

# RTAP BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Fall 2003—Vol.1, No.2

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## CUTR + RTAP = Benefits for Florida's Rural Transit Systems

**W**ant to learn how other rural transit operators are managing shrinking budgets? Need assistance in managing grants? Interested in ways to improve? Looking for a shoulder to cry on? If “yes” is the answer to any of these questions, the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) is here to help.

In 1986 the Federal Transit Administration (then the Urban Mass Transportation Administration) began a Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) for transit operators. Its

purpose is to provide training, technical assistance, and technology exchange to rural and small urban areas. In Florida, the Public Transit Office of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), which serves as program administrator and partner, administers the RTAP program.

Earlier this year the Florida DOT selected CUTR to manage Florida's RTAP Center and help address the technical assistance and

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## Rural Transit Awards to Sumter County

**S**umter County received two awards at the 11th annual Transportation Disadvantaged Conference, held recently in Orlando.

Sumter County's Local Transportation Coordinating Board (LCB) was awarded the “LCB of the Year” award, which recognizes the leadership of the Board in the areas of cost oversight, evaluation of the

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Members of the Sumter County Local Transportation Coordinating Board.



training needs of Florida's small urban and rural transit systems.

CUTR is pleased and proud to serve as the RTAP Center Manager and is dedicated to helping you in ways that best address your needs. Our RTAP Center team consists of talented and experienced transit professionals with whom many of you have already worked. Our approach is intended to be broad and flexible, with an emphasis on training, technical assistance, research, and other support services. Specifically, we have adopted a two-pronged approach: maintaining and enhancing training, technical assistance, and outreach while simultaneously working with the program's 17-member Advisory Committee to determine the right direction for RTAP in Florida.

We publish a quarterly newsletter and have facilitated a number of comprehensive, weeklong training sessions for rural transit system personnel; created an electronic "peer-to-peer" network; updated and published a rural transit resource guide; and conducted personal meetings with rural transit stakeholders throughout the state.

Additionally, we have convened several meetings of the RTAP Advisory Committee and have created tentative vision and mission statements, as well as a series of goals and actions steps, all designed to make Florida's RTAP the best in the country.

Many of you may have already taken advantage of CUTR's technical assistance and training opportunities through such programs as the *Florida Maintenance Training and Technical Assistance Program*, which provides training to bus transit maintenance professionals; the *Florida Vehicle Procurement Program*, which provides opportunities for transportation providers to procure vehicles through the program from various vendors at reduced rates; the *Florida Bus Operator Trainer Training Program*, which provides training and certification to bus operator trainers; and the *Statewide Transit Technical Assistance and Training Program*, which provides technical assistance and support and professional development opportunities to public transportation profession-

als. We trust you have found your business relationship with CUTR to be value-added and we intend to provide the same level of high quality, value-added service to you, our RTAP customers.

Please feel free to contact any of us; we look forward to working with you.



**Victoria Zambito** applies her extensive experience in organizing transit-related roadeos. She addresses administrative and logistics tasks associated with the annual Roadeo.



**Gwen Hollis** has the day-to-day responsibilities for managing the Center for Urban Transportation Research Resource Information Center (CRIC).



**Molly Buffington** is responsible for administrative tasks associated with training, including newsletter production and contract management between vendors, FDOT, and CUTR.



**Amber Reep** coordinates all training activities and helps respond to technical assistance requests.



**Lisa Staes** serves as co-Contract Manager. She is the Program Director for CUTR's Transit Technical Assistance and Training Team.



**Philip L. Winters** serves as co-Contract Manager. He is CUTR's TDM Program Director and oversees the RTAP web site and manages the RTAP listserv.



**Michael J. Audino** serves as the RTAP Program Director. He is responsible for facilitating advisory committee meetings, providing strategic direction for the program, maintaining dialogue with FDOT, and responding to customer comments and inquiries.



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Please direct all question or comments to:

#### RTAP BULLETIN

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#### OUR MISSION

The Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) provides a broad and flexible program of training, technical assistance, research, and other support services for Florida's small urban and rural transit operators.

*Editor: Michael Audino*  
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# RTAP's Plan for the Future

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" Alice asked.

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." said the Cat.

"I don't much care where." said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go." said the Cat

This dialogue from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* clearly frames the challenge and opportunity facing Florida's RTAP Program. For the past 15 years, RTAP has provided a variety of training and technical assistance services that have helped rural transit stakeholders throughout Florida. As a result of RTAP, rural transit drivers are better trained to operate vehicles safely, transit managers have a better understanding of the implications of federal drug testing regulations, and Florida's rural transit community has developed a sense of camaraderie through the annual transit roadeo.

While much has been accomplished there is more work to be done and Florida's RTAP program is committed to providing services that are both customer-driven and

value-added. Before service delivery can effectively begin, the program must have clear purpose and direction. Florida's RTAP Advisory Committee is currently working to develop a strategic action plan to determine what and how training is provided, who and where technical assistance is offered, and what new initiatives might best serve the needs of Florida's rural transit industry.

On September 24 the Advisory Committee met and adopted the following mission statement for RTAP:

*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*

The Committee also adopted the following RTAP Vision:

*Customer Driven...Comprehensive...The Model for Others*

The Strategic Plan for Florida's RTAP will be completed prior to the end of the year. Stay tuned!

## Catherine's Corner

Catherine Kelly, FDOT RTAP Program Manager

The hot days of summer are officially over. What a summer it was. The cooler temperature in the mornings, leaves falling, trees turning their golden color and football let me know that fall is here.



Some may say that things are slowing down while others may say things are picking up speed. The Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged Conference was a great success. Participants came from all over the state, making it one of the largest TD conferences. If you missed it, you missed an excellent conference. The workshops and plenary sessions were superb. The hotel was beautiful. The plans for 2004 are in the works. Congratulations to the staff for a job well done.

Congratulations to all of the winners at the annual award celebration. Special recognition to our local winners, Ernest Rittman of Big Bend Transit, who won the Driver of the Year award and Big Bend Transit who

won the Operator of the Year award. Great job Ted.

The Rural Transit Assistance Program Advisory Committee is in full force. All vacancies have been filled and we are meeting to discuss how best to serve the rural transit providers. Our first meeting was very productive. Technology has made it real easy to communicate and interact with each other while conducting a telephone call.

We will be gearing up real soon to start the preliminary planning for the 2004 paratransit roadeo. MV Transportation is hosting the roadeo in Orlando on April 16-17, 2004. Please mark your calendar for this exciting date. You will be provided with more details at a later date.

W e l c o m e A u t u m n ! !

Thought for today: "Begin to make the kind of investment of personal time which will assure that those who come after us will live as well." Charles W. Bray III

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Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), handling of grievances, and other extraordinary efforts in local transportation coordination.

Sumter County Transit received Florida's Rural Transportation Agency of the Year award for 2003, which recognizes excellence in the provision of public and specialized transportation. Nominees were judged on documented data in the annual performance report, quality insurance inspections, evaluations conducted by the Local Transportation Board, and input from regional managers. Performance measures considered by evaluators included cost effectiveness or reduced cost, expansion of services, coordination successes, or other exemplary efforts in service delivery. Of particular note was Sumter County Transit's success in providing almost 10,000 more trips in 2003 than in the previous year.



Accepting the award for Rural CTC of the Year are Jim Sparks, CCTM, Director; Pamela J. Black, Operations Supervisor; Benny Strickland, Sumter County Commissioner.

This was the second time Sumter County received this award. The first time was in 1998, making Sumter the only one of Florida's 67 counties to twice earn the award.

CONGRATULATIONS to our friends and colleagues in Sumter County!

## WAZZUP?

To Come...

**October 27-29, 2003—Commuter Choice Workshop: Track 1, Commuter Choice Clusters (Core 2)**, Tampa, Florida, sponsored by CUTR. For more information, contact Sue LoBianco, (813) 974-6898

**October 27-29, 2003—Commuter Choice Workshop: Track 2, Commuter Choice Planning & Management**, Tampa, Florida, sponsored by CUTR. For more information, contact Sue LoBianco, (813) 974-6898

**December 8-12, 2003—Paratransit Driver's Qualification Train-the-Trainer Workshop**, sponsored by CUTR, Palm-Tran, West Palm Beach. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810

**December 10-11, 2003—Commuter Choice Policy (tentative)**, sponsored by CUTR, Tampa, Florida. For more information, contact Sue LoBianco, (813) 974-6898

**December 12, 2003—Florida TDM Summit**, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. For more information, contact Sue LoBianco, (813) 974-6898

## RTAP Advisory Committee Members

Richard Shine  
*District 1*

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*District 2*

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*District 3*

Marcin Gadek  
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*District 5*

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*District 6*

Elba Lopez  
*District 7*

Karen Somerset  
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Ted Waters  
*Big Bend D3*

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*Marion Ct Sr. D5*

Raymond Archer  
*KeyWest D6*

Richard Cook  
*Transhernando D7*

Lisa Staes  
Phil Winters  
Michael Audino  
*CUTR*

Catherine Kelly  
*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](mailto:rtap@cutrlist.eng.usf.edu) or visit the RTAP website at [www.rtap.cutr.usf.edu](http://www.rtap.cutr.usf.edu)