The board room: How to create a productive atmosphere

by Jacob Bustad

The board room is an environment where incredible things can be accomplished—and one in which repetition and boredom can sap productivity. By looking at the biggest causes for board "dysfunction," we can find what creates a good board atmosphere. And if there is one factor that sparks board productivity, it is a board atmosphere with a clear focus on the long term. So how can you tell if your board environment is a lightning storm, or just a dull rain?

Creating a functioning board
The most obvious cause of dysfunction is sheer boredom—when most

Coordinated plans— Some assembly required

by Christy Lane

If you have bought a bookshelf, or even worse an entertainment center, from a department store, you have read the dreaded words . . . *some assembly required.* The best furniture manufacturers have learned the benefits of providing clear instructions for their customers. Detailed, yet easy-to-follow assembly instructions result in higher customer satisfaction. Such instructions typically include the following: A list

Inside:

Board room,

of the board meeting time is spent with staff talking (and talking) about decisions that have already been made. In such situations board mem-

> "Get materials to the board, including a proposed agenda, at least one full week prior to the actual meeting..."—Linda Yeager

bers become passive, and the meeting becomes largely a waste of time. This is the opposite of a productive long-term approach—an approach that is essential to an effective board.

Long-term view
Boards sometime resist focusing on the long term because agenda items are less tangible and immediate. However, considering the "horizon" of the future can help the board identify challenges before they arrive. Trends can be identified over months and years, and former reactions to surprise problems give way to strategic problem-solving.

"Long range planning is one of the very most important functions of the board and EVERY member should be expected to participate in the development of it," said Margi Ness of Ness and Associates. "A half or one day annual retreat is not unreasonable. The time and responsibilities of being a board member should be explained before they join the board, and long range planning is a major one."

Linda Yeager, Executive Director at OATS, Inc. (in Columbia, MO) advises "When developing a long-range plan, assure board members are very familiar with what is being developed and have an opportunity to comment, question and, finally, act."

Board's relationship with staff
When the board is clear about their role in looking ahead, they will not be slowed down by what is behind, in other words, about staff decisions that have already been made. While the board does have an important oversight role, if the board becomes focused on supervision, it can undermine the meeting's as well as the agency's effectiveness. Board members should understand that their primary job is leadership, and not management; confusion of these roles can lead to the dreaded "micromanagement."

Ness also recommends having any staff concerns or requests go through the executive director (ED). "I wouldn't encourage board members to go to staff other than the ED. This has a tendency to get board involved in staff functions and daily operations, which is not their role," Ness said. "The ED should be the liaison between the staff and board."

However, Ness suggested having key staff members attend board meetings and lead agenda items within their areas of expertise. This can help those staff members appreciate the issues the board grapples with. This also allows the board to appreciate and recognize the good work of the staff.

The manager's role
Aside from what the board should do at meetings, it's also crucial for managers to appreciate their own role in the board room. Thomas McLaughlin of *The NonProfit Times* says that managers might feel like their daily job is akin to the game "Whack-a-Mole," where they spend every day watching different problems pop up and trying to knock

them back down—and some managers "feel like they're already losing...by 9:45 a.m. every day." But, he says, that is what managers are paid to do. By handling problems, they help keep the agency productive. But where does that place managers in the larger strategy?

McLaughlin says that the board room should be an "oasis" for managers—a place where time is slower, where ideas can be expressed and deadlines are not a worry. This can allow day-to-day problems to be seen as temporary distractions, with long term considerations always the focus: "performance is measured in months, not years."

Meeting prep
To get off to a good start at meetings, give your board adequate preparation. Yeager offers this advice: "Get materials to the board, including a proposed agenda, at least one full week prior to the actual meeting so they each have full information and an opportunity

> "Camaraderie builds as [the board works] on the issues. An orientation for board members, with all board members present, can help build this from the start.—Margi Ness

to review all materials, ask relevant questions, etc."

A board agenda that focuses on immediate decisions undermines ultimate productivity. Because a board is a group, any decision is a group task, and this means decisions will naturally take time. There are exceptions for emergencies, but too much focus on items that have firm deadlines will affect the stability of a long term approach to board work. Limit the number of agenda items that require quick decisions from the board. Managers should generally handle

shorter term items (tomorrow through six months) and leaders should handle items with much longer time frames, in years. Again,

"The executive director should be the liaison between the staff and the board.—Margi Ness

any board focusing on the short term automatically gives up the long term.

Board development

There are several strategies to keep interest and energy levels high on the board. Yeager suggests team building activities to provide board members the opportunity to work cohesively as a group and to encourage them to speak up with their thoughts. She recommends holding recreational gatherings of the board members to build cohesiveness. Ness, however, has found that recreational gatherings in and of themselves may not be the best way to accomplish this.

"In my experience, busy board members would rather spend time doing meaningful things together for the good of the organization—while having fun in the process—than feeling obliged to participate in recreational gatherings," Ness said. "Camaraderie builds as they are working on the issues. An orientation for new board members—with all board members present—can help build this from the start."

Ness also suggests having a one-on-one mentoring program between seasoned board members and new members. Also, having board members serve on small committees and work on fund-raising together can help them get to know one another.

Finally, assure that all board members understand their role in your agency: long-term rather than short-term decision-making.

As for finding new board members when you need them, Yaeger suggests recruiting people with a sincere interest in your service, including actual users, to represent different points of view.

The future of any organization can look much clearer when thinking is geared specifically towards just that. Everyday problems will be easier for the manager to manage because they will be better anticipated. If board members and managers both understand their roles in the process, and they come to each meeting prepared to fulfill those roles, a board meeting can be an "oasis" and storm of productivity at the same time.

Source:
McLaughlin, Thomas A. "Whack-a-Manager: the board room should be an oasis of calm." *The NonProfit Times.* Dec. 1, 2006. ▲

Planning for coordination,
continued from page 1

of the names of the components in the box, the tools needed, an approximate timeframe for assembly, step-by-step instructions, and probably most helpful, a picture of what the furniture it is supposed to look like when assembled. Lesson learned: The better the assembly instructions, the less stress on the customer. So it goes with transit coordination.

In January, we reported that the KU Transportation Center (KUTC) created a Web tool kit with detailed instructions to help alleviate stress on coordinated transit districts (CTDs) as they assemble their coordinated plans. Also, as part of the United We Ride initiative, the KUTC assisted two coordinated transit districts (CTDs) with demonstrations of cre-

ating coordinated plans, using these tools. This article provides a few lessons learned in the process.

Coordinated Transit District 3 was selected as the first pilot, representing a rural district. Coordinated Transit District 12, in the Wichita area, was the second pilot, representing an urban district. Piloting with these CTDs allowed the KUTC to identify whether the summit process should be different in an urban versus rural area. We learned that the process worked well for both CTDs overall; however, a rural CTD, because it generally has fewer staff resources, will be more stretched in handling the various details of the meeting planning.

In her book *Successful Public Meetings,* Elaine Cogan states that planning for a meeting is essential to the success of a meeting, and this was true of these demonstrations. Preparing for the summits was the most labor intensive part of the planning process, but it paid off.

Each CTD created a list of stakeholders invited, with contact information. The list was important for two reasons: it allowed the CTD members to track who accepted the invitation to the summit, and the list also documented a "good faith effort" for reaching out to a variety of stakeholders in the district.

An individual from each CTD had to find a meeting room that would accommodate 70 to 100 people, set-up with tables and chairs to accommodate small group discussion. The CTD members also had to arrange for lunch and beverages to be catered into the summit. These details sound mundane, but if someone had not taken the time to complete them, the participants would not have been comfortable and would not have participated at the level they did during the summits.

Another relatively time-consum-

Planning for coordination,

ing task faced by each CTD was collecting data and preparing packets prior to the meeting. The data consisted of inventories of transportation and human service providers in their area, plus results of an online survey created by the KUTC. This data helped the summit participants assess their area's level coordination and identify areas needing improvements.

All this careful preparation led to productive discussion about coordination—which is, of course, the main purpose for having a summit. In small groups, summit attendees where asked "What could we do better?," and their answers were captured on a flip-chart. This brainstorming activity lead to the creation

of goals and objectives to be included in the action plans for the CTDs.

Lessons learned
The lessons learned during the pilot process were:
—The CTDs found the forms and timeline provided in the Web toolkit helpful in guiding the process of hosting a summit. A few tweaks were made to the Web resources fol-

lowing the summit, including creating a tailored package of summit-related materials for each CTD in Kansas. To find your own package, go to www.ksunitedweride.org, and click on "CTD Transportation Summit Materials" in the right-hand column. Then click on your CTD.

Another lesson learned was just how important it was to provide a

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When preparing a public meeting, the little things count!

"If you treat the meeting as an add-on to an already overburdened schedule, gather up slides at the last minute, slide them into a slide tray, ask any staff person who happens to be free to make a presentation, take whatever location is available without checking it out, get to the room with no idea whether you will face an audience of 20 or 200... in other words, if you have a cavalier attitude toward the public meeting, you court disaster." —Elaine Cogan, *Successful Public Meetings*

Suggested timeline to prepare for your coordination summit

Days before summit (minimum)	*Task*
35 days out	Select date and location of summit (facility and city).
30 days out	Identify stakeholders in each county in the CTD. Send out summit invitation letters and inventories, and maintain a log of who is invited for later attachment to the completed plan. Determine who will: 1) receive and compile the RSVPs and produce a summit roster, 2) Set up a spreadsheet for entry of inventory data from transit providers and human service agencies.
30 days out	Assign a facilitator for the summit.
30 days	Contact the KUTC with date of your summit. KUTC will provide link to an online "Framework for Action" survey for your CTD, demographic information for your counties and population maps for inclusion in summit participant packets.
28 days	Identify site for summit, make reservations, arrange refreshments and lunch (optional).
14 days	Completed inventories due back from transit providers & human service agencies.
7 days	Compile transportation and human service provider inventories into two tables.
7 days	RSVPs due.
7 days	Online "Framework for Action" survey completed by all stakeholders. KUTC will provide a summary of results.
4 days	Prepare packets for hand-out at the meeting. Packets to include agenda, roster, Powerpoint hand-out (optional), population tables and map, transportation provider inventory summary, human service inventory summary, Framework for Action results summary, action plan worksheet, and glossary of terms.
0	Hold the transportation coordination summit.

Management

Vehicle sharing—A new policy for public transportation

by Jacob Bustad

As the demand for public transportation increases, the need for cooperation among different transportation services will be the key to making sure everyone that needs a ride has one. This idea is behind a recent policy adopted by the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM). The policy is aimed at the coordination of transportation resources to maximize accessibility and availability of services. CCAM's policy was a response to Federal Executive Order 13330, which directed federal agencies to make efforts at reducing duplication, increasing efficient delivery, and expanding transportation access for populations that do not have readily access to private transportation, such as seniors, persons with disabilities, children, and low-income persons.

Current problem: Transportation "silos"

The largest problem being faced in these efforts is that federal grantees at the state and local levels often restrict their transportation services to clients of that particular federal program—the result of funding silos, where the source of funding is targeted to one type of service. This means that services become fragmented, leading to both unused or underutilized vehicles and unavailable transportation services.

Joni Roeseler, FTA Region 7 Team Leader for Planning and Programs Development, said that the goal of the new policy is coordination. "It was done in support of the whole concept of coordination, and in particular the efficiency that results from coordination," Roeseler said. "The United We Ride program and CCAM look for opportunities with their resources to make sure they are being used in the most effective way possible."

Roeseler said that one way to achieve this coordination is to share vehicles, but there is a common misconception that vehicles cannot or should not be shared. The purpose of this new policy statement is to recognize the obstacles to sharing, and make a commitment to work past them.

"It has been a problem for a long time," Roeseler said, "but now it's being addressed in a new way. At the federal level we want to see the most mobility for all the resources we have out there."

Putting the policy to work

The first step towards coordination is communication; the local providers need to develop a comprehensive understanding of one another's current strategies in order to improve upon them. According to the CCAM statement, the aim is a "seamless" use of transportation resources.

"Local agencies have a responsibility to learn about other providers in their area, to get to know them and seek opportunities to collaborate," Roeseler said. "There are lots of different ways, and the best way may not be vehicle sharing. But the better you know what's out there, the better you can use their resources.

Agency concerns about sharing

Roeseler said obstacles to vehicle sharing mainly stem from two concerns. The first is that agencies worry that sharing vehicles will affect the quality of service they provide to their clients. The other is an issue of funding—because the path of the money goes from federal to state and then to a program, there is a worry that somewhere along that path there are legal reasons for not sharing vehicles.

"The purpose of coordinating is to eliminate those worries, and work with different programs to eliminate

> There is a common misconception that vehicles cannot or should not be shared.

the obstacles," Roeseler said.

Providers need to find efficiencies within what Roeseler calls their "comfort zones," or current day-to-day practices, and if those practices are successful, trust in vehicle sharing will increase and further solutions can be made at a local level.

Examples of solutions

Here are some ideas for meeting your community's transportation needs, as well as some specific examples of implementing them, as found

Planning for coordination,

comfortable meeting space with the information and materials on hand (flipchart, markers, etc.) for a productive discussion. It is also important to have a facilitator to encourage open dialogue and sharing of ideas and concerns.

Like assembling furniture, it is helpful to know what is expected before beginning the planning process. Having the proper tools, forms, and help along the way can make the process go smoother.

Please review the Web tool kit at http://www.ksunitedweride.org. For a suggested timeline for creating your CTD's coordinated plan, see page 4 in this newsletter. For further assistance, contact Pat Weaver at weaver@ku.edu or (785) 864-2595, or the KDOT Program Consultant that represents your CTD.

Source: Cogan, Elaine. *Successful Public Meetings: A Practical Guide for Managers in Government.* Jossey-Bass. 1992. ▲

Vehicle sharing,

in the CCAM and United We Ride policy statement on vehicle sharing:

● *Partnering with other program agencies.* A program that served senior citizens owned and operated shuttle buses that provided transit services in several rural communities. The agency partnered with other programs to expand service for persons with disabilities working in community rehabilitation programs (CRPs), to provide transportation to key employment locations, and to provide Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation. This was done via a

cost-sharing arrangement.

● *Maximizing use.* A for-profit organization that received Federal Head Start funds purchased specially equipped buses to transport children to and from their Head Start facility. Generally, the buses were only used during specific hours of the day.

Each funding source also pays its fair share of allowable ongoing costs in accordance with the benefit received by each party.

During the idle periods (including evenings and weekends), the organization rented the vehicles to another program that served seniors and persons with disabilities to provide transportation for recreational events, and personal needs (e.g., grocery shopping, hair dresser visits, medical appointments). The rental contract included payment for extra costs incurred, such as expanded insurance coverage and additional fuel expenses. [While this extra service is not allowable with Head Start funds, the income generated by the use of the buses during idle periods may be viewed as incidental to the primary use of the buses, as long as such use does not interfere with regular Head Start transportation services.]

● *Pooling resources.* A community action and economic development agency, another non-profit organization, and a community mental health center that received a variety of block grants (Community Service Block Grant funds, Community Development Block Grant funds, Social Service Block Grant funds, Community Mental Health Block Grant funds and/or Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant funds) teamed up with the state agency that administers the Temporary Assistance for Needy

Families (TANF) program and the state's labor department. Each funding source provided an allocable amount of seed money that started a shuttle operation service in the local service areas with high unemployment and no public transportation services. Each funding source also paid its fair share of allowable ongoing costs in accordance with the benefit received by each party. The operation was based on fixed routes that connected individuals to job and training sites, outpatient mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and counseling services in the area. The operation also provided a feeder service to connect clientele to public transportation that went into the downtown area.

● *Partnering with non-profit or other community organizations.* Several agencies contracted with a local organization that operated a door-to-door van service for their clientele, transporting them to key places in the area. Such places included hospitals and other medical facilities, child care centers, senior citizen centers, selected employment sites, and prisons for family visits.

● *Engaging the business community.* Various programs within the state's transportation and labor departments, the TANF agency, and agencies that provided community health care and assistance for the aged worked with employers in the area and contributed to the expansion of the local transportation system. The private system provided shuttle service to selected employment sites and curb-to-curb services to CRPs, senior citizen centers, retail centers, community health centers or substance abuse treatment and counseling centers, hospitals and other

Marketing

Focusing... on your agency

by Kelly Heavey

Interested in learning more about what riders want? It's simple as sitting down and letting them tell you—in a focus group. Focus groups are a staple in the business world. Without them, important information for developing a company or an organization might never be known. The insight an agency gains a from focus group can't be read in a book or passed down from supervisors because it gathers the thoughts and opinions from the people you serve. This article will cover the bases of a focus group—what it is, how to do it, and why you need it.

The focus group

A good focus group generally has 4-6 people, John Lowe in *Midwest Injury Control's* January 2007 newsletter explains. Fewer participants wouldn't provide enough discussion; more people might make it hard to hear everyone. Conduct the session in a comfortable atmosphere so participants are more apt to speak freely. A moderator facilitates discussion without expressing an opinion either way. This neutral moderator could be someone from your agency or a professional with a background in sociology, psychology, or marketing. Have a tape recorder or assign a note-taker to record responses to adequately reflect on the session

afterwards. And make sure to have the questions prepared ahead of time with appropriate research on your agency and the community, considering topics such as past problems or anticipated developments.
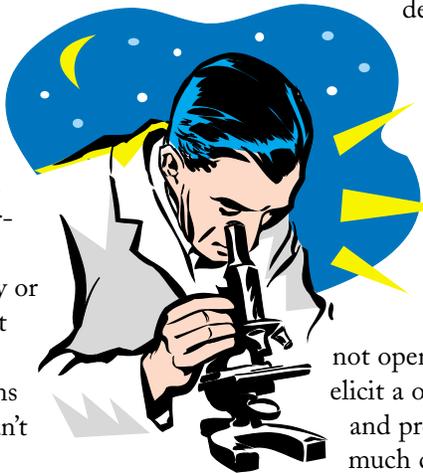
The most important thing to remember is to ask open-ended questions. For example, "Do you like the current bus routes?" is not open-ended. It will elicit a one-word answer and probably won't spark much discussion. Instead ask, "What do you think about the current bus routes?" The participants will feel prompted to give more opinions with this type of question.

Online connections

If your focus group participants are scattered over a large geographic area, making it difficult to gather in person, one solution is to conduct the focus group via the Internet in a "virtual room." Without travel and accommodation expenses, this can the costs substantially and keeps the participants comfortable in their own living or work environments.

E-FocusGroups.com, whose slogan reads "Insight...at the speed of now," says an online focus group has three "virtual rooms": 1) a respondent waiting room, 2) a client room, and 3) the focus group discussion room. The moderator invites individual respondents into the discussion room when he or she chooses. The client(s)

can view all rooms and interact privately with the moderator.

A benefit to online focus groups, besides the cost, is the immediate transcript of the session. An obvious drawback to the online focus group is the lack of body language and facial expressions from participants.

E-FocusGroups.com says the online focus group works best when considering high-tech system enhancements. For a transit agency, this could be testing online access to bus routes or an online ticket system.

Concept testing

One method to test a new service or product is *concept testing*. The service or product idea is pitched to the focus group participants, and their reactions may influence your decision to use the new service or not.

Navigation Inc. explains that concept testing should be part of a larger development process, not a pass/fail test, and that it is risky. People are often skeptical of new ideas, and you would be asking a handful of people about a hypothetical situation for an entire market. But if you're curious about what a reaction might be, concept testing in a focus group is one way to find out.

After the group meets

After your focus group session ends, Managementhelp.org suggests taking some time to write your notes while the session is still fresh in your mind. Record any observations you had, and finish with a summary of the big ideas that surfaced, including the moderator's recommendations. Share the notes and summary with your agency to start improving.
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What it can do for your agency

A focus group allows your agency to know itself and its riders better. With

FTA random drug testing rate lowered to 25 percent

locations. The service was sustained through a fare-based system, with each agency benefiting from the expanded service subsidizing an allocable portion of the fares for their clientele. This service helped participating employers and their family members, as well as job seekers, dislocated workers, current employees and their family members to have access to a range of services and opportunities.

• *Facilitating car-pooling.* A local workforce investment board identified clientele with reliable cars living in various locales and paid them to pick up other people in their area going to the same employment or training site. Riders paid a fare to ride. The State's TANF agency and the State's Office for the Aging participated in the car-pooling activity by defraying a portion of the fare for their riders. These other agencies also helped to expand the available cars in different locales by paying for necessary car repairs and insurance costs for their share of participants.

• *Arranging ride sharing.* An agency that received program funds to assist elderly individuals purchased a van to transport their clientele to medical services and other destina-

> "The current federal strategy is to try to free things up so local entities can be creative and make the most of the resources in order to accomplish their goals," Roeseler said.

tions. Other program agencies worked out a financial agreement with this agency to pick up their clients living in the same neighborhoods and take them to and from

. . . .
by Jacob Bustad
. . . .

A decline in the rate of employees testing positive for drugs and alcohol in the past few years has allowed the FTA to evaluate its current testing standards. In 2005, the transit industry's random drug testing positive rate (nationally) was 0.792 — the third year in a row that the rate had dropped. It was also the third year in a row that the positive rate had been below one percent. This allowed the FTA to lower the testing rate to 25 percent for 2007, from the previous standard of 50 percent.

This new 25 percent rate should be considered a minimum, and it is the option of the transit employer to

destinations along the van's route.

• *Earning income:* The state's department of transportation noticed that some of the shuttle buses they owned were underutilized. The DOT used three of those shuttle buses to launch a fixed-route service in areas of the state lacking access to adequate transportation to shopping, work, school, training, medical services, and other daily needs.

The bus service was open to the public and fares were charged. Other state agencies, such as the department of human services entered into a memorandum of agreement to provide program funds

lower their agency's testing rate. Each agency should assess their specific situation, and consider the agency's past positive test rate, as well as pool size. FTA encourages employers with 12 or fewer employees to test at a rate higher than the minimum; this is to ensure that at least one test is done per quarter.

Transit employers that identify the minimum drug testing rate of 50 percent in their policy statements need to edit that if they choose to lower the rate. Employers that do not define a specific testing rate but say they test at the federal minimum rate do not need to make the change.

For more information, check the *FTA Drug and Alcohol Regulation Updates* online, Winter 2007 (Issue 33). This information was the source for this article. ▲

to the DOT for applicable fare costs for their respective clientele benefiting from the service. The income generated was used to defray operating costs or for other program purposes, in accordance with the applicable program and administrative rules.

Importance of coordination in vehicle sharing
"The current federal strategy is to try to free things up so local entities can be creative and make the most of the resources in order to accomplish their goals," Roeseler said. "There is a perception that a large number of people still need public transit, and I think that is true, but the resources aren't rising significantly, so we need coordination to pool resources."

Aware of your surroundings?

by Justin Dorsey

"Hmmm....that's a strange thing for someone to do. Well, it's probably nothing." Has this thought ever crossed your mind while riding public transportation? If so, pat yourself on the back for being aware of your surroundings. However, question whether ignoring the unusual behavior was the correct response.

Public transportation systems are vulnerable to attack. How can we better protect them? One way is for employees and riders to become more responsive to their surroundings. That means identifying, reporting, and responding to suspicious behavior.

What is suspicious?

The easiest way to define suspicious behavior is "out of the ordinary." This assessment relies heavily on personal judgment and gut instinct. However, guidelines exist. According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), suspicious people can be identified by where they are, when they are there, and what they are doing. For example, a suspicious person may:
• Be in a restricted area without good reason
• Be in an area at a strange time
• Appear lost
• Lack proper identification
• Sweat excessively, or
• Dress inappropriately for the weather.

However, sometimes the person might not appear suspicious, but their activities do—such as:
• Briskly walking away after abandoning a package
• Taking photographs of facilities
• Watching the routines of employees and customers
• Propping-open a door that should be closed
• Parking a vehicle (especially a rental vehicle) in a strange location
• Unlocking a door that should be locked
• Taking a uniform (especially one worn by utility crews or delivery personnel)
• Taking an identification card, or
• Asking an unusual amount of questions about a transportation agency's operations.

Notice that the FTA focuses on *behavior* in attributing suspicion, rather than race or any other personal characteristic that may not have

foreign objects, both inside and outside. **Exterior** searches should pay special attention to:
• Wheel wells
• External lifts
• Exhaust system components and
• The underbody

Interior searches should pay careful attention to:
• Areas below seats
• Storage compartments
• Steps, and
• Internal lifts

Be on the lookout for scratches which appear to be made by prying tools. Keep your bus and work area clean and organized. This makes it easier to identify out-of-the-ordinary objects.

I see something, now what?

You see a suspicious person...now what do you do? First, you decide if the suspicious person is approachable. Avoid approaching individuals

> According to the Federal Transit Administration, suspicious people can be identified by <u>where</u> they are, <u>when</u> they are there, and <u>what</u> they are doing.

any significance in making a person suspicious.

Finally, 58 percent of attacks on public transportation since 1920 have been from improvised explosive devices. Thus, knowing how to spot a suspicious package is important. A suspicious package is likely to be placed in an "out of the way" location or may have a message attached to it like, "To Mommy..."

Vehicle tampering

As a security precaution, buses should be frequently searched for

that have been confrontational or threatening. If you decide the person is approachable, approach in a calm manner and ask:
• Can I help you?
• Who are you here to see?
• Could I see your ID?

If the individual cannot produce an ID or explain what he/she is doing there, offer to escort the individual off the premises. Meanwhile, paint a physical picture of the individual in your mind, remembering characteristics like eye color, hair color, height,

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etc. After your conversation, inform a supervisor of the situation.

If you decide against approaching the person, attempt to keep the person in sight and contact a supervisor.

If you see a suspicious package, do not touch it. If the package is harmful, touching it may trigger its on-switch or destroy evidence like fingerprints. Next, the area must be evacuated. As a transit employee, passengers will look to you for evacuation guidance. Therefore, calmly give the passengers evacuation instructions, reminding them to exit quickly, but calmly. Finally, contact the local police or sheriff, remembering not to use a cell phone or radio within 50 feet of the package.

Transit Watch

If your community wants to increase awareness of transit safety issues, the FTA's *Transit Watch* Program can help. Transit Watch is designed to educate transit passengers, employees, and the general public about transit safety.

Getting the program under way is easy. Implementation begins by

> **For more information,** visit http://transit-safety. volpe.dot.gov/Security/ TransitWatch/tool kit.asp

downloading the Transit Watch tool kit. The tool kit includes: a brochure, fact sheet, logos, posters, and press releases. It can be downloaded from: http://transit-safety. volpe.dot.gov/ Security/ TransitWatch/tool kit.asp.

Our safety

Individuals who wish to harm our public transportation system do not advertise their intentions. Therefore, we must remain awake at the awareness wheel. That means identifying, reporting, and responding to suspicious behavior. After all, you may be the only person who sees a suspicious act. ▲

Sources :

Pennsylvania Homeland Security information on spotting and reporting suspicious behavior. http://www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us/homelandsecurity/cwp/view.asp?A=519&Q=166134

Transportation Security Administration information on protecting large vehicles. Access to this PDF requires you to be a registered user of the site. http://www.trala.org/government/EmployeeGuidetoRentalTruckSecurity.pdf

Federal Transit Administration information on the Transit Watch Program. http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/security/TransitWatch/Default.asp

How the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada implemented the Transit Watch Program. http://www.rtcsouthernnevada.com/tw/

DVD discussing how to identify, report, and respond to suspicious behavior and objects. *System Security Awareness for Transit Employees,* National Transit Institute, 2002.

DVD describing what transit employees can do to protect transit systems. *System Security Awareness for Transit Employees: Warning Signs,* National Transit Institute, 2003.
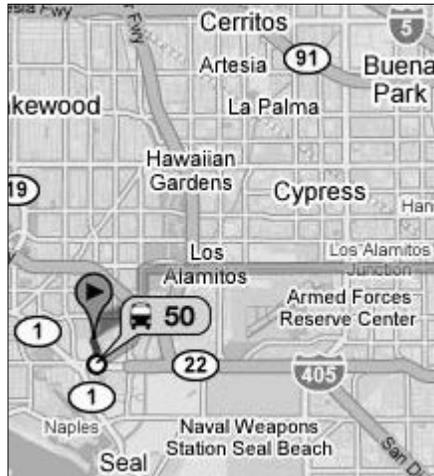
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this information, advertisements and publicity can be better tailored, as well as programs or events for outreach. It also provides a chance to learn what areas you need to improve to keep the riders you already have.

Resources

The internet has plenty of resources for conducting focus groups. Here are a few sites we found helpful for planning a focus group.

The Focus Group Center. On this site you will find articles by a man who has run focus groups for over 30 years. He provides advice on a variety of topics including pitfalls to avoid and whether to perform a face-to-face session or a telephone or online focus group. www.mnav.com/qualitative_research.htm

Management Help. This site walks the reader through focus group preparation, question development, planning and facilitating the session and what to do immediately after the session. http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm.

Groups Plus. This site lists 10 tips for running successful focus groups. http://www.groupsplus.com/pages/mn091498.htm.

Sources:

"Face to Face: The Value of Focus Groups," by John Lowe, *Midwest Injury Control,* Fall 2006.

Market Navigation Inc. http://www.mnav.com/contest.htm

"Basics of Conducting Focus Groups." http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm

Focus Group Center <http://www.mnav.com/qualitative_research.htm>

www.e-FocusGroups.com ▲

Technology

"Google Transit" new service in trip planning

by Jacob Bustad

Imagine going online and planning a trip from one corner of Kansas to the other, all on public transportation. For years, people have been using Google to find driving directions. Now the company wants to extend that idea to "trip planning."

This is different from simple directions, because now several forms of transportation, from walking to Amtrak, can be linked together to make it easier than ever to get around. Right now, most of that information is already online, but at several different Web sites. By combining this information into one source, trip planning can be taken to the next level. See for yourself at www.google.com/transit.

Current Google trip planner locations:

- Burbank, California
- Tampa, Florida
- Honolulu, Hawaii
- Duluth, Minnesota
- Eugene, Oregon
- Portland, Oregon
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Seattle, Washington
- Orange County, California

Google transit

Google Transit was created by several engineers working in Google offices in San Francisco, New York, and Zurich. Tom Sly, a business development manager at Google, explained that the idea is a "20 percent time project," referring to the company's practice that 20 percent of work is spent on ideas separate from regular assignments. A couple of other projects have come from that practice, like Google News," Sly said.

When several engineers from the various cities all began to realize that planning trips could be made much easier, they devoted their 20 percent time to the project, and more and more "20 percenters" became involved. This resulted in Google Transit's Trip Planner, a resource that will allow travelers to easily access public transit schedules to plan trips using local transportation options.

Google Transit feed specification

Below is a detailed list of the required and optional data required from transit agencies by Google:

- *agency.txt* - required. This file contains information about the transit agency.
- *stops.txt* - required. Contains information about individual locations where vehicles pick up or drop off passengers.
- *routes.txt* - required. Contains information about a transit organization's routes. A route is a sequence of two or more stops.
- *trips.txt* - required. Contains information about scheduled service along a particular route. Trips consist of two or more stops that are made at regularly scheduled intervals.
- *stop_times.txt* - required. Lists the times that a vehicle arrives at and departs from individual stops for each trip along a route.

- *calendar.txt* - required. Defines service categories. Each category indicates the days that service starts and ends as well as the days that service is available.
- *calendar_dates.txt* - optional. Lists exceptions for the service categories defined in the calendar.txt file.
- *fare_attributes.txt* - optional. Defines fare information for a transit organization's routes.
- *fare_rules.txt* - optional. Defines the rules for applying fare information for a transit organization's routes.
- *shapes.txt* - optional. Defines the rules for drawing lines on a map to represent a transit organization's routes.
- *frequencies.txt* - optional. Defines the headway (time between trips) for routes with variable frequency of service

Source: http://code.google.com/transit/spec/transit_feed_specification.htm

It's all about the data

The Google Transit design is built on data that local transportation agencies develop and save in a designated set of data files, structured and named according to specifications provided by Google (see page 11). Google then assembles the data into an easy-to-use schedule design.

"We go out and grab the information after it's provided, ingest it into our system, review it for accuracy, and then it 'goes live' on Google.com," Sly said.

The data includes 11 key components with details about the transit agencies themselves, as well as routes, stops, schedules and fares. Six of these components are required, and five are optional. All of this information must be processed into the correct form (ready for "export") for Google to work with it—and sometimes this can be quite the project.

cies have contacted us in different ways. Sometimes we run into an agency at a conference, and sometimes agencies get their data ready and there is actually very little human interaction at all."

Google has expanded the Trip Planner to eight metro areas and one county. Orange County, California is the only county-wide Trip Planner in use right now, but Sly said that agencies at all levels are welcome to work with Google. Check out the sidebars in this article to see a complete list of the cities involved, as well as an example of using the Trip Planner in Orange County, California.

"We really want to make it as easy as possible for agencies to provide data, and the key point is in working with *all* agencies," Sly said. "We are not selective at all—when agencies get their data ready, it's not necessarily available only to us, but to

that public transit users will be able to plan travel throughout the state, using a variety of public transportation resources, including Amtrak, Greyhound, Washington State Ferries, airports, and other local agencies.

Robin Phillips, Administrator of Coordinated Transportation at ACCT/WSDOT, explained how the process has worked so far.

"We had someone work for four to six months on developing the

> We want to make it as easy as possible for agencies to provide data.

interface with Google, creating a schema to organize the information, testing the data, and contacting both Google and the various providers," Phillips said. "The project was lengthy simply because no one had done it before, but now that the schema is in place the biggest task is complete. The ability of Google to collaborate made the process that much easier."

> Some agencies can even develop their own trip planner on their own Web site. It's for the agency's benefit, and we want to help them. —Tom Sly, Google

"Some agencies do face the question of having the resources to spend building the export method," Sly said. "Generally it is a one-time effort that can take from a couple of days to a week. Then, as the agency exports data we can collect it on a weekly or quarterly basis to record changes in schedules, routes or the like."

City transit

Google's first Trip Planner release was for the Portland, Oregon metro area. "We actually found the Portland TriMet (transit authority) to be an ideal partner because they had great data they could share," Sly said. "Since then, different agen-

anyone. In fact, some agencies can even develop their own trip planner on their own Web site. It is for the agencies' benefit, and we want to help them."

The next level: State-wide trip planning

Right now, the Trip Planner can be used to get around any of the participating cities. But what about larger areas? The state of Washington is on the cutting edge of taking the idea to a state-wide level. Since early 2006, the Washington DOT (WSDOT) has been working with Google to build "city-to-city" (intercity) itineraries. These connections will mean

With the system in place, changes in the different information can be made on Google as well. Phillips said that while the intercity providers only change information like routes or fares once a year, other providers—like the state's ferry service—might change quarterly. But because of Google's flexibility, these changes can be made at any time, and the system will make sure that they are reflected online.

According to Phillips, there were obstacles in their development process, both for the local providers and those gathering the data. For those at WSDOT, the interaction with local providers was initally cumbersome but eventually was streamlined, down to small details like "making sure we ask for contact information once a year, instead of five times." Local providers, mean-

while, were not always excited about sharing their data. Some were concerned about how funding and other decisions might be affected. Phillips said that at some point the providers would look at the "cost-benefit of the situation" and realize they needed to "let go" of the information simply because the benefit was too great; taking this technological step could mean that many more customers.

"[WSDOT] had been working on compiling and making available statewide travel information for seven years, so this was a great opportunity," Phillips said. "By streamlining the way we get data from providers, we can help them update other information and improve the ways they do their annual reporting. This helps to eliminate all those little things—data collecting, fact-checking, etc.—that add up and are a pain, and we wanted a system that is more respectful of time and energy agencies have. We figure if they are spending time and money, we should make sure the result is valuable."

"Right now, we don't have a firm deadline [for going online], but we are hoping for late spring or early summer 2007. The first round will be the intercity providers, and then we will move to local providers," Phillips said.

"We usually approach local agencies with the stance that "This is a great opportunity, so how can we work together to get your data?" Phillips said. "They may think that they are serving all of their customers, but this system will open up more customers on a statewide level."

Orange County—Using Google Transit

So let's say I'm attending a conference at California State University, Long Beach, in Orange County. After a long day of meetings, I decide that the best possible place to spend the southern California evening would be at a baseball game. The Anaheim Angels play at Angel Stadium, which is on the other side of town, but how could I ever get there without a rental car, or overpaying for a taxi?

Enter Google Transit. Once I go to www.google.com/transit, I enter the Orange County portal. In the space, I type: "cal state long beach to angel stadium." The system gives me both directions (on the left side of the screen) and an interactive map (on the right side).

First, the system gives me options of when I want to leave, so it can match me up to the local transit schedule. If I wanted to change the time of my departure, I could do that and the system would change the directions if necessary. Here I'm told to walk from the university to Seventh and West Campus, where I'll wait for the OCTA Bus #50. The bus ride will last approximately one hour and two minutes, and then I'll walk the short remainder of the trip to the Stadium.

There are also links to the OCTA, where I can check full schedules, routes, and fares for my trip, as well as a link for reverse directions so I can plan out how I will get back to the campus. Check out the screenshots, and check out Google Transit!

Phillips said that with the help of research at both Washington State and the University of Washington, many rural providers are being grouped into regions, and as soon as

Calendar

Rural Transit Conferences and Workshops

May 7-9, 2007
Bus and Paratransit Conference
American Public Transportation
Association
Nashville, TN
(202) 496-4845
www.apta.com

May 19-25, 2007
CTAA EXPO
Community Transportation
Association of America
Reno, Nevada
(202) 247-8356
expo@ctaa.org

May 15-17, 2007
Passenger Assistance:
Certification for Trainers
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
For more information: Maribeth
Sacho, 414-227-3337. Email:
msacho@uwm.edu.

May 21-25, 2007
Fundamentals of Bus Collision
Investigation
Kansas City, Missouri
www.transit-
safety.volpe.dot.gov

June 4-5, 2007
Efficiencies in Paratransit
Scheduling and Dispatching
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
For more information: Maribeth
Sacho, 414-227-3337. Email:
msacho@uwm.edu.

June 4-5, 2007
Coordinated Mobility: A Unified
Transportation Management
Solution
Denver, Colorado
www.ntionline.org/coursedates

**Securing Community
Mobility**
September 4, Wichita
September 5, Garden City
September 6, Great Bend
September 7, Salina
September 8, Emporia
For more information, con-
tact Pat Weaver, Kansas
RTAP, weaver@ku.edu or
785-864-2595

September 10, 2007
Securing Community Mobility:
Train the Trainers
Wichita, Kansas
FMI: Pat Weaver, Kansas RTAP,
weaver@ku.edu or 785-864-
2595

September 10-12, 2007
Annual Meeting of the Kansas
Public Transit Association
Wichita, Kansas
FMI: kptacentral@yahoo.com
or http://www.kstransit.com/

Google transit,

one region has its information ready,
it can be incorporated.

Google and Kansas
While Kansas may be different from
Washington State or Orange County
in terms of public transit, the idea
behind Google's Trip Planner is just
as applicable. Using these resources,
people may someday be able to sit
down and plan a transit trip not only
across the state, but across the coun-
try. Sly said that the idea has been
building momentum, and more agen-
cies are excited about the opportunity
to get their information out there.
Be sure to check out:
www.google.com/transit. ▲

Sources:
www.wsdot.wa.gov/acct
http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2005/12/public-transit-via-google.html
http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/acct/statewide_travel_options.htm

Vehicle sharing,

Also, as providers attempt dif-
ferent efforts and strategies towards
coordination, the need for communi-
cation to state and federal officials
becomes crucial—both about obsta-
cles that remain persistent problems
as well as advances toward a cohesive
planning of coordination. Roeseler
said this communication is part of
the larger strategy because the feed-
back will enable those strategies that
work to be shared, and those that
don't to be further analyzed.
To learn more about the policy
itself, visit www.unitedweride.gov and
visit the "vehicle sharing" link. ▲

Resources

Resources Order Form

Use this order form to order hard copies for the PDFs listed here.

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.

Download or hard copy

Clean, Sober and Safe: An Employee Drug Awareness Training Video and Handbook. Developed by the Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida. Download from http://www.cutr.usf.edu/byrnessamsite/video.html or order from Kansas RTAP.
❏ Send hard copy

The Power of Brand Delivery. McKinsey Practices http://www.mckinsey.com/practices/retail/knowledge/articles/PowerofBrandDelivery.pdf
❏ Send hard copy

Volunteer Driver Liability and Immunity, by Matt Sundeen and Nicholas Farber. National Conference of State Legislatures, December 2006. Includes an overview of transportation programs that use volunteer drivers, a summary of research questions and project limitations, and information about relevant federal and state laws. The report supplements a detailed map of state statutes posted on NCSL's web site located at http://www.ncsl.org/programs/transportation/SVDLLaws.htm. Download at http://www.ncsl.org/print/transportation/vol_driverliabl06.pdfhttp://www.ncsl.org/print/transportation/vol_driverliabl06.pdf
❏ Send hard copy

Online resources

Paul Temporal's Branding Tips. http://www.brandingasia.com/columns/temporal10.htm

Marketing for Dummies. http://www.dummies.com/WileyCDA/DummiesArticle/id-2914.html

Focus Group Center. http://www.mnav.com/qualitative_research.htm

"Tire Maintenance." Car Talk Advice. www.cars.com

"Suspicious Behavior." Transit Watch Safety and Awareness Program. http://www.rtcsouthernnevada.com/tw/

Homeland Security. http://www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us/homelandsecurity/cwp/view.asp?A=519&Q=166134

FTA Transit Watch. http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/security/TransitWatch/Default.asp

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Name   Title

Agency   Phone

Street address   Email address

City   State   Zip + 4   Date materials needed

Kansas Trans Reporter

How to reach us

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 2160, 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**

Address incorrect?

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

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

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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