
TRANSPORT

The Newsletter of the Illinois Rural Transit Assistance Program



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RTAC NOTES I recently attended the Rides Mass Transit District (RMTD) annual meeting. This is the third such meeting for me, but somehow this one was different. Or, maybe the meeting was the same as prior ones, but the world around us is changing so much. In any case, the experience impressed me to the point where I feel compelled to express my reaction.

True, this year's RMTD meeting followed nearly the same format as last year's gathering and the one before that as well. There was a large number of people, 160 or so, attending the gathering. There were Rides employees, current and former board members, local elected officials, and individuals representing various state agencies. As the meeting progressed, I began thinking about the lessons one could learn from being there.

The first thing different about Rides is the total community involvement. How many rural agencies even have an annual meeting? I cannot answer that question here, but I bet most do not have one; and, if so, it would likely not be of the magnitude of the Rides meeting. A primary reason for the meeting is to recognize Rides employees, without whose dedication the enterprise would not be nearly so successful. Just as important, though, what about the positive effects it has on the other people attending? The sense of belonging?

Second, in scanning the audience, I thought about the diverse group of people who were in that room. There were representatives from the Department on Aging, local social service agencies, various elected officials, probably most employees and their guests,

and so forth. The point is, the very people who can and do make things happen were there.

The diversity of the crowd also reminded one to consider what kind of transportation system could any one of the Rides counties have by itself? After all, the counties served by RMTD are small, rural counties with very scarce resources. Think about the leverage these small counties have by working together and pooling their scarce transportation resources through RMTD.

Betty Green's opening remarks about how Rides began are telling in and of themselves. Rides started from zero just like most other agencies. What is different about Rides is the seemingly endless effort to extend and improve service. With over fifty contracts with local and state agencies to provide transportation service, Rides is a real-life example of what coordination means.

Finally, the theme of this year's meeting itself, "Partnerships," says a whole lot about how RMTD management sees things. It reminds me a lot of another meeting I attended a couple of months ago that featured Rodney Slater, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation. Secretary Slater, too, emphasized the importance of coalitions and partnerships.

This is not to suggest Rides has a monopoly on community involvement. There are many other examples in Illinois where community transportation flourishes as a result of widespread support. Nor does it have access to any magical formula. Instead, RMTD succeeds because of hard work, dedication, and the realization that community transit works best when it involves the entire community.

Joel McQueen

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NEW

RTAP Listserve

NEW

We recently established a “listserv” on the Internet to discuss issues of concern for rural transit in Illinois. It’s called “RTAP-I” (lower case el, not number 1). In case you don’t already know, a mailing list is a discussion group whose subscribers exchange messages about a particular topic using electronic mail. A message sent to a single, central address is forwarded to all people on the list. In an unmoderated list, the mail is forwarded automatically, without human intervention or modification. In a moderated list, the mail is first screened by a moderator who then forwards mail that is considered appropriate for the group at large. RTAP-I is set-up as a moderated list, but we can change to unmoderated if we want.

So, if you have access to e-mail, we encourage you to join RTAP-I (subscribe). The following procedure explains how to go about subscribing.

Step 1

Send the following message to **listproc@ecnet.net**

subscribe [listname] [Firstname Lastname]

For example:

subscribe RTAP-I Joel McQueen

Step 2

Within a half hour or so (the ListProc list server checks e-mail every 15 minutes), you will receive two e-mails from the list server. The first e-mail explains that you have been subscribed to the list and contains the standard ListProc welcome message. The second e-mail contains the list owner’s welcome message (the one you wrote) to new subscribers.

We look forward to using this new forum as an efficient way of exchanging information of interest to those who are involved in rural transit.



The Illinois Rural *TRANSREPORT* is published by RTAC as part of a training and technical assistance program sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration and the Illinois Department of Transportation. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations in this newsletter are those of the authors, and do not reflect the views of any of the above groups. Specific product descriptions are for informational purposes only, and should not be considered as endorsements.

IACT/RTAC FALL CONFERENCE

The Illinois Association for Community Transportation (IACT) and the Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) Fall Conference was held October 13 through 15 at the Best Western Gateway Inn in Monticello. The conference was hosted by Piattran, headquartered in Monticello. Ron Weishaar, Piattran Transportation Director, opened the gathering and introduced Duane Noland, State Representative, 102nd District, and James Ayers, Mayor of Monticello. Both Representative Noland and Mayor Ayers expressed their support for Piattran, and Noland commented about the importance of agencies maintaining a close relationship with elected officials.

Tom Zucker, IACT President, reported on the IACT Board Meeting. Zucker announced that IACT would award a door prize at the close of the conference on Thursday, consisting of an audible alarm system valued at \$200. He went on to mention the workshop sponsored by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities (IPCDD) scheduled for November 17 in Springfield.



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IACT Employee of the Year



From the left, Tom Zucker, Gene Englehart, Linda Tisdale, and Robert J. Myers.

Robert J. Myers, Assistant Transportation Director, Voluntary Action Center, Sycamore, was presented the **IACT Employee of the Year Award** during the RTAC/IACT Fall Conference in Monticello. Myers received the award from Gene Englehart who read the following citation:

Bob has 10 years paratransit experience with no accidents or citations. He has 3rd party testing, safety officer training, and EMT training. He has over 7 years paratransit driver training experience and trained over 20 drivers in FY 98 alone. He has never had a trainee fail CDL testing.

In addition to participation in many training opportunities, Bob has been instrumental in the development of the employee recognition program, including the "Wall of Fame" and the Safety Day award. He established VAC's in-house CDL testing, saving the agency time and money.

He was instrumental in trouble shooting at a satellite program of VAC's. VAC was

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IDOT Update

Dave Patton, IDOT, Section Chief, Non-Metro Grants, said the FY 1998 vehicle order is complete, and FY 1999 letters will be out soon. Letters are also out for the small capital program. All but two FY 1999 operating contracts are delivered. Patton said documentation for FY 1999 will be spread out. The program monitoring project contract has been signed, and the initial agency audit is expected in January or February, 1999. Agencies will be given advance notice as to when an audit will occur. According to Patton, the Federal Transit Administration will audit every state for drug and alcohol testing compliance within the next two years. Funding is one year behind and amounts to \$4.3 million this year. The funding level increases to \$5.16 million next year and \$6.16 million the following year. IDOT has not determined how new funds will be allocated. One option is to hold the increased funding for one year, while using additional funds for capital expenditures is another option.

Barbara Crowe-Hickey, Section 5311 Program Manager, Non-Metro Grants, discussed small capital purchases. She said agencies are allowed to purchase small capital items through their operating grant with IDOT concurrence. Small capital purchases are explained in the Section 5310/5311 Grant Management Manual.

Louise Stigler-Baker, Section 5311 Project Manager, Non-Metro Grants, discussed requisitions and how the support documentation process has been improved for FY 1999. She pointed out that agencies receiving more than \$300,000 annually in federal assistance are required to submit a single-agency audit. Several grantees have not submitted required audits.

Lurie Brown, Section 5310 Project Manager, announced that the next vehicle delivery dates

are November 9 through 16 and that award letters for 1998 vehicles will be issued soon. She also mentioned that vehicle disposition is presenting a problem. There have been a large number of requests for vehicle disposition, and Brown said vehicles generally need to have 120,000 miles of service to be eligible.

Bob Selinger, IDOT liaison to the IPCDD, outlined the November workshop. Selinger indicated the workshop would involve transportation providers, state agency representatives, and various groups representing persons with disabilities. The workshop is intended to help increase input of persons with disabilities into the transportation decision-making process. Selinger discussed an upcoming Request for Proposals from the IPCDD for up to six projects involving a total of \$120,000 to improve coordination of existing transportation services. Proposals will likely be due in March or April.

Marketing Workshop

Dave Soeldner and Joe Caruso, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, presented a workshop Wednesday, October 14 entitled *Innovative Strategies to Increase Ridership*. The session addressed marketing and promotion; promotional strategies; customer service; research; and promotional plans.

- Marketing and promotion - the six P's of transit marketing: Product; place; pricing; promotion; people; and politics.
- Promotional strategies: The media; special events; partnering with business; partnering with public entities; short-term promotions; employee involvement; attract young riders; and revamp business.
- Customer service: The customer service triangle - strategies, systems, and staff.
- Research: Survey basics.
- Promotional plans: Plan components - assess the business environment; establish measurable objectives; list strategies; and evaluation.

The marketing workshop concluded with participants dividing into four groups, with each group working through a case study and, then, presenting the results of their analysis.

Roundtable Discussion

The final day of the conference featured a roundtable discussion of current issues, including the driver selection process, welfare reform, on-board video surveillance, and options for new transportation funding.

The first issue submitted for discussion was the driver selection process and the current widespread difficulty agencies are having in hiring qualified drivers. The screening process was mentioned and how welfare reform and a booming economy seem to have lowered labor pool standards. Training costs are a concern, with one agency spending up to \$1,000 per person in training new drivers. Competition from other



businesses is causing an increase in starting wages for drivers. The average starting wage for drivers among roundtable participants is about \$6.50 per hour, while the average hourly wage for an experienced driver is just over \$9.00.

Welfare-to-work was also addressed by the group. A recurring problem is categorical funding for transportation. For example, it is difficult to continue a route if a passenger for which an agency is receiving categorical funds stops riding.

Generally, what happens is the route stops when the funding stops. Providing service to areas of high need is another problem. Some agencies have been asked to not only provide transportation for new workers, but to help people find jobs.

Springfield Mass Transit District (SMTD) has recently installed video surveillance on several of its buses. There are four cameras per vehicle, and the ones monitoring the rear of the bus have prevented at least two lawsuits arising from incidents that occurred as passengers were de-boarding.

The final topic discussed by the roundtable group was new funding. It was mentioned that the Section 5311 fleet throughout the state is high-mileage. One option would be to spend the new money to upgrade the fleet. Or, some mix of new starts and an increase in level of service for existing operations could be devised.

IACT Employee of the Year

Continued from Page 3

faced with many safety and procedural issues at that site in FY 97. Bob reorganized dispatch, retrained operators, and implemented procedures to ensure the agency standards of operations were being met. Prior to Bob's involvement, relations between the two operations had all but disintegrated. Bob's strong managerial and social skills, vast knowledge, and dedication were instrumental in repairing relations and getting the operation back on-track.

Bob is truly one of the agency's greatest assets, both in-house and in the community. He demonstrates initiative and sound judgment in all areas of operation. Bob does not hesitate to jump in wherever needed.

From serving as agency photographer to volunteering to do out of town medical trips, Bob is always ready, willing, and able.

It is an honor to nominate him as IACT Employee of the Year.

COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP



Transit Communication Workshop, sponsored by the Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities (IPCDD) and the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), was held November 17, 1998, in Springfield. The workshop was conducted in two sections, a morning general session and an afternoon session in which participants separated into three groups representing downstate urban, rural, and Metro-East systems.

Neil Ferrari, Bureau Chief, IDOT, Division of Public Transportation, opened the workshop and welcomed the 75 participants. Alan Goldberg, Chairman, IPCDD, characterized the gathering as a meeting between the public and transit providers. Goldberg noted the public transportation deficiencies in rural areas.

Betty Green, Executive Director, Rides Mass Transit District, briefly summarized the history of her agency and some of the improvements Rides has made since 1977 in serving the public. Green went on to discuss the 1991 Illinois Transportation Coordinating Committee report in which several barriers to a coordinated transportation system were cited. Green assessed what Rides and other transit agencies have done to overcome the barriers. The barriers are:

- Client-specific transportation - this has largely been overcome, as Rides currently has 51 service contracts with various agencies.
- Self interest - there has been considerable progress, but this issue still remains.
- Duplication of service - this is becoming a small issue at Rides, as the agency strives to mix human service agency clients with the general public as much as possible.
- Underused equipment - still exists, and may not ever completely be overcome.
- Lack of options in rural areas - still a problem; exacerbated by the regionalization of services.
- Lack of uniform eligibility criteria - no longer a problem.
- Lack of uniform subsidy levels - continues to be a problem; for example, some agencies reimburse at 31 cents per mile--does not cover cost of trip.
- Lack of coordinated reporting procedures - this issue persists for some agencies.
- Administrative costs - continues to be a problem.
- Changing demographics - still a problem; for example the aging of the population.
- Insurance costs and liability - Rides has worked around insurance issues.
- Restrictions on use of funds - becoming less troublesome.

Green concluded by saying these issues were not really barriers, but, rather, problems that mostly have been overcome. Some new obstacles facing transit agencies are: oversize wheelchairs; rough, gravel roads; people expecting individualized, taxi-style service; the need to expand service; and the public mind set.

Kathy Moran, Chair, Transportation Task Force, Chicago Area Transportation Study, discussed the top ten transit barriers experienced by persons with disabilities. The barriers are:

- Transit operating hours are too short.
- Lack of sensitivity of transit operators toward persons with disabilities.
- Lack of employees to provide gap fitter at transit stops.
- Paratransit service is inadequate.
- Accessible lifts are not provided at terminals, stations, and airports.
- Personnel are not available to assist persons with disabilities.
- Schedules are too difficult to understand.
- Transit system does not cross county lines.
- Public transportation not available in rural areas.
- Fares are too high.

Tom Zucker, President, Illinois Association for Community Transportation (IACT), discussed the top concerns in providing transportation for persons with disabilities. Zucker indicated the following issues were mentioned in a survey of the IACT membership.

- Insufficient operating funds.
- Insufficient number of vehicles.
- Some persons with disabilities need aides when using public transportation.
- Some mobility equipment presents safety challenges.
- Lack of understanding of how transit systems operate.
- Communication problems with some passengers.
- Recruiting, hiring, and retaining drivers.
- Infrastructure and property maintenance.

In the afternoon session, workshop participants were divided into three discussion groups to develop plans for addressing the issues mentioned in the morning session. After a one hour discussion period, each group presented its plan of action for resolving problems mentioned earlier in the day.

Among the items mentioned were lobbying the state legislature for additional funding; cooperative driver and support staff training between various state agencies; and consideration of all options, both public and private, when looking for ways to initiate or expand transit services.

TRANSREPORT Revamped

The front page of this issue of *TRANSREPORT* has been revamped to realign the information about RTAP. Additionally, a volume and numbering system has been started for easier identification of each issue. The next issue of *TRANSREPORT* will be Volume 1, Issue 2.

We hope you like the changes.



Piatt County Transit is Spelled



Piattran is not a word found in Webster's dictionary and it likely won't be part of an answer to a puzzle on a game show. In actuality, Piattran is the transit system based in Monticello that serves Piatt County. Surrounded by Macon, Dewitt, McLean and Champaign counties, Piatt County residents have several choices for shopping, medical services and other amenities offered by cities in these counties according to Ron Weishaar, Transportation Director for the Piatt County Mental Health Center.

Weishaar said, "people from Piatt County travel to many cities outside the county for their medical needs. That can cause us transportation problems as people want to go to many different locations."



Transportation Director Ron Weishaar stands in front of one of Piattran's nine vehicles.

Piatt County is a long, narrow county dissected by two interstate highways. Interstate 74 cuts across the northern part of the county, I-72 runs through the middle, and I-57 is a few miles east in Champaign County. Weishaar says it is difficult to meet the people's needs on the north and extreme south portion of the county with Piattran's vehicles. People in the northern part of the county trade in Bloomington-Normal, Champaign-Urbana, or in Clinton. People in the middle part of the county shop in Decatur and those in the southern part travel to Decatur, Mattoon and Charleston.

Piattran has a fixed route that makes daily trips to Champaign with a 15-passenger Aerotech. Weishaar says the vehicle is at capacity every day with disabled workers, workshop clients and welfare-to-work riders who make the daily round-trip to the Development Services Center, Parkland College, or connect with other public transportation. Weishaar would like to have a Bluebird to transport these clients because the Aerotech is always full.

Two buses travel in Monticello each morning, noon and afternoon transporting kids to day care or to kindergarten, clients to the mental health center, or the local medical center, and senior citizens for local shopping.

Weishaar has tried several innovative programs to serve clients. Drivers who live at the extreme ends of the county have taken buses home with them in the evening so they can pick up passengers early the next morning to catch feeder routes in the county.

A unique program for medical patients in Piatt County and rural areas in some surrounding counties is a video link that has been established between Carle Clinic in Urbana and area medical facilities, including the hospital in Monticello. Medical personnel from Carle Clinic and patients in the outlying area can actually see each other via the video link and have two-way audio and visual conversations.

Carle Clinic currently uses this video link, called "telemedicine", for three purposes: emergency department coverage, specialty consultations with doctors; and pre- and post-surgery visits that enable patients to travel only once, not three times, to Urbana for medical care.

Piattran operates with seven employees, two full-



Norma Williamson, a 10-year employee, answers the telephone and handles all of the accounts receivables plus does all of the billing for the agency.

time and five part-time. The nine vehicles in the fleet next year will make about 32,000 trips, covering approximately 160,000 miles. Six of the nine vehicles are wheelchair-equipped. Most of Piattran's trips are for employment. Last year 63% of the trips were work-related. Educational trips comprised 13%, medical trips made up 9%, recreational trips accounted for 7% while 8% were other or undefined. All vehicles are radio-equipped, allowing Weishaar to contact each driver to respond to schedule changes.

The building housing the transportation system also is home to the Piatt County Mental Health Center. The building is five years old and is operated by a Mental Health Board appointed by the Piatt County Board. The county has retained ownership of the building and Piattran workers are employed by the county.

A new vehicle storage and maintenance facility is attached to the office complex. This 60' by 90' structure has an inside passenger loading area that is heated and is a drive-through for easy entrance and exit. The mechanic's bay, with its own overhead door, is also heated, but the small vehicle storage area is unheated. All vehicles can be stored inside.

Weishaar said Piattran does a pretty good job with training. They currently have annual CPR, first aid, driver sensitivity, fire and emergency evacuation, and driving techniques training.

When commenting about the future, Weishaar said there is an increasing demand for transportation

services in Piatt County. Welfare-to-work clients demand more service and people who have lost their driver's license due to DUI and need transportation to the required counseling sessions are a steady if not increasing portion of Piattran clients.

Weishaar would like to see a countywide dispatching system using a toll-free number. From most areas of the county, it is a toll call to telephone Monticello.



The vehicle storage and maintenance facility has unheated small vehicle storage in the bay at left. The maintenance bay in the center and the passenger loading area on the right are both heated.

Champaign-Urbana is implementing a new intermodal transit system and Weishaar is not sure how that will impact Piattran's trips to Champaign-Urbana.

Weishaar would like to increase the summer trips to nearby Allerton Park, to enable more riders to enjoy the scenery and the summer concerts. Obtaining bus sponsors and selling advertising on buses are possibilities of increasing revenue. Weishaar said, "money is always a problem. We don't know the impact of TEA-21 yet. Will the Illinois Department of Transportation provide replacement vehicles? Will there be money for expanding service?" Weishaar would also like to start a daily trip to Decatur and improve service in the southern part of the county.

There are many things to do if money and other resources are available.

The Transportation Action Model

A Case Study in Jacksonville, IL

by Rebecca Shaw

Rebecca Shaw served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Lesotho, southern Africa. She is pursuing her Master of Arts degree in Geography as a Peace Corps Fellow at Western Illinois University. She hopes to work in transportation planning in the future.

What is the Transportation Action Model?

The Transportation Action Model (TAM) is a “local input model to engage community transportation planning”. It was developed by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University. The TAM outlines a step-by-step process that can enable rural communities to envision a future transportation system. The planning process spans approximately fourteen weeks and includes four organizational meetings. In addition, various subcommittees are formed to complete tasks independent of the main group. To investigate the viability of this model in rural Illinois, a case study of Jacksonville will be used.

Background

Jacksonville is a city of 20,000 located in western Illinois. The community had previously formed an economic development committee and determined that public transportation was a priority for the city and that Jacksonville needed outside assistance in exploring various alternatives. Rebecca Shaw from the Rural Transit Assistance Center was assigned to facilitate the TAM in Jacksonville.

Jacksonville has a number of specialty transportation providers serving specific

segments of the community. For instance, the Prairie Council on Aging serves the elderly within the Jacksonville city limits. Low income and mobility-challenged residents may use taxi service under a reduced fare program sponsored by the city. However, the development committee felt that a comprehensive coordinated transportation plan would better serve the needs of the area.

The TAM Process

The first meeting, held on September 22, 1998, dealt with background information and organizational issues. As outlined in the TAM, formation of the Technical Committee and the Public Input Committee was discussed. It was decided on September 22 to table committee formation until the process coordinator, Larry Weber, could contact the individuals that he felt should lead the two committees.

The second meeting for the Jacksonville group was held on October 15, 1998. Because the two committees had not been formed at the first meeting, the group’s process was behind on the time line as outlined by the TAM. Committees were formed at the October 15th meeting. In addition, the geographic area for visioning was defined as Morgan and Scott counties. A representative from the local media attended the meeting as well.

The third meeting was held on November 5th. The technical committee distributed a report on vehicles currently available in Jacksonville for public transportation. The technical committee felt it necessary to perform a thorough needs assessment of the area. While this survey will take longer than the time allotted by the TAM, it was agreed that the information was important

enough to delay the rest of the process somewhat.

In addition, the November 5th meeting began the actual visioning process. In transportation visioning, as in community visioning, the concept is extremely important. The transportation planning committee identified several issues to address for the visioning process. However, when discussing these issues, there was some disagreement in how to proceed. There was confusion concerning “visioning” versus “implementation”. As a result, the committee decided to contact a speaker who has previously gone through this process. All issues were tabled until the speaker could be scheduled.

Betty Green, Executive Director of the Rides Mass Transit District (RMTD) based in Rosiclare, IL met with the Jacksonville group December 17 to discuss the trials and tribulations of starting a transit system.

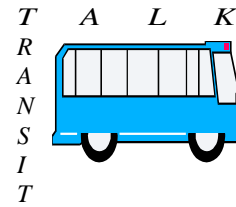
Green reviewed her experiences in starting and maintaining the RMTD operation and offered several suggestions to the group. Before the next meeting, scheduled for January 7, 1999, group members will contact the Morgan County Planning Commission and local government leaders to enlist their help and support in starting and maintaining a transit operation for the area.

Currently

Jacksonville is still in the visioning process. Although there have been bumps in the process, using the TAM has been a positive investment in Jacksonville. The Jacksonville experience suggests that the TAM is a successful model.

Peace Corps Fellow Available for Transportation Work

Each Peace Corps Fellow at Western Illinois University serves an 11-month internship in a rural Illinois community. If your community or agency has an interest in having a Peace Corps Fellow work on transportation issues, contact Joel McQueen or Lee Eavy at (800) 526-9943.



Q. *How difficult a problem is insurance when agencies attempt to coordinate transportation services?*

A. Coordination of transportation services is once again a hot topic throughout the U.S. Many agencies are reluctant to participate in such an arrangement because of the liability issue. The following comments about coordination are from a nationally recognized leader in insurance for rural transit agencies.

When two or more agencies share transportation, it is easier if one of the agencies becomes the vendor or lead agency and provides the transportation to all of the other agencies. In that model, the vendor agency has control over all aspects of transportation, including vehicle maintenance, vehicle operator qualifications, and training. There is no problem with carrying passengers from different agencies in the same van at the same time. Vehicles should be classified on the insurance policy as Social Service Transportation, class code 648_ (Fleet) or 645_ (Non fleet), which contemplates this kind of operation. Vehicles should not be classified as church buses, private passenger vehicles, school buses, service vehicles, even though these classes will develop a lower premium. Such classes of vehicles are not set up for this exposure and could result in problems at the time of any claim. The agencies who are purchasing services can be named as additional insureds on the provider agency's policy, and this should cover the exposure of the purchasing agency. On the issue of employee operators, they should all be considered employees of the providing agency, as this will eliminate any workers compensation problems in the event of an accident. There are many ways to set this up, and the concept should not inhibit coordination between agencies (for additional information, contact David Ellis Agency, 717/737-0200, extension 300).

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