

RTAP BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SUMMER 2006—VOL.4, No.1

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Mobility and Economic Development in Rural Florida

On December 7, 2005, more than 50 local and state officials, transportation professionals, local and state economic developers, planning staff members, and private sector representatives convened at the inaugural Rural Mobility and Economic Development Summit in Sebring. The purpose of the Summit was to share information, increase understanding regarding the connectivity between personal mobility and economic development, create excitement for the future, and encourage actions that will help improve the quality of life for the residents of south central Florida.

The Summit was the result of a Rural Transit Planning and Marketing Assessment Initiative study that was recently completed for the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 1 Office by the USF Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR). The study identified 16 recommendations to improve mobility; the first priority was convening a Rural Mobility Summit to discuss mobility needs, available resources, and coordination opportunities within south central Florida.

The morning segment of the Summit provided participants with a broad overview and understanding of the mobility and economic development



FDOT District 1 Secretary, Stanley Cann



Summit participants engaged in a presentation of the Rural Transit Planning and Marketing Assessment study

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issues, challenges, and opportunities within south central Florida. After opening remarks by Stan Cann, Secretary of FDOT District 1, representatives from Enterprise Florida and the Florida Heartland Rural Economic Development Initiative (FHREDI) updated attendees on recent economic development accomplishment within the region. Presentations by the Hendry County Department of Public Health and the Diocese of Venice provided attendees with a richer understanding of the severity of mobility challenges in south central Florida.

Jo Ann Hutchinson of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) addressed the attendees at a luncheon, followed by an in-depth discussion of 16 recommendations from the Rural Transit Planning and Marketing Assessment Initiative study. A facilitated discussion focused on how best to implement the recommendations.



*CTAA Coordination Ambassador,
Jo Ann Hutchinson*

The annual forum of FHREDI was incorporated into the Summit to provide participants with increased opportunities for awareness of existing support programs and economic development projects and to assist in the discussion and the development of specific action plans to address mobility needs.

As a result of the Summit, the Board of Directors of FHREDI will convene in early 2006 to determine how to best implement a rural mobility demonstration planning initiative. Also, recognizing the critical role economic development plays in addressing and responding to mobility goals, a joint

partnership was established among Enterprise Florida, Inc., FHREDI, and FDOT to address these mobility issues.

For more information about the Summit or the Rural Transit Planning and Marketing Assessment Initiative study, contact Lisa Staes at staes@cutr.usf.edu, (813) 974-9787, or Michael Audino, audino@cutr.usf.edu, (813) 974-3275.



2006 Florida Paratransit Roadeo

**May 5-6, 2006
Hilton Oceans Resort Plaza
Daytona Beach, FL**

Hosted by VOTRAN

*For additional information contact
Mike Wright, FDOT RTAP Program Manager,
(850) 414-4529 or
Ted Waters, Big Bend Transit,
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RTAP BULLETIN

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OUR MISSION

The Florida RTAP provides training, continuing education, and technical assistance 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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Addressing the Stress of Elder Care: Behavioral Health Services Can Provide Relief for Caregivers

Jim Brown, MBA, JD, Com Psych Corporation

Michael J. Audino, MA, USF Center for Urban Transportation Research

The unpredictable nature of caring for an elder and the emotional toll it takes on the caregiver can be overwhelming. The responsibilities cause stress, depression, anxiety, grief and relationship issues—all of which can be helped through behavioral health resources. Transportation agencies that provide their employees with this kind of support will be rewarded with a more productive workforce and higher rates of retention.

By 2010, one in two employees will care for an elder. That's an astonishing 50 percent of the workforce who will be juggling their paying jobs, family responsibilities and their role as a primary caregiver for an aging parent or an ailing spouse.

Caring for an elder takes a special kind of person and exacts an enormous toll upon the caregiver. And caregivers overwhelmingly say the emotional toll is the worst—watching their parent's or other relative's health and mental acuity decline. Other studies indicate a significant number of elder caregivers will develop psychological distress, particularly those who care for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease.

Added to these stressors is the fact that many caregivers—more than 5 million, according to the MetLife Mature Market Institute—live an hour or more away from the elder for which they care. Traveling to and from the elder's residence puts additional time constraints and pressure upon the caregiver. Living far away, out of state in many cases, can cause feelings of sadness and guilt. And, for those caregivers who either do not own or have access to an automobile, what options does public transportation provide?

Dual challenges: retain experienced employees, keep productivity high

With the approach of 2010, many public transportation agencies are also anxious about predictions of an impending labor shortage or, at the very least, a sudden shortage of experienced and knowledgeable workers. There are currently 77.5 million baby boomers ranging in age from 41 to 59. In five to six years, many will, or can, begin retiring. While many boomers say they expect to work in their

retirement years, the pressures of caregiving can tilt the balance in favor of retirement.

Those who don't officially retire still may have to leave the workforce for a period of time. According to AARP, one-fifth of people who provide care for the elderly leave their jobs at least temporarily because of those responsibilities.

Caregivers who stay in the workforce still are likely to miss work due to caregiving responsibilities. Unscheduled employee absence hit a five-year high of 2.4 percent, according to the 2004 CCH Incorporated Unscheduled Absence Survey. And the practice of taking time off for caregiving duties has become an issue, accounting for 23 percent of all absences.

At the same time, employee knowledge of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has led to increased use of time off for elder care purposes. ComPsych's FMLASource® reported a 20 percent increase in the use of FMLA for elder care from 2002 to 2003, compared with just a 3 percent increase in FMLA absences for child-related care for the same period.

Another consequence of the rise in elder care giving is the cost in lost productivity in the form of distraction. Caregiving is an activity that demands time and attention. Full-time employees struggle to balance job duties with family caregiver obligations. In fact, MetLife Mature Market Institute notes that 84 percent of employees who care for elders now report using work hours to do so.

The rise of presenteeism

Perhaps even more damaging in terms of lost productivity are the invisible absences that occur when employees show up for work who are ill or mentally exhausted from their caregiving responsibilities. Increasingly, workers are using their personal days, sick time and vacation time for caregiving, leaving little personal time and causing physical and psychological distress. Not

surprisingly the main health complaints among caregivers are a nearly identical match with the top conditions associated with presenteeism: depression, chronic stress, anxiety, head and backaches and digestive system problems.

Options for transportation agencies

Public transportation agencies can reverse this trend by supporting employees with a combination of work-life and EAP services. In this way, the employer is meeting both the logistical as well as the emotional needs of the caregiver. An integrated approach that takes a holistic view can help resolve the full array of employee issues related to elder care, from stress and relationship problems to care referrals to financial and legal concerns.

By integrating these two important services, the employer can ensure the caregiver receives comprehensive care. For instance, when an employee calls for assistance in finding a long-term care facility that accommodates Alzheimer's patients, an integrated program will have a specialist on the line that can assess the caller for stress, depression and other emotional issues and refer the caller for behavioral help if needed.

Early intervention—resolving issues before they become emergencies

Providing EAP and work-life services also helps employees manage problems “upstream,” before they become a serious impairment. Early intervention can possibly prevent an FMLA absence by addressing, through work-life and EAP services, issues such as choosing a long-term care facility, making arrangements and dealing with one's own stress. However, for employees who must take an FMLA leave, offering work-life and EAP services as part of the process will help them return to work in a more productive state. For example, one of the common reasons employees use FMLA in relation to elder care is to help the relative through a serious illness and then transition the elder from the hospital to a day-to-day living arrangement. This transition requires a number of decisions: will the relative live at home with hospice care or with the employee or at an assisted living or long-term care facility? A work-life program can help the employee make these decisions based on the elder's unique situation as well as financial and Medicare considerations. Work-life service experts also can conduct an in-home assessment of the relative and provide detailed recommendations for local care providers and facilities, saving valuable research time for the employee.

Support groups—a “free” benefit for employees

Another way public transportation agencies can provide assistance is to provide in-company support groups to help these caregivers deal with their unique challenges. Having someone to talk to can be an enormous help to the caregiver—support groups are an easy and inexpensive way for employers to give the caregiver an outlet for expressing frustrations and getting encouragement from peers who share the same experiences.

Program promotion is key

In general, employees who are caregivers have been slow to come forward and seek assistance. Caregivers often don't identify themselves as such, and they view their duties as merely helping a loved one. If caregivers aren't coming forward to ask for help, employers must bridge the gap and make their workforce fully aware of the resources that are available.

For those who see themselves as a caregiver, many are not aware of the services their organization provides. And for those who are aware of company-sponsored elder care, there is still confusion and misinformation about the services. It is for these reasons that program promotion key. Public transportation organizations should expect a work-life and EAP provider to help promote the program with a comprehensive and ongoing campaign emphasizing free and confidential help using posters, brochures, periodic e-mails, direct mailings, newsletters and help sheets. These communications must be relevant and engaging and use real-life examples where possible. When employees identify with the information they receive, they are much more likely to use the program.

Educational “lunch n' learns” are also a good way to introduce employees to available services. These informational programs are ideal for drawing attention to the heightened stress levels that elder caregivers experience, and for reminding workers that the employee assistance program is there to listen and help.

Integrated work-life programs that recognize the various needs of the caregiver and provide behavioral health support will be the most successful in addressing all the problems and challenges that arise out of caregiving. A fully integrated EAP and work-life program will take elder care services to the next level by attending to both the caregiver's emotional health and the day-to-day issues he or she is managing, resulting in healthier, happier and more productive employees.

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Message from Mike

Did you know that, according to the 2000 Census, more than one-third of America's population lives outside urbanized areas? Nearly 40 percent of the country's transit dependent population--primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals--reside in rural areas. Yet, in many of these communities, public and community transportation is limited or absent. However, in Florida we are fortunate to have a strong network of rural transit providers and the consistent support of the Florida DOT and the Florida Legislature.

The new funding initiatives that were included in the recent reauthorization of the federal transportation bill (SAFETEA-LU) will provide additional opportunities to improve and expand transit services in our rural communities. As the guiding regulations for these new programs are promulgated by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Florida DOT will provide any guidance necessary to ensure that each and every agency will have access to these funding sources.

The primary vehicle for delivery of this information is through the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), which was established by FTA in 1987 to provide a wide range of professional services and products. Each state was directed by FTA to create and operate its own Rural Transportation Assistance Program.

In Florida, the Center for Transportation Research (CUTR) is contracted to provide training and techni-

cal assistance to the Florida DOT staff and the transportation agencies that provide rural transit services. Throughout the year, CUTR staff schedule training opportunities for Florida's rural transit providers in an effort to provide effective and timely technical assistance that will enhance their operations and delivery of services.

One of the premier events on the 2006 RTAP calendar is the Paratransit Roadeo, which will be held May 5-6 at the Hilton Oceans Resort Plaza and at the VO-TRAN facilities, both in Daytona Beach. This event is underwritten by Florida DOT to ensure the participation of every interested rural transit provider. The top winners of this roadeo are awarded a "scholarship" to the National Paratransit Roadeo, which will be held this year in Orlando on June 3-9 as part of the CTAA EXPO 2006. The annual Florida Transportation Disadvantaged Training and Technology Conference also will be in Orlando on June 5 & 6. A special registration rate will enable Florida providers to attend both events. Check the Commission for Transportation for the Transportation Disadvantaged website for details (<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/ctd/>).

We hope you will avail yourself of the many services offered through RTAP. If you have any suggestions, please contact me at *Michael.Wright1@dot.state.fl.us*. I welcome any and all comments, and I look forward to seeing you at the 2006 Roadeo!

JTRAN's Sharon Peeler goes above and beyond

Our sincere thanks to Sharon Peeler and staff at JTrans for going "above and beyond" as hosts of the first Non-Emergency Stretcher Transport (NEST) classes last year. Due to a delivery problem, training materials did not reach the property prior to the class, and Sharon and company stepped in to save the day (and the class!) by arranging for last-minute copies of all the materials. Just another example of the unparalleled camaraderie and "can-do" attitude of Florida's transit properties!



2006 UPCOMING EVENTS

March 27-29, 2006

TSI's Transit System Security: Design Review Course—CUTR, Tampa. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

March 30-31, 2006

TSI's Crime Prevention through Environmental Design—CUTR, Tampa. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

April 3-6, 2006

Instructor's Course in Paratransit Operations—Lake County BoCC, Tavares. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

April 10-14, 2006

Intermediate Problems in Bus Collision Investigation—PSTA, Clearwater. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

April 13, 2006

Fuel Options for Florida's Mass Transit Systems Summit—Double Tree at USF, Tampa. For more information, contact Vicki Zambito, (813) 974-9763. zambito@cutr.usf.edu.

April 30-May 3, 2006

APTA Bus and Paratransit Conference—Marriot Hotel, Orange County, California. For more information, visit www.apta.com/conferences_calendar/bus/.

May 2-3, 2006

Increasing Human Effectiveness—CUTR, Tampa. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

May 5-6, 2006

2006 Florida Paratransit Roadeo—VOTRAN, Hilton Oceans Resort Plaza, Daytona Beach. For more information, contact Mike Wright, FDOT RTAP Program Manager, (850) 414-4529, or Ted Waters, Big Bend Transit, (850) 574-6266.

May 22-25, 2006

Instructor's Course in Paratransit Operations—Lake County BoCC, Tavares. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

June 3-9, 2006

CTAA Expo 2006—Gaylord Palms Orlando. For more information, visit www.ctaa.org/expo/2006.

June 5-6, 2006

14th Annual TD Conference—Gaylord Palms Orlando. For more information, visit www.dot.state.fl.us/ctd.

June 5-8, 2006

TSI's Instructor's Course in Bus Operator Training—CUTR, Tampa. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

August 8-10, 2006

FDOT/FPTA/CUTR Professional Development Workshop—Embassy Suites, Tampa. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

August 9, 2006

NTI Rural ITS Workshop—Embassy Suites, Tampa. For more information, contact Molly Buffington, (813) 974-7810.

October 22-25, 2006

17th National Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation Conference—Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, Washington. For more information, visit www.trbruralconference.org.

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