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Upcoming Events:

September 13-15, 2010
  IPTA Fall Conference, Fairview Heights
October 13, 2010
  Regional Maintenance Workshop, Champaign
April 6-7, 2011
  RTAC Spring Conference, Springfield
On-Going:
  On-Site Driver Training and
  Classroom Driver Training
  (Call RTAC: 800.526.9943)

RTAC is a unit of the
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University
RTAP Advisory Council

Tom Zucker, Chair
tzvac@aol.com
Voluntary Action Center
1606 Bethany Road
Sycamore, IL 60178
815.758.3932

Rich Machala, Vice Chair
jdctransit@att.net
JoDaviess County Transit
POB 6087
Galena, IL 61036
815.777.8088

Kevin Carr
carrk@kreiderservices.org
Kreider Services, Inc.
500 Anchor Road, POB 366
Dixon, IL 61021
815.288.6691

Connie Darnell
Connie.Darnell@illinois.gov
DHS-DRS
1124 North Walnut Street
Springfield, IL 62702
217.782.4830

R. Jean Jumper
managingdirectorwcmdt@frontier.com
West Central Mass Transit District
1120 W. Walnut St.
Jacksonville, IL 62650-1131
217.245.2900

Bill Jung
rmtdeo@ridesmtd.com
Rides Mass Transit District
1200 West Poplar
Harrisburg, IL 62946
618.253.8761

Linda Mitchell
lmitchell@cefseoc.org
CEFS Economic Opportunity Corporation
POB 928
Effingham, IL 62401
217.342.2193 X120

Sheila Niederhofer
sniederhofer@southcentraltransit.org
South Central Transit
1616 East McCord
Centralia, IL 62801
618.532.8076

Anna Oestreich
bcsenior@sbcglobal.net
Bond County Senior Center
305 South Third
Greenville, IL 62246
618.664.1465

Non-Voting Member
Gary DeLeo,
Section Chief Non-Metro Programs,
Gary.DeLeo@illinois.gov
IDOT, Division of Public and Intermodal Transportation
J.R. Thompson Center, Suite 6-600
100 W Randolph
Chicago, IL 60601
312.793.6043

RTAC Notes

At some point in their driving career, it is likely that every transit driver will encounter an agitated passenger. Hopefully your drivers will have been trained to provide proper responses to such instances. The article beginning on page 4 contains information we hope will assist your system with its new hire and refresher training. We will also include the article in our classroom training packet to be mailed out in several weeks.

Drivers and dispatchers, the “face” of your organization, are the employees most responsible for how the public views the quality of your transit services. Those employees’ customer service skills can literally make or break your reputation. Imagine the effect of a driver’s improper response to an agitated customer or a dispatcher’s terse handling of a caller.

At this year’s RTAC conference Karen Copeland, executive director of Rock River Center, suggested we sponsor a training session on customer service. I agree with Karen. Existing transit systems are expanding and new systems are starting up, which means that more and more rural Illinois citizens are being introduced to public transportation. We need to put our best “face” forward.

At our next Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) advisory council meeting we will discuss how best to address this issue—should we have a training session at our next conference so that managers can take information back to employees, or should we add a customer service course to our on-site training offerings? In addition to the RTAP advisory council input, I welcome readers’ suggestions. Please call or email with your ideas.

A breakout session on mobility management is being offered at the IPTA conference in less than two weeks. As you know, mobility management has many definitions but essentially is the process of arranging a ride for a customer. Mobility management and superior customer service go hand in hand. In rural areas, mobility management is interconnected with the 5311 expansion program, the Interagency Coordination Committee on Transportation (ICCT) mission to fill in service gaps for transit disadvantaged populations, and the rural HSTP regional coordination effort. I will explain more at the Mobility Management session at the IPTA conference.

P.S. When you see Jean Jumper and Sheila Niederhofer at the conference, please congratulate them. They have been appointed to our advisory council.

Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) Staff

Edward Heflin, CCTM, manager, EL-Heflin@wiu.edu (RTAP)
John Edmondson, transit coordination assistant, John.Edmondson@illinois.gov (ARRA)
Mable Kreps, transit specialist, MR-Kreps@wiu.edu (RTAP)
Carol Montague, transit coordination assistant, CA-Montague@wiu.edu (ICCT)
Dawn Piper, transit coordination specialist, DC-Piper@wiu.edu (ICCT)
Jacqueline Waters, transit specialist, JS-Waters@wiu.edu (RTAP)

Macomb: Telephone: 800.526.9943  Fax: 309.298.2162
RTAC Web Site: www.iira.org/outreach/rtac.asp
RTAC E-mail: rtac@wiu.edu

Chicago: (John): Telephone: 312.793.0011  Fax: 312.793.1251
State of Good Repair

According to a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) study released in July, $77.7 billion is needed to bring all the nation’s rail and bus transit systems into a state of good repair. On top of that, an additional $14.4 billion is needed annually to maintain the systems in that state. While only $18.4 billion of that repair backlog is for non-rail transit, more than 40 percent of the nation’s buses are in poor or marginal condition. Maintaining the nation’s bus and rail systems in a state of good repair is vital to preserving safe, reliable, affordable public transportation across the country. “Transit remains one of the safest forms of transportation, but this report shows the clear need to reinvest in our bus, subway and light rail systems,” U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said. “As a nation, we must lead when it comes to infrastructure development and commit ourselves to rebuilding America.”

In Illinois alone, $912 million is needed to bring all public transportation systems into a state of good repair (2009 Downstate Public Transportation Capital Needs Assessment). Nearly $103 million of that identified need is in rural areas. And that is only for systems that currently receive federal funding. Additional need exists where service is still being established. Clearly this need is tremendous. Thankfully, state and federal officials do not take this issue lightly.

Secretary LaHood has included State of Good Repair as one of the five transportation system-wide goals in his proposed strategic plan for the Department of Transportation. Additionally, this past April, FTA’s Administrator, Peter Rogoff, announced that $775 million was available in a State of Good Repair Bus and Bus Facilities Program. While this is a great start, and that type of investment is welcomed, it is likely the funding will be spread rather thin, as there were more than 400 project applications and more than $4.2 billion in requests for the funding.

The Illinois State Legislature approved two capital programs in 2009 that contained a total of $300 million for downstate public transportation. Governor Pat Quinn recently announced more than $500 million in public transportation infrastructure improvement projects statewide. Of that, $58 million was for downstate, funding at least 37 different projects. Many of these projects will help in the effort to bring public transit systems in Illinois into a state of good repair. “Our mass transit systems drive Illinois’ economy and we must invest in them to continue our economic recovery and create jobs,” said Governor Quinn. “This important capital investment will improve the safety, reliability and efficiency of the public transportation systems that people throughout Illinois rely on every day.”

State capital funding for public transportation has been woefully inadequate over the last several years. Moving forward, it is important to continue the investment in transit capital with a focus on returning our systems to a state of good repair. This type of investment is a vital step in rebuilding a strong economy, and at the same time ensuring the safety and well-being of transit passengers.

Laura Calderon
How to Work With an Agitated Passenger

By Anne Lowder

Practical tips for drivers in handling specific types of situations.

Whether you are assisting a passenger into a transit vehicle or driving down the road to a scheduled destination, a passenger may become agitated. There may be just one factor contributing to this agitation, such as a passenger with dementia imagining he or she missed an appointment or obligation. Or there could be other reasons (or a combination of them) for the agitation such as the inability to communicate basic needs, strange surroundings, medical conditions that affect brain activity, or just wanting to be somewhere else.

Passengers who are agitated may refuse to board the vehicle, perform distracting behaviors during the ride such as moving from seat to seat, attempt to leave the vehicle while in motion, and be or become argumentative. As a driver, keep in mind that there are ways to deal effectively with the behavior of an agitated passenger, but the same method may not work each time. Be ready to try different approaches.

Transporting an agitated passenger

Customer management on the vehicle you drive is important. The majority of your passengers are most likely quiet, courteous, and easy to serve. Occasionally someone will present you with a problem, but the common denominator for transporting all your passengers is effective communication, which starts with remaining professional and keeping calm, cool and focused. As a transportation operator, you are the leader establishing a level of communication that provides a quality ride for every passenger, including those who may be challenging.

A major barrier to effective communication can be our own tendencies to judge and then approve or disapprove of someone based on their actions or appearances alone.

A second barrier is allowing emotion to take over. No matter how badly your passenger behaves, as a professional driver it is your responsibility to remain calm. You must match what you say with how you say it.

What are strategies for good communication?

There are several strategies that can help you get your message across in almost any situation, and these are particularly effective with working with someone with a cognitive impairment:

• Be calm, or at least attempt to appear calm.
• Try to put yourself in the person’s situation. Imagine how he or she might be feeling or is trying to express.
• Use positive and helpful body language.
• Offer as much reassurance as you can.

Sources

• Give extra time for the passenger to respond.
• Speak directly and clearly. Use short sentences and simple, easy-to-understand words.
• Keep directions clear by explaining one step at a time.
• Provide accurate, honest information.
• Empathize. Try to put yourself in their place, and tell them that you can see their point of view.
• Use pictures and objects to illustrate your words. Point to your ID picture as you say who you are, point to any safety equipment as you speak about it. Anticipate what you need the passenger to do, and connect those tasks to other common events. For example, “By lunch time…” or “By the time the sun goes down…”

Heading off agitation
So what do you do if your passenger repeats the same gesture, asks the same question over and over, switches from seat to seat, tries to blame you for something you didn’t do, or becomes paranoid that you are plotting against him or her? How about when someone sees objects or people that aren’t there, or says things that simply don’t make any sense? Is your reaction to try and bring the person back to reality? No, that strategy generally does not work.

Passengers who are agitated often have a cognitive disability such as dementia and are living in a different time than you or I. When they talk about people or places from the past, go along with them instead of correcting them. This will help create a calming connection between you and your customer. Simply repeat back what they say and then ask them to tell you more about that person or place.

For example if your passenger becomes argumentative because he believes that he lives at a different house than where you are headed, it is often helpful to agree and act as if you are going along with his plan—even use it as a discussion topic—while you are proceeding to the original destination. This will help him use the parts of his brain that are still working and alleviate anxiety by allowing him to reexperience his memories. This is usually more effective than arguing with someone with dementia, as he may not have the ability to understand the reality of the situation even after many attempts on your part to explain things.

Validate your passenger’s beliefs, which will result in more cooperation. Validation is empathy; however, empathy is not sympathy, confrontation or being patronizing. The chart on page 12 outlines some role-playing ideas using validation that handle some of the more difficult situations you may face as a driver.

Summary
As a driver you have an important job to not only provide your customers with a safe and comfortable ride but also to provide positive customer service. Skill in working with agitated passengers is not as much a natural skill as one developed by practicing responding to potential situations, evaluating how a given situation evolved, and making changes to the situation based on a desired outcome. The process must start with training in passenger assistance. Remember that working with agitated passengers is within your control; apply the various training tips to situations on your vehicle to find the tips that works best with each customer.

Used with permission from the Kansas TransReporter, July 2010, page 10-11.
Monroe Randolph Transit District
By Jesica Pirtle, MRT Director

Monroe Randolph Transit District (MRT) provides demand response, curb to curb transportation services to the 70,000 residents of Monroe and Randolph counties covering 940 square miles in south western Illinois. MRT employs 13 individuals including eight part- and full- time drivers, one mechanic, one book keeper, one dispatcher, one receptionist and a director.

The District is administered by a nine person board of directors appointed by each county board and each municipality within the district with a population over 1,000. Funding comes from the Illinois Downstate Operating Assistance Program, Section 5311 Grant, fare boxes, donations, ad sales (interior and exterior), and service contracts.

MRT is open for business Monday through Friday from 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM. Each one way trip is $3.00. Assistants always ride free. MRT provides Medicaid-funded transportation.

During its first year of operation, MRT became a Downstate Operating Assistance Program (DOAP) recipient. In FY2009, MRT received its first 5311 grant, after completing the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation (ICCT) Clearinghouse Transportation Coordination Primer process. The first MRT vehicle, a 10-passenger turtle top van, was donated by the St. Clements Community Foundation in 2005. It is still on the road providing trips across our two counties. The next five vehicles were purchased with a grant from the Delta Regional Authority. In 2007, MRT received the first set of Illinois Department of Transportation, Department of Public and Intermodal Transportation (IDOT, DPIT) medium duty

Monroe Randolph Transit began as a consortium of concerned citizens with representatives from area social service agencies, health departments, the Regional Office of Education, and many others who were concerned that there was no system in place to get clients to their offices. In 1999, these folks began researching how to form a funded district. By December 2005, MRT became an operational Mass Transit District, providing 35 one-way trips during its first month of operation.
14-passenger vans. Since then, MRT has gained three additional IDOT vehicles, and is awaiting the delivery of five more. In total, MRT has (or will) received five vehicles from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus grant, along with $100,000 in dispatching software and accessories. IDOT hopes to have the software delivered in the fall/winter of 2010. With the addition of the new software, dispatchers will no longer have to rely on pencil and paper to schedule trips.

With the completion of the ICCT Clearinghouse Primer came the securement of service contracts. Currently, MRT provides transportation to Garden Place, an assisted living facility, out of Red Bud and Columbia. The District provides approximately 200 trips per month just to these two facilities. MRT will begin a new service contract this fall with a local church facility.

In 2009, MRT sold its first full-vehicle wrap to the local community college. The wrap and smaller interior ad sales have been a unique revenue source for the District. With more vehicles on the way, the District hopes to continue to sell the advertising space to area companies and social service agencies.

In 2008, MRT was awarded another Delta Regional Authority Grant to work in conjunction with a GIS agency to map out ridership in order to give a clear picture of ridership trends in comparison with census data. As this partnership grows to a close, the outcomes of the project have shown where feasible fixed routes would benefit the community. Plans for the future of the District include implementing a deviated fixed route, increased service hours and adding weekend service to better meet riders’ needs. The GIS project has fit well with the Primer process in finding existing gaps in coverage, plans to fill those gaps, and new partnership opportunities.

In 2010, MRT opened a hub in Monroe County. It takes approximately one hour to travel from the northernmost to the southernmost points in the county. Having the vehicles parked in the middle of each county reduces the number of deadhead miles and travel time. The new Monroe County hub is an un-staffed location, supplied by the Monroe County Health Department. A filing cabinet and fax machine make up the office. All calls are taken through the Sparta location, and manifests are faxed to the Monroe County drivers every evening. Having an un-staffed location keeps overhead costs down.

Until May of this year, MRT’s Operations and Administration departments were housed at separate locations. In early 2008, the building owner of the leased administration facility offered to build a joint facility to house both departments. The move to the new facility took place at the end of April, and was fully operational by the
Transit Movers recognizes people in Illinois transit who have been promoted, changed responsibilities, moved to a different transit agency, etc. If there are people within your agency who fall into these categories, contact the RTAC staff at 800.526.9943, e-mail rtac@wiu.edu or fax 309.298.2162. Please include pictures!

Mike Neuenkirchen was recently named para-transit director for Gateway Services in Princeton, Illinois. Concurrently, he serves as director of operations for Bureau Area Rural Transit (BART).

Prior to joining BART, Mike was executive director of the Streator Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He was responsible for overseeing the community’s economic development program including marketing, project management, and administering the Streator Area Enterprise Zone. Before that, Mike worked as public relations director for the greater Aurora Chamber of Commerce. Mike has also worked in management for Jewel Food Stores in the Chicago suburbs.

In his spare time, Mike plays guitar in a couple of bands (badly) and likes to play golf (again...badly).

We are happy to announce that Resha Oylear is returning to RTAC. She has contracted to become our Defensive Driving trainer as of September. You will remember Resha from her 2003-2008 stint as our Emergency Procedures trainer.

Resha began her transportation career in 1997 as a para-transit driver in southern California, working for a private contractor performing two public transportation contracts in West Ventura County. With that company she worked her way up by becoming a behind-the-wheel trainer, dispatcher, and operations supervisor. In the winter of 1999, Resha moved with her family to the Greater Chicago area, where she assisted a private contractor’s start-up program as a trainer of para-transit drivers. She moved on to become a transportation supervisor for a local government agency and is now in charge of safety, training and security at a transit location in northern Illinois.

Resha’s training sessions are characterized by her professionalism, thoroughness, and focus on passenger safety. RTAC is pleased to have her back!
first of May. Housing all employees in one location has provided much smoother communication between the departments, hands on and face-to-face interaction, and less confusion.

As MRT looks to the future, goals include implementing some fixed routes, extended service hours/days, increased service contracts and increased ridership. The District is still relatively young, and has many goals for the future.
Service Contracts - The Nuts and Bolts of Coordination

Where is your transit system on the Transportation Continuum?

Cooperation | Collaboration | Consolidation
-------------|---------------|---------------
Everyone does own thing. | Several operators. | Single Operator is also System Administrator.
Service often duplicated. | Might work in urban settings. | |

Considerations:

1. **Details Provide Clarity** - Define system roles, who are the Grantee, System Administrator, and the Operator. Where is the funding coming from and why is the system the way it is?

2. **Fare Policy** - Is your fare policy a good one that shows value to customer? They make economic choice to ride during regular routes (cheaper) or off times (higher fare).

3. **Build Transit Capacity** - Service contracts allow you to capture existing density.

4. **Target Groups** - Do an inventory of your area to see who provides transportation now. Public Transit Systems can coordinate resources with agencies through creating service contracts.

**Potential Service Contracts:**

**Senior**
- Adult Day Care
- Block Grants
- Community College
- County Court Systems (Victim's Rights)
- Dialysis
- Domestic Violence
- Foster Grandparents
- Hospitals
- Library Programs
- Literacy Groups
- Medicaid
- Nutrition programs
- Senior Centers
- Senior Housing (HUD)
- Social Security
- Special Events
- Title 20 (DFI) DHS
- Title IIIB
- United Way

**Disabled**
- American Cancer Society
- American Heart Association
- ARC
- Autism support
- Centers for Independent Living
- Charity Organizations
- Day Training
- DORS (DHS)
- Epilepsy Foundation
- Foundations
- DHS
- Mental Health
- Muscular Dystrophy
- New Freedom
- Nursing Homes
- Parole Agency
- Rehabilitation Centers
- RESPITE Home Program
- Substance Abuse
- Supported Employment
- Veterans

**Low Income**
- Churches
- Community Colleges
- Community Development Block Grant
- DCFS
- Detoxification Centers
- DHS Front Door
- Employers
- Food Pantries
- General Assistance
- General Employers
- Homeless Shelters
- HUD
- JARC
- Medicaid
- Mental Health
- Public Health
- Salvation Army
- Schools
- TANF
- Workforce Investment Act
5. **Benefits of Service Contracts** - Pool together resources for a common purpose, providing rides. Create more efficient system through economies of scale. Eliminate unnecessary competition for scarce resources through service contract relationships. Stop underutilized resources from going to waste (rural areas).

6. **Make Transit System Usable** - Make the transit system customer centered. Represent all transportation needs without prejudice and be responsive to problems. Are there natural situations for contracting that make use of dead head time?

7. **Cost and Performance Matter** - Increasing ridership through service contracts brings the transit system’s overall service cost down so everyone wins. Pooling insurance of vehicles under the same company can provide significant cost savings. Analyze the service being provided as well as the system as a whole. Know these measures about your system and about the agency’s service in order to compare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Routine Cost Analysis</th>
<th>Performance Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trip length</td>
<td>Total cost per trip and cost per mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadhead miles</td>
<td>Revenue per mile and revenue per trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live miles and time</td>
<td>Operating costs per trip and per mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of wheelchairs</td>
<td>Service miles and service hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of no-shows</td>
<td>Unduplicated riders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trips per service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent Unduplicated General Public, Percent Senior, Percent Disabled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. **Administrative Costs** - Can be shared by all as a percentage of the total (applied to all trips) or paid by a dedicated source (lead agency). Cost should not be shared if not equitably given to everyone involved.

9. **Rates** - Base rates on standard time or distance: miles, hours, days, trips. Consider wait times, setup times, unmarketable deadhead miles. Service provision can be highly customizable. Review/reevaluate service every 3 to 6 months.

10. **Legal Representation** - Hire independent legal professionals that have your best interest in mind. Although everyone wants the same thing (efficient and affordable transit) we understand things differently, so be clear and use the same definitions.

**Service Contracts** - Contracts are needed at all levels in order to defined relationships, provide protection to everyone involved, and continue on the path to coordination.

**First-Tier Contracts** - Grantee (County) passes through all grant obligations. Should structure service goals; provide oversight; and a customer feedback mechanism. Insure fair distribution of work and document denials.

**Second-Tier Contracts** - System Administrator contracts with agencies and with other Operators on a per trip coverage for agencies. Compensation should be for performance not just total cost. Grant obligations/agency requirements pass through. There should be oversight and a feedback mechanism.

**Fixed Price Contracts** - State and Federal programs may have fixed rates which may be less than cost to provide service. Consider the impact to the overall systems efficiency. Conduct cost analysis on a regular basis.

**Agency Contracts** - No contract is too small. Use standard language, match billing to fit agencies funding source needs, must consider program’s service requirements.

Source: Notes compiled by Elton Trojan (South Central Illinois Regional Planning Commission) from the Service Contracts 101 Presentation by Bill Jung (Rides MTD).
What we learned from the stimulus  
And how to use what we learned to speed job creation in the 2010 jobs bill

Summary: ARRA data show that investing in public transportation creates more jobs

“The latest data on stimulus spending show that funds spent on public transportation were a more effective job creator than stimulus funds spent on highways. In the 10 months since the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was signed, investing in public transportation produces twice as many jobs per dollar as investing in roads:

• Every billion dollars spent on public transportation produced 16,419 job-months.
• Every billion dollars spent on projects funded under highway infrastructure programs produced 8,781 job-months.

(Because transportation projects are of a different duration, a "job month" is a more accurate way of comparing quantities of employment created than is a "job-year".)

As Congress and the Administration discuss a possible jobs bill, the implication is clear: shifting available funds toward public transportation will increase the resulting employment.”

To read the entire report please visit http://www.cnt.org/repository/010510_whatwelearned_stimulus.pdf.

Downloaded May 27, 2010.

—— continued from page 5

Tips for Handling Specific Behaviors of Agitated Passengers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passenger Behavior</th>
<th>Why the Behavior is Occurring</th>
<th>Strategies to Work with the Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to leave the vehicle, or</td>
<td>Desire to meet obligations that don’t (or no longer) exist.</td>
<td>Often helpful to agree and even use it as a discussion topic while you are proceeding to the planned destination. In other words validate the passenger’s beliefs as opposed to re-orienting those beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being argumentative because of a</td>
<td>The agitation might have occurred before your arrival.</td>
<td>Allow the passenger to calm down; often a short walk will help in this process. Also a person may have forgotten how to enter the vehicle; patience and simple directions will help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belief that they should be going somewhere else.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Be prepared with relaxing music, sunglasses, a piece of candy or a magazine to decrease the agitation through distraction. Another distraction is to start a conversation about your passenger’s grandchildren or a hobby.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Agitated or resists entering the vehicle.

• Agitated behavior while riding.

The inability to communicate the need to use the rest room, or the environment of the vehicle, such as noise or temperature, is discomforting.

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