

RTAP

BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

FALL—VOL. 9, NO. 4

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St. Lucie County Intermodal Ribbon Cutting a Success!

A few years ago, St. Lucie County staff developed the vision of a transit facility for the Avenue D corridor of Fort Pierce, which is located in an area in need of major revitalization. On August 23, 2011, the idea became a reality, celebrated by local and state officials and over one hundred local community residents attending the ribbon cutting of the \$1.7 million newly constructed intermodal transit facility.

"It is a wonderful facility because people thought outside of the box," said Beth Ryder, Director of Housing and Community Services for St. Lucie County. "It's much more than just a bus station with restrooms," said Darrell Drummond, President of the Council on Aging of St. Lucie, which operates the local transit system. "This is something beyond my imagination," he said. "Its construction has been a labor of love," stated Corine Williams the County Transit Coordinator.

This project was jointly funded by the Fort Pierce Redevelopment Agency, Florida Department of Transportation and Federal Transit Administration stimulus funds. St. Lucie County Commission Chairman Chris Craft spoke about the positive economic impact on the County and highlighted the fact that the stimulus program created jobs.

The 5,400 square foot intermodal facility will service bus riders, as well as people seeking or using other modes of transportation such as walking, biking, carpooling and taxis. "The facility is green, having the LEED equivalency of gold certification," said Paul Dritenbas, the lead architect involved with the project. He noted the solar panels, system for harvesting rainwater for irrigation and the lighting and ventilation controls.

This facility also recognizes the talent of the well-known Highwaymen artists by its finishing- touch of



Fort Pierce "Green"
Intermodal Transfer facility.



Intermodal ribbon cutting: Commissioners of St. Lucie BOCC, City of Fort Pierce, TPO Director, SLC School Board and EDB Architect Firm and COASL Transportation Director and Rep. from A. Hastings Office



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St. Lucie Ribbon Cutting—cont'd from cover

a tropical mural with their names, located on the west side of the building. Several of the artists, whose moniker was coined in an article about them, got their names from their early start travelling highways to sell their art, were present at the opening and exhibited several of their paintings. The opening of the new facility was used as an opportunity by Dennis Eirikis with the Florida Public Transportation Association, to urge people to oppose cuts to mass transit funding, citing its negative impact on communities and residents.

In Memory of RTAP Advisory Committee Member



Barbara J Timmerman
Martin County Council of Aging
August 27, 1951 to September 30, 2011

FTA Drug and Alcohol Program Audit Outcome

Recently, nine of our state's rural transit agencies underwent a comprehensive federal audit that measured compliance with FTA and USDOT drug and alcohol testing program regulations (49 CFR Part 40 and Part 655), a condition of the state's receipt of Section 5311 funding.

Mr. Mike Redington, Transportation Industry Analyst with the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center and five members from the Federal Transit Administration's contracted audit team of Cahill and Swift, arrived in Florida on Monday, August 1, 2011.

The six auditors divided into three teams and covered the state from the Panhandle to Key West to conduct audits on location, at each of the nine selected transit systems.

The auditors conducted an eighty-eight question interview with each of the Drug and Alcohol Program Managers; performed an extensive records review; and also examined the drug and alcohol testing service providers, including specimen collectors, breath alcohol test technicians, Medical Review Officers and Substance Abuse Professionals. The audit measured agency compliance with a combined total of 3,996 items.

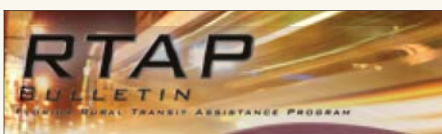
On Friday, August 5, 2011, Mr. Victor Wiley, FDOT Transit Safety Programs Manager, Mr. Robert Westbrook, FDOT

Operations Administrator, and Ms. Elizabeth Stutts, FDOT Grant Programs Administrator met with the audit team leaders to receive the final audit report. During the meeting, the auditors remarked that all of the Drug and Alcohol Program Managers (DAPM) interviewed were well trained, knowledgeable and appeared to be very conscientious about their duties.

The auditors also noted that the FDOT Substance Abuse Management Website managed by Diana Byrnes at the Center for Urban Transportation Research is an excellent resource for material and information and is often referenced by the federal audit team members (sam.cuttr.usf.edu).

Mr. Redington stated that "The oversight measures, training and support provided by FDOT to ensure FTA compliance are superb. The CUTR/FDOT Substance Abuse Oversight and Technical Assistance Program is considered a model for other states to follow."

The overall combined audit "score" was a 97.5% compliance rate, a significant increase from the 2004 federal audit. This demonstrates the success of the programs implemented by FDOT to increase training and compliance monitoring efforts that ensure continued receipt of funding for rural transportation in our state.



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OUR MISSION

The Florida RTAP provides training, continuing education, and technical assistance to those who provide or assist in the provision of public transportation services in rural and small urban communities in order to promote the coordinated delivery of safe, efficient, and effective transit services.

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SPOTLIGHT—Boyd Thompson, Director of Operations, Ride Solutions, Inc.

SPOTLIGHT highlights one of our many energetic Florida RTAP transit professionals and allows these individuals to introduce themselves in their own words. In this issue the SPOTLIGHT is on Boyd Thompson, Director of Operations, Ride Solutions, Inc.



Name: Boyd Thompson

Title: Director of Operations, Ride Solution, Inc.

Birthplace: Woodland, Calif.

Education: B.A. Psych, UCLA, 1972

Professional History: Employed for a number of years in social work and the industrial and marine construction industries before being hired by Ride Solution

Years Working With Current Agency: 25 years

Years Working In Transit Industry: 25 years

Biggest Surprise In Paratransit: It has been surprising how Community Transportation builds community. My initial interest in Coordination was based on the need for more efficient government but, in building our services to convert demand response to flex route and increase on-the-road efficiency (www.theridesolution.com), the social benefits of ride-sharing have become unmistakable. If you want to know what is going on in Palatka, ride the Palatka City Route. People get on board a bus and, inevitably, somewhere in the process end up talking to their seat-mates. They end up journeying together, even if only in shared silence on a particular day.

America's social fabric is under tremendous tension. Shared rides are rivers of community in the midst of cultural separateness. Buses and commuter vans are often rolling community centers and produce public transit's contribution to social cohesion. If 80% of American commutes, commutes to urban employment, were shared rides, this would be a significant contribution. There is a market for the social networking inherent in public transportation that needs to be better understood and developed.

Biggest Challenge In Paratransit: The SOV, whether private or commercial, has become economically unsustainable. Paratransit demand response, both taxi and van, is essentially comprised of chauffeured SOVs. Like the private SOV, which soaks up between 47% and 57% of American household income (stories.energytrap.org/bigpicture), the cost of demand response paratransit limits access to public transportation

at a time when genuine need is going through the roof. Call volume at Ride Solution in 2009 averaged 3500 per month. In August of this year, it was 6800 and in September over 5000. Gatekeeping, alone, cannot be an adequate response to such exponential growth in need. Paratransit must begin to condense down into flex-routes in order to broaden access to public transportation and increase the discretionary income of working households.

It may be some time before jobs return to America as we are competing, for example, with unionized auto workers in China who are making \$1.25 an hour. In the interim, government can offset our loss of income by facilitating efficiencies that lower our cost of living. Americans spent almost \$500B last year on gasoline, roughly equivalent to our trade deficit. The bulk of that gasoline was burned in life sustaining activities. There is an immediate economic requirement for regional public transportation that is focused on the commuter market. In Duval, commuter trips over 25 minutes long are approximately 5 times the current number of JTA trips and over 200 times the current Duval TD trips. The geographic dispersion of urban employment centers, however, argues a commuter service fleet comprised of small, reservation-based vehicles which saturate the market. Paratransit and fixed route's biggest challenge consists of overcoming the political and technical hurdles inherent in adequately addressing that massive commuter market. Until we field a broad public transit alternative to the SOV, the American worker will be economically caught in an "Energy Trap", resulting in people cutting back on food, medicine, and other discretionary spending in order to buy fuel to get to work.

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Personal Benefit Of Working In Paratransit: It has been a privilege to work in Community Transportation.

Community Involvement: We are interrelated in ways that we are just beginning to realize. When a small country like Greece has the potential to collapse the global economy, then it is time to reexamine what it means to build socially stabilizing infrastructure and the extent to which that critical infrastructure extends beyond our immediate interests.

In a similar manner, the collaboration that is essential to Community Transportation, which is our best segue into regional public transportation and, thereby, into critical economic relief for American workers, requires a broader view. The current narrow focus surrounding Medicaid transportation within Medicaid Reform has the potential to collapse Community Transportation. This is unnecessary and avoidable and the outcome will depend upon the choices that we make.

The outcome will also determine whether we are able to rapidly lower the US cost of living. If we reduce the average household cost of transportation by 50%, we increase effective income by over 20%. A four passenger vehicle is a 75% reduction in fuel burn over an SOV. Cutting gasoline consumption is, by far,

Handling the Irate Customer

By Nancy Friedman, the Telephone Doctor

If your job entails taking calls or working with unhappy, irate customers, you've got your work cut out for you. Employees who work with this type of situation are especially vulnerable to outbursts from customers who are going through an emotional, stressful time.

Handling this type of customer takes time and training, but it can be accomplished effectively. Here are some of the Telephone Doctor's best techniques for turning this situation into satisfied customers.

Get Off on the Right Foot

Realize that upset angry customers are not unhappy with you, but with the situation. Don't take a customer's hostility personally. You are merely the rod that redirects the violent lightning. You can do a great deal to diffuse the anger before you get to the customer. How? By smiling before you answer that call. You can really "hear" a smile over the phone. It's very difficult to be rude to someone who is warm and friendly.

Anatomy of a Hostile Call

There are four basic steps to handling an irate customer. Telephone Doctor calls them our ASAP techniques.

our most deployable household expense reduction due to the gross inefficiencies of the daily SOV commute. Even the US airline industry gets over 50 passenger miles per gallon. Unlike current paratransit and fixed route markets, commuter services can be self supporting. Economically, it is time for Coordinated fixed route and paratransit to replace the SOV.

Personal Background: Jeanie and I have been partners for the last 33 years. Jeanie administers the 21st Century Community Learning Center for Putnam County Schools. We have three children; Jeremy, Ashley, and Ellis. Like everyone's children, they are wonderful. Jeanie and I currently share the house with a very dedicated dog and two transcendental cats.

Childhood Ambition: To be like my Dad.

Inspiration: Ideas and ideals and the mystery that is their source.

Favorite Book: "La Casa Verde".

Favorite Color: Blue: www.theblueibis.com.

Favorite Candy: A good, chocolate milk-shake.

My Motto: Commit

A: Acknowledge the person's feelings and apologize for the inconvenience the customer has encountered. Make an effort to be sincere. In today's impersonal society, it's incredibly rare to hear the words, "I'm sorry that happened. Let me get the ball rolling to fix it." Those are MAGIC words. You'll probably spend about 80 percent of your time massaging the caller's feelings and 20 percent actually solving the problem.

S: Sympathize and empathize with the caller. Phrases like "I can understand why you're upset" can help soothe ruffled feathers. Pretend it's you calling. Then get busy solving the problem.

A: Accept 100 percent responsibility for the call. OWN IT. This is probably the toughest part. Chances are excellent that you had nothing to do with the problem. However, it's your job to take the responsibility and help initiate a solution.

P: Prepare to help. Begin by re-introducing yourself - callers don't usually remember your name. State that you will be able to help. Use the caller's name, if possible. This helps to diffuse

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2012 UPCOMING EVENTS

The classes and conferences listed below are sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation and the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa. If you would like to attend any of the courses, you will find a course announcement and registration form for each course at www.floridartap.org in the Training Calendar section. Click on course name to download or view training class details. If you have an idea for a training course or would like to host a course, please contact Amber Reep (813) 974-9823.

January 9-12, 2012

TSI's Instructor's Course in Bus Operator Training (FT00429)¹—Tampa, FL

January 13, 2012

TSI's Instructor's One-Day Course in Paratransit Operator Training (FT00542)²—Tampa, FL

January 26, 2012

Disability Etiquette—Jacksonville, FL

February 13-15, 2012

TSI's Substance Abuse Management & Program Compliance (FT00465)—Tampa, FL

February 22-23, 2012

Non-Emergency Stretcher Transport Workshop—Marianna, FL

May 31-June 1, 2012

NTI's Paratransit Management and Operations—Tampa, FL

¹ Required course for the Florida Transit Operator Trainer Training Certification

² Prerequisite: TSI Instructor's Course in Bus Operator Training (FT00429)

Irate Customers—cont'd from pg 4

anger. A willing attitude is essential, because if the caller senses insincerity or indifference, it will cause them to stay angry. It's exasperating to file a complaint with someone who obviously doesn't care.

Excuses - When to use them.

NEVER. Never make an excuse to a complaining caller. No one wants to hear "The computer is down" or "I'm the only one here." That is your problem, not the caller's. When you give an excuse, the caller automatically hears "I'm not going to help you."

Transferring Calls

Sometimes you're not able to solve the problem on the spot. Many times you need more information from another department. Perhaps the call needs to be handled by another person. Although these are legitimate courses of action, they usually upset your caller all over again.

If you need more information, TELL the caller. Ask them if they're able to hold while

you obtain it, or would they prefer a call back. "Joe, I need to check with our claims department in order to answer your question. It will take two or three minutes, are you able to hold/wait while I check?" Avoid untrue, frustrating phrases like "Hold on a second." Nothing takes a second.

If you need to transfer a caller, if you can, let them know the name of the person they'll be speaking with. It's also good to explain a reason why you're bringing in a third party. "Joe, Mrs. Smith in our claims department is the real expert in resolving your type of situation. May I transfer you directly to her?"

All these tips work in a face to face situation as well! The ASAP technique works! Try it and see!

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