

RTAP BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Winter 2003—Vol. 1, No. 3

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Rural Transit Planning Workshop

As Florida grows and evolves, the needs and circumstances influencing public transit decisions change and become more complicated. This is particularly true in rural areas of Florida.

Consider the following:

- 16% of Florida's total population resides in rural areas;
- 26 of Florida's 67 counties are considered rural;
- Florida's rural population has a high school graduation rate 7% less than the national average;
- Per capita income for Florida's rural residents is approximately 15 to 25% lower than those of their metro-area counterparts;
- Per capita incomes in Florida's "Designated Rural Areas of Critical Economic Concern" are 60% of the national average.

These data suggest that we need to discover new and innovative ways to improve access to employment and educational opportunities if we are to improve the quality of life in our rural communities.

The Florida Department of Transportation's District One

Modal Development Office recognizes this need and is undertaking a proactive initiative to address the need.

On November 12 the District conducted a Rural Transit Planning Workshop in Sebring. The workshop provided attendees with information and resources related to current and potential planning requirements, best practices in planning, current planning activities, future planning opportunities, and appropriate information related to potential transit funding resources and services. Attendees included local elected officials, a

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Training Resource Catalog

The National RTAP Program is proud to unveil the National RTAP Training Resource Catalog. You can access the catalog at <http://www.NationalRTAP.org/ResourceCatalog/>.

The catalog is an excellent resource for identifying the latest training available. The catalog provides the opportunity to search more than 650 training resources by resource name, type, subject, author, agency, or keyword and the results include how to access the resources and cost. Users also have the option to update the materials in the catalog.

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Rural Transit—Up Close and Personal

Rose Faulk didn't know about rural transit service until she and her mother needed it most. When her mother developed health problems, Rose moved to Marianna, her hometown, to be closer. A physician told them they would need to schedule regular office visits.

"I told the doctor, 'I don't drive! And trying to find someone that I can depend on will be like trying to find a needle in a haystack,'" recalls Rose of her initial concern. " 'Oh, you have no problem,' he said. 'You have J Trans' and he set up everything for us."

Serving 1000 square miles of the panhandle's Jackson County, J Trans is the single source of public transit, providing on-demand service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Some 70 percent of the system's rides are non-emergency medical trips. Many rides take passengers across state lines to a major medical center in Dothan, Alabama.

Rose, 74 and living alone, has used the service ever since her discovery, and now rides rural transit to her own medical appointments, as well as biweekly trips to the senior center and shopping or social excursions. Without J Trans, she explains, she would be dependent on others for transportation needs—a situation she prefers to avoid.

"I want to stay independent as long as I can," says Rose. "With J Trans, I don't have to worry about rushing around, like I do when I have someone take me someplace. I can take my time. No one is saying, 'Are you ready to go yet?'"

As a participant on the Jackson County Local Coordinating Board—one of over 50 state-mandated ad-

visory entities working to address mobility needs through better transportation coordination—Rose provides a voice for seniors in the community. She knows first-hand the limitations of the J Trans system. The city routes, she says, need to be expanded, offering more stops that would reduce the distance many passengers walk to reach a bus stop. Insufficient service to rural areas, she explains, severely limits options for residents outside the city limits.

"We're doing pretty good here in Jackson County, but we can do better," affirms Rose. "We can use all the funds we can get! If we had more funds, we could be picked up everyday to go to the senior center. We could reach out in the rural sections of the county. We could build a better system."

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Vol. I, No.3

Winter 2003

The RTAP BULLETIN is produced by the USF Center for Urban Transportation Research.

Please direct all question or comments to:

RTAP BULLETIN

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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.

Editor: Michael Audino
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Train-the-Trainer Workshop

The Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) in cooperation with the Florida Department of Transportation and the USF Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) will present the Paratransit Driver's Qualification Train-the-Trainer Workshop on **March 1-5, 2004**. The workshop is being hosted by General Manager Steven Neal and his enthusiastic colleagues at Sun Tran in Ocala.

This program is an RTAP training session for trainers of new and existing drivers. Topics to be covered include: Train-The-Trainer, ADA Service Requirements, Passenger Assistance-Securement-Restraint, Sensitivity Training, and Quality Customer Service. Upon completion, each attendee will receive an Instructor's Manual and associated training aids. Additionally, participants will receive certificates of completion for each module completed.

For further information, please contact Molly Buffington at (813) 974-7810 or at buffington@cutr.usf.edu.

Paratransit Roadeo

The annual Florida Paratransit Roadeo will be held on **April 16-17, 2004** in Orlando at the Adams Mark Hotel. MV Transportation will be the host of this year's event.

Paratransit vehicle drivers from across Florida will compete in both the Small Bus and Van Divisions. Each driver will demonstrate his or her driving skills and customer service by negotiating a pre-set course. The course will challenge the driver's ability to maneuver the vehicle safely under a variety of conditions while providing riders with a comfortable ride.

For more information, contact Ted Waters at (850) 574-6266.

Hope to see you there!



Catherine's Corner

Catherine Kelly, FDOT RTAP Program Manager

The Florida DOT will be giving the "Above & Beyond Award" again this year at the Annual Paratransit Roadeo, which is scheduled for April 16-17, 2004 in Orlando.



Jerry Crunk of Sure-Lok has continued to show his support and involvement of the Roadeo and will be presenting this award on Friday, April 16. The purpose of the award is to honor a driver who has performed in an outstanding manner and has shown care and concern for passengers with special needs.

To help with the nomination process, the following performance criteria have been established:

1. The driver takes time on a regular basis to create a safe and secure environment for special needs passengers.
2. The driver properly secures the mobility aid and occupant restraints.

3. The driver demonstrates sensitivity toward individuals with special needs.

In summary, drivers must perform "above and beyond" their daily routines.

A letter of support should come from the driver's supervisor or agency director. Nominations can also include compliments and commendations from riders and other drivers.

The deadline for submitting the nomination for the "Above and Beyond Award" is 5:00 pm, March 19, 2004. Please send all nominations to:

Florida Department of Transportation
Catherine J. Kelly
605 Suwannee St., MS 26
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0450

For more information, contact Catherine Kelly at 850-414-4500.

RTAP'S Strategic Plan

Florida's RTAP Advisory Committee continues its efforts to develop a strategic plan for the program.

Following formulation of program vision and mission statements last September, the Committee recently adopted the following program goals:

- Continue to improve RTAP program promotion
- Strengthen RTAP program leadership
- Further develop and promote rural transit policy in Florida
- Maximize information sharing among stakeholders
- Expand, update, and personalize training, continuing education, and technical assistance.

The Committee's next step involves identifying specific actions that could be undertaken to help accomplish each of the approved goals.

If you have specific ideas on how to accomplish the RTAP program goals, please email your ideas to audino@cutr.usf.edu.

WAZZUP?

March 1-5, 2004—Florida Paratransit Driver's Qualification Train-the-Trainer Workshop, SunTran, Ocala. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

April 16-17, 2004—Florida Paratransit Rodeo, Orlando, Adams Mark Hotel. For more information, contact Ted Waters, (850) 574-6266.

June 8-10, 2004—3rd Annual FPTA/CUTR Professional Development Workshop, USF Embassy Suites. For more information, contact Amber Reep, (813) 974-9823 or Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

June 13-16, 2004—Community Transportation Association of America EXPO 2004, Seattle Washington. For more information, contact CTAA at www.ctaa.org.

RTAP Workshop—cont'd from cover

county administrator, and rural transit operators and planners from throughout south central Florida.

As a result of the workshop, FDOT will collaborate with rural transit stakeholders from the District and staff from the Center for Urban Transportation Research, to more fully assess opportunities for enhanced transit planning in the district's rural areas.

For further information, contact Richard Dreyer at (863) 519-2387.

Training Catalog—cont'd from cover

To keep the catalog up to date and relevant the RTAP National Program asks you to check your current listings and add new resources as they become available. The intent of this catalog is to keep it as a living document—ever growing in size and relevance.

RTAP Advisory Committee Members

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Richard Cook
Transhernando D7

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FDOT

JOIN THE RTAP DISCUSSION GROUP

Sometimes the answers can't be easily found in a book, report, or website.

The FDOT-funded Florida RTAP Center at CUTR has developed an email discussion group or listserv for rural transit professionals to ask each other questions and gather information about various aspects of rural transit.

Think of this discussion group as an automatic e-mail distribution system.

Any subscriber may send an e-mail message to the listserv and it will be automatically distributed via e-mail to the other members of the group. To subscribe, please send an email to rtap@cutrlist.eng.usf.edu or visit the RTAP website at www.rtap.cutr.usf.edu