RTAP
BULLETIN
FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
10 YEARS
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Florida Captures $9.5 Million in Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative Grants

In July of 2011, the U.S. Department of Transportation, together with the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, announced the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI), designed to increase collaboration among federal, state and local agencies and organizations to address the mobility challenges faced by our nation's veterans, service members, and their families.

The VTCLI is an innovative, federally coordinated partnership that will make it easier for U.S. veterans, active service members, military families, and others to learn about and arrange for locally available transportation services that connect them with work, education, health care, and other vital services in their communities. Projects have been selected and funded in urban, suburban, and rural communities around the nation to strengthen and promote "one-call" information centers and other tools that conveniently "connect the dots" as never before.

Veterans and military families are a traditionally under-served population when it comes to transportation access, so they're an important focal point. However, the VTCLI grant program is structured to fund projects that will potentially benefit anyone living within the jurisdiction of a grant recipient, with or without veteran status.

In the first two years of the VTCLI program, nine Florida transit agencies successfully completed for and were awarded with over $9.5 million in initiative funding. A summary of the Florida VTCLI awards are detailed:

Broward County Transit - $539,937

- Upgrade 211 system to serve as one-call/one-click center, bringing transportation into the employment, housing, food and counseling information system.

Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA) - $1,148,339

- Create a One-Call/One-Click Transportation Information Center that will serve as a single point of contact for consumers to learn about available transportation resources in the seven-county Tampa Bay region.

StarMetro (Tallahassee) - $1,250,000

- Expand existing transit call center to provide information, transportation and scheduling for veterans, add customer scheduling website.

Jacksonville Transportation Authority - $1,975,200

- Build a one-call/one-click transportation resource center to expand access to the regional scheduling system via the internet and telephone.

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STATE OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
CUTR
USF UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

Federal Transit Administration Rescinds Buy America Waiver for Mini-Vans

On December 3rd, 2012 the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) rescinded the Buy America waiver for minivans. This decision is effective immediately and all programs that use FTA funds for minivans which are not certified 'Buy-America' will be affected, this includes demand response programs vanpool projects. The FTA did provide commuter vanpool program some opportunity to appeal by allowing project sponsors to submit an official appeal through regional offices.

The Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) advises all vanpool projects which involve minivans to have the direct recipient of the FTA grant funds reach out to the regional FTA administrator and discuss the process for submitting a waiver.

This is the link to the FTA waiver notice in the Federal Register: *www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-03/pdf/2012-29129.pdf*

MCAT Opens New Downtown Transit Station

Dozens of local officials and transit employees helped dedicate the sparkling new Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) downtown transit station in early November.

The new station is located between Sixth and Eighth Avenues on 13th Street West in downtown Bradenton. MCAT buses began picking up riders at the new station on Saturday, November 10th.

Manatee County Commissioner Michael Gallen, whose district includes the transfer station, raved about the new design and layout of the station. Gallen added that the project would not have been possible without a "dedicated collaboration among the county, the City of Bradenton and the Downtown Development Authority, or without our funding partners, the Federal Transit Administration and the Florida Department of Transportation."

FDOT District 1 representative Jennifer Stults congratulated the entire community on the new station. "It's gorgeous," Stults said. "The new facility will improve the transit experience for MCAT customers."

Buses from five MCAT routes—2, 3, 4, 9 and 99—will pick up passengers Monday through Saturday at 10 to the hour and at 20 after the hour from 5:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. The new station includes public restrooms, an information and ticket booth, and an automatic ticket vending machine. It also includes five, 25-feet-tall/10-feet wide public art display sections designed to represent the region's natural landscape.

The $2.4 million project was largely funded by a $1.5 million Federal Transit Administration grant. The remaining $955,070 is being split evenly between the Florida Department of Transportation and local funding. Land for the new facility was provided by the City of Bradenton.

For more information on MCAT, contact Sarah Perch, MCAT Transit Planner at *sarah.perch@mymanatee.org.*

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Our 10th Year

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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: Yolanda Moore Designer: Stephanie Lewis

SPOTLIGHT—Santa Claus, Operations Manager of Elves and Reindeer

Each SPOTLIGHT edition 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 Santa Claus, Operations Manager of the Elves and Reindeer.

Name: "Jolly Old" Saint Nicholas (AKA: Santa Claus, Father Christmas, and just Santa)

Title: Operations Manager: Elves and Reindeer Department, Toymaker CEO: North Pole Division, Jolly Old Elf

Birthplace: Patara, Turkey (in the fourth century)

Employment History: Long term, self-employed, seasonal employment

Years Working in the Delivery Industry: Several centuries

Biggest Surprise: Not all homes have chimneys!

Biggest Challenge: Convincing people that Santa Claus is alive and well.

Personal Benefit of Working in Delivery Industry: I have traveled the world, got to meet great people, allowed to play with toys, have reindeer as pets, never age, and (best of all) get free cookies and milk!

Community Involvement: Help the Salvation Army with their holiday kettles. Participate in toy drives. Ride on floats in community parades. Get my picture taken with children during the holiday season.

Personal Background: I live a modest, quiet life with Mrs. Claus and our adopted family of elves. We train and breed reindeers, including some that fly. I rebuild antique snow sleighs when I can find the parts. Spend my spare time tinkering in the toy shop.

Childhood Ambition: To drive a bus and deliver people to toy stores

Inspiration: The woman behind the Jolly Old Elf – Mrs. Claus!

Favorite Book: The Night Before Christmas

Favorite Artist: Thomas Nast

Favorite Songs: Jingle Bells and Jolly Old Saint Nicholas

Favorite Color: Red

Favorite Candy: Candy canes (of course)

My Motto: "You better be good – Santa is watching"

Closing Comment: "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes—how they twinkled! His dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf.. . .

From: *The 1823 poem destined to become immensely popular, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," now better known as "The Night Before Christmas"*

Florida RTAP
Wishes You a Happy Holiday Season

Polk County Transit - $1,542,267

- Consolidation of three call centers into single one-call center with centralized website and phone number for coordinated delivery of transportation.

LYNX (Orlando) - $1,056,800

- New customer information system including one-call service integrated with transit website and transportation information kiosks throughout project area.

Lee Tran (Ft. Myers) - $1,359,200

- Deployment of informational kiosks at key transit locations, including the new VA Health Care Center, for planning assistance for regional coordination on transportation access, and for implementation of vehicle arrival notification system for the transit system's 65 buses.

Santa Rosa County - $222,387

- Upgrade vehicle technology as well as scheduling and dispatching software for the Santa Rosa County Veterans Memorial Foundation and the Veterans' Affairs Clinic in Escambia County. These technology upgrades will allow the trips to be provided without the need to purchase additional vehicles.

St. Lucie County - $454,000

- Set up the infrastructure necessary to create a one-call/one-click center. The goal is to connect St. Lucie and Martin County veterans, their military family members, and other transportation-disadvantaged populations to various destinations throughout the region for employment, medical and recreational purposes.

The Statewide and National Reach of New Online Training e-Learning Course

The Disability Etiquette for Transit Operators e-Learning course was released to Florida's public transportation agencies in September 2012. This online, self-paced, computer-based training course provides transit operators with basic tips, skills and techniques to improve their ability to interact with persons with disabilities in an understanding and effective manner.

The Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) wants to acknowledge Lee Tran's William Shrout as the first person to successfully complete the Disability Etiquette for Transit Operators e-Learning course. Mr. Shrout, who has extensive experience working in bus and paratransit operations, shared the following about this training experience: "this course is an excellent training tool for all transit agencies, more-so because we all transport Americans with disabilities. I would hope that more computer-based training courses would be available for all transit agencies because, it saves on travel expenses and training costs as well."

Shortly after the release of the course to Florida's public transportation agencies, the National Rural Transit Assistance Program contacted the course developers (FDOT and CUTR) about making the course available nationally. With the support of FDOT, and in coordination with CUTR, the Disability Etiquette for Transit Operators e-Learning course was released nationally in November 2012.

As of December 1, 2012, over 26 transit agencies from 15 states and Canada have accessed the Disability Etiquette for Transit Operators e-Learning course. In addition to Florida, course participants have come from Arkansas, California, Colorado, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Nova Scotia, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Online e-Learning courses make the access and availability to training convenient and cost-effective. Advantages of online training include the elimination of travel time and costs, while providing students the flexibility to choose the learning and training times that are convenient.

Florida RTAP is pleased with the early response and use of the Disability Etiquette for Transit Operators e-Learning course. With the support of FDOT and guidance of Florida's public transportation professionals, Florida RTAP hopes to continue to develop innovative and necessary online e-Learning training courses for the transit industry.

For more information on the Disability Etiquette for Transit Operators e-Learning course and other transit training opportunities, please contact Amber Reep at *reep@cutr.usf.edu.*

2013 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 the 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 14-18, 2013
Fundamentals of Bus Collision Investigation—Tampa, FL

February 20-21, 2013
Managing for Performance-Safety, Customer Service, Conflict and Work Ethic: A Guide for Transit Operator Trainers—LYNX, Orlando, FL

March 11-15. 2013
Transit System Security (FT00432) —Tampa, FL

May 6-10, 2013
Instructor's Course in Bus/Paratransit Operator Training—Tampa, FL

DART Initiates Service in DeSoto County

DeSoto-Arcadia Regional Transit (DART) system inaugurated service on November 14, 2012 following a formal ribbon cutting ceremony at the DeSoto County Public Library in Arcadia.

DART, Florida's newest fixed route public transit service, will operate Monday through Saturday from 7:00am to 7:00pm on three different routes in and around the City of Arcadia and the Nocatee area. The route deviated service is open to the general public with the very reasonable fare of only 50 cents per passenger.

The new transit service will provide DeSoto County residents with mobility and access to life sustaining activities, including: health care services, jobs, employment opportunities, government services, and commercial centers. The routes will connect neighborhoods to a variety of destination and activity centers.

Based on the findings and recommendations of the Heartland Rural Mobility Plan, the DART service became a reality through funding provided by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The project will be funded for three years with FDOT State Transit Service Development Program grant funds, U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration Section 5311 "Non-urbanized Area Formula Program" grant funds, and fare box revenue.

DART—"We'll take you there!"

DeSoto County Commissioner Jim Selph cuts the ribbon officially launching the new DART bus service.