



Kansas Trans Reporter

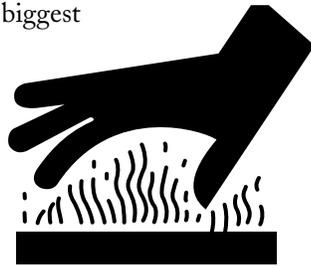
January 2004

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

What's Hot in Region 7?

by Pat Weaver

Is it the cost of insurance that's giving you your biggest headaches? How about long-distance medical transportation and the challenges of meeting the needs of your passengers traveling to the doctor? Or funding cuts you've already received or are expecting in the coming year? We recently asked rural transit managers in Region 7 (Kansas, Iowa, Missouri



and Nebraska) to rank some common challenges faced by agencies today. About 60 managers completed a web-based survey and the results provided a backdrop for a roundtable discussion in Kansas City.

The survey

Approximately 60 transit managers responded to the survey, some of whom participated in the roundtable discussion as well.

We asked survey participants to indicate which of six different "hot topic" issues were the most pressing. The six topics were: 1) insurance, 2) state and local funding, 3) rural safe-
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United We Ride

New nationwide program will assist communities and states with coordination efforts.

by Pat Weaver

For most people in the United States, mobility means getting in our cars to go where we want. However, for some, it's not that easy. Those without access to a car—for whatever reason—often face tremendous obstacles when trying to "get a ride."

It's not that we all haven't worked very hard to improve mobility in our communities by working together. Most human service agency
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ty and security, 4) capital needs and replacement, 5) medical transportation and 6) staff training. These topics were selected from typical comments and questions we've heard from transit managers in the past few months.

The discussion

The survey results provided a backdrop for a roundtable discussion at a recent Region 7 Transit Conference. The conference was held in November 2003, and was co-sponsored by Region 7 Federal Transit Administration and the transit associations from the region's four states. The goal of the roundtable discussion was to provide a forum to identify common problems and potential solutions.

Beth Denniston, Director of the National Rural Transit Assistance Program based in Washington, D.C., joined me in facilitating the one-hour discussion. The roundtable session much too brief for the wealth of knowledge in that room of 50 or more managers, but at least it was a starting point for identifying some of the common themes among the agencies.

What's hot

Not surprisingly, state and local funding issues were at the top of the list for inclusion in the discussion, with capital needs and replacement a close second. Insurance and rural safety and security were ranked last of the six topics, although respondents still indicated a very high interest in those two topics (80 percent and 84 percent, respectively, indicated moderate or high interest).

Money, money

Approximately one-third of survey respondents indicated that adequate

levels of state funding were of concern to their agencies. About 30 percent indicated that local funding was of concern. Many indicated that all sources of funding were a concern, particularly because of the need for state and local matches to access federal funds. In Iowa, one respondent stated that "\$2.6 million had been diverted out of transit's \$10.7 million dedicated funding and that funding to cities and counties had been cut." Another mentioned the lack of ade-

quate administrative funding support.

Local funding issues mentioned by participants included the challenges of working with many local groups that support rural public transit, each with different demands on the system. Communicating to local officials the importance of supporting public transit in the community was a challenge for some, and finding and maintaining ongoing fund-raising strategies to raise a local match was mentioned by others.

What does the future hold? While funding at all levels was reported of concern, considerable discussion centered on transit success or failure to obtain state funding, particularly when going up against highway interests. Steve Feigenbaum of the Kansas Public Transit Association identified the critical need to partner with highway interests in pursuing state funding, rather than trying to forward a funding package seen as competitive with highway interests. The approach is one of cooperation: Transit needs the road network to be successful; those interested in forwarding highway

funding need transit constituents, among others, to convey the message of the impact of the highway network on the state. Kansas transit agencies consider the success of their state funding efforts in recent years to be directly attributable to that kind of strong partnership.

Insurance and risk

If you've participated in any meetings lately where transit managers are gathered, chances are you've

Considerable discussion centered on transit success or failure to obtain state funding, particularly when going up against highway interests

heard the subject of insurance discussed. Of the survey participants, 47 percent indicated that their premiums have increased moderately over the past year with no change in availability. An additional 31 percent stated that premiums have risen dramatically and that availability has been limited.

Participants in the discussion identified some of the reasons for some dramatically differing experiences: some participate in self-insurance pools, county government insurance programs, or policies that package transit with other insurance (facilities, etc.). These efforts have provided some protection from dramatic changes. In Iowa, transit agencies are able to participate in a statewide pool for cities and counties; in Kansas, that type of pool is not available for transit agencies. Others managed to contain costs by changing coverage; i.e. increasing deductibles or self insuring the comprehensive and collision on older vehicles. Nebraska agencies reported that the problem has not been in vehicle insurance, but with work-

man's comp insurance.

Insurance cost and availability.

Representatives of the four state associations agreed to explore potential for a regional insurance pool by identifying overall interest in the four states and any potential legal or regulatory barriers. Denniston also volunteered that National RTAP and the Multi-State Technical Assistance Program (MTAP), a transit consortium of state agencies within the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), were preparing to collect data from each of the MTAP-member states regarding the extent of the insurance problem and potential solutions nationally. Another participant suggested including a member of the insurance industry on the transit agency board as a way to help lead risk management efforts within the agency and educating insurance companies about the nature of the transit service.

Capital needs

The rural issues survey identified funding fleet expansion and replacement as the greatest need (57 percent) followed by ensuring performance of available vehicles (26.5 percent). Roundtable participants noted inadequate overall funding to replace and expand fleets, with a major reliance on discretionary federal funds rather than dedicated capital funds. In some states, this problem is expected to be exacerbated by requirements for new vehicles to serve Head Start transportation.

Impact of Head Start. The impact of the Head Start vehicle regulations which require a specific vehicle design that precludes public transit from providing Head Start transportation varies from state to state because not all transit agencies currently provide Head Start transportation services. However, transit

regulations which unnecessarily lead to a duplicate fleet is seen as a major barrier to coordination—in some cases, immediately, but in all cases over the long term. All agreed that the four state associations will continue to carry the message to Congress (in their spring meetings with the legislators, as well as other times) to request changing the regulations perceived as leading directly to separate, uncoordinated transportation programs. For more information about this issue, read the final rule issued in 2001 (<http://fr.cos.com/cgi-bin/getRec?id=20010118a6>) or a Community Transportation Reporter article available at <http://www.ctaa.org/ct/dec95/hstart.asp>.

Vehicle specifications. Improved communication among agencies and among states was identified as an important strategy to develop vehicle specifications. One suggestion made (for those who are writing specifications or want to pose a question or comment to transit fleet maintenance personnel around the country) is to subscribe to the Transportation Research Board's Transit Fleet Maintenance Committee web board. To subscribe, go to <http://webboard.trb.org/~a1e16>. A new user will need to select a user name and password. The user can then review comments or questions posed by others in a number of different categories, or post a question for others to answer.

Data needs. Another problem is the lack of comprehensive data at the state level in the region to adequately identify capital needs. Participants in the roundtable believe that those needs may be much more significant than currently identified.

Another issue identified by participants is associated with requirements in some areas to accept low bids. Others mentioned the lack of adequate information about the per-

formance of the vehicles during the bid process. A process that would provide more information and identify problems would be helpful in securing high quality vehicles.

Staff training

The most frequently identified issue under staff training on the survey was the lack of backup personnel available to release employees for training without disrupting service. Lack of adequate funding and resources were identified by 28 percent of respondents as an issue.

Denniston offered resources of the National RTAP Program to assist in bringing training to Region 7 if topics were identified that would benefit each of the states for which we don't have the resources to offer individually.

Medicaid and Medicare

Medicaid contracting and long-distance medical trips were important issues to survey respondents.

Medicaid and Medicare transportation. Participants identified the need to collect more specific information about opportunities and challenges within the Medicare and Medicaid. One article that may be helpful in learning more about federal policy in using medicare funds to provide transportation services is entitled "Researching the Health Care Benefits of Medicare Transportation." It is available at <http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/medical/medicare.asp>.

CTAA also has developed recommendations for eligible transportation services for Medicare transportation, listed at <http://congress.nw.dc.us/ctaa/issues/alert/?alertid=1&type=CO>.

As specific recommendations are identified, the roundtable participants agreed that Region 7 state

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association representatives will bring those recommendations to the Congressional delegations.

For more information

The results of the survey and a copy of the Powerpoint presentation are provided on the conference website at www.region7meeting.com as well as on the Kansas RTAP website at www.ksrtap.kutc.ku.edu. For more information about the survey, contact Pat Weaver at weaver@ku.edu. ▲

United we ride,
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managers recognize that transportation is important. In fact, there are 62 federal programs that fund transportation services.

Ironically, for most people who need transportation help, the creation of more programs hasn't made getting around that much easier. We all recognize that the key to using these services more efficiently is coordination. But we who work in transportation also know how difficult it can be to bring many agencies, funding sources and services together to improve mobility and not cost more in the long run. The question is, what can be done to facilitate coordination of human service transportation?

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), with its partners at the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and Education, are taking another run at helping the coordination process by launching "United We Ride."

New five-part initiative

United We Ride is a new five-part initiative its creators say is intended to "break down the barriers between programs and set the stage for local partnerships that generate common sense solutions and deliver A-plus performance for everyone who needs transportation." The initiative includes major five components:

- *A Framework for Action.*

Created by a panel of experts from around the country that convened in August 2003, this publication is a self-assessment tool. States and communities can use it to identify areas of success and highlight actions still needed to improve the coordination of human service transportation. To download the complete *Framework for Action* and facilitator's guide, visit www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/framework.html.

- *State leadership awards.* These awards will recognize a select number of states that have accomplished significant progress in human service transportation coordination. Award applications will be due in early January each year. For a complete application package, visit www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/unitedwerideaward.pdf

- *National leadership forum on human service transportation coordination.* This conference, planned for late

February 2004, will bring together governor-appointed senior leadership teams seeking to raise the visibility of the issue among state leaders—and secure commitments to action. The forum will be used to provide

technical assistance, as well as to recognize states that have already taken significant steps to improve human service transportation.

- *State coordination grants.* States participating in the United We Ride national leadership forum will be eligible to submit an application for state coordination grants to

address gaps and needs related to human service transportation in their geographic regions.

- *"Help Along the Way."* This technical assistance program will build on the work of the Community Transportation Assistance Program (CTAP), the Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP), Easter Seals Project ACTION and other stakeholders to provide hands-on assistance to states and communities in the development and delivery of coordinated human service transportation programs.

For more information about United We Ride, visit the FTA website at www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/www/index.html. Send questions to unitedweride@fta.dot.gov. ▲



This publication is one of the resources provided by the new United We Ride initiative.

Lift accidents may require employee testing

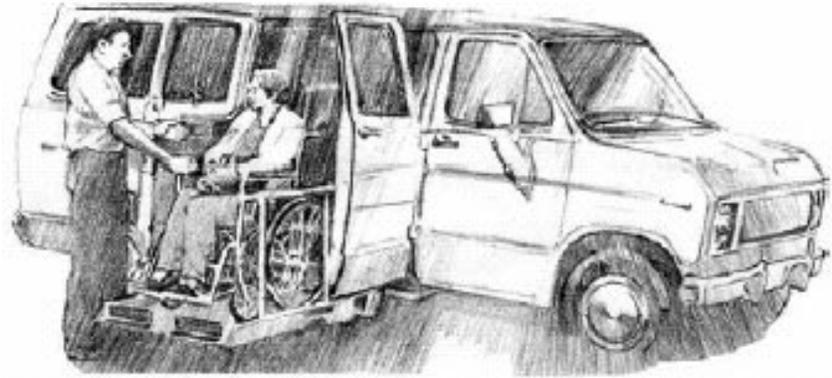
by Ira Allen

At a recent Community Transportation Association of America conference, Mark Snider of the FTA Office of Safety and Security provided an important clarification to FTA's drug and alcohol testing regulation on post-accident testing (49 CFR Part 655). Essentially, the FTA may now require the driver be tested for drugs and alcohol in the event of an accident involving a wheelchair lift.

The rule (§655.4) defines an "accident" as an "occurrence associated with the operation of a vehicle" in which:

- An individual dies; or
- An individual suffers bodily injury and immediately receives medical treatment away from the scene of the accident; or
- In the case of an occurrence in which the mass transit vehicle (including non-FTA funded vehicles) involved is a bus, electric bus, van, or automobile, one or more vehicles incurs disabling damage as a result of the occurrence and requires removal away from the scene by a tow truck or other means; or
- In the case of an occurrence in which the mass transit vehicle is a rail car, trolley car, trolley bus, or vessel, the mass transit vehicle is removed from operation.

Previously, FTA provided guidance that an "occurrence associated with the operation of a vehicle" meant that the accident had to be directly related to the manner in which the driver applied the brake, accelerated, or turned the steering wheel. Given this focus on the actual movement of the vehicle, incidents



involving the operation of wheelchair lifts were determined to be outside the accident definition and therefore would not require FTA post-accident drug and alcohol tests.

Upon further consideration, FTA has determined that because a lift is used in revenue service and its operation is essential to the operation of the vehicle and affects public safe-

post-accident tests unless the employee can be completely discounted as a contributing factor, as consistent with §655.44.

We hope, of course, you won't need this information. If one of your passengers is injured on lift, however, and you're unsure whether to test or not, call The Mental Health Consortium, Inc. for guidance

FTA has clarified its position, expanding its interpretation of "operation of a vehicle" to include operation of its lift.

ty, the lift's operation should be included in the accident definition. Therefore, FTA clarified its position, expanding its interpretation of "operation of a vehicle" to include operation of its lift.

Thus, fatalities associated with the operation of a lift will require drug and alcohol post-accident tests for the driver and any other covered employee that could have contributed to the accident. Non-fatal accidents associated with the operation of the lift that result in bodily injury requiring immediate transportation to a medical facility will also require FTA drug and alcohol

through the process. They can assist in determining whether testing is required and can help you arrange the testing within the regulated timeframes. Tim Harris, at The Consortium, can be reached at (785) 232-1196.

Adapted from *FTA Drug and Alcohol Regulation Updates*, Issue 25, page 3, <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Safety/DATesting/Newsletters/issue25/pdf/issue25.pdf>, Summer 2003. ▲



Eastern wisdom on community surveys

by Ira Allen

What do you know about collecting passenger data? How about using it? Although some agencies around Kansas send out surveys or track rider statistics, most don't, so we headed east for more information. We talked with Mary Ellen Gomes, director of the Westport Senior Center, in Westport, MA. With collaboration from the nearby University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, she and her staff conducted a needs assessment survey of residents age 55 or older in the Town of Westport. The survey turned up some interesting information about transit usage and needs. Gomes kindly shared a number of tips, hints, and the lessons of hindsight for agencies thinking about conducting their own surveys.

Survey says?

Because Gomes and her team concentrated on the needs of the aging community in general, only some of her survey results directly relate to transit. The results showed trends that will not surprise most transit providers in Kansas. For instance, 90 percent of respondents reported driving their own cars, although the need for transportation services increased with age. Survey participants needed transport for food shopping, doctor and pharmacy visits, and going to church, and they expected to need more of these services as time went on.

While these survey results may not be terribly surprising, the response rate was. A whopping 38

percent of those who received the mail-in survey sent back completed forms. Instead of the two or three percent response rate they expected, Gomes and company had to deal with an enormous influx of paper.

While exciting, processing the results from 1,456 surveys was also overwhelming. Gomes said, "It was extremely time-consuming. My staff was awesome," but also noted, "I never expected the overwhelming response that I got, so I've had some trouble knowing how to use it."



Westport, MA, had a 38 percent survey return rate, instead of the typical 3 or 4 percent.

Who says you can't have too much of a good thing?

Why did so many respond? Gomes isn't sure, but she did say, "...We did a lot of publicity beforehand to let them know that it was coming." Perhaps the older population is more vocal about its needs, or perhaps Westport is a unique case.

One lesson for potential surveyors to take away from the Westport experience is this: Advertise, advertise, advertise. If you let your target population know the survey is com-

ing, they may be more likely to respond when it reaches them.

You've got the results: Now what?

Gomes said, "We presented the results of the survey to the Town to indicate need—and we also wanted to know how to plan for the future." The strong survey response helped both with planning and proving need. As she noted, "you always have to prove need" if you want funding.

In addition to helping raise money, Gomes explained, "the survey brought to light areas that we had no clue about." She noted another useful aspect: "It helps you to know what people really want, not what you think they want." Obviously, more survey responses help give a better picture of what's really needed, and help prove to local committee and commission members that the need in the community is great. After all, if the issues covered by the

survey didn't matter, so many people wouldn't have responded.

Reflections

Looking back over the process her agency went through to conduct the survey, Gomes had plenty of afterthoughts to share. Following are some of the tips she gave:

- *Number the questions!* Transferring answers to a circle chart, like those used in standardized testing, was a

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Premium charges for transit services

FTA's Office of Civil Rights provides guidance on charging fares for complementary paratransit services.

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by Pat Weaver
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Is a transit operator permitted to establish "premium charges" for complementary paratransit services that exceed the minimum requirements established by the Department of Transportation's (DOT) ADA regulations? The FTA Office of Civil Rights has published guidance to answer that question. It's important to note that the requirements to supply complementary paratransit at all apply to systems which offer fixed route transportation service.

In general, any paratransit services that a transit operator provides above and beyond the regulatory obligations of ADA, including service to individuals who do not fall under one of the three categories of eligibility established under the ADA, are not subject to the service criteria for ADA complementary paratransit (i.e., service area, response time, fares, trip purpose, hours and days, and capacity constraints). Transit operators may therefore elect to establish "premium charges" for such services.

Under the ADA, paratransit functions as a "safety net" for people with disabilities who are unable to make use of the fixed-route—e.g. "mainstream"—transit system (bus or rail). It is not intended to be a comprehensive system of transportation that meets all of the travel needs of persons with disabilities. The level of service is required to be comparable to the fixed-route system, and service



Be sure to read the regulations with care before you decide to use premium charges to carve out a little extra money.

is required only for individuals whose disability, permanent or temporary, prevents them from using the fixed-route system. The eligibility requirements are incorporated into §37.123 of the Department's regulations, and the service criteria are established by §37.131.

Section 37.131 establishes the minimum requirements for complementary paratransit provided under the ADA; transit operators are free to provide any level of additional service that they or their communities find necessary. This could include providing paratransit service to individuals

who do not meet the eligibility criteria, operating paratransit service beyond the fixed-route service area, providing service when the fixed-route system is not running, or by exceeding the basic next-day service requirement. In such cases, the operator would not be bound by the service criteria for ADA complementary paratransit, including the requirement that limits the fare to no more than twice the fare for a comparable trip on the fixed-route system.

While premium charges are permitted for these services above the required minimum, transit operators who wish to charge premium fares are strongly advised to thoroughly review Subpart F of the DOT's ADA implementing regulations before making any changes to the operations, eligibility, or fare structure of their existing ADA complementary paratransit systems. Not only must transit operators ensure that any proposed changes are consistent with the basic ADA requirements, but they must also meet the applicable public participation requirements.

With regard to public participation, §37.137(c) requires a paratransit operator to create an "ongoing mechanism" for the participation of individuals with disabilities in the continued development and assessment of services to persons with disabilities. While this provision does not require a transit operator to conduct a public hearing for minor adjustments to its ADA paratransit service, the use of some form of public participation process in the establishment of "premium services" is strongly advised.

A public hearing is required, however, for changes to the para-

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transit reservations system. Under §37.131(b)(4), any changes to the reservation system must comply with the public participation requirements in §§37.137(b) and (c) of the Department's ADA implementing regulations.* These require that public participation include: outreach, consultation with individuals with disabilities, opportunity for public comment, a public hearing and the creation of a mechanism for continued participation of persons with disabilities in the development and assessment of services to persons with disabilities.

Transit operators also must still meet the basic ADA paratransit service criteria, and are advised by FTA to avoid any practice by which eligible riders are "steered" into a service category to which premium charges are applied. Furthermore, transit operators should not look to "premium services" as a means of relieving demand for ADA complementary paratransit services by eligible riders.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding public transportation for persons with disabilities, please contact the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Office of Civil Rights on their toll-free Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Assistance Line at (888) 446-4511 [Voice]. Your questions and concerns will be addressed by the FTA ADA Officer of the Day or directed to the person who can assist you. ▲

*Note: §37.131(b)(4) of the DOT's ADA regulations, as amended, contains a typographical error; reference to §37.131(b) and (c) should read "37.137 (b) and (c)."

Community surveys, continued from page 6

"huge endeavor," said Gomes. The fact that questions on the survey weren't numbered made it that much harder.

- *Don't be afraid to ask for help.* Although Gomes and her team did most of the work on the project, they worked with a nearby university to analyze the results, and ended up with a very professional document. Professionally-presented results can



Be prepared; if you're going to do a big survey, with a lot of questions (Westport's had 131), you'll need a lot of people to compile the results.

be much more persuasive when it comes to convincing a cash-strapped city or county commission to fund one more bus route.

- *Think before you print.* Gomes: "If you're going to make your surveys double-sided, don't put your most important questions on the back, because people don't always notice them there."
- *Be prepared.* If you're going to do a survey with a lot of questions (Westport's had 131), you'll need a lot of people to compile the results.
- *Know what you want.* Gomes said "setting up the survey so that it gives you what you're looking for" was particularly important. She explained, "We had decided in advance what we wanted to know...which larger questions we wanted answered."
- *Watch out for ambiguity.* Gomes said, "You have to be very careful and

New One-Stop Website on ADA

www.disabilityinfo.gov

There's a one-stop website with information for Americans with disabilities, and it's just a click away! The new site, DisabilityInfo.gov, has information on civil rights, education, employment, housing, transportation, government benefits (including Social Security) and more. Check it out.

specific about how you word the question," or the answers will be hard to decipher, if they mean anything at all. A pilot survey with only 10 or 20 respondents is a good way to test the clarity of your questions.

Although setting up and mailing out surveys can be a lot of hard work, the results may change the way your agency does business. If you begin with a clear idea of what questions you want answered, the responses you get can help you see what changes are needed and, equally importantly, convince funding sources of their necessity. How you use the results of your survey ultimately determines its effectiveness. If you are prepared from the get-go, you're much more likely to end up with a document that tells you—and others—what's necessary to know. ▲



Make Your Web Site Accessible

by Matthew Kaufman



Our last two issues contained articles on making marketing materials and electronic documents accessible to your passengers with visual impairments. This article is the last in the series and will address making your website accessible.

At first thought it might seem the Internet would not lend itself well to serving individuals with visual impairments. But actually, the same thing that makes the Internet so helpful to sighted users—its flexibility—makes it valuable to non-sighted users. In fact, the Internet has been characterized as a godsend to individuals with visual impairments. Through the use of assistive technology these individuals can now access newspaper and magazine articles, bank statements, tax information, and, hopefully, information about your transit agency. Improved access to information allows these individuals to perform numerous tasks that previously would have required assistance from a sighted person.

Understand site access

Unfortunately many websites are inaccessible to persons with visual

impairments. This is generally the result of a lack of awareness on the part of web designers about how such persons access the Internet.

Individuals with visual impairments have a couple of options for using the Internet. Those suffering from limited vision can choose to enlarge the text and images they view on the Internet. This is a fairly simple task and can be done

through a menu option on some browsers or with specialized software. Unfortunately, this option may not work for enlarging pictures and diagrams, or may cause pictures and diagrams to become so pixelated* that they are difficult to understand. Luckily there are some easy options for solving this problem, and we'll

Individuals with visual impairments can now access newspaper and magazine articles, bank statements, tax information, and, hopefully, information about your transit agency.

discuss those later.

Screen readers provide another option for Internet users who are visually impaired. These software programs are able to read (aloud) text in a linear fashion and identify certain objects appearing on pages, such

* Digitized images are made of thousands of individual pixels. When digitized images are made too large the pixels increase in size making the image appear blurry.

as tables and links. Refreshable Braille displays perform a similar task, but instead of reading text they convert it to Braille.

Keep it simple

None of these options will work well, however, if your website is complex or cluttered with graphics. This is not to say that you should avoid all types of graphics; however, be sure that items appearing on your website are clearly labeled. This means adding what are called alternative text or "alt tags" to your images. These tags allow images to be labeled with text that, while not immediately visible on the page, can be read by text readers and refreshable Braille displays. The method for inserting these tags will vary depending on the type of web-authoring tools you use.

Without these labels many graphics will be lost on your users

with visual impairments. With the alt tags, all of your site's users will know which graphics depict buses, which depict people, and which lead to more information. Our own website (www.kutc.ku.edu) uses alt tags. If you visit the site and roll your mouse over an image you will see its alt tag appear.

Tables are tricky

Tables can also cause problems for text readers. When posting schedule

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Accessible web site,

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information, operating hours, and other items in a table format, special steps need to be taken or the tables will be difficult to understand. (The sidebar on the next page provides an example of the problem.) Web page designers also use tables for formatting purposes. This allows them to easily designate where images, links, and text will appear. In either case, poor formatting can cause problems.

Tables used for formatting purposes are relatively easy to design in an accessible format. Text from each cell will be read linearly before the text reader or refreshable Braille display moves onto the next cell on the right. Web page designers must ensure that all text contained within the table makes sense when read in a linear fashion. A simple way to ensure this is to read the text directly from the HTML code. If the text does not make sense, you need to reformat your table so that it will appear in a linear format. Table headers should also be avoided and proportional sizing rather than absolute sizing should be used.

Tables that list information, such as bus schedules, should have their row and column headers designated with a "<th>" tag, data cells should be associated with the appropriate headers, and names and titles should be assigned using the "<caption>" tag. These tables should also use proportional sizing rather than absolute sizing.

Unfortunately, web-authoring tools do not yet perform these tasks automatically; web designers must make these changes by hand. This means having a basic understanding of HTML code.

If all of this information sounds like Greek to you, help is available. The website WebAIM offers many

Tips for Making Tables Accessible

<i>Location</i>	<i>Arrival</i>	<i>Departure</i>
18th and Main	12:01	12:05
30th and Main	12:12	12:16
40th and James	12:30	12:35

Without appropriate formatting, it would be difficult for an individual using a text reader to understand the table above. The text reader will say, "Table with three columns and four rows. Location. Arrival. Departure. Eighteenth and Main. Twelve oh one. Twelve oh five. Thirtieth and Main. Twelve oh twelve. Twelve sixteen. Fortieth and James. Twelve thirty. Twelve thirty five."

Understanding the table would be difficult, and understanding one with additional columns could be impossible. With correct formatting, however, a text reader will say, "Table with three columns and four rows. Location eighteenth and Main. Arrival twelve oh one. Departure twelve oh five" etcetera. Tables formatted to be read like this will be much easier for your passengers with visual impairments to understand.

tutorials for individuals wanting to create accessible websites. You can access their site at www.webaim.org. A tutorial on creating accessible tables is located at www.webaim.org/howto/tables/.

Throw away your mouse

Web sites should also be designed so that they can be navigated easily without the use of a mouse. This will help individuals lacking fine motor skills because of arthritis or other ailments in addition to your riders with visual impairments. To navigate websites without a mouse, users press the tab, shift, enter, and arrow keys. Because a user selects links using the tab key, he or she will have to press the key many times if a page contains multiple links. While this may not sound like much of a problem, it can seriously delay web navigation.

This problem can be addressed by adding "skip links" to your web pages. These are special links located at the top of a page that, when selected, allow users to skip repetitive navigation links such as "Home,"

"Search," and "Contact Us," and go directly to the main content of the page. An example of this type of link is located at www.webaim.org.

Label, label, label

You can further assist your website users with visual impairments by carefully labeling all input controls, which include check boxes, list boxes, and all buttons. When these controls are not labeled, text readers and refreshable Braille displays are unable to identify them. Clearly labeled controls allow all users to interact with and gain information from your site. They also make using the website easier for your sighted users.

Pay special attention to the colors you use. Approximately 10 percent of the male population and 0.5 percent of the female population is color blind. These individuals have difficulties distinguishing between certain colors or certain shades of colors. Reds, greens, oranges, and yellows tend to cause the most problems and should never be used alone to convey

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How Safe are Your 15-Passenger Vans?

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Reports of accidents involving 15-passenger vans rolling over and killing occupants tend to make headlines. These vans often carry children or church groups, and accidents make for compelling stories. The media attention has caused the safety of these vehicles to be questioned. But are 15-passenger vans really unsafe? Accident statistics provide an answer: It depends.

According to a National Transportation Safety Board report, between the years 1991 and 2000, 15-passenger vans were involved in about 0.22 percent of all fatal accidents in the country, while accounting for 0.25 percent of the country's fleet. These numbers indicate that fatality rates for 15-passenger vans are commensurate with their actual numbers. However, these vans roll over in 52 percent of the single-vehicle, fatal accidents they are involved in, compared to a national average of 33 percent for all passenger vehicles.

Rollover propensity

While the fatality rate of 15-passenger vans compares to that of other vehicles, the vans do show a propensity to roll over, and data show that this propensity increases as the number of passengers carried in the van increases. Vans carrying 10-15 occupants are almost three times more likely to roll over in an accident than vans carrying five or less occupants.

The cause of these rollovers has a lot to do with loading. As the load of a 15-passenger van increases, the

vehicle tends to transition quickly from understeer to oversteer. This change causes drivers to overcompensate in emergency situations. Additionally, the center of gravity of the vans moves rearward and upward with loading. This is a result of the extra weight created by passengers who are seated above the drive train and often behind the rear axle. This change in the vehicle's center of



Vans carrying 10-15 occupants are almost three times more likely to roll over in an accident than vans carrying five or fewer occupants. But fully loaded vans can be operated safely—when special precautions are taken.

gravity increases the potential for a roll over and the possibility that a driver will lose control of the vehicle.

Not unsurprisingly, 15-passenger vans are also more likely to roll over when they are driven at higher speeds. And ultimately, driver error plays significantly to the cause of deadly rollover accidents.

While statistics indicate that 15-passenger vans are more likely to roll over than other passenger vehicles, it is important to remember that these vehicles do not claim more occupant lives than the average vehicle on the road. They are not fundamentally unsafe and if operated with care can carry passengers securely.

Enforce a seat belt policy

One of the most effective steps that can be taken to ensure the safety of passengers is to require them to wear seat belts. A spokesperson for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration notes that seat belts play a significant role in protecting passengers in rollover accidents; individuals not wearing seat belts accounted for 80 percent of all fatalities. Assure that any 15-passenger van is equipped with seat belts, that a written seat belt policy exists, and that drivers enforce the policy.

Use experienced drivers

Ford Motor Company, manufacturer of the Econoline series, emphasizes that better driver training can also protect the safety of passengers. During normal driving a moderately or fully loaded van is lighter on its front wheels. During heavy braking or evasive actions the vehicle's weight will move to the front wheels and the van becomes much more responsive to steering motions. This sudden shift will cause untrained drivers to overcompensate and may result in the van rolling. Loading vans appropriately can minimize this weight shift. If a van is not full, all

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Transitweb and you: An interactive article on web site creation

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by Ira Allen
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If you glanced at the title of this piece, and cringed at the thought of creating a web site for your agency, this article is truly for you. But before you read any further, here's a simple exercise to try. Log on to the Internet, type in the web address www.transitweb.its.dot.gov in your browser window and press <Enter>. You are now looking at the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) latest effort to help transit agencies of all sizes move fully into the electronic age. The website offers a wide range of services, and we're hesitant to take away the fun of exploring them for yourself, so this article will concentrate on only a couple of the site's features.

Transitweb is USDOT's attempt to provide an easily accessible resource for transit agency managers and web designers, and serve as a forum for shared experience within the transit industry. A directory of hundreds of other agencies' web sites is included along with usability guidelines, extensive content and design hints, and links to other sites of interest. Here is a brief, interactive guide to some of the web site's more interesting features.

Website directory

From the home page, click on the "Agency Type" button under the words, "Search by," on the left-hand side of the screen. On the next screen that comes up, select "Rural Public Transportation" and click on the

"Submit search" button. On your screen you should see a list of over 200 web sites; you can go to any of these simply by clicking on them.

Looking at these websites will certainly not make you a web designer, but it may give you some ideas for features you would want on your own agency's site. That is one of the reasons Transitweb was created.



Transitweb

A Web Site Design Resource for Transit Agencies

Transitweb is USDOT's attempt to provide an easily accessible resource for transit agency managers and web designers, and serve as a forum for shared experience within the transit industry.

This is only one portion of the directory—the Rural Public Transportation section. Clicking on Home on the left-hand side of the screen (the navigation bar that stays conveniently visible regardless of which portion of the site you visit) will bring you back to the page at which you began. From here, you can also do a quick search of the database, by state. If you do a search for Kansas, you will find Johnson County Transit (The Jo), Lawrence Transit Systems (The 'T'), Tiblow Transit (in Bonner Springs), the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (Topeka Transit), and Wichita Transit. As of yet, no of other rural Kansas systems are listed,

although several do have web sites.

The bottom line here is that there are examples—from around the state and around the country—of how other agencies are using the Internet to make their agencies more accessible to the general public. Because there are a lot of transit sites out there, every year Transitweb selects examples of sites that work

particularly well. These sites are given awards and may be accessed from the right-hand side of Transitweb's Home page.

Usability guidelines

What does usability mean? It refers to how easily someone looking at your web site can access and understand the material (or 'content') you provide there. Transitweb describes its usability guidelines as "an online handbook for making public transit web sites easy to use." Within this component of Transitweb is an evaluation checklist for managers. This can help you evaluate an existing web site, or to check a new web site design or individual pages prior to

putting them on-line.

Under 'Usability Guidelines' (which you reach by clicking its link on the navigation bar on the left-hand side of the home page), you may also explore general concepts or specifics, like the best way to design an interactive itinerary planner, how to make the content on your home page stand out, or what you can do to display your route schedules in a user-friendly manner. This portion of Transitweb's site offers much more, but we will leave that for you to explore for yourself. Fortunately, and appropriately, this is one web site that is pretty easy to find your way around.

Content and design hints

Located below Usability Guidelines, the "Content & Design Hints" link provides a wealth of information for the transit agency manager. Click on it to find tips on a variety of conveniently-indexed topics, including:

- Improve linkages between agencies and coordinated services,
- Technology improvement,
- Overall strategies for improvement,
- Improve accessibility/ease of use, and
- Promote tourist use of transit.

Let's look at just one of these topics. "Improving linkages..." is the first topic of this section. Within it, Transitweb addresses four types of linkages, and provides links to other sites that provide web links for various purposes. Sound complex? If you're following along on your computer, that should help some, but we'll also explain a few terms.

"Linkages" here refers to the connections between your web site and other web sites. These "web links" generally appear as clickable text. An easy example is right in front of you. The blue, underlined text in the box following the words "Provide Information About Coordinating Services" represents a web link. In

this case, clicking on this text should take you to the Norwalk Transit District's web site.

Transitweb also helps with linking to other transit agencies. It provides a little information about this topic, and gives you a link to a specific part of the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) web site. If you click on this web link, it will take you to APTA's index of transit agencies around the country. From there, you can go directly to their web sites.

What is the value of all this linking? Two words: traffic and content. Traffic refers to how many people visit your web site. The more your site is linked to other web sites, the higher your traffic is likely to be. Of course, it's prudent to choose your links to and from related sites carefully. After all, someone who chances upon your web site by clicking a link from the Peanut Growers' Association of Senegal, for example, is unlikely to get much out of your site. But transit-related traffic helps get your agency's name recognized a little more. It's almost like free advertising, especially if you link with local companies' web sites or the sites of cities in your service area. The idea here is to provide links to other organization's web sites, and ask them to provide links to yours.

The content of your web site is, literally, what you have on there. Providing links to other web sites that might be of interest to your users can be valuable to you, because this effectively gives them access to more content than you may have the time, energy, or money to put on your own web site. For an example of this concept at work, you might check out KUTC's "Links" page at www.kutc.ku.edu/links/index.html.

The above example addresses only one tiny portion of the informa-

Go to next page

Accessible web site

continued from page 10

important meaning. If color must be used to convey meaning, as is often the case with graphs, be sure to use an additional identifier such as small shapes or different line patterns.

Get some help

Taking these extra steps may seem rather difficult if your familiarity with website design is limited. However, a significant number of resources are available to assist you. The WebAIM website, mentioned earlier, contains helpful tutorials and tools. It has screen-reader and low-vision simulations that allows you to better understand how individuals with visual impairments access the Internet. In addition, the site offers tools for testing your own site's accessibility. You can also use "Bobby" (bobby.watchfire.com) to check the accessibility of your website.

Consider contracting with a professional web designer if you think no one on your staff is capable of designing an accessible website. Make sure that the designer understands the recommendations in this article and that he or she tests the new design using the tools found at either WebAIM or Bobby'.

A well designed website will provide a great service to your riders by ensuring they are all able to access information without the assistance of others. Every task that individuals with visual impairments can conduct on their own improves the quality of their lives.

Sources: WebAIM (Web Accessibility in Mind web site) www.webaim.org; American Council of the Blind; Bobby' (bobby.watchfire.com). ▲

Rural Transit Conferences and Workshops

January 11-15, 2004
Annual Meeting, Transportation Research Board.
Washington, D.C.
For more information, visit <http://www4.trb.org/trb/annual.nsf>

January 20, 2004
Kansas Public Transit Association Capitol City Day,
Topeka, Kansas.
For more information, contact Steve Feigenbaum, KPTA, 913/492-9094, www.kstransit.com.

January 25-27, 2004
24th Annual Conference and Expo of the South West Transit Association,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
For more information, call 210/366-1436 or email ahernandez@swta.org.

March 5-10, 2004
13th National Transporting Students with Disabilities & Preschoolers Conference & Exhibition,
Atlanta, Georgia.
For more information, call 703-288-4088 or visit www.eduprogroup.com.

May 2-6, 2004
APTA Bus and Paratransit Conference,
Denver, Colorado.
For more information call 202/496-4800, email creeve@apta.com, or visit www.apta.com.

June 12-16, 2004
2004 CTAA Community Transportation EXPO,
Seattle, Washington.
For more information, call 202-661-0214 or visit www.ctaa.org/expo.

Editor's Note:

To include meetings or workshops in our calendar, send information to:
Kansas Trans Reporter, KUTC,
1530 W. 15th St., Room 2160,
Lawrence, KS 66045.
E-mail: weaver@ku.edu

Transitweb, from page 13

tion covered in the Content & Design Hints section of Transitweb. At your leisure, surf through the site for other items of interest. You are almost sure to find something that captures your imagination, or makes building your own agency's web site seem that much more manageable.

The broad view

There are many side benefits to building a web site for your agency. It offers another marketing tool and provides the opportunity to work more in conjunction with other agencies (especially if you use Transitweb), for example. Still, the target of a web site should always remain the user. Anything you can do to make the site interesting and easy to use will be appreciated. Transitweb offers a number of ideas for accomplishing both those aims, and the web sites links you can find there offer even more. ▲

15-passenger van safety, from page 11

passengers should be seated in front of the rear axle. Drivers should also be aware of the rollover propensity caused by taking turns too quickly.

Maintaining appropriate tire pressure can also help prevent rollover accidents. Tires should be checked each day during a pre-trip inspection for under-inflation and worn tires should be replaced. Larger interior mirrors can also increase safety by limiting the driver's need to turn around to see passengers.

High-tech help

New and current technologies can also improve the safety of 15-passenger vans. Anti-lock breaks can help drivers maintain control of vehicles during heavy breaking.

Vehicle manufacturers are also looking into electronic stability control to help improve the safety of passenger vans. These systems can correct or compensate for driver errors that may result in the loss of vehicle control. Unfortunately stability control systems are not yet available on 15-passenger vans, but may

arrive shortly.

Van manufacturers are also investigating lane-departure systems that would warn drivers who may be straying from the road surface. These systems will help prevent accidents in which vehicles "trip" against items such as curbs and then roll over.

While these new technologies will lead to fewer accidents, drivers must remember that the safety of 15-passenger van occupants will depend on multiple factors such as loading, speed, and driver ability. Transit agencies must follow basic safety precautions including enforced seat belt policies, correct vehicle loading, quality vehicle maintenance, and good driver training.

Sources: "Evaluation of the Rollover Propensity of 15-passenger Vans," National Transportation Safety Board, October 2002; "15-passenger Van Rollovers Still in the Spotlight," *Bus Ride*, March 2003. ▲

Resources Order Form

Use this order form to order the resources described here. Feel free to keep the publications. **Send the order form to:** KUTC Lending Library, 1530 W. 15th Street, Room 2160, Lawrence, KS 66044. Or fax the form to 785/ 864-3199.

Resources for loan

- Economic Benefits of Coordinating Human Service Transportation**, 2003, TCRP R-91. Available for order online at <http://www.tcrponline.org/bin/search.pl?keyword=R-91>, or order here.
- Effective Use of Transit Websites**, 2002, TCRP S-43. Available for order online at <http://www.tcrponline.org/bin/search.pl?keyword=s-43>, or order here.
- United We Ride: A Framework for Action. Self-Assessment Tool for Communities or United We Ride: A Framework for Action. Self-Assessment Tool for States.** Available for download (see next column) or order here.
- Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications Tool Kit.** Available in pdf form online at <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Publications/substance/RxOcx/RxOcx.pdf>. Print copies are currently out of stock at FTA. Place an order for reprinted modules when they become available at <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Publications/Default.asp#Order>.

Website resources

United We Ride, http://www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/United_We_Ride.html#United_Read_More. This is the Coordinating Council of Accessibility and Mobility's (CCAM) web site describing the new "United We Ride" initiative. Provides publications for download.

National RTAP Resource Directory is now online and available. Go to www.nationalrtap/resourcecatalog/ for information on more than 800 publications, videos, training modules and other.

National Accessible Travelers' Database. This database of transit systems also has information on accessible tours and tour companies, accessible airport and other private shuttles, and accessible taxi services. The transportation database website allows the user to highlight the state and city they plan to visit, and view all transportation services available to them. The user is also able to view the travel agencies specializing in travel arrangements for persons with disabilities. http://projectaction.easter-seals.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ESPA_travelers_database.

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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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Address incorrect? Send us the inside form with your corrected address, or fax your changes to 785/864-3199.

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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
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- 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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Editor Lisa Harris
Editorial Assistant Ira Allen
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