

RTAP BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Summer 2003—Vol.1, No.1

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Federal Reauthorization Legislation

By now, you are aware that the Bush administration has released its proposed 2003 Federal Highway and Transit Reauthorization legislation. Entitled SAFETEA (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act), the Administration's proposal provides a starting point for Florida's rural transit providers to begin the dialogue and formulate policy positions that could be shared with our Congressional delegation.

According to the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), "The Administration's proposal increases support for and investment in transportation services to Americans living in rural areas, our nation's growing population of senior citizens, Native Americans, and persons with disabilities. SAFETEA also addresses the need for a more equitable distribution of federal transit investment and will help communities around the nation to begin meeting the unmet need for such services."

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has identified five primary ways in which SAFETEA could benefit rural public transit.

First, SAFETEA would provide nearly \$46 billion in funding for public transportation programs through fiscal year 2009, a 28 percent increase over the funding levels of TEA 21. Rural (Section 5311) funding authorizations in SAFETEA would increase from \$359 million in 2004 to \$402 million in 2009.

Two percent of that would be distributed by formula to the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), of which not more than 15 percent may be available for the National RTAP program.

Second, SAFETEA promotes common-sense transit solutions by reducing the num-

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Congratulations to Florida's Roadeo winners

Since 1989, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) has recognized the importance of community transit operators by organizing the National Community Transportation Roadeo. Each year, contestants and judges from all over the country converge on one parking lot to enjoy food, song and intense competition.

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ber of different federal program “silos” and providing states and localities more flexibility to fund local priorities. Instead of trying to match projects to specific pots of money, FTA wants states and localities to be able to base their transit decisions on maximizing mobility and creating seamless community transportation networks.

Third, SAFETEA includes a new ridership-based performance incentive program to encourage “A+” performance in transit. The program will be relatively small the first year—\$35 million in urbanized areas and approximately \$3 million in rural areas. Over the course of SAFETEA, however, the program will provide nearly \$1.3 billion in incentive awards to top performing transit systems. This program will encourage states and urban areas to institute the data collection necessary to measure performance and focus their attention on the issues that matter most to riders and potential riders.

Fourth, SAFETEA will increase funding for underserved rural communities and, perhaps more importantly, improve services to the elderly, low income, and persons with disabilities through coordinated planning and predictable funding.

Finally, SAFETEA supports the President’s efforts to champion independence and opportunity for all Americans. It proposes the creation of a new formula program as part of the President’s New Freedom Initiative to give persons with disabilities increased opportunities to become more fully integrated into American communities.

Reauthorization of our nation’s transit programs is critical to Florida’s rural transit systems, and it is vital that all of us take the opportunity to fully understand the contents of the SAFETEA legislation. We must collaborate and strive to speak with a unified voice. We must be proactive and mobilize all rural transit stakeholders to help communicate how important this legislation is to Florida’s future.

To learn more about SAFETEA, contact Elizabeth Stutts at the Florida Department of Transportation, (850) 414-4500, elizabeth.stutts@dot.state.fl.us.

Midyear conference highlights

The 2nd Annual Florida Public Transportation Association’s Professional Development Workshop was held June 17-19 at the Embassy Suites Hotel at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

The two-day workshop provided participants a broad range of professional growth opportunities from operations to maintenance, from management to training. One of the workshop highlights was a transit bus simulator that demonstrated the benefits of advanced transit training technology deployment.

Over 140 public transportation professionals from throughout Florida participated in the two-day workshop.

New beginnings for TD commission

John Stanley was recently named Executive Director of the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged.

John served as Executive Director of JTrans in Marianna and has served as a member of the TD Commission. He is a former County Commissioner and had a distinguished career in the military.

John’s understanding of rural public transportation issues and his policy and political experiences will surely contribute to his success as the new Executive Director.

All of us involved with Florida’s RTAP program say “Congratulations, John,” and we look forward to working with you!



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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.

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2003 Florida Paratransit Roadeo

The annual Paratransit Roadeo was held on April 11-12, 2003, in Tampa at Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority facilities. A total of 26 drivers from all across Florida competed in the Small Bus Division category. Another 19 drivers competed in the Van Division. Each driver demonstrated his or her driving skills and customer service by negotiating a pre-set course. The course challenged the driver's ability to maneuver the vehicle safely under a variety of conditions while providing riders with a comfortable ride. Congratulations to the winning drivers!

Small Bus Division winners: 1st Place—Richard Tew, Calhoun County Transit; 2nd Place—Shawn Douglas, Space Coast Area Transit; 3rd Place—Ray Brant, Gulf County Transportation.

Van Division winners: 1st Place—David Santos, Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority; 2nd Place—Tim Smith, Calhoun County Transit; 3rd Place—Raymond Aylmer, Gulf County Transportation.

"All the drivers are winners!" said Catherine J. Kelly, Florida Department of Transportation RTAP Program Manager, when announcing the awards to an enthusiastic crowd of more than 100 people. Thanks to all the vendors, volunteers, judges, drivers and drivers' families and friends for making it a rousing success!

The 2004 Florida Paratransit Roadeo is planned for April 16-17.

For more information regarding this year's Roadeo, visit the RTAP website at <http://www.rtap.cutr.usf.edu/>.



Small Bus Division (l to r): Richard Tew, Shawn Douglas, and Ray Brant.



Van Division (l to r): David Santos, Tim Smith, and Raymond Aylmer.

Catherine's Corner

Catherine Kelly, FDOT RTAP Program Manager

This is just a brief note to say thanks to a job well done. The roadeo was an astounding success. I wish I could thank every individual separately but it would take forever and I'm sure I would miss someone. Therefore, I would like to thank HARTline for hosting this year's roadeo. I also would like to thank Jerry Crunk for coordinating the vendor sponsorship. Finally, I would like to thank **ALL** of the drivers, volunteers, judges, vendors, and spectators. Whatever role you played in this roadeo, we could not have done it without **YOU** and your help. Thank you!

Congratulations to Florida's finest drivers of the 7th Annual Paratransit Roadeo and our winners on the national level. As I've said many times before, you are all winners. You represented Florida well at the national roadeo, which was held in Philadelphia on May 18. We are so proud of our drivers. We are making plans for next year's roadeo, and MV Transpor-

tation in Orlando has graciously agreed to host the event scheduled for April 16 and 17, 2004. So mark your calendars now—more detailed information will be provided at a later time.

I hope you are planning to attend the Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged Conference in Orlando on August 4-7. If you haven't registered, please do so since the hotel accommodation deadline of July 11 is approaching. You will be able to meet and welcome the staff from the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida, which was selected to manage the Rural Transit Assistance Program.

Summer is here and I understand it is going to be a scorcher. Take every precaution to stay safe during these hot days. Have a wonderful summer.

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The Roдео tests the skills of transit operators in the areas of driving, pre-trip inspection, wheelchair loading and securement. Also, participants take a general knowledge written test. Awards are presented to the top five contestants in both the van and small bus divisions.



Smith (l) of Calhoun County Transit (CCT) placed 4th in the Van category while Tew (r), also of CCT, placed 5th in the Body of Chassis category. Tew won CTAA's first Spirit award.

This year's national roдео was held in Philadelphia and, once again, Florida

proved itself to be among the best with four drivers receiving recognition.

Timothy Smith of Calhoun County Transit placed 4th in the Van Division and Richard Tew, also from Calhoun County Transit, came in 5th in the Body-On-Chassis Division.

David Santos of HARTline finished 16th in the Van category and Shawn Douglas of Space Coast Area Transit finished 24th in the Body-on-Chassis category.

As a new award this year, CTAA awarded a "Spirit" award to the driver that showed the most spirit and congeniality among other

drivers. Richard Tew of Calhoun County was awarded the "Spirit" award out of 72 drivers. Timothy Smith placed 4th in the Van Division and Richard Tew came in 5th in the Body-On-Chassis Division.

As a new award this year, CTAA awarded a "Spirit" award to the driver that showed the most spirit and congeniality among other drivers. Richard Tew of Calhoun County was awarded the "Spirit" award out of 72 drivers. All Florida participants

were appreciative of the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and compete with drivers from all over the country and look forward to next year's competition. "We can't wait until next year because I know we can do better," stated Richard Tew.

"We can't wait until next year because I know I can do better," said Tew. Marilyn Russell, Executive Director of Calhoun County Transit, was delighted with the roдео results.

"Way to go, guys!" exclaimed Marilyn. "Now everyone knows where Calhoun County is. We are very proud of you," stated Russell.

WAZZUP?

August 4-7, 2003—11th Annual Transportation Training and Technology Conference sponsored by the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, Orlando, Florida. Visit www.doce-conferences.ufl.edu/TD or contact Robert Craig (850) 410-5713, Erin Schepers (850) 410-5710, or Laura Revell (850) 410-5704 for more information.

August 10-13, 2003—12th Annual National Rural ITS Conference, sponsored by CMC & Associates, Palm Harbor, Florida. Visit www.itsflorida.org or contact Faith Kendrick at (850) 224-7775 for more information.

October 21, 2003—Improving Public Relations, Florida DOT's Statewide Transit Training Program, Tampa, Florida. For more information contact Amber Reep at (813) 974-9823, reep@cutr.eng.usf.edu.

JOIN THE RTAP DISCUSSION GROUP

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

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