



Kansas Trans Reporter

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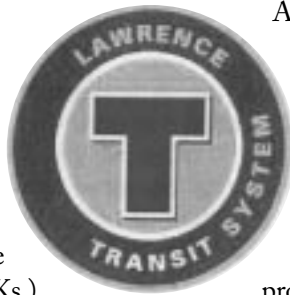
The Newsletter for Kansas Rural and Specialized Transportation Providers • The University of Kansas Transportation Center

A “T”errific First Year

by James C. Holland

“If you build it, they will come.” That saying is true for the Lawrence Transit System—also known as the “T.” The T’s goals are to provide the citizens of Lawrence (Ks.) with a dependable, clean, safe and cost-efficient transit system. Evaluations from the first year, and the first few months since then, have proven the system has done just that.

The city’s T (fixed route) and



T-Lift (paratransit) services have become great success stories with the assistance of two main organizations: 1) the Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC), established by the City Commission to advise the City on public transit system matters; and 2) MV Transportation—the system’s fixed route and paratransit contract provider.

Karin Rexroad, public transit administrator, said that the system’s major accomplishments after its first year were “getting a system that was timely and efficient, supported by a continual growth of ridership.”

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
New AARP Report Helps Agencies Understand Needs of Seniors

by Ira Allen

Are you planning a new service for seniors?...or expanding an existing one? Doing either requires some insight into the needs and expectations of your passengers. A new report recently released by the AARP could help you gain that insight. *Understanding Senior Transportation* may help you better understand how older persons connect with their communities and the types of mobility problems they

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A "T"-errific First Year,

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Routes were tweaked

Part of the T-system's success is attributable to the ability to identify and address routes that needed a few alterations. Some routes were shortened; others were lengthened or eliminated.

As a result of route changes after the system's initial launch, the T and T-Lift offer more direct and consistent transfers throughout the system, reduced waiting time and improved traffic flow, new service to some popular destinations, new connections and additional service to a major retail district, additional service to Haskell Indian Nations University and the North Lawrence neighborhood, and improved service to East Hills Business Park.

Passenger-friendly

The T-System vehicles have several passenger-friendly features. Fixed route coaches can "kneel" (lower the front door access to the curb) for the purpose of boarding safely. The two



While the future of the T-system looks very bright, there are still some disagreements about what its future should look like.

passenger entry doors improve the flow of riders boarding the bus. Flip seats within the vehicles allow for two wheelchair tie-downs or, when needed, additional passenger seats. The public address system allows for calling out major stops along the routes, transfer points, and requested stops. One of the most noticeable system enhancements is the bike racks on the front of the buses.

Some system enhancements, such as shelters and extra bus stop

Lawrence Transit System Goals for 2002

- increasing paratransit service efficiency;
- providing fixed route travel training for those needing assistance;
- building additional public awareness of the benefits of public transportation;
- building ridership on the fixed route system;
- encouraging first-time riders; and
- building partnerships with agencies, organizations, school systems, and community employers.

signage, were not implemented in the first year but are now being installed.

Understanding that every goal and objective will not be achieved, stated Rexroad, is key when starting a transit system. In fact, a new transit system takes twice as long as one would think to get in place—so there can be no room for getting easily discouraged, she said.

Ridership

Throughout 2001, the T operated eight fixed routes and provided approximately 156,000 one-way trips

Revenue

Fare prices for the T and T-Lift system were set low, to encourage ridership. A ride costs 50 cents, each way, and \$1 for a one-way paratransit trip. An option to purchase 10 punch tickets to ride either the fixed route or the paratransit system alleviates the need to have the correct fare when boarding a bus. A monthly pass is convenient for passengers who ride at least 40 trips per month. The pass is discounted 15 percent from regular bus fare.

T and T-Lift services produced about \$103,000 in revenues in 2001.

to families, seniors, employees, students, and individuals with limited mobility. In addition, the T-Lift provided about 44,000 one-way trips to individuals unable to access the fixed route system because of a disability or who requested special door-to-door service.

The T operated for almost 39,000 revenue-hours available to riders—while the T-Lift operated for about 17,000 revenue hours.

Lawrence Transit System is expected to easily cross the \$125,000 mark this year.

The Future of the T-System

This year the Lawrence Transit System is adding:

- four paratransit vehicles to aid in meeting door-to-door demand;
- 20 covered bus shelters;
- benches along the routes; and
- additional bus stop signs to clarify route locations and transfers.

To continue to receive federal funding, the City of Lawrence is making a conscious effort to meet the demand for its paratransit service, T-Lift. In 2001 T-Lift operated about 59 revenue hours per day. This number increased to 63 revenue hours per day in 2002.

While the future of the T-system looks very bright, there are still some disagreements about what its future should look like. Alan Black, Public Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) member, believes that there is still room for improvement in routes and schedules, by eliminating or shortening some of the routes and focusing more on improving the most popular routes. Black also believes that the headways of the T-system (time that separates two vehicles traveling the same route) need to be improved.

“Steady growth” describes Lawrence’s T-System to date, and its future holds promise for further expanded services.

Source: “Lawrence Transit System: A Year in Review,” Lawrence Transit System, December 7, 2001. ▲

AARP report,

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experience—particularly current or potential riders over age 75.

The report summarizes and analyzes the results of a national survey commissioned by AARP. The survey examines seniors’ perspectives on transportation and transportation services, exploring all modes that seniors are likely to use. A Health and Disability Status (HDS) index was created for this survey, which asked participants to rank their HDS between poor and excellent. HDS

How to Obtain A Copy of this AARP Report

A copy of *Understanding Senior Transportation* is available online at www.research.aarp.org/il/inb50_transport.pdf or by contacting AARP at 601 E St., NW, Washington, DC 20049; phone (800) 424-3410.

was then used as a tool to help understand the relationship of transportation to personal functional level.

How seniors travel

Driving. Like the rest of the nation, seniors would rather drive than walk. Those seniors who do drive, however, report certain problems. Over 60 percent of those surveyed complained that inconsiderate drivers were a concern, and 18 percent thought inconsiderate drivers were a serious problem.

Data such as these are the nails and the glue of the marketing workbench. For example, an ad taking the above information into consideration might run something like this: “Tired of dealing with inconsiderate drivers? Let our considerate drivers deal with them...ride the T.”

Other significant problems reported with driving were traffic congestion and night driving. Driving at night was the only reported problem with driving that worsened statistically with age. While only nine percent of respondents ages 50 to 74 saw it as a large problem, 17 percent between 75 and 79 thought it was, and 23 percent of those aged 80 to 84 concurred. Perhaps this is something for transit agencies to keep in mind when considering their after-dark schedules.

The problems mentioned above are major barriers to mobility for those with poor HDS, as will be discussed later in this article.

Ridesharing. Ridesharing was the second-most common mode of travel for those surveyed, and it, too, was found to have its share of problems. Feelings of dependency or worries about imposing on others were

The report examines driving problems reported by older drivers, including difficulties driving at night.



reported as the two largest problems with ridesharing. These two problems, as well as others with which ridesharers are faced—embarrassment, fitting the ride-giver’s schedule, lack of willing drivers, the ride-giver’s driving habits, and the feeling that reciprocation is necessary—can be addressed by public transit.

Once again, individuals with poor HDS experience problems more acutely than those with excellent HDS. For example, only 14 percent of respondents with excellent HDS found feeling dependent to be a problem with ridesharing, where 31

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Finding Alcohol in Unexpected Places

by Lisa Harris



Alcohol isn't just in beverages. It's also in food and body care products using ethyl, methyl, or isopropyl alcohol. Some of these products can add small amounts of alcohol to your system.

FTA regulations say that any combination of alcohol that results in a breath alcohol concentration of 0.04 or greater is considered positive. A concentration of 0.2 or greater but less than 0.04 will result in the employee's removal from safety-sensitive duties for at least eight hours unless a re-test shows a concentration of less than 0.02.

The source of alcohol is irrelevant in test results. Safety-sensitive employees should read content labels when consuming food products and beverages and using medicines and oral hygiene products to ensure alcohol is not being inadvertently consumed.

Here are some food and household products containing alcohol. Some might surprise you!

- non-alcohol beer
- candy
- gum
- cold medicines
- mouthwash
- breath spray
- denture adhesives

Source: *FTA Drug and Alcohol Regulation Updates*, Issue 21, page 4.

AARP report,

continued from page 3

percent of those with poor HDS experienced problems surrounding that same issue.

Transit agencies can underscore the advantages of transit in marketing efforts. Information from this report can help managers determine which comparisons will be particularly helpful in attracting new riders to transit.

Relationship of HDS to mobility

Age alone is not the best indicator of transportation mode use, transportation problems, or personal

mobility. The survey found that individuals who were over 85 years old but who reported excellent HDS were more mobile than younger respondents with poor HDS. In contrast, those who had poor HDS at all ages were more likely to experience problems with all modes of transportation. Transit managers can benefit from considering the problems reported by this portion of the population, as seniors with poor HDS are more likely than any other segment of the population to be transit riders. An understanding of the difficulties faced by potential riders is essential to providing considerate and consistent service.

Implications for transit services

We know that driving is the mode of choice for most Americans, and seniors are no different. However, as mentioned above, several problems with driving were reported by seniors, and understanding these problems should be helpful in structuring and marketing transit. The same holds true for ridesharing, the second-most common form of transportation among survey respondents. The survey also found that seniors who use transit are more likely to have poorer health and more disabilities. Service options designed to accommodate these special needs should be implemented to attract riders.

HDS strongly affected how those respondents perceive the magnitude of their problems with public transportation. Of these problems, unavailable destinations, vehicle accessibility, increased travel time and crime were most commonly reported as the four of greatest concern.

Some of these problems can be alleviated by transit agencies and some cannot. For instance, most agencies are already doing all they can to run services quickly and efficiently. Particularly in rural areas, riding the bus is just not going to be as fast as driving, and that's that. However, working with advisory groups of local citizens, including seniors, when designing routes and scheduling for fixed-route service can go a long way toward addressing concerns about unavailable destinations and inefficient routes.

Worries about crime may be less likely to affect rural transit services, but accessibility issues remain very real in the minds of rural transit riders. Is there more that can be done to address the concerns this survey brings to light? Perhaps not, but it's always a good idea to ask what can be done better, and this survey can help guide that questioning. ▲



Rethinking Monthly Board Meetings

by Pat Weaver and James Holland



Tired of the same old boring monthly board meetings? Are you routinely faced with time running out after you've only heard staff reports—with no real discussion by the board? Do board members arrive at the monthly meeting unprepared or uninformed because they have not received reports in advance? Does the board discuss issues from month-to-month without the opportunity to develop and discuss long-range plans for the agency? There may be a better way.

For transit agencies, monthly board meetings are the norm. However, the number of meetings is not a measure of effectiveness and efficiency of the board. In this article we'll explore the advantages and disadvantages of the typical monthly board meeting structure and suggest some possible alternatives.

When do monthly board meetings work?

During monthly board meetings, the board typically receives one or more reports from the general manager or

executive director, and perhaps from other departments or functional areas. These reports might be on financial activities, marketing, service or operations, or maintenance. In a one- or two-hour meeting, the board generally approves the minutes and financial reports, receives other reports, discusses old business, and squeezes in short discussion about new business issues that have come up during the month.

Monthly board meetings are appropriate in an agency going through rapid changes and may be wise for an agency starting new services. Monthly board meetings provide regular contact with staff in critical specialty areas, such as financial management or major capital development.

When is there a problem?

Monthly board meetings spent listening to reports may waste the valuable time of transit board members when an agency is not in crisis or undertaking any major new initiatives. These types of meetings often do not require much action from the board. Without adequate planning, they also may focus the board on day-to-day operational issues and problem-solving rather than on policy and longer-range planning.

A major downfall of monthly board meetings structured in this way is that they encourage short-term thinking. Report-driven board meetings, with reports received the day of the meeting encourage board mem-

Changing the structure of board meetings requires:

- written reports provided in advance of the meeting;
- more emphasis on discussion; and less listening to reports;
- an orientation to future growth by focusing on strategy instead of daily operations;
- careful meeting planning with a timed agenda to avoid distractions and dead-end dialogs;
- board members who prepare in advance of the meeting;
- a committee structure that allows for additional attention to special projects.

bers to focus on monthly results—30 days or less. A “near-sighted” organization is a less stable one.

What are the alternatives?

Alternatives to monthly board meetings can work when the board understands its role as a policy body, not as micromanagers of day-to-day operations. These alternatives also require an informed, competent staff who are adept at preparing good summary reports, distributed in advance of the meeting—and an executive director who is trusted by the board.

Board members may think that monthly meetings are needed to provide adequate time to discuss important issues. The real challenge is to make the most of the meeting time and to make sure they are spending time on the “real” work of the board. Require staff to submit reports in advance of meeting and focus the agenda (developed by the board) on

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Marketing Tip: Treat All Your Passengers With Dignity

(It beats slick advertising any day...)

.....
by Ira J. Allen
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Not all people function at the same level—not bus riders, not bus drivers, not even transit agency managers. Providing safe, reliable and courteous service can be very difficult, given the wide range in social skills and sensitivity in each of these groups. How a transit agency interacts with seniors and people with disabilities can be either a public relations coup or a PR disaster. How individual drivers treat their passengers, especially those who are older or have a disability, says a lot about a transit agency to the public—more than any TV or newspaper advertisement could. Make sure your agency communicates the right message.

While we acknowledge that the majority of bus drivers treat persons with disabilities sensitively and appropriately, there is always room for improvement. Sometimes a little better knowledge of disability etiquette can ease the discomfort of a driver. No one needs to feel awkward when working with a person with a disability; after all, they are just people like everybody else. But there are some techniques you can use to show sensitivity and give your passengers with disabilities a more pleasant riding experience. The following tips are adapted from an article by Gary



Before you take a passenger's arm to assist her, make sure she welcomes your help.

Speidel in the Winter/Spring 2002 issue of *The RTAP Rap*.

Ask before you help

Do not assume that a passenger automatically needs your help simply because he or she is elderly or has a disability. A part of your job as a transit vehicle driver is to be there to assist those who need or want it, but imagine how you would feel if you were coming out of the grocery store and someone ran up and took your groceries out of your arms to help carry them to the car. You might be

grateful, but you might also be put out at the invasion of your personal space. Persons with disabilities tend to feel much the same way about their personal space. So before you jump in and start helping, offer to provide assistance, and if your offer is accepted, ask how you can help.

Be sensitive about physical contact

This is fairly common sense, and goes right in line with the tip above. Some seniors and people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Taking someone by the arm—even if your intention is to assist—may provoke an angry reaction or actually knock the passenger off balance.

Avoid patting anyone on the head—or other patronizing gestures. If you are assisting adults, the fact that they have disabilities or are seniors does not detract from the fact that they are your equals, and appreciate being treated as such.

Touching wheelchairs, scooters or canes can be a bad idea, too. Many people with disabilities consider mobility and other devices part of their body and/or personal space. And of course, do not ever make unwanted or inappropriate physical contact with a passenger.

Respond graciously to requests

When a passenger asks for a special accommodation during the assis-

tance process or transport, it is usually not intended as a complaint. It shows that he or she feels comfortable enough in your vehicle to ask for what s/he needs. If given a positive response, that passenger will probably use your service again and tell his/her friends about the good service you provided.

Remember, customer service is the best form of advertising. While this may be hard to remember in today's glitzy world of high-gloss

passengers. If you ask extensively about a disability, people may feel that you are treating them as a disability rather than as a person. Nobody likes to be treated as anything other than a human being. Treat passengers with respect and they will be more likely to respect you—and your agency.

Talk directly to people: look them in the eye. Try to make yourself eye-level when communicating with passengers in wheelchairs

Treat passengers with respect and they will more likely respect you—and your agency.

magazines and clever Super Bowl commercials, it holds particularly true for industries like transit, where the marketing budget for an agency can often be tracked on a single napkin from the diner down the street.

Don't assume anything

Senior citizens and people with disabilities are the best judges of what they can or cannot do, so this bears repeating: Do *not* make decisions for them about their need for assistance. Depending on the situation, your actions could be a violation of ADA regulation by denying or excluding their wishes for independence because of a presumption about their limitations.

Communicate with kindness

Always speak directly to passengers, rather than to their companions, aides or sign language interpreters. Making small talk with a senior citizen or person with a disability is a good idea, and they should be spoken to the same way you would speak to anyone else. Avoid being patronizing; watch your tone of voice and body language in such situations.

Also, respect the privacy of

(simply squatting should do the trick). Identify yourself; give your name and role as the driver, and let your passengers know what you are doing, especially those with visual or hearing disabilities. Be aware of your and their surroundings in case you need to point out obstacles. Speak clearly, don't chew gum and don't cover your mouth with your hand. Give the passenger your full attention, and do not interrupt or try to finish his or her sentences.

All of these suggestions comply with common sense and basic etiquette. When transporting seniors and persons with disabilities, special treatment is often neither needed nor desired. Hopefully this article has communicated the importance of treating these riders just like all other human beings—because they are.

Source

"Effectively Communicate With Your Passengers," *The RTAP Rap*, Winter/Spring 2002. ▲

Rethinking board meetings,

continued from page 5

policy monitoring and action required of the board. The board then will be able to devote more of their meetings to discussion.

A successful move away from monthly meetings will likely require several changes in the board schedule and type of meetings. For example, an agency can have quarterly board meetings supplemented with task-oriented committee meetings. Written reports from staff and committees can be provided to the board on a regular basis. Quarterly meetings might run longer than monthly meetings to allow time to focus on policy issues and long-range planning. Special annual meetings can be held to focus on strategic planning and "benchmarking" (setting performance standards). A board retreat might be scheduled to accommodate strategic planning, or this work might be incorporated within a quarterly meeting.

Summary

Reorganized board meetings won't create a good board from an ineffective, uninvolved one. However, setting up a structure and a schedule to allow success is the mark of effective leadership. Focusing the board's work on policy development and monitoring rather than on management of transit operations will support board productivity and leadership, no matter how often the board meets.

Source

"Time to Work: No More Monthly Board Meetings," by Thomas A. McLaughlin, *The NonProfit Times*, October 1, 2001. ▲



by Ira Allen

Funny Business

humor, internet marketing and your agency

this about humor on the Internet:

“It’s something that generates a buzz that people can send to their friends. Things that are humorous tend to get more pass-alongs than other things.”

This is particularly important with web sites, where most traffic is attracted by word of mouth. Chances are, the number of people referring friends to transit web sites right now is pretty small. But transit agencies can certainly jump on the bandwagon of humorous Internet advertising that other nonprofit industries are currently riding. Don’t be afraid to design web sites or web site features

going to be able to get Saatchi & Saatchi to work for them for free (or at all, most likely), but the idea remains good. Shoot a short, humorous video; make it RealPlayer-compatible and stick it on your web site, and the number of hits you get will probably increase dramatically.

Another example was an April Fools Day web site designed by Donordigital for the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA). The temporary site used front-page images from popular magazines and newspapers, replacing the real print with items like the following: “In related news, Attorney General Ashcroft announced... that ‘prayer, pot and patriotism’ are America’s new fundamentals.”

You don’t have to agree with the message this agency is putting out to appreciate the potency of this type of satire as a pull for ‘net surfers. This web site had 25,000 hits on Monday, April 1st—three times the activity of the previous Monday. And best of all, the entire production cost to DPA was only \$5,000.

You don’t have to satirize our elected officials if you don’t want to, but a focus on humor of some sort is almost becoming a must in today’s advertising world. It’s simply a matter of translating that to the web.

Could it be that easy?

Possibly not, but have you explored your options? Do you have any people on your staff or are you reasonably creative and funny? If so, you can probably come up with a humorous way to present an aspect of transit to the web-viewing public.

Should you decide to do this

What is your agency doing to promote itself on the Internet? Are you using flashy graphics, video spots and innovative web design features? Or perhaps not; maybe you’re focusing more on the content of your web site, making sure it’s complete, accurate and relevant. Or maybe you haven’t really given too much thought to your web

Some web sites have humor that is really “out there.” You don’t have to agree with their message to appreciate the potency of this type of approach as a pull for Internet surfers.

site, seeing it as an electronic brochure and little more.

If this is the case, you may be making a big mistake. More and more non-profit agencies are moving the main thrust of their marketing to the web, in an effort to reach more people for less money. And some of those that are most successful are doing it with humor. Is your agency ready to break some new territory to earn some bigger rewards?

Ha ha...very funny translates to more customers

Nick Allen, CEO of Donordigital, a San Francisco company that designs Internet advertising, says

to make people laugh. Because when they’re laughing, they’re listening.

For example, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) enlisted the aid of powerhouse advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi to design an ad for their “Fix Cats” campaign (the ad firm donated the spot). PETA tried to buy time on TV, but was thwarted because of the racism of the humorous ad. [It used cloth cats copulating to help spread the message about the need to neuter felines.] PETA then turned to the Internet, where the ad became a huge success.

Most rural transit agencies aren’t

entirely in-house, it also offers an opportunity to get your whole team involved. Have a contest for drivers and office staff to see who can come up with the best advertising idea. What do they think is the funniest thing about transit? Then shoot a video or work with a web designer to create something Internet-based or compatible.

Testing either the idea or ad with a focus group may be a good idea before you put it on your web site. This will help you weed out unfunny or offensive material that may have slipped by—after all, we all have different senses of humor.

Incidentally, it would probably be best if your web site also contains concrete and relevant information. The point is lost if people laugh at the humor but can't tell who or what the site is about.

The balance between humor and obscurity can be delicate, but don't be afraid to experiment. The beauty of the Internet is that exploration is reasonably cheap. If you're making a TV spot, it had better be just-right, considering all the money you're paying for it and the fact that it's still going to be on TV in a month, like it or not. If you're making an Internet video spot and it's no good, it only takes 15 minutes work to pull it off the web.

So try it out. If you don't like what you come up with, you can always change your mind. And if you come up with a winner, you just might change someone else's mind about transit.

Sources

"April Fools Gold—Now Playing"
The NonProfit Times, July 15, 2002.

"Special Report: Hot Nonprofit Web Sites," *The NonProfit Times*, June 1, 2002. ▲

Internet Marketing: Who's Doing It?

by Ira J. Allen

The transit industry, both rural and urban, has been slow in using the Internet to its full potential. However, there are a few standouts. Among these, the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) web site is one of the best (www.ridetransit.org). The user has the option of going to the Virtual Transit Center (see below), which is much like a transit desk one might see at an airport, except there is no line—and no rambunctious kids. Clickable signs are set against the backdrop of a transit employee at a help desk, and all of the information is laid out very neatly. Clicking on a

sign or banner or newspaper stand brings the user to a new set of information, well laid-out and complete.

The CATS web site does not have a good search feature, but this is a problem common to many web sites, even those of for-profit entities. For some reason, a good search feature seems hard to implement.

Qualms with the search feature aside, the CATS web site is a great one, and it is not unique among transit. There are a number of well-designed transit agency sites out there, although most of them belong to higher-budget urban agencies. Most rural transit agencies are still using their web sites as little more than an electronic brochure, providing some vital information and without

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Below: Each sign at CATS's Virtual Transit Center is a hot link to more information.



Not-so-Common Knowledge About the Common Wheelchair

.....
by Arin Gustafson
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(Questions and answers from the Office of Civil Rights, Federal Transit Authority)

What is a “common wheelchair?”

A “common wheelchair” is a mobility aid belonging to any class of three or four-wheeled devices, usable indoors, and can be operated either manually or powered. It does not exceed 30 inches in width and 48 inches in length measured two inches above the ground, and does not weigh more than 600 pounds when occupied.

Is an electric scooter or other mobility device a common wheelchair?

If an electric scooter or other mobility device meets the physical specifications of a common wheelchair, then it must be treated as a common wheelchair.

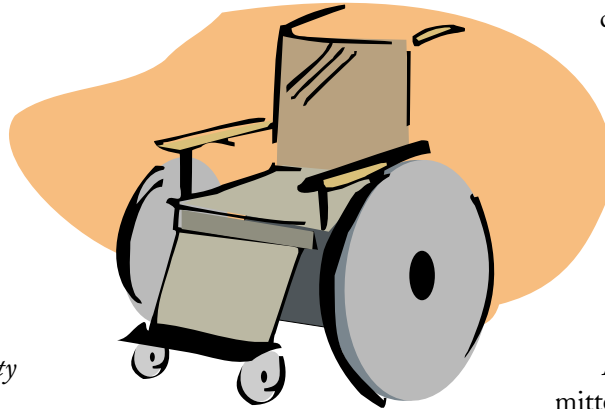
May a transit operator require common wheelchairs be secured to the vehicle?

Yes, provided that the transit operator has established such a policy. A transit operator is allowed to establish a policy that requires all riders to have their common wheelchairs secured while aboard a transit vehicle. Therefore, the operator may decline to provide service to a rider who refuses to allow his or her common wheelchair to be secured, as long as a policy has been established. Or transit operators may adopt a policy that allows common wheel-

chairs to ride unsecured. If the rider wishes his or her wheelchair to be secured, however, the operator’s personnel must provide the requested assistance.

What kinds of securement equipment must be provided?

All ADA-compliant vehicles must



have a two-part securement system, one to secure the common wheelchair, and a seat belt and shoulder harness for the wheelchair user. Vehicles over 22 feet in length to have enough securement locations and devices to secure two common wheelchairs, while vehicles 22 feet and under must be able to accommodate at least one common wheelchair.

May a transit operator deny boarding a rider whose common wheelchair is difficult to secure?

No. If the transit operator has a policy that requires securement, or if a rider asks that the wheelchair be secured, transit personnel need to use their best efforts to secure any mobility device that meets the regu-

latory definition of a common wheelchair. Transit operators cannot refuse to accommodate a common wheelchair—including a scooter or other specialized mobility device that complies with the ADA regulation’s specifications—because the wheelchair cannot be secured to the driver’s satisfaction.

Given the diversity of “common” wheelchairs, transit operators should consult with the manufacturers of securement devices and wheelchairs, as well as the owner of the wheelchair, to determine the best means of securement.

Does a wheelchair user have to use the seat belt and shoulder harness?

A transit operator is not permitted to mandate the use by wheelchair users of seat belts and shoulder harnesses, unless the operator mandates the use of these devices by all passengers, including those sitting in vehicle seats. For example, on fixed route buses, if none of the other passengers are required to wear shoulder belts, a person in a mobility device cannot be required to do so, either.

Transit operators may establish a policy that requires a seat belt and shoulder harness to be used by all riders, including those who use wheelchairs as well as those who use vehicle seats, if seat belts and shoulder harnesses are provided at all seating locations. In some cases, state law could require an operator to adopt such a policy.

What kind of services must transit personnel provide?

Because safe and nondiscriminatory transportation is the responsibility of the transit operator, transit operators are required to train their personnel to properly assist and treat individuals with disabilities with sensitivity, and to operate vehicle and equipment safely. This includes training personnel to use the accessibility equipment and to accommodate the different types of common wheelchairs.

Attendant-type services (e.g., personal baggage or suitcases) are not required, but assistance with boarding and disembarking, including pushing a manual wheelchair up a particularly steep ramp, is required.

What if the accessibility equipment is missing or not working?

Public transit operators are required to establish a schedule or system to ensure regular and frequent maintenance checks and to take a vehicle out of service to repair or replace any broken or missing equipment before returning the vehicle to service. In some instances, an operator must provide alternative accessible transportation if the accessibility equipment is not present or not working.

Does a common wheelchair need brakes in order to use public transit?

No, the definition of a common wheelchair does not include this requirement. A transit operator may not deny transportation to a wheelchair user because the wheelchair does not have brakes or the user does not choose to set the brakes.

Can an operator refuse to carry a person with a disability, especially a person using an electric scooter that meets the definition of a "common wheelchair," because of higher insurance rates or liability concerns?

No. Transit operators are prohibited

from denying service to an individual with a disability because its insurance company conditions coverage or rates on the absence of individuals with disabilities or persons who use common wheelchairs.

Can a transit operator require a person to transfer from a wheelchair to a vehicle seat?

No. Persons who use wheelchairs are allowed to transfer to a vehicle seat, however it is the rider's decision and the transit operator cannot force a rider to transfer to a vehicle seat. ▲

Driver Tips for Resolving Conflicts

... by Jamie Hashagen

While interpersonal conflict may seem inevitable in the daily lives of most individuals, a way to avoid this unwanted stress does exist. Preventing the problem before it starts will make all involved parties happier and more productive.

Prevention as the key to conflict resolution was the message presented by Jennifer Schubert and Melissa Soules at the TransAction Conference. In the General Conflict Resolution workshop, sponsored by RTAP, Schubert and Soules provided those in attendance with a variety of



tips for avoiding conflict.

Schubert and Soules felt that the most important aspect of preventing conflicts and often the most easily

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If a conflict arises on the vehicle, remember . . .

- stay calm
- keep safety in mind
- shut the vehicle off and pull over, if possible
- keep talking
- acknowledge the passenger's feelings
- stay on the passenger's eye level
- don't compare the passenger's behavior to someone else's
- keep your hands visible
- if need be, create a distraction, i.e. clap hands, beep horn, turn up music
- praise passenger as s/he begins to calm down
- follow emergency precautions as deemed appropriate by your company

Remember to follow through after a conflict by . . .

- repairing the relationship
- reporting the conflict to your supervisor
- reporting the conflict to the passenger's caregiver



Miles of Files?

by Matthew Kaufman

database software can help

Tracking your passenger, employee, and volunteer information no longer means having to maintain multiple computer files or keeping reams of paper. Desktop database software provides another option.

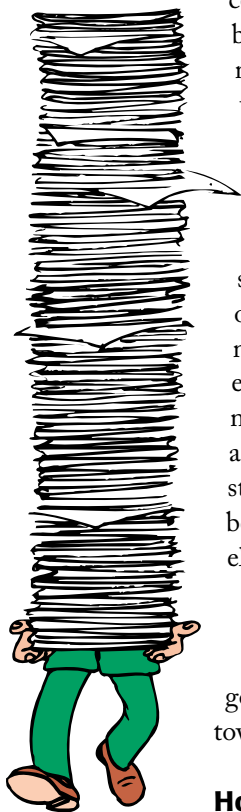
Database software allows you to take a collection of data and organize it for your specific purposes. Instead of referring to multiple files you can access all of your information through one screen. You may already have database software on your computer in the form of Microsoft Access™, Lotus Approach™, Claris FileMaker Pro™, and even Microsoft Excel™.

Benefits of database software

Database software can help you reduce staff training time and hours worked, save physical space, quicken searching, sorting, and reorganization of data. Information is more transportable and easily shared within your office, and it is easier to back up and protect your information from fire, theft, and loss. Database software allows you to easily and quickly sort through your client list based on address information, last interaction, and in the case of transit providers, destinations. Automating tasks also helps to keep your organization going when employees are sick or you experience turnover.

Disadvantages and risks

Some drawbacks do exist. Depending on the system you choose or need, the initial costs may be high or beyond what your organization can afford. You will also need to devote a significant amount of time to setting up your database and training your staff to use it. If your office has significantly more staff than computers, some of your staff may have difficulty accessing information stored on a computer being used by someone else. Even if you currently lack the resources to implement database software, it may be a goal you'll want to work toward.



How to get started

The first step toward implementing your database is to create a technology plan (or update your existing one). This means determining how you want to use technology in your office. You may want to talk to individuals from other organizations to determine how they are using technology. They may have some excellent recommendations you or your staff has not thought of.

Once you have decided how you want to use technology, you need to

create strategies for implementing your technology plan. If you decide that a database should be part of your plan, you need to decide what your database will be used for. Look around your office and make a list of the information you currently track and how you track it. Virtually anything you track on paper or on multiple computer files can be tracked in a single database. You should also think about tasks that you would like to automate. You may be surprised by what software can do for you.

Programs are available to transit agencies that use databases to track client, schedule, fleet, and driver information and then generate route and schedule information for transit drivers. Allowing a computer to generate routes for you can often result in a fuel savings and better utilization of your fleet and employees. Once you have decided what information you would like to track and what tasks you would like to automate, you will be able to determine what type of database software to use.

A simple system

If your needs are basic or moderate i.e., you want to store passenger information, fleet information, employee records, financial information, and perform simple calculations—you will probably be able to use one of the database applications that typically come installed on computers. These applications provide you with the tools to develop and manage a database, but you will have to create the database yourself. As budgets are

Software for Rural Transit Operators



Some software programs combine databases capable of tracking client, billing, fleet, schedule, driver, and trip information—and can automatically produce routes and schedules based on client needs. These programs, such as the two listed below, can reduce your fuel costs, miles driven, and work force needs.

- Automated Business Solutions offers software ranging in price from \$7,000 to \$18,000, depending on whether you purchase the automatic scheduling and routing portion of the package and what type of setup, support, and configuration you choose. For more information call (610) 565-2800 or visit www.abs-pa.com to download a free demo.
- EnGraph offers a database program starting at \$2,500. The basic program, licensed for a single user, provides a database for tracking client and fleet information. A version offering automatic scheduling and routing costs \$20,000. For more information call (785) 865-1436 or visit www.engraph.com.

often tight, creating your own database may also be the only financially plausible option. This means that you must have at least a basic knowledge of the software you are going to use.

Obtaining this knowledge may be easier than you think. A simple search on the Internet can provide you with a great deal of information. Also check with your local community center, college, or university to see if classes are offered. (The University of Kansas offers Microsoft Access classes that members of the community can take for \$75.) Don't forget to ask your friends, colleagues, or volunteers. Some of them may be experts.

A more complex system

If your database needs are more complex and you would like to automate tasks, you may need custom-made or business-specific software. While this usually means spending more money, it doesn't have to. It is possible that an organization similar to yours may have already developed its own database and is willing to provide you with the software for free.

Custom database software is also

available for free through the Internet. Or you can buy it directly from a software developer. This option can be expensive, so it is a good idea to speak with other non-profits to see what they use before making a decision.

If you decide to buy software, be sure to request a test copy of the software before committing to a purchase, and ask the software developer for a list of references.

Web site considerations

If you want to make your database information available to the public through a web site, your software options are limited. The most common database programs that provide a web interface are MySQL and mSQL [SQL stands for "structured query language"]. While MySQL is more advanced, mSQL can be downloaded for free by noncommercial users and educational institutions.

Provide staff training

Once you have your database software you will need to ensure your staff uses it. Remember that some

people in your office may not be open to change, may dislike computers, or be opposed to change *and* dislike computers. Work with them. Find out what they need and make sure the changes you make address their needs. Let your employees know how the new database will make their job easier or more efficient, and make sure that they have enough technical support to feel comfortable using the software.

For more information

If you decide that database software may help your organization, the Internet can be an excellent next resource for information on this topic. Use your favorite search engine to look for information on "database software" or "non-profit database software." Both options should provide you with a wealth of information to help get you going.

Sources

MySQL & mSQL, by Randy Jay Yarger, George Reese, Tim King, published by O'Reilly, July 1999;

"Database," by Coyote Communications, coyotecom.com, June 17, 2001;

"Microsoft Fundamentals," <http://databases.about.com>, October 4, 2001. ▲

Internet marketing,

continued from page 9

a lot of frills, and often, sadly, also without a great deal of content. While very understandable, given the modest marketing budgets with which most rural transit agencies are working, this limited usage of the Internet is truly a pity, because even rural transit agencies could be getting so much more. ▲

Rural Transit Conferences and Workshops

2002 Kansas RTAP Driver Training Workshops
Great Bend—10/8
Salina—10/9
Hays—10/10
Dodge City—10/15
Wichita—10/16
Emporia—10/17
Topeka—10/22
Manhattan—10/23
Pittsburg—10/24
Olathe—11/6
Contact: Rose Lichtenberg, Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program
Phone: 785-864-2594
Fax: 785-864-3199
Email: rosemary@ku.edu
Website: www.kstap.kutc.ku.edu

October 27-20, 2002
15th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation
Huron, OH
Contact: Transportation Research Board
Phone: 202-334-2934
Fax: 202-334-2003
Email: ops@ruraltransportationconference.org
Website: www.ruraltransportationconference.org

November 17-19, 2002
Kansas Association of Counties Annual Conference
Wichita, KS
Contact: KAC
phone: 785-272-2585
fax: 785-272-3585
Email: kac@ink.org

November 20-21, 2002
2002 Kansas Transit Managers Workshop
Salina, KS
Contact: Rose Lichtenberg, Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program
Phone: 785-864-2594
Fax: 785-864-3199
Email: rosemary@ku.edu
Website: www.kstap.kutc.ku.edu

January 12-16, 2002
TRB 82nd Annual Meeting
Washington, D.C.
Contact: Transportation Research Board
Phone: 202-334-2934
Fax: 202-334-2003
Email: LKarson@nas.edu

Editor's Note: To include meetings or workshops in our calendar, send information to Kansas Trans Reporter, KUTC, 1530 W. 15th St., Room 2011, Lawrence, KS 66045.
E-mail: weaver@ku.edu

Tips on resolving conflict, from page 11

overlooked, involves forming a relationship with the passengers. Pay attention to the little details, like seating the passengers next to their friends, telling them about any changes in their daily routine and maintaining open lines of communication with the passenger's caregivers. This will let passengers know their well-being is important.

Open lines of communication between the driver and the passenger from the inception of the relationship will also help to avoid any possible misunderstandings in the future. Schubert and Soules stressed that not only is verbal communication important, but also body language. Body language can send signals to the passengers, and sometimes those signals may be unintentionally sending the wrong message. The driver's behavior

can be key in avoiding conflicts.

Drivers should always remain professional. This includes not using jargon, avoiding sarcastic tones and avoiding the use of commands.

Even though all of these preventive measures may be followed faithfully, Schubert and Soules said that drivers should still always be prepared for conflicts. If a conflict does arise on the vehicle, there are things a driver can do to minimize its effects.

The most important thing a driver can do is stay calm and keep safety in mind. If the passengers see that the driver is remaining calm, they are more likely to remain calm. To maintain a relaxed and calm environment, drivers should keep talking to their passengers, acknowledge their passenger's feelings and try to stay at their passenger's eye level. All of

these techniques will help to calm the passengers and assure them that everything will be okay.

Drivers play an important role in the lives of their passengers. While all of these tips may seem like more work, there are also a lot of benefits. By putting forth a little extra effort each day, drivers will feel an increased sense of self-satisfaction in their job. In the long-term, their job will be easier and their level of personal safety will increase. Also important, drivers will get to know more people and have the opportunity to leave a lasting impression on their lives.

Reprinted with permission from *The RTAP Rap*, a newsletter of The New Jersey RTAP Rural Assistance Publication, Summer/Fall 2000. ▲

Resources Order Form

THESE RESOURCES are distributed free of charge, unless noted otherwise, as a service of the Kansas Rural Transportation Assistance Program. Please use the order form on this page to order the publications and videos described here. Videos are available for two-week loans; please request no more than two videos at a time.



Questions and Answers Concerning Common Wheelchairs and Public Transit. (3 pages) FTA ADA Information, Volume 1, FTA Office of Civil Rights. Provides definitions and requirements for transporting wheelchairs, scooters and other assistive devices.

Building Mobility Partnerships for People with Disabilities: Opportunities for Federal Funding and Promising Practices. (28 pages) Project Action, June, 2002. Also available online at www.projectaction.org/fundguide/final_guide.pdf. This resource is based on CTAA's funding guide, "Building Mobility Partnerships: Opportunities for Federal Funding." It offers supplementary information gathered by Easter Seals Project ACTION about programs that specifically target increased mobility for people with disabilities and seniors.

Introduction to Preventive Maintenance: An Investment that Pays Off. This video and workbook are designed to help all levels of a transit agency realize that each staff member has a part in preventive maintenance; not just mechanics. Interdependency is emphasized through the eyes of a sprightly wizard who introduces viewers to "The Ten Golden Rules of Preventive Maintenance." The workbook contains information and training exercises organized around the "Golden Rules." Special features of the workbook are numerous checklists, a section on contracting maintenance services out, and a section describing available software programs, including "freeware." FTA RTAP National Transit Resource Center, 2002.

Where to Send Order Form

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 1530 W. 15th Street, Room 2011
 Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7609

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City	State	Zip + 4	Date Materials Needed

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Kansas Trans Reporter

The *Kansas Trans Reporter* is an educational publication published quarterly by the Kansas University Transportation Center. The newsletter is distributed free to rural and specialized transit providers and others with an interest in rural and specialized service.

The *Kansas Trans Reporter* is co-sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration under its Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP) and the Kansas Department of Transportation. The purposes of the program are to: 1) educate transit operators about the latest technologies in rural and specialized transit; 2) encourage their translation into practical application; and 3) to share information among operators.

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For a free subscription to the *Kansas Trans Reporter* or to contact one of our faculty or staff, call toll-free **800/248-0350** (in Kansas) or **785/864-2595** (outside Kansas). Send correspondence to *Kansas Trans Reporter*, Kansas University Transportation Center, 1530 W. 15th Street, Room 2011, Lawrence, KS 66045. Send e-mail messages to Patricia Weaver at weaver@ku.edu or Lisa Harris at LHarris@ku.edu. Visit our web site at **www.kutc.ku.edu**

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Other services


In addition to publishing the *Kansas Trans Reporter*, the Kansas RTAP program offers a variety of other educational services. Following is a partial list of these services:

- Publication dissemination
- Technical assistance
- Telephone consultation
- Training development
- Web site
- Program planning assistance
- Video lending library
- Computer database searches
- Referral services
- E-mail discussion group

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Kansas RTAP staff

Assistance can be obtained by contacting a *Kansas Trans Reporter* staff person at the numbers or address above.

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