% to 5.1% — a 73% reduction on the highest-volume complex-booking line.

☐ Speaker notes: These are all directionally consistent with the current numbers but pulled from the five-month report — the Jan 2026 snapshot. The story has only improved since. The cost number is particularly clean: AI Voice costs less than a third of a reservation agent per call, and it answers at 2 AM.

# Calls happen when the call centre is closed

Call Volume (Mar-Apr 2026)



✔ **~2,000 calls** taken between 7 PM and 7 AM over March-April – calls that previously had no answer.

📝 Speaker notes (PSTA): This is one of the cleanest wins for us. Our reservations team isn't staffed overnight. Before AI Voice, those 2,000 calls were either left on a voicemail nobody actioned in time, or simply abandoned. Now they get an answer. Some get a booking.

# What we did before the AI agent took its first real call

## On PSTA's side

- PSTA IT (Greg) configured RingCentral call tree to route to Spare
- Two-week internal test line live on option 9 of the call tree
- Rider ID + DOB authentication scheme agreed for callers with non-matched phone numbers
- Ross (senior PSTA rider) involved as a real-world tester

## On Spare's side

- Booking flow handled multi-service edge cases (the AIP-462 blocker)
- Recurring trip support shipped before Phase 2
- Forwarding number wired into the agent
- Analytics V2 dashboard template for AI Voice ready for PSTA before launch

📄 Speaker notes (PSTA): Lean on the left column. The data and integration work was Spare's problem. Getting riders, IT, and call centre leadership ready was ours.

# If you're thinking about this – start here

## 1 Phase your launch.

Don't ship every intent at once. PSTA launched Access first, recurring trips four days later, AI Chat months later. We could measure what was working before scaling it.

## 2 Make readiness a people exercise, not a data exercise.

The hardest pre-launch work was call tree configuration, internal testing with real staff, and getting a senior PSTA rider testing it before riders hit it.

## 3 Watch the trend, not the snapshot.

Forwarding rate dropped from 57% to 51% over eight months without dramatic changes. Compounding improvement matters more than launch-day metrics.

📄 Speaker notes (PSTA): This is my message to the room. The technology works. What separates a good rollout from a bad one is the pre-work and the patience.

# Four questions we asked before saying yes

1

**Will it actually book a trip?**

Not just route the call – complete it

2

**Will it handle the riders we serve?**

Older riders, riders with disabilities, riders using assistive tech

3

**Will it free up staff for the calls that need a human?**

Redirect, not replace

4

**Will it work inside the platform we already run on?**

No parallel system to maintain

# What changed for PSTA's call centre

## BEFORE AI VOICE (PRE-SEPTEMBER 15, 2025)

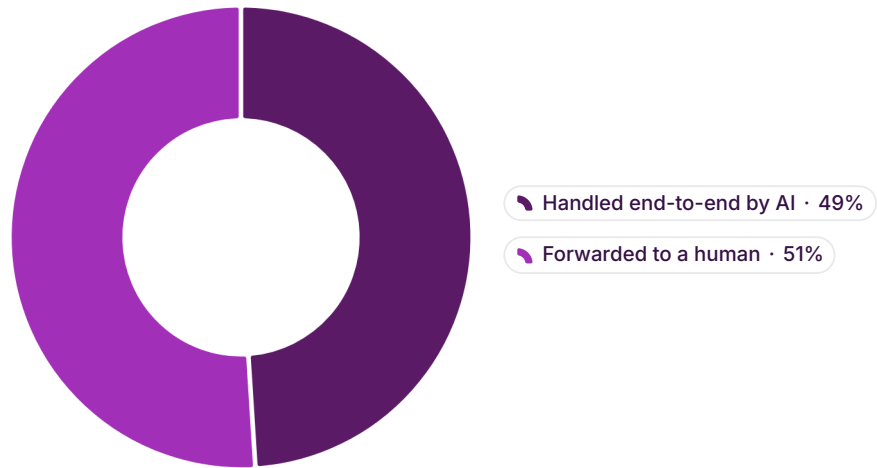
- Average hold time: ~1:35 min avg across all lines (MOD: 1:23 · Reservations: 1:56 · Ride Status: 1:28)
- Calls per day: ~1,279/day (38,362 total in Aug 2025)
- Abandoned call rate: ~10.7% overall (Reservations 18.4% · MOD 8.8% · Ride Status 12.4%)
- After-hours bookings possible: No

## AFTER AI VOICE (APRIL 2026)

- AI Voice handles ~36,000 calls/month with no hold time
- ~700 outcomes delivered per day
- 49% of calls fully handled by AI, no human required
- After-hours: ~2,000 calls answered between 7 PM and 7 AM (Mar–Apr alone)

- ❏ Speaker notes (PSTA): Walk through the left column with the real PSTA numbers we'll insert before the conference. The right column comes straight out of Spare's warehouse. The point isn't that AI Voice is faster than a human – it's that AI Voice answers calls that previously got no answer at all. The Reservations abandoned call rate is the most dramatic single number in this deck – 18.4% of callers were hanging up before the pilot. That's nearly 1 in 5. Point that out explicitly.

# About half of calls are fully handled by AI – and that share is climbing



Was 57% forwarded at launch → now 51% forwarded – 8 months of compounding improvement

## The honest number

Half of calls still need a human – and that's by design. The AI is great at booking, status, and cancel. It hands off when it should.

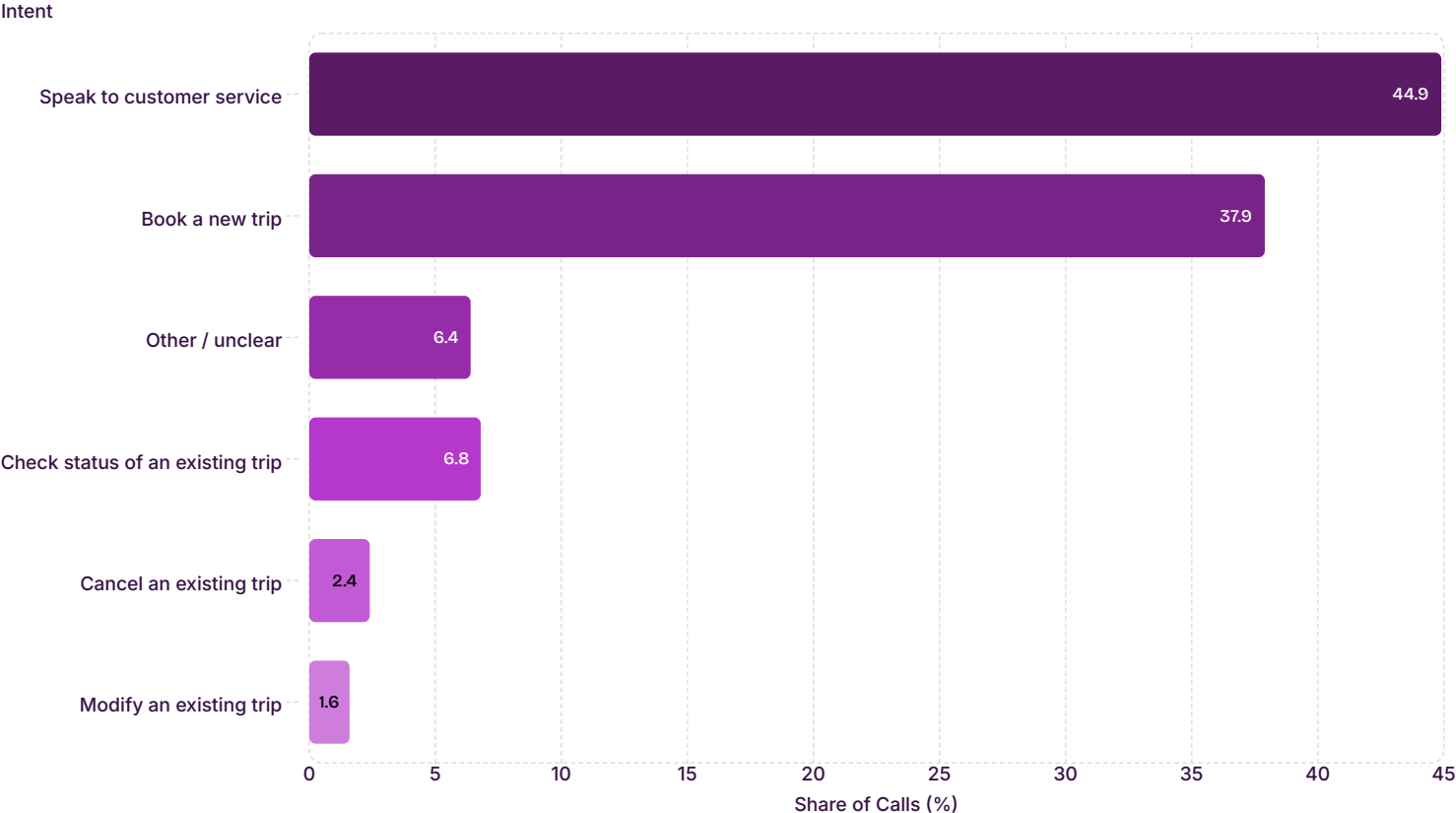
- ✔ When AI Voice launched in September, forwarding was 57%. As of April, it's 51% – six points of measurable improvement in eight months.

What matters is that the trend is going in the right direction without us doing anything dramatic.

- 📄 Speaker notes (PSTA): The honest number. Half of calls still need a human – and that's by design. The AI is great at booking, status, and cancel. It hands off when it should. What matters is that the trend is going in the right direction without us doing anything dramatic.

# What riders ask the AI agent

Jan 1 – May 12, 2026 · Top call intents by volume



Speaker notes (PSTA): Look at the top of the list. Nearly half of all callers start by asking for customer service. The AI's job in those cases isn't to fight them – it's to escalate cleanly. Most of those calls would never have been candidates for self-service. What matters is the 37.9% that the AI completes as bookings, plus the ETA checks and cancellations on top.

# Three things we did not see coming

**The hardest intent wasn't booking. It was recurring trips.**

We turned recurring bookings off two days after Phase 2 launched and worked through cancellations and list-recurring first.

**A model update made things worse before it made them better.**

Pronunciation of "PSTA" regressed when we shifted voice models — riders noticed before we did.

**The acronym "PSTA" itself was harder than expected.**

The agent kept reading it as a word, not letters. Small thing, large signal that local pronunciation matters.

- ❏ Speaker notes (PSTA): The recurring trips one is the most useful for other agencies. We thought booking was the hard intent. It wasn't — it was managing the long tail of recurring trip edits.

# Take this home

## Recap

- AI Voice has taken 275,000+ PSTA calls in 8 months
- ~49% of calls are fully handled by AI — and that share is climbing
- 95% of calls end in neutral or positive sentiment
- The keepers from PSTA's experience: phase the launch, treat readiness as a people problem, watch the trend

## Resources

- AI Voice product page (link)
- This deck (link)
- Pat: pat.gregory@spare.com
- [PSTA contact]

 Speaker notes (PSTA): Don't read the slide. Mention where the deck will be posted.

# Then: agreeing the rollout plan

Three decisions before go-live.

## Which lines

Not all lines at once. PSTA chose which call centre lines would route to AI Voice first – starting where the volume and use case fit was strongest.

## Which use cases

Each line had a defined scope. The AI handled what it was ready for – and handed off everything else. No overreach on day one.

## Rollout sequencing

A phased plan, not a big bang. Lines and intents were added progressively, with each phase validated before the next began.

✓ The result: a live system on September 15, 2025 – with riders on the line from day one.