

TRANSPORT



The Newsletter of the Illinois Rural Transit Assistance Program

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RTAC NOTES I was browsing through a trucking industry magazine recently and came across an article having to do with driver retention. The crux of the article was that retaining drivers is less costly than recruiting replacements. That seems pretty reasonable. What happens though, when companies are not only unable to retain existing drivers, but are unable to recruit replacement drivers as well?

Although it may not be exactly the same as with the trucking industry, this is actually happening with some transit agencies in Illinois. In fact, recently an agency representative in northern Illinois told me about the problems they are having with turnover and in hiring replacements. The economy is so buoyant in that area, people are able to shop around for the best possible job. In some respects, that's not exactly a bad situation, unless you're the one responsible for keeping buses and vans on the road. Then it becomes a nightmare.

The magazine article went on to point out the results of a recent nationwide survey of trucking companies that found a substantial number of companies had experienced improved driver retention since 1995. Some reasons for this are management friendliness toward drivers, open communication, and fair treatment. Of particular note here is these are things that carry little or no cost for companies. Keep in mind, drivers are

key to the success of your operation—they see your customers more than any other representative of your agency.

This is not to say that the above-mentioned transit agency hasn't already tried a number of things to retain drivers. They told me about the right mix of people as being one way to deal with the problem. They had tried hiring younger people at one time, but those folks are upwardly mobile. Retired people work best they have found, particularly those who retire early. These individuals are simply looking for something to keep them busy a few hours a week. The problem is the labor pool in the 55 to 65 year old range may not fulfill the demand in some areas.

In the hustle and bustle of making sure everyone who needs a ride gets a ride, however, I wonder if some of the non-economic things that might help keep employees happy are being overlooked. Money has its merits, but it's not everything. For example, the article cited one market researcher who discovered the importance of image when it comes to how truck drivers relate to management. Drivers want management respect and support. They want to be treated as professionals whose input is valued and be given opportunities for career development. They also value quality-of-life issues above money. One might assume the same holds true for transit drivers.

Joel McQueen

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RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE CENTER TRAINING PROGRAMS

by Rich Machala, Jo Davie County Transit

During the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities (IPCDD) Transit Communications Workshop held in Springfield November 18, 1998, Alan Goldberg, Chairperson of the IPCDD, and Kathy Moran, Chairperson of the Transportation Task Force for Persons with Disabilities, Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS), discussed the following transportation barriers for people with disabilities:

- Hours of operation are too short; they should include weekends and holidays;
- Lack of sensitivity of vehicle operators toward people with disabilities;
- Lack of employees to provide gap fillers at train stops;
- Paratransit service is on a first-come, first-serve basis;
- Accessible lifts are not always provided at terminals, stations, and airports;
- On board personnel are not available to assist persons with disabilities;
- Schedules are too difficult to understand;
- Transit systems do not cross county lines;
- Public transportation is not available in many rural areas;
- Fares are too high.

Of those barriers that apply to non-urban areas, most are directly related to funding issues that are not easily resolved. Some of the barriers, however, can be addressed through driver and support staff training such as that offered through the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP). RTAP training courses in defensive driving, emergency procedures, and passenger assistance are available through the Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC).

If your transit operation could benefit from this type of training session, I encourage you to call RTAC at 800/526-9943.



ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

The first Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Advisory Council meeting of Fiscal Year 1999 was held January 21, 1999, at the Drury Inn, Springfield. Betty Green, RTAP Advisory Council Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. Green opened the meeting by expressing her desire to step down as Chairperson. Tom Zucker had been mentioned as a possible new Chairperson. However, there was a short discussion about potential conflicts with Zucker serving as President of the Illinois Association for Community Transportation and being Chairperson of the Advisory Council. There was agreement that Zucker should probably not be Chairperson of the Advisory Council. Zucker proceeded to nominate Rich Machala as the new Chairperson. Betty Green seconded the motion. All members voted aye. Linda Mitchell made a motion to nominate Dave Diamond as the new Advisory Council Vice-Chairperson. Anna Oestreich seconded the motion. All members voted aye.

Joel McQueen mentioned the vacancy on the Advisory Council. McQueen said that Ron Weishaar of Piatran would be a good candidate to fill the vacancy. Tom Zucker then nominated Weishaar, and Anna Oestreich seconded the motion. All members voted aye. Rich Machala will forward a letter to the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) nominating Ron Weishaar as a candidate for the Advisory Council vacancy.

Joel McQueen discussed the Spring Conference scheduled for April 13th through the 15th at the Drury Inn. A training topic has not been selected thus far. Tom Zucker suggested the Y2K issue as a possible topic and employee retention as another. Betty Green mentioned compliance issues as another possibility, having a panel of officials from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and others discuss current transportation programs, or addressing internal audit procedures. The consensus was that FTA be contacted about presenting a grant application

session. Another issue that attracts interest is the IDOT compliance review. Members are curious about what has happened with reviews elsewhere. Joel McQueen agreed to check with agencies in Indiana and Wisconsin to obtain their comments. Betty Green suggested the Y2K issue be covered in a technical bulletin.

The summer retreat was discussed, and it was mentioned that the Advisory Council had tentatively decided during the retreat last year to hold the meeting in southern Illinois. Betty Green suggested Harrisburg as a location. The meeting will be held June 13th and 14th, and Rides Mass Transit District will be the host. Participants will likely have the opportunity to tour the Harrisburg area as part of the retreat.

A multi-state conference was brought up for discussion. Rich Machala suggested an attempt be made to hold a multi-state conference this fall and made a motion to that effect. Rudy Muzzarelli seconded the motion. Possible locations include Chicago and the Galena area, and an attempt will be made to involve participants from Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin. All members voted aye.

With no further business, the Advisory Council business meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m. Following a break, the meeting resumed with a technical presentation.

Pat Curry, Illinois Extension, presented a session on strategic planning, in which he outlined the planning process beginning with the basic elements of a strategic plan. Curry also discussed environmental monitoring; applications; values scanning; missions, goals, and values; mission statement; needs assessment; strategic objectives; outcome measures; and performance feed forward. Curry concluded the presentation by encouraging Advisory Council members to review strategic planning resources on the Internet.

TransVAC HITS TWO MILLION MARK

by Tom Zucker, VAC

On January 15, 1999, the TransVAC, Sycamore, celebrated its two millionth ride. This accomplishment is a result of efforts, both public and private, made on behalf of the Voluntary Action Center (VAC) from its beginnings in 1974 through today.

VAC was created in 1974 by a group of community activists as a grass roots organization called the *Greater DeKalb Volunteer Bureau*. VAC received its first grant from the National Center for Voluntary Action to serve as the volunteer clearinghouse for DeKalb County. Through their efforts to meet the needs of the community, the staff and Board of Directors of VAC identified a need for accessible public transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities. VAC organized volunteers using their own vehicles to provide transportation, such as for medical appointments and for grocery shopping. Current TransVAC services evolved from these beginnings.

In 1975, VAC purchased its first van and provided just over 7,000 trips. Within one year, service more than doubled and continued to increase as funding became available for additional vehicles and paid drivers. In 1992, after 17 years, TransVAC registered its one millionth rider.

TransVAC is a model for coordinated community transportation. Throughout the years, VAC, the city of DeKalb, and DeKalb County have received numerous federal and state grants. This has resulted in a transit fleet of thirty buses and vans, as well as a centralized transportation facility from which TransVAC operates.

According to Tom Zucker, VAC Executive Director, there are several factors that contributed to the growth of the agency. "Certainly the increase in staff expertise in community transportation has broadened our accomplishments." So,



Tom Zucker, VAC's Executive Director, addresses a crowd of nearly 100 state and community leaders at VAC's recent celebration of TransVAC's 2,000,000th ride.

too, has been a willingness to provide innovative services, a determination to meet the growing need for services, and the extensive public and private partnership that made service possible. Zucker adds, "TransVAC has reached this milestone of two million rides because of the dedication of its volunteers, staff, drivers, and Board of Directors over the years. TransVAC has achieved this and many other accomplishments because of its public-private partnerships, the generosity of the DeKalb County community, and the vision of a small group of community leaders in 1974."

Zucker cites service to Sandwich and Somonauk as an example of partnerships in the delivery of service. Utilizing a grant received by the Fox Valley Older Adults Services (FVOAS), TransVAC was able to provide senior transportation into Sandwich and Somonauk. In addition to helping fund the service, FVOAS provides administrative support. TransVAC provides staff, vehicles, and operating support for services that are also available to persons with disabilities and others in need of a ride in these communities.

Jerry Maring was a member of the founding group in 1974 and continues to serve on the Board of Directors. Maring says “I’m often teased about serving a life sentence on the VAC Board, but to have seen it from its infancy to what is being accomplished today is tremendously rewarding.” Maring has watched the agency go from its first donation of stamps, envelopes, and payment of a seven-dollar invoice, and a budget just slightly more than \$10,000. Today, the VAC budget is more than \$1.7 million. Maring adds, “I remember, following the purchase of our first vehicle, we would stay after the Board meeting

to change oil. I’m sure VAC mechanics wonder why I always so gratefully thank them for a job well done.”

TransVAC has changed over the years, but its mission continues to focus on meeting the mobility needs of the community. Zucker maintains “in many cases, TransVAC is literally a lifeline for our riders. It enables our riders to achieve personal independence and economic well-being. We are proud to provide the services we do.”

RUSSIANS VISIT TransVAC

Excerpt from the *Daily Chronicle*, DeKalb/Sycamore, IL, February 14, 1999

Eleven individuals representing the Russian trucking industry recently toured the DeKalb area as part of the *Productivity Enhancement Program*. The group was in the U.S. primarily to observe the transportation system. While in DeKalb, the Russian delegation visited several businesses, including the Voluntary Action Center (VAC).



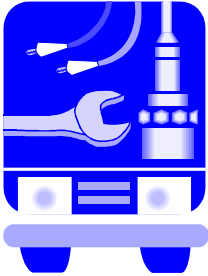
At VAC, the group had an opportunity to see the TransVAC fleet and modern maintenance facility, seeing firsthand how community transportation operates in DeKalb.

DARTS INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

by Rudy Muzzarelli, DARTS

The Demand And Response Transportation System (DARTS), Belleville, is a classic example of how agencies can work together to improve service and lower cost. A year ago, DARTS began a fleet maintenance agreement with the Bi-State Development Agency (Bi-State), the fixed-route transit provider in St. Clair County. This arrangement came about through a contract DARTS has with the St. Clair County Transit District (SCCTD). The SCCTD also contracts with Bi-State. These three agencies are cooperating to provide efficient cost effective transportation service.

Prior to this maintenance arrangement with Bi-State, DARTS vehicles were maintained on a fee-for-service basis by a private garage. Stock's Underhood Specialists had been DARTS's maintenance vendor for several years. Paul Stock and his staff provided exceptionally high quality work. DARTS represented approximately 25 to 30 percent of Stock's business. The excellent professional and congenial relationship that DARTS enjoyed with Stock's made a decision to change extremely difficult. A key factor was the occasional excessive down time experienced because Stock's was only open during typical business hours. The loss of DARTS's business was a difficult adjustment for Stock's. Paul Stock demonstrated a tremendous professional and ethical approach to the changes. He was a key element to a smooth transition, providing any assistance requested. DARTS highly recommends Stock's to individuals and other businesses.



Under the present arrangement, Bi-State provides a garage large enough for storing all of the DARTS fleet. Previously, DARTS vehicles were parked outside. Cold weather problems, starting difficulties, frozen doors, digging out of a parking space, and scraping ice and snow have been eliminated. Bi-State also provides a small office for DARTS drivers. The main advantage of having Bi-State maintain DARTS's fleet, however, is the hours of service offered and the effect it has had on reducing down time. The garage is open twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. Routine maintenance is done at night. Normal repairs and service such as starters, brakes, alternators, tire replacement, etc., is done overnight.

Down time for DARTS's fleet has been so dramatically reduced that DARTS was able to reduce the fleet by five vehicles, while at the same time maintaining passenger service levels of approximately 250 rides per day. By not having to insure and maintain the five "extra" vehicles, DARTS was able to reduce costs substantially. Insurance and routine maintenance savings alone amount to about \$25,000.00 annually.





DRIVE ON TO CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE COURSE

In response to several requests from transit agency personnel, a new training course has been developed to help all transit employees provide better customer service. The transit industry is customer driven, and all of an agency's employees, from the director, to dispatchers, drivers, bookkeepers and everyone else, need to provide the best customer service possible. Read about the course's four modules and schedule this course for your agency. Without customers and repeat customers, where would we be?

Drive On to Customer Service Excellence is a four-part introductory skills-building course for rural transit employees. Each 50 minute module involves lecture, discussion, and interactive skill-building activities. Because Modules Two, Three, and Four build on preceding sessions, the program should be presented in its entirety for maximum benefit.

Class size and other requirements: ten to thirty participants; participating agencies should provide a classroom with adequate space.

Module One Discovering and Evaluating Your Personal Skills and Talents

Description. Positive customer service depends on the skills, talents, and unique personality traits of each agency employee.

Objectives. Students will learn how to evaluate and improve upon personal weaknesses in areas of customer service. Students are shown ways of improving upon personal adaptability to change.

Module Two Perceptions and Realities vs. Communication

Description. Customer feedback is an important part of maintaining high quality service.

Objectives. Students are taught techniques for discovering customer expectations and perceptions of the transportation services offered. Students will learn how to respond to misconceptions concerning the services offered.

Module Three Problem-Solving

Description. Problems should be viewed as hurdles, not barriers.

Objectives. This segment teaches students to anticipate problems before they occur. Students are also taught how to create a personal action/reaction plan.

Module Four Team Building

Description. An agency should utilize the individual talents of all its members to achieve customer service excellence.

Objectives. Students will learn the importance of ownership and working together. This segment also teaches students how to create and implement an agency-wide customer service excellence plan.

Lead Instructor: Carol Davis, Spoon River College, Canton, IL.

Availability: Call the Illinois Rural Transit Assistance Center at 800/526-9943 to schedule this program.

Rural Peoria County

by Lyle Nichols



“A New Day for Senior Citizens” is the slogan used by the Rural Peoria County Council on Aging, Inc., (RPCCA) as it provides specialized services to seniors and others in rural Peoria County. Tom Horstmann, Executive Director of the agency since September, 1996, provides the leadership for the agency and is the liaison with the RPCCA Board, the Peoria County Board, the Illinois Department of Transportation and a myriad of other agencies, elected officials and public bodies.

Horstmann said, “It sometimes is a real struggle to keep everything running, coordinating the funding, watching the expenditures and making sure we provide the services to the citizens of the county.” The Peoria County Board is the grantee of the Section 5311 monies received by the agency. This current fiscal year has the highest amount ever received—\$92,000.



Executive Director Tom Horstmann proudly displays a newly lettered minivan—lettered with financial support from CVS Pharmacy.

Transportation Supervisor, Becky Alexander, runs the transit part of the agency. Alexander said, “We provide transportation to residents of

Peoria County except those living in the City of Peoria. Although we provide transportation to all of the people, most of our riders are seniors,” she continued.

Alexander has been with the agency almost 3 1/2 years as Transportation Supervisor. Among her previous jobs was work as a part-time school bus driver. As supervisor, she also drives when needed, dispatches drivers, answers the telephone and performs light maintenance.



This building, originally a township fire station, has served as home for RPCCA for over 15 years.

The agency was started in 1982 in a private residence and within a year moved into the Limestone Township fire station in Bellevue. The facility was converted to the agency’s use with mostly volunteer help and still serves as its home.

Nine vans, all wheel chair equipped, comprise the agency’s fleet. The three raised roof vans (two 1994 and one 1996), two diesels (1994 and 1998) and three minivans (all 1998) were purchased through the Section 5310 program. Several units of local governments contributed

financial resources that were combined with other donations to purchase an additional van. This 1995 van is normally held in reserve for emergency use or dispatched when other vehicles are undergoing maintenance.

The agency doesn't have a maintenance facility but contracts with Peoria County for major work and with a local garage for oil changes and minor maintenance.

Alexander has three full-time, three part-time and one volunteer driver. Most of the agency drivers are retired and come from a variety of backgrounds, including a retired contractor, and a retired Caterpillar employee. The volunteer driver is a retired farmer who has driven for the agency one day a week for 14 years. She said, "It is difficult to find drivers, and I am very lucky to have the good drivers I have."



George Perisho and Larry Brackett plus Executive Director Tom Horstmann (back) display newly delivered minivans purchased through the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Starting drivers are paid minimum wage, and after a one-month probationary period will receive a wage increase to \$6.00 per hour. Alexander said after the initial raise, the RPCCA Board determines all wage increases.

The agency's mission is: "To help senior citizens to live independently and with dignity in their own homes as long as they are able."

To fulfill its mission, RPCCA provides a case coordination unit that deals with the needs of the elderly, including operating four meal sites in the county, home delivered meals to home-bound persons, home visits by nurses and many other services for seniors. Additionally, Alexander said they provide transportation to a workshop operated by the Peoria Association of Retarded Citizens five days a week on a contractual basis. On a regular basis seniors are transported to Senior World, an adult daycare program at the YWCA in Peoria.



Becky Alexander, Transportation Supervisor, dispatches her drivers and communicates with them frequently during the work day.

Bellevue, located on Illinois Highway 116, is less than a mile from I-474, which funnels traffic around Peoria's west side. Alexander said the interstate highway has really been helpful in getting transit vehicles around the city and out to rural areas of Peoria County.

When describing the type of transportation service provided, Alexander says, "We provide several levels of service upon demand with a semi-fixed subscription route and demand response that we make into routes as much as possible." Last year the agency vehicles recorded 154,000 miles and made 12,700 trips.

Alexander said, "We operate on a donation basis. For riders age 60 and older, we ask for a donation of \$2.50 one way and \$5.00 for a roundtrip." For

those under 60 the donations are doubled. “But,” Alexander said, “with the higher rates for younger riders and even if some seniors have problems donating the full amount, we never turn anyone down.”

In addition to the Section 5311 funding and revenue from fares, other funding sources include donations from townships, villages, towns, the County Board, businesses, individuals and memorial contributions.

All new drivers receive three days training to familiarize them with the van’s wheelchair lift operation, passenger securement, and many other aspects of how to handle passengers safely.

All drivers receive training in both CPR and First Aid from Advanced Medical Transit in Peoria. Alexander said drivers also are trained in emergency evacuation and in assisting the elderly. Alexander plans to have additional training later this year through the Rural Transit Assistance Center.

Transportation services operate from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, which makes it difficult to have training. Alexander said they

adjust their schedules on training days to accommodate their riders.

Alexander said there are some people in the county who still don’t know about the service RPCCA provides, but the word is spread through notification of area medical facilities, word of mouth, and occasional articles in local and area newspapers. The agency operates most weekdays throughout the year, except eight holidays. Service was interrupted by inclement weather one day last year and only two days so far this year.

“Having an annual volunteer recognition dinner really allows us to thank all of the volunteers who help us through the year,” said Alexander. The agency also has an employee picnic during the summer in which all employees, their spouses, and families are invited. Alexander started this when she came to the agency and it has proven to be very popular. “It gives everyone an opportunity to get to know each other a little better.”

If additional funding were available, Alexander would like to have a maintenance person and a building with vehicle storage where maintenance could be performed. She would also like to expand service to people in the rural part of the county not currently being served.

Funding of Capital Projects

Capital funds, separate from operating funds, are used to fund transit infrastructure. Federal law provides for federal funding for transit infrastructure to be a maximum of 80 percent of the project cost. The remainder is to be provided by state and local governments.

In reality, the federal government pays less than 80 percent of the project cost. Since some projects are entirely funded at the local or state level, only 54 percent of transit capital funding comes from the federal government. Transit agencies raise 22 percent from taxes, tolls and fees they levy plus contributions from other sources. States contribute 13 percent and local governments 11 percent.

Source: 1999 Transit Fact Book published by American Public Transit Association (APTA).

OLDER DRIVERS AND HIGHWAY DESIGN

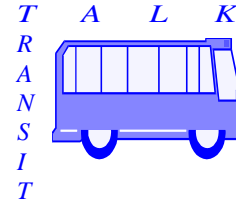
Increasing numbers of older drivers over the next several decades will present challenges to highway designers. By 2020, drivers age 65 and over will comprise about 1/5 of the driving age population of the U.S. “In effect, if design is controlled by even 85th percentile performance requirements, the design driver of the early 21st century will be an individual over the age of 65.”

The aging of the population means there will be an increasing proportion of drivers who have diminished vision, slower reaction times, and a loss of flexibility. This promises to have a significant effect on highway design criteria.

The single greatest safety concern in accommodating older drivers (and pedestrians) is the ability to maneuver through intersections. One study conducted a few years ago found that, for drivers 80 years and over, more than half of fatal accidents occur at intersections. For drivers under age 50, less than 25 percent of fatal accidents occur at intersections.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently developed 16 specific recommendations for design engineers to enhance the performance of diminished-capacity drivers as they approach and travel through intersections. Interestingly, nearly half of those recommendations involve traffic control lights and roadway signage in and around intersections.

Source: Staplin, L., Lococo, K., and Byington, S., *Older Driver Design Handbook*, (Washington, DC: Office of Safety and Traffic Operations R & D, Federal Highway Administration, January, 1998).



Q. We recently had an inquiry about escorts for persons with disabilities. In checking with a couple of agencies, I found that both had escorts available, but neither had any written policy. Do other agencies have written policies pertaining to escorts?

A. Rides Mass Transit District (RMTD) has a written escort policy in our Policy and Procedure Handbook and also in our Operations Manual. RMTD provides escort assistance on and off the bus for all elderly and disabled individuals. RMTD also allows an escort to ride free if the passenger could not ride without their assistance. RMTD believes it is better to allow an escort ride with a passenger who might need help during transit instead of having the driver be responsible. Quincy Transit does not have escorts available as such. In most cases the driver will assist a passenger if needed. Drivers occasionally go into the home and assist in getting a passenger ready. There is no written policy on this matter, however. For further information contact RMTD at 618/285-3342 or Quincy Transit at 217/228-4555.

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