

TRANSPORT



The Newsletter of the Illinois Rural Transit Assistance Program

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RTAC NOTES

Customer service is the catchword of the 1990s. Everywhere one looks nowadays, someone is talking about the exceptional customer service available through their business. The question is, how many businesses are actually delivering?

According to John Tschohl, founder of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, most people cannot identify five businesses where they receive exceptional customer service every time they deal with them. Part of the problem relates to the fact that organizations fail to properly educate and train their employees to deliver exceptional customer service. Tschohl goes on to outline how properly trained employees work to the advantage of an organization. Training improves customer retention, and, typically, 65 percent of an organization's business comes from loyal customers.

Employers themselves often fail to see the linkage between employee training and customer service. Even when the linkage is recognized, many employers are reluctant to do so, as they fear newly-trained employees will leave for another job. Indications are, however, a good training program actually decreases employee turnover and increases customer loyalty. In the business world, the general rule is it costs five times as much to attract a new customer as it does to keep an existing one. This, in turn, suggests a good training program may provide returns far in excess of its cost.

Not only does poor customer service hurt business, it also leads to employee turnover. One recent study

found that employee turnover is inversely proportional to employee perceptions concerning the quality of service provided by their employer. Poor service eventually leads to customers not patronizing a business, but to employees not wanting to work for the organization as well.

What is customer service and how do you know if your organization is delivering the right kind or the right level? Probably the most logical way is to ask your customers. The willingness to measure customer service performance can make a large contribution to an organization's success. And how that's done is important. Customer service must be measured from the customer's perspective, not from the organization's. A good example is where a large warehouse manager reported his facility cycled orders in only two days. Turned out, however, it actually took seven days from the time the order was received to when products typically arrived at the customer's door.

Tangible products neatly stacked in warehouses ready for shipment are, of course, not a primary concern of the transit business. But customer service is. It makes little difference whether one's principal business is making hammers or transporting people, satisfied customers are a high priority. Just as manufacturers have come to realize they cannot survive nowadays without putting customers first, transit people know on-time service, clean vehicles, and courteous drivers are essential if transit is to thrive in the next century.

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Results Of Our Recent Section 5311 Wage Survey

Starting Rate

	Driver	Scheduler-Dispatcher	Maintenance
Average	6.19	7.83	8.26
Low	5.25	5.50	7.00
High	7.37	10.00	9.80
	n=11	n=6	n=4

Average Rate

Average	7.54	8.49	9.93
Low	5.50	6.25	7.00
High	12.35	10.50	14.35
	n=13	n=9	n=5

Note: n=number of agencies reporting.

RTAC SPRING CONFERENCE

The Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) Spring Conference was held April 13 through 15 at the Drury Inn in Springfield. Approximately forty-five persons attended the gathering. Opening remarks were made by Joel McQueen, RTAC, and Tom Zucker, President, the Illinois Association for Community Transportation.

IDOT/IPCDD

Bob Selinger, IDOT Liaison to the Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities (IPCDD), presented a summary of a questionnaire distributed to forty agencies in Illinois requesting information on individuals who are interested in participating in local transit planning activities. Thus far, fourteen persons have been identified.

Selinger also mentioned the IDOT/IPCDD Transit Communication Workshop held in November, 1998, that attracted approximately 100 participants. The purpose of the workshop was to improve communication among the participants by focusing on barriers faced by those with disabilities who use public transit and the various problems transit agencies have in providing service to persons with disabilities.

The IPCDD is currently analyzing the workshop results for inclusion into the Illinois State Developmental Disabilities Plan. In addition, the IPCDD is reviewing proposals for developing public transportation systems in high need areas of Illinois. Under these proposals, the IPCDD will fund up to six projects of \$20,000 each.

IDOT Update

Neil Ferrari, Bureau Chief, discussed recent staff changes and the funding workshop held in

Springfield. The Department is accepting comments on the forthcoming five-year Section 5311 program. There are two pots of money: one for existing operations, and the other for new service.

The Department will hold workshops in May primarily for new applicants for the Section 5311 program. These workshops will help guide new applicants in completing service proposals. IDOT will announce the new Section 5311 grantees in early Fall.



Dave Spacek, Bureau Chief, Downstate Programs, discussed recent staff changes. Spacek said vehicle applications were due April 16. Current contracts were delivered, and some Fiscal Year 1998 awards have been delivered. From FY 1993 through FY 1998, 460 vehicles were delivered to 170 grantees.

On-site vehicle inspections are continuing, and the biggest deficiency found is not having a written maintenance plan. IDOT has published guidelines for preventive maintenance, and a booklet is available. The Department is considering two new vehicles types for the future; a super medium-duty based on a Navistar chassis and a square-back, raised-roof van.

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A pilot maintenance program is being developed for the central part of the state. Under this plan, Springfield Mass Transit District (SMTD) will receive an “extra” vehicle that can be loaned-out to agencies within a sixty mile radius of Springfield. Agencies within this region will be able to bring their vehicle needing repair (major) to SMTD and drive the loaner vehicle back to use as a replacement for the one taken out of service. SMTD will, then, make the necessary repairs and the loaner will be returned on completion of the work.

Barbara Crowe-Hickey said that drug and alcohol testing results were getting better. There were three positive tests (two pre-employment and one random) this fiscal year. There are five grantees who are required to develop disadvantaged business enterprise plans.

Louise Stigler-Baker discussed Section 5311 operating assistance grant applications. Cost allocation plans must be accompanied by a letter from a CPA. IDOT needs considerable detail and information concerning the cost allocation plan. There are minor changes in the application forms. Annual financial reports for Section 5311 grantees are due thirty days after the last payment is made.

RLS and Associates

Rich Garrity, RLS and Associates (RLS), discussed the forthcoming compliance review that his firm is conducting for IDOT. RLS will pay site visits to all Section 5311 grantees and their operators over the next several months. Garrity outlined the review process, explaining his firm will conduct two-day technical assistance visits to grantees and operators. The site visits will not begin immediately, as RLS is preparing a review methodology to ensure uniformity among the reviewing teams.

As each site visit progresses, reviewers will note compliance issues and make suggestions as to



how grantees and operators can correct deficiencies. Grantees and operators will have a chance to rebut those deficiencies found during the review. Garrity noted one of the more common problems found during such reviews is cost allocation.

Transit Districts in Illinois

A panel discussion entitled *Transit Districts in Illinois* was presented by Betty Green, Rides Mass Transit District (RMTD), Rosiclare, Robert Wilson, Attorney-at-Law, Harrisburg, and Dave Spacek, Bureau Chief, Downstate Programs, IDOT.

Green noted that RMTD, formed in 1990, was the first rural transit district in Illinois. It originally included five counties in the southeastern part of the state, but has now expanded into four additional counties. RMTD is a coordinated service provider that currently holds contracts with fifty-one agencies. RMTD grew out of an earlier aging program that held fund-raisers to maintain a transit program. The real essence of RMTD is to allow its small counties to leverage their limited resources.

RMTD operates as a business, providing demand-response and scheduled route service throughout its service area. The system recorded 214,000 trips in Fiscal Year 1998. Although each county schedules its own trips, all nine counties act in unison for most other business purposes. The system serves an estimated 10 to 15 percent of the population in the nine-county region and

is considered an integral part of the local infrastructure.

Robert Wilson discussed the evolution of RMTD and how service began with nutrition transportation in Golconda. Wilson noted the shift in retail and service patterns over the years caused residents to travel farther.

RMTD was formed by adapting the Illinois Local Mass Transit District Act to a rural area. Wilson said the RMTD incorporating document could have been simpler, but there was no precedent to serve as a guide when the system was formed.

Dave Spacek outlined the four types of mass transit districts. These are: single community districts that serve as the operator (e.g., Peoria and Rockford); single community districts that contract services (St. Clair County); multi-community districts that provide service (e.g., Champaign and RMTD); and multi-community districts that contract services (Kankakee).

Spacek went on to say mass transit districts were originally intended for urban areas so that one governing body could focus on regional public transportation. Moreover, the district concept allows for a formal relationship with the metropolitan planning organization; provides for single agency budgeting, operations, and service planning; eliminates overlapping transit services and management functions; and consolidates resources. Spacek observed that, in rural areas, recent interest in forming mass transit districts is driven mostly by the potential to obtain state operating assistance.

Improving Access and Mobility in Rural Illinois

A panel discussion entitled *Improving Access and Mobility in Rural Illinois* was presented by Susan Gatlin, Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), Springfield; Joel McQueen, RTAC; Shirley Nolen, DHS, Chicago; and Norm Walzer,

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA), Macomb.

The presentation evolved from a transportation study conducted for DHS by the IIRA that was completed in early 1999. The purpose of the study focused on public and specialized transportation in the Southern Seven counties of Illinois. The purpose of the study was twofold: to identify the lessons learned in the Southern Seven region particularly with regard to welfare-to-work transportation; and to use this information as a guide for other rural counties in Illinois in helping solve local transportation problems.

Walzer summarized the DHS study as follows: There are several barriers to coordinating public and specialized transportation in the Southern Seven counties. These are irregular travel schedules; lack of scheduled routes; limited access to a private vehicle; lack of communication among agencies; and legislative and regulatory restrictions.

DHS Local Office Administrators (LOAs) throughout the state were surveyed as part of the study. LOAs believe public and specialized transportation is inadequate, contending that more persons could be employed if transportation were improved.

Lessons learned from the Southern Seven region and from innovative practices elsewhere form a blueprint for the remaining rural counties in Illinois.

Shirley Nolen cautioned that DHS has a limited role in solving public and specialized transportation problems. However, Nolen said that DHS was willing to consider funding creative transportation projects and noted the importance of combining funding streams. Nolen also discussed how essential it is for clients to realize they are responsible for achieving self-sufficiency.

Susan Gatlin spoke about the reduction in case load since welfare reform was implemented in Illinois.

Joel McQueen summarized the period of 1994 through the present with respect to how public and specialized transportation has been treated. In 1995-96, changes in federal welfare legislation caused thousands of people to be moved off public assistance and into the workplace. Such massive change was not well thought out by policymakers, however, as communities were ill prepared to meet the transportation challenges. For example, estimates are 94 percent of those households receiving public assistance do not have access to a vehicle.

Roundtable Discussion

Approximately fifteen persons participated in a roundtable discussion on April 15 moderated by Barbara Crowe-Hickey. Among the items discussed were:

- Grant application training.
- Contacting IDOT staff to check on expense items prior to submitting a requisition.
- Holding a breakout session at conferences for new grantees.
- Federal legislation and regulations (e.g., civil rights).
- Allowable expense items.
- Arranging shorter duration sessions at conferences.
- Expense items eligible for state funds that may not be allowable under federal rules.
- Clearer definitions (e.g., service and coordination).
- Cost allocation plans (DeKalb is model).
- IDOT signing a contract versus concurrence.
- Rule changes after the fact.
- IDOT concurrence examples.
- Excess vehicle policy.
- Greater visibility of IDOT staff in the field.
- Training (management and support).
- Fares.
- ADA requirements for fixed-routes and paratransit.

Highlights of the Region VII FTA Meeting

by Lyle Nichols

On May 2-4, 1999, Rich Machala of Jo Daviess County Transit and I attended the FTA Region VII biennial meeting at the Westin Crown Center in Kansas City, Missouri. This meeting, held in partnership with the state transit associations of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska, had approximately 180 in attendance.

Our purpose in attending was twofold: to learn about the problems of transit providers in other states and how they handle them; and talk with representatives from FTA, state DOTs, and state transit associations.

“Cultivating Strategic Partnerships to Improve Mobility in the New Millennium”, the theme of this meeting, was prevalent throughout the three-day session.

The opening sessions featured meetings of each state’s transit association members to discuss legislative issues important in each state, followed by a joint four-state legislative session for a review of legislation that will affect transportation.

Over thirty companies and agencies participated in a vendor exposition that was open the first two days of the meeting. This exposition allowed attendees to view new transportation products, equipment, software and services, plus network with other meeting attendees. To further acquaint the attendees with vendors, in one of the general sessions, time was allocated for vendors to highlight their products and services.

The newly appointed regional administrator of FTA’s Region VII, Mokhtee Ahmad, attended the meeting along with most of his support staff. Ahmad and several members of the FTA staff made presentations at the conference. Ahmad and his staff were very helpful. They supplied technical information when asked and openly responded to questions.

One of the most interesting sessions was about Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). These systems collect, store, process and distribute information relating to the movement of people and goods. A representative from FHA discussed a national ITS architecture and how public and private organizations should work together to have a coordinated ITS in a geographic area. An ITS, for example, may involve the timing of traffic signals to accommodate transit vehicles or a system of vehicle location that identifies the specific location of each vehicle at all times or a myriad of other functions.

A national ITS would not represent a specific design or system, but provide a starting point for public and private organizations to work together to develop a unified ITS for their region. A national ITS would assist state and local agencies by helping them save time and money in achieving maximum benefits by implementing an integrated ITS.

There was much interest in the presentation on drug and alcohol testing. A presenter from FTA in Washington, D. C. indicated that a large problem with agencies and their testing is the collection of samples. This important element is done typically by the lowest paid and least trained employees. Secondly, most samples are not taken randomly enough. Agencies were encouraged to vary the day of the week and time of day when samples are collected. For example, if an agency operates 12 hours a day and on weekends, samples should be taken late at night as well as the first hour in the morning and on weekends at different hours. FTA periodically conducts state audits, typically spending 4 and a half days in a state.

Safety of transit systems was discussed at length. One speaker stressed teaching people about transit safety, especially young children and seniors. Additionally, local police should be trained on each type of transit vehicle an agency has, including location and number of exits, passenger capacity, communications equipment on board, and the presence of video cameras. Police should also be trained on gang activity and how to properly react in a hostage situation.

A roundtable discussion of rural transit providers proved to be very enlightening. Lack of money seems to be a universal situation with many transit operations, and most transit providers have learned to be “partners” with the agencies with whom they work.

SHAWNEE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL INC.

Shawnee Development Council, Inc., (SDC) is a not-for-profit corporation that administers federal and state grants to sponsor, develop, and operate programs that combat the causes and conditions of poverty. As a Community Action Agency, SDC provides assistance to a wide variety of clients in the southern-most Illinois counties of Alexander, Hardin, Johnson, Massac, Pope, Pulaski, and Union.

Although SDC provides most of its services to all seven counties, it offers public transportation in five, with Hardin and Pope counties receiving transportation from the RIDES Mass Transit District.

Cheryl Vanderford, Executive Director of SDC, has been with the Council since 1966, just one year following its incorporation as a non-profit corporation. Vanderford worked with the Neighborhood Youth Corps, wrote grants, and served as Fiscal Officer prior to her selection as Executive Director four years ago.



Cheryl Vanderford, Executive Director, oversees Shawnee Development Corporation, a Community Action Agency that provides programs to assist low income residents in the seven southern-most counties in Illinois.

A 21-member governing board, comprised of three members from each of the seven counties, meets monthly to provide input into the programs needed in the southern-most counties. Each of the seven counties has an outreach office, with the SDC headquarters located in Karnak in Pulaski County.



Denna Williams, Administrative Assistant, assists Cheryl Vanderford and other co-workers in keeping Shawnee Development running as smoothly as possible.

Ron Black, Operations Coordinator, oversees the transportation operation in the five counties. His previous positions as driver and dispatcher serve him well in this capacity. One of the biggest problems facing Black is the tremendous number of miles the transit vehicles travel on the roads in this rural part of Illinois and the maintenance required to keep the vehicles on the road. Black would like to have newer vehicles to replace those with high mileage. The vehicle fleet consists of a maintenance vehicle, five minivans, one 8-passenger, seven 10-passenger, four 14-passenger, one 21-passenger, two 22-passenger and one 25-passenger vehicle. Black indicated one of the vehicles has in excess of half a million

miles. All of the vehicles that transport clients except two minivans are wheelchair accessible.

Black said SDC received two new 10-passenger vehicles in December, 1998 and has one Bluebird and one 14-passenger bus scheduled for delivery in 1999. Next year one 14-passenger and one 21-passenger vehicles are due to be received.



Part of Operations Coordinator Ron Black's responsibilities include hiring new drivers and scheduling training for all drivers.

The 17 full-time drivers made 119,742 trips last year, traveling 801,540 miles. There are no part-time drivers at this time. Black is still called on to drive occasionally, as is dispatcher Mary Dale-Wright. Black said keeping good drivers is a problem because of high employee turnover and the tight labor market. New drivers are paid \$5.25 per hour and move to \$5.50 after a 90-day probationary period. Drivers are paid \$.10 extra for each of the following: CDL, air brake, and passenger endorsement. Employees earn one sick day each month and are entitled to 13 paid holidays and insurance. Additional changes in wage rates are determined by the SDC board.

Vehicle maintenance is done by a full-time mechanic and mechanic's helper at the maintenance facility in Karnak, just a few blocks from the SDC office. All maintenance is done in-house including charging air conditioning systems and changing tires. Black said more effective scheduling has improved vehicle

maintenance, but there is still more that can be done to make it better.

Defensive Driving, CPR, and Safe Driving have been recent training sessions for the SDC drivers. Black would like to expand training for the drivers to have a more encompassing curriculum. Another program Black has initiated is to have periodic driver meetings to discuss vehicles, maintenance, road conditions and a myriad of other issues important to SDC.

Both Black and Vanderford want more vehicles for their operation. Vanderford said SDC has insufficient vehicles and sometimes is in a "crisis" mode to make sure they transport their clients in a timely manner. Both agree they would like to upgrade their maintenance facility.

In other thoughts about the future, Vanderford said that SDC needs to be stricter with people with whom they contract, to make sure the agencies fulfill all aspects of a contract.

Additionally, Vanderford would like to run established routes which would make it easier for scheduling vehicles, drivers, and clients. Vanderford will continue to work with elected officials to urge them to upgrade area roads and speak to community groups about services offered by SDC. Vanderford said the public needs to be educated on public transportation and it is very important that they know what services SDC offers.



Gale Childress, one of 17 full-time drivers, handles a variety of vehicles in Shawnee's 22-vehicle fleet.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

On May 3, 1999, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) published a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on the definition of “tripper service” for agencies that receive FTA financial assistance for providing public transportation. The current regulation defines tripper service as “mass transit service modified to accommodate the needs of school students and personnel.” Buses used for tripper service must be clearly marked as open to the public and may not carry designations such as “School Bus” or “School Special.” Tripper buses may only stop at regular service stops, and routes traveled by such buses must be within a regular route as indicated in the agency’s published route schedules. FTA is proposing to amend the current regulation pertaining to “tripper” service school bus transportation. FTA grantees are allowed to provide student transportation under 49 USC 5323(f) (see inset).

Schoolbus Transportation. - (1) Financial assistance under this chapter may be used for a capital project, or to operate mass transportation equipment or a mass transportation facility, only if the applicant agrees not to provide schoolbus transportation that exclusively transports students and school personnel in competition with a private schoolbus operator. This subsection does not apply (A) to an applicant that operates a school system in the area to be served and a separate and exclusive schoolbus program for the school system; (B) unless a private schoolbus operator can provide adequate transportation that complies with applicable safety standards at reasonable rates; and (C) to a State or local governmental authority if it or a direct predecessor in interest from which it acquired the duty of transporting school children and personnel, and facilities to transport them, provided schoolbus transportation at any time after November 25, 1973, but before November 26, 1974. (2) An applicant violating an agreement under this subsection may not receive other financial assistance under this chapter.

Some grantees are providing school transportation that is inconsistent with the FTA definition of tripper service. Specifically, tripper service provided by some agencies creates a public perception that buses used for such service are for the exclusive use of school children. Other cases include the use of a tripper service bus equipped with a swing-arm that reads “Caution Students;” using a bus that has markings indicating the vehicle is used for transporting children certain times of the day; and picking-up and discharging students on school property and not at bus stops that are accessible to the general public.

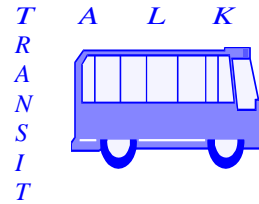
Under the proposed amendment to the tripper service regulation, buses would not be allowed to display “School Bus,” “School Special,” “Student,” or any other marking indicating such vehicles are carrying school children. Moreover, buses are allowed to stop only at stops that are clearly marked as available to the public.

Rides Receives Job Access Grant

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration recently announced the award winners for the "Job Access" grant. Rides Mass Transit District was one of the award winners in Illinois.

The Job Access grant has two major goals: 1) to provide transportation service in urban, suburban and rural areas to assist welfare recipients and low income individuals in accessing employment opportunities and, 2) to increase collaboration among transportation providers, human service agencies, employers, metropolitan planning organizations, states and affected communities and individuals.

Rides held a meeting in June for all partners instrumental in the grant transportation plan to discuss grant guidelines, procedures, and implementation.



Rural Peoria County Council on Aging (RPCCoA) is having vapor lock problems with two 1998 Dodge Caravans. The vehicles are still under warranty and have been in to the local dealer. The dealer put them on the computer and has concluded the underlying problem is fuel-related (ethanol in the fuel makes too lean a mixture).

The dealer says the problems are:

- 1) Fuel pump
- 2) Power train valve
- 3) Fuel filter

Thus far, the dealer has been unable to correct the problem. There is a concern about a vehicle vapor locking in traffic and getting rear-ended. Are other agencies having similar problems? (Contact RTAC at 800/526-9943 or RPCCoA at 309/697-3305)



1982 Chevy 12-passenger van
Needs some work
\$500.00 or BO

1987 Ford 12-passenger van
Needs some work
\$1,000.00 or BO

Contact:

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- M. RFPs & RFQs
- N. Routing/Scheduling
- O. RTAC Resource Guide with
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- Q. Safety
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Customer Service Course?

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Rider Sensitivity & Assistance Methods?

Call RTAC at (800) 526-9943

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