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Upcoming Events:

October 14, 2015
Springfield Regional Maintenance Workshop
April 6-7, 2016
RTAC Spring Conference, Springfield
On-Site Driver Training and
Classroom Driver Training
(Call RTAC: 800.526.9943)
RTAC Notes

Our newer rural transit systems cannot be expected to immediately perform at the level of established systems. It takes time for them to fine tune operations, build ridership, establish relationships with partners, procure rolling stock, and deal with various compliance requirements.

Those newer systems were developed as a result of a collaborative transit capacity building process. IDOT DPIT has required, since 2006, that counties seeking a Section 5311 grant first work through the ICCT Coordination Primer process designed to bring together and educate stakeholders, develop transit capacity (most often finding specialized providers with existing vehicle complements who were interested in expanding their operations), educate potential grantees, and develop an initial service plan. The process also connects the prospective grantees to IDOT DPIT and helps them develop a proposed budget. At the end of the Primer process prospective grantees develop a transit advisory council. Then the system begins its own never ending process of growing and evolving.

The new systems have a variety of resources to help them on their path. The IDOT Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation (DPIT), the Illinois Public Transportation Association (IPTA), the Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) Coordinators, the Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC), the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and peers (all other Illinois transit systems) are available and should be utilized.

I always worry when I never hear from a new system after the Section 5311 grant has been achieved. For example, the last couple of years I have been collaborating with the fine folks at a new rural transit system which faces operational and compliance problems. For the first two years after the system start up, I heard nothing from them. I called a few times, was told “everything is fine.” Finally, after a personnel change at the system operator, I got a distress call. It took a couple of meetings with a variety of county partners to realize what was causing the grantee’s problems. The insular nature of the system’s operations and administration was the culprit.

At a meeting with the system and local partners, I asked how often the transit advisory council met. At the end of the Primer process the Transit Partnership group (TPG) had created the council in order to provide input to the governing

—RTAC Notes continued on page 12
IPTA Notes

Last month, IPTA tragically lost one of its longtime board members, Tom Zucker. Tom passed away suddenly at home after suffering an apparent heart attack on Tuesday, August 18. Tom has been the executive director of Voluntary Action Center (VAC) since 1991. I had the great pleasure of getting to know Tom during the six years I have been with IPTA, and I had the chance to work particularly close with him during his term as President of the board from 2010 to 2012.

Tom had a real passion for helping his community. He was the backbone of VAC, which provides public transportation and Meals on Wheels for citizens of DeKalb and Kendall Counties. During his more than 20 years in the business he truly helped advance rural public transportation in the state through his work on the board of the Illinois Public Transportation Association and as the longtime state delegate for the Community Transportation Association of America. His compassion and care for those his organization served was abundantly apparent.

I could always count on Tom. No matter what I was looking for, whether it was a simple request for information, a volunteer to serve on a committee, or someone to help with just about any task, Tom always stepped up. I never had to ask twice with him and for that I will always be grateful.

Very fittingly, the IPTA Board has created an award in Tom’s name—The Thomas F. Zucker Award for the Advancement of Rural Public Transportation. This award will be given to individuals that have made a significant impact on rural public transit, as Tom certainly did. It was presented to Tom posthumously this month at the 2015 IPTA Fall Conference. His family was in attendance to accept the award on his behalf.

I considered Tom Zucker more than just a colleague; I considered him a friend. He always wore a smile and had a joke to tell, and while they may not have always the best jokes, you couldn’t help but laugh. His love and commitment to his family and the communities he served was without measure. Tom has left very big shoes to fill both on the IPTA Board of Directors and at VAC. He is sorely missed!

Laura Calderon

IPTA Fall Conference 2012, Tom Zucker receiving IPTA recognition award from Bill Grogan
Transporting large wheelchairs and customers of size is a growing concern for transit agencies. The total weight of a passenger and wheeled mobility device combined can present safety challenges for drivers. This tech brief evaluates some of the issues related to transporting oversized wheelchairs and will evaluate some of the best practices and recommendations for safely securing and transporting oversized mobility devices.

ADA requirements

Transit providers are required to transport wheelchair and occupant if the lift and vehicle can physically accommodate them. If a lift has the minimum design load of 600 pounds, there is no requirement for an agency to transport a heavier occupied device. However, if the vehicle lift has a design load of 800 pounds, the agency would need to transport a 800-pound wheelchair/passenger combination, but not a combination exceeding 800 pounds.

Transit providers are not required to transport devices that do not fit on the lift or vehicle.

Transit providers must transport a wheelchair and occupant if the lift and vehicle can physically accommodate them, unless doing so is inconsistent with legitimate safety requirements.

“Legitimate safety requirements” refers to wheelchairs of such size that they would block an aisle, would be too large to fully enter a railcar, would block the vestibule, or would interfere with the safe evacuation of passengers in an emergency.

Transit providers cannot impose a limitation on the transportation of wheelchairs and other mobility aids based on the inability of the securement system to secure the device to the satisfaction of the transportation provider. It would be inconsistent with the rule to deny service to people who use wheelchairs solely because particular devices may be problematic from a securement point of view.

Transit providers are not required to retrofit vehicles.

Transit providers are not required to procure vehicles or lifts that exceed the ADA requirements.
Revised Wheelchair Definition

Section 37.3 of the DOT regulations implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (49 CFR Parts 27, 37, and 38) defines a “wheelchair” as “a mobility aid belonging to any class of three- or more-wheeled devices, usable indoors, designed or modified for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered.”

Oversized Wheelchairs

Transporting and securing large and/or heavy wheeled mobility devices is an ongoing challenge for some transit providers. Recent changes to ADA definitions continue to cause confusion. Several research projects have examined issues related to transporting oversized/overweight wheelchairs and mobility devices. The recent changes to the ADA definition of wheelchair have alleviated some of the concerns addressed in the reports. However, some of the findings suggest that more work needs to be done and that likely changes in population demographics will be increasingly problematic for transit agencies, operators, and passengers with wheelchairs.

Potential Issues

Although current research suggests that large and/or heavy wheelchairs are not a significant problem, potential problems reported by transit agencies, state DOTs, vehicle manufacturers, and experts include the following:

- Harm to the passenger, their wheelchair, the lift, the vehicle, the driver, or other passengers.
- Mobility devices not fitting safely on the lift or that are unable to be secured or maneuvered on to the vehicle.
- Securement belts not being long enough to go around the passenger, or the passenger’s size making it difficult to reach attachment points, requiring extension belts.
- Large and/or heavy mobility aids not fitting easily within the securement area on a transit vehicle.
- A clear floor space as large as 33 x 56 inches may be needed to accommodate people with the largest space needs (large power wheelchairs and scooters, people who have limbs that have to be kept in an extended position, equipment that is hung off wheelchairs such as respirators and control devices, and simply large bodies that extend outside the perimeter of the devices).
- Difficulty maneuvering larger mobility devices on transit vehicles, especially on low-floor bus models, due to limited space.
Lisa Beith, director of public transportation, Danville Mass Transit

I was raised in Danville, Illinois and moved to Reno, Nevada after high school. My first job in Reno was transportation-related in a whole different capacity. I worked at Lear Fan, which was a company founded by Bill Lear. While his concept of an all composite aircraft did make its first flight, it never made it to production and the company closed.

After my second daughter was born, I went to work for Washoe County School District in their transportation department. I began driving school buses in 1986. I held many different positions in the department including instructor/evaluator, CDL 3rd party examiner, dispatcher, and ultimately became the first student management instructor for the district.

In 1997, after 13 years with Washoe County School District, my husband and two daughters and I moved back to Danville. I worked briefly for Ryder Student Transportation, and then took a position at CRIS Senior Services as the director of the transportation department. CRIS provided (and still does) senior transportation, county transportation in Vermilion County and ADA paratransit services for Danville Mass Transit.

While working for CRIS, I became the first RTAC passenger assistance instructor. I enjoyed traveling across the state and meeting many of the employees who make our rural transportation system such an asset to the state of Illinois.

In 2001, I resigned from CRIS and worked at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana for a year. In early 2002, I interviewed and was hired as the Operations Supervisor at Danville Mass Transit. I established a comprehensive training program and primarily oversaw the operators, dispatchers, training program, and drug and alcohol program. I served as the Operations Supervisor for 13 years.

After the resignation of our director at DMT, the Mayor appointed me to serve as the interim director. I officially became the director of public transportation at DMT in March 2015. Moving from the operations side to a more administrative role proved to be a challenge, but I am fortunate to have the wisdom and experience of Richard Brazda. He was the director from 2003 until his retirement in 2012. He is serving as a consultant to DMT and has been a valuable resource during this transitional period.

Over the past 13 years, we’ve doubled our ridership, our routes, and our full-time operators. We’ve equipped all of our buses with camera surveillance systems, new fare boxes, and bicycle racks. We have almost completed installation of facility surveillance cameras, and in the next couple of months, we’ll break ground on a $3.1 million dollar project to construct a new transfer facility. The new transfer zone will have an indoor facility equipped with restrooms and vending, a covered boarding area, and will be a beautiful addition to our downtown environment.

On the personal side, I have been married to my husband, Dale for 33 years. I have two daughters, a wonderful son-in-law and two beautiful granddaughters, who are the joy of my life. I love to camp, fish, garden, and sew.
1. How did you get started in rural transportation?

I started my career at Macoupin County Public Health Department (MCPHD) as a full-time receptionist in January 2004; I answered phones and assisted clients. The Health Department had a small medical transportation system with three vans and three drivers. Because of the limited services, I began supporting the system by answering transportation calls and scheduling medical trips. I learned how to bill Medicaid, which gave us more revenue, which in turn gave us the opportunity to provide more rides. The program began to grow rapidly. In October of 2007, MCPHD was offered the opportunity to start transporting Senior Citizens. This gave us the opportunity to transport patrons for not only medical purposes, but for recreational needs as well. I conducted all the scheduling and planning for both programs. It also allowed me to create a database and scheduling system using Excel, which we still use today. In 2008, Macoupin County began the 5311 ICCT Primer Process for transportation. In 2010, public transportation began and I was promoted to Transportation Coordinator. At the present time, we have two full-time dispatchers, approximately 26 drivers, and two transportation coordinators. Through advertisement, word of mouth, and service contracts we have grown to 23 vehicles and provide nearly 50,000 rides a year.

2. If you didn’t have a transit background, how did you learn the ropes?

I learned the ropes from Peggy Garrison, Kent Tarro, and the ICCT Primer Process, in addition to the knowledge of what I had been learning through the years.

3. Did you have a mentor in transit?

Peggy and Kent were great mentors to me. I could count on them to get the answers to necessary questions along with suggestions on how to improve transportation throughout the county.

4. Toughest day-to-day operational problem

The toughest part would have to be not being able to provide a ride to all patrons when needed. Even though we try our hardest to find a solution to every request, sometimes we just don’t win.

5. What’s a typical day like

A typical day consists of first and foremost ensuring the safety of all my staff and clients. I monitor and direct MCPT’s dispatchers and drivers. With approximately, 200 calls and 300
On paratransit vehicles, maneuverability can be difficult when more than one mobility device is on board.

Mobility devices that are overweight when occupied (over the 600-pound minimum weight standard that the ADA defines for transit vehicle lift load) have the potential to damage lifts, ramps, and transit vehicle suspensions.

Not knowing the combined weight of a passenger and his/her wheelchair and having to ask (or perhaps the passenger does not know).

Having to determine on the road whether the lift can accommodate the weight, and whether the wheelchair will fit—potentially causing delays, resulting in more rushed decisions, and embarrassing the passenger.

For the rest of the article and more information, please visit www.NationalRTAP.org, or contact National RTAP directly at info@nationalrtap.org or at 888-589-6821.

STATEWIDE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has begun work on the State’s first Statewide Public Transportation Plan (Plan). IDOT intends to use this Plan to implement policies designed to increase resident and visitor mobility through improved connectivity among transportation modes. The Plan will have a comprehensive vision for public transportation throughout Illinois and identify goals, objectives and strategies covering short-term (5 years), mid-term (10 years) and long-term (20 years) planning timeframes. Performance measures will also be identified. The Plan’s development will take approximately 24 months resulting in final plan in December 2016.

Data collection and identification of existing conditions and trends has been underway during the first half of 2015. The Steering Committee, comprised of transit providers, metropolitan planning organizations, an HSTP Coordinator, RTAC and IPTA, held their first meeting in June. The committee started to develop a vision statement, goals and objectives, performance measures and discussed service gaps and funding. The plan website will be launched in September and we will be seeking input from transit stakeholders and the public on the vision, goals and objectives this fall. If you are interested in getting updates on the plan and would like to be added to the email list, please contact Nicole George at nicole.george@illinois.gov.

Nicole George & Mike Healy
Co-Project Managers
Eileen C. Sierra-Brown joined Piatt County Public Transportation (Piattran) in June 2015 as the assistant director. Prior to taking on her current position, Eileen had worked for Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) since 2010—at first as a MY TRIP mobility coach (United We Ride)—then later as the coordinator for East Central Illinois Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) Region 8.

Before entering into the rural transportation field, Eileen worked for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) on projects for the FBI’s N-Dex Project and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) Law Enforcement Leadership/Training Institutes in Alexandria, VA. In 2007, Eileen earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of Maryland at College Park. Eileen is a native of Marietta, GA—but sadly does not have the southern accent to prove it.

Currently, she is enjoying learning the ins and outs of operations at Piattran, including dispatching with Lisa Olsen! If ever near Monticello, please stop by to check out Piattran’s new offices and vehicle bays (1925 N. Market Street, Monticello, IL 61856).

rides/trips occurring per day, this can be quite busy. My position also calls for counting trips, working with senior citizens for group trips, helping with grant writing, and solving management and billing issues.

6. What’s your proudest achievement?

Two come to mind as my proudest accomplishments in public transportation. The first is the Macoupin County Public Transportation’s Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on March 8, 2011. The second is the public transportation system receiving The Meeting the Challenge Award from the Carlinville Chamber of Commerce presented by Mayor Deanna Demuzio on December of 2014. This award highlights our abilities for continuously meeting the challenges to provide transportation services, even amidst the most difficult financial circumstances.

7. What motivates you?

The knowledge that we are helping people keep their sense of independence motivates me the most. Without our program, some of our community members would not be able to conduct their daily routines or desires. This allows me to be able to leave work knowing I made a difference in someone’s life.

8. What do you do to motivate your staff?

Our staff at Macoupin County Public Transportation is a family. We work together to solve problems and in turn praise each other for our successes or raise each other up from our disappointments. Without our dedication to teamwork, the transportation department would not be able to function in the efficient manner that it does. This is our motivation, our caring for one another and our common desire to provide a much needed service.
In Memoriam
Tom Zucker

—Tom Zucker continued on page 11
When I began attending RTAC conferences back in the 1990s, I noticed a couple of people who seemed heavily engaged, involved with panel discussions and the like. Tom was one of those folks. When I joined RTAC in 2000, lo and behold, Tom was the chair of the RTAP advisory council. In the intervening years we participated in a lot of meetings and trainings, as well as a number of one-way discussions (me listening and Tom telling one of his myriad of jokes).

We both loved the music and panache of the late Steve Goodman. Tom had often seen Goodman perform in venues in and around Chicago, I got to see Goodman in concert the year he died in 1984, and I have a friend who was in Goodman’s band in the 1970s. A few years ago a live album from a 1978 Goodman performance at the Earl of Old Town was released. I got Tom a copy. We often talked about it.

And we talked about the Cubs and Cardinals. Tom, like most Cub fans, yearned for a World Series championship. That Goodman album featured a rollicking “When the Cubs Go Marching In.” When the Cubs finally go marching into a World Series, this Cardinal fan will be thinking of Tom Zucker.

Some folks achieve professional accomplishments at the cost of peer and employee goodwill. Not Tom, his peers and employees loved him. He always seemed to be having a good day. He will be missed.

Ed Heflin
body (county which held the Section 5311 operating assistance grant) on ways to enhance service and/or boost efficiency. In theory the TPG morphs into an advisory council to allow public and stakeholder representation to continue and help ensure grant transparency as well as the aforementioned service and efficiency enhancement. As I had expected, after the Primer process ended a local decision had been made that the council was not needed. The resultant lack of stakeholder input detrimentally affected system operations.

At a meeting with the grantee and operator, it was evident that the board for the operator had been calling the shots for the Section 5311 grant. Essentially, the board for an agency which served a specific demographic group was making financial and operational decisions for a transit service intended to serve residents in all demographic groups countywide. This practice detrimentally effected system operations, inhibited public ridership, and caused a litany of compliance issues as evidenced by the results of an RLS & Associates compliance review.

It is important to state again that the folks I’m working with at that grant are good people. I enjoy seeing them and visiting their community. Yet, from the moment a local decision was made to not convene an advisory council for the county’s Section 5311 grant, things went askew. Once we re-formulated the council and began holding meetings, the following positives changes began to occur:

- A representative for the grantee came to the table and it was established to all parties that the grantee (and not the board of the operator) needed to be making decisions for the grant.
- Progress began toward developing much-needed local match.
- Council members began discussing ridership needs.
- Council members began discussing advertising needs.

Let’s discuss that last bullet point. A council member asked about advertising as part of a broader discussion we were having about the public’s lack of knowledge about the public transit system. The system manager stated that advertising was occurring. I asked for specifics. He stated that the human service agency’s bulletin mentioned the public transit system. I asked who received the bulletin and was told the clients of the human service agency. As a result, the large majority of the riders of the public transit system were the clients of the human service agency which operated the system.

Council members made some good suggestions on how to reach a general audience via advertising. They suggested other outreach activities to make the public aware that they could get a ride. In case you are wondering, yes, the system vehicles were marked with the requisite public transportation wording. But since the public was not getting information about their ride eligibility and usually saw agency clients getting rides, that wording on the bus was not enough to promote sufficient public ridership.

Now things are improving at that rural transit system. The grantee is engaged, the human service agency operating the system is supportive and has made some excellent changes, the system has set priorities, and problems are being rectified. A variety of partners have contributed to those positive changes.