



# Kansas Trans Reporter

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

## Disaster response: Lessons learned in Kansas

by Tom Worker-Braddock

Natural disasters that struck Kansas the past year should remind Kansas transit agencies they serve a vital role in their community's disaster response. A community transit provider is often the one agency that knows both where vulnerable populations live and has the logistical ability to transport those vulnerable populations to safety in the event of a community-wide emergency. Kansas-area transit agencies that responded to the Greensburg tornado, Coffeyville



flooding, and north-central ice storms have come away with their own experiences and lessons learned on what went well, and what didn't.

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## Revised charter regulations

by Dan Nelson

Many transit operators throughout the state of Kansas, especially those in rural areas, have likely been engaged by an outside entity to provide charter transportation services. These transit managers are aware of the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) stringent restrictions placed on charter service. Recent changes to the FTA charter rule have significantly altered the protocol required to perform such services, and addi-

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## Disaster response, *continued from page 1*

### Greensburg tornado

The tornado that hit Greensburg came suddenly and caught everyone unaware. The local senior center had the only transportation service in the vicinity, and was not part of the

**Make sure your agency's regular and emergency contacts are on the correct lists both both KDOT and local emergency response crews.**

Kansas DOT transit network. The senior center did not have a disaster response plan regarding transit, and even if they did, one of their vehicles was destroyed by the tornado.

Transit agencies in neighboring counties stepped in. The Pratt Coalition on Aging and Sunflower Diversified Services sent vehicles to the KDOT building in Greensburg at the request of Pratt County law enforcement officials.

The overall response went fairly smoothly, said Tiffany Brown with the Pratt Council on Aging. The site of the destroyed Dillons grocery became the gathering point for Greensburg's residents, and the donated transit vehicles spent the night shuttling those without access to cars to the Pratt Hospital and Haviland shelter, and then later, from the hospital to the shelter.

### Coffeyville flooding

In early July of last year, one quarter of Coffeyville flooded. Flood waters were only a block from Senior Services of Southeast Kansas's (SEK) offices. Sandra Nielson, chief financial officer for SEK, used their ramp-equipped minivan and wheel-

chair accessible van to shuttle residents from overcrowded shelters to less crowded shelters.

This service was volunteered by the executive director of Senior Services SEK, but two days later, KDOT gave the official approval to use the KDOT-funded vehicles for emergency response. SEK was

informed that KDOT would refund any emergency-response related expenses, such as gas and wages, out of state funds, to prevent agencies from going bankrupt while responding to disasters for which the agencies may not have budgeted.

Senior Services SEK opened their doors for the fire department to store supplies, used the back of their facilities for emergency response, and arranged with vendors that supply ingredients for the SEK's meal program to bring extra bottled water. These responses did not follow a specific response plan; instead SEK relied on the local fire station across the street for response coordination.

To prepare for the next disaster, Sandra Nielsen recommends making sure that your transit agency's regular and emergency contact information are on the correct lists for both KDOT and the local emergency response crews. She also said that it would be a good idea to sit on local emergency response boards, although SEK is currently not doing that.

"Natural disasters," says Nielson, "are something you never expect, but should always be in the back of your mind to prepare for, in order to be a better agency."

### Ice storms

Riley County experienced severe ice

storms this past December.

According to Laurie Harrison, the county's assistant emergency management director, emergency officials were in contact with the local transit agency, Riley County ATA, which informed them that the agency had the capability to take people to shelters if needed.

While transit was not used for disaster response during the ice storms, the emergency management office does keep in close touch with transit area providers, including Riley County ATA and the three areas school districts, and has emergency contract numbers for those entities' top officials.

Currently, Riley county is reviewing their emergency operations plan and will be inviting area transit agencies for their input and comments. By statute, every county must have an emergency operations plan. Harrison recommends that transit officials stay involved with these. Get in touch with the emergency management director so the director knows the transit agency's resources and capabilities. That way, in the event of an emergency, the director can call the transit agency when disaster hits with knowledge about the capabilities of the agency.

### The state and federal role

The state and federal governments are limited in their ability to provide transit during emergency response. Dan Hay, from the Operations Office of the Kansas Division of Emergency Management, says that the state and federal government don't actually own any transit vehicles in Kansas, and is very difficult for the state to require transit agencies, vehicles, or personnel to go into a disaster site.

Hay recommends cities and counties with transit agencies take the initiative and plan for disaster

response in one of three ways:

1) communities can set up mutual aid agreements with each other, with agreements to donate aid without any monetary compensation; 2) cities or counties can create agreements to contract with other transit agencies during a disaster; and 3) a city or county can use its own vehicles. If a county does not have a transit agency housed in their jurisdiction, the local emergency planning agency could work with the Coordinated Transit District (CTD) in their area to identify potential transit-related resources.

If a county or city hires a transit provider to come in and provide services during a disaster, the disaster-stricken city or county can ask for 75 percent reimbursement of transit-related expenses from FEMA with an additional 10 percent from the state. It's important to note that only city or county governments experiencing the disaster can be reimbursed for disaster-related expenses; transit providers would have to submit for reimbursement by going through city or county government.

### Recommendations

Dan Hay recommends transit agencies proactively identify their own role in county and community disaster plans. Communities need to keep in mind that disasters might leave vehicles unaffected, but might prevent drivers, mechanics and other personnel from performing their duties. Everyone remembers rows of driverless school buses in New Orleans. Therefore, agreements might be for an agency to provide vehicles, personnel, or both to a community.

Hay also recommends communities arrange for alternative fuel sources ahead of time. Most fuel pumps run on electricity, and if the entire community is without electric-

ity, emergency generators might be needed in other places. Communities should contract-out ahead of time with petroleum companies that can provide a tanker of fuel on short notice that would stay in the disaster area until no longer needed.

Waiting until a disaster strikes before planning the response is too late to suddenly figure out who needs to be called for what services. Transit agencies need to identify their own role in disaster response, and make sure that county and city governments are aware of what transit agencies can provide, and would need, during a disaster.

Sandra Nielson's words are worth repeating: "Natural disasters are something you never expect, but should always be in the back of your mind to prepare for, in order to be a better agency."

For more information, contact your local emergency management director. A listing can be found on the Kansas Division of Emergency Management's Web site at [www.kansas.gov/kdem/contact\\_us/cocoordinator\\_lepclisting.shtml](http://www.kansas.gov/kdem/contact_us/cocoordinator_lepclisting.shtml).

### Contacts

Sandra Nielson, SEK,  
(620) 251-7313

Laurie Harrison, Riley County  
Assistant Emergency Management,  
(785) 537-6333

Dan Hay, Kansas Division of  
Emergency Management,  
(785) 274-1406

Sara Krom, Sunflower Diversified  
Services,  
(620) 792-7321

Tiffany Brown, Pratt COA,  
(620) 672-7811. ▲

### Charter regulations,

*continued from page 1*

tional exemptions have been approved. The new regulations set forth by the FTA go into effect on April 20, 2008.

#### How are these charter regulations important to transit managers?

All transit managers across Kansas, whether they currently provide incidental charter service or not, should be aware of changes to the FTA charter regulations.

Charter service is defined as contracted transportation service using busses or vans provided to an outside entity for a fee, usually on an irregular basis or for special events. A thorough understanding of the charter rule protects federally-funded transit operators from unknowingly violating the law when it comes to providing service outside the realm of normal day-to-day operations. If found in violation of these regulations, transit operators are subject to sanctions including the withholding of up to all federal financial assistance and the suspension or debarment of the recipient's employees.

#### What are charter regulations?

In attempt to prevent undue competition with private charter companies, the FTA charter rule prohibits federally-funded public transportation providers from providing charter service if there is at least one private charter operator in the area willing and able to perform the service. There are, however, several exceptions that allow publicly-funded transit operators to provide charter service if a private operator exists. The language governing these exceptions was a primary focal point of the recent revisions.

The FTA's predecessor, the Urban

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## Charter regulations, continued from page 3

Mass Transportation Administration, first established charter bus service regulations as part of the 1964 Urban Mass Transportation Act. The statutory language regarding the rule evolved over the next 24 years until 1988, after which time it remained unchanged until the recent revisions. In response to growing discontent among transit industry professionals over the regulations, Congress directed several inquiries into charter service rules that culminated in establishing the Charter Bus Negotiated Rulemaking Committee in 2006. This committee laid the groundwork upon which the FTA drafted the new regulations released on January 14, 2008.

### What were the issues with the previous charter regulations?

A number of concerns regarding the previous charter regulations were raised by members of the public transit community and were incorporated into the new legislation. Among these concerns was a lack of understanding regarding the rule's stance on demand-responsive systems, and whether or not these types of operations were subject to charter regulations. Further, there were complaints that the rule was "anti-transit" in some respects, and placed the burden of proof on transit providers when confronted with requests for charter services. Lastly, many rural providers felt that the regulations created unnecessary hardships for groups that requested charter service but could not easily obtain it due to the restrictive nature of the rule.

These concerns, along with others including consideration for training and disaster relief activities, are addressed in the revised charter rule. Lisa Koch, public transit manager at the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) said of the

new regulations, "Hopefully, the new charter regulations will provide clarity to our providers on what constitutes a charter service and what steps are needed in order to follow the regulations. The new regulations are an improvement, but KDOT staff will still need to work to provide clarity to our providers on the changes in this new regulation."

### What are the changes to the new regulations?

*Redefining charter service.* Among the changes to the charter rule is an expanded definition of charter service. Per the new regulations, charter service is defined as "transportation provided at the request of a third party for exclusive use of a transit vehicle for a negotiated price." This includes transportation to irregularly-scheduled or limited-duration events. However, the new rule indicates that demand-responsive systems are not considered charter service, and thus are not subject to the charter rule.

*Expanded and additional exemptions.* Other important changes to the charter rule include exemptions for agency recipients of FTA Section 5310 (transportation for elderly individuals and persons with disabilities), Section 5311 (public transportation in rural areas), Section 5316 (job access and reverse commute) and Section 5317 (new freedom transportation for persons with disabilities).

Further, FTA recipients may provide charter services to human services organizations that receive funding from one or more of 64 federal programs listed in "Appendix A" of the rule, provided the organization registers online with the FTA. This change is aimed to assist organizations that provide services to the elderly, disabled, and/or low-income populations.



*The FTA, with input from transit professionals across the country, has worked to improve the rule to make it easier for transit managers to provide charter transportation services.*

Koch indicated that KDOT representatives are available to answer questions regarding how the new regulations impact agencies that use these funds. Further, information pertaining to these changes will be addressed at future CTD meetings.

*Provisions for training and disaster relief.* The FTA has also made revisions regarding the use of charter service for training activities. Rural systems are now given exceptions for transit training and all systems are now granted exemptions for conducting disaster training activities or providing disaster relief for up to 45 days after a federal or state disaster has been declared.

*Improved reporting procedures.* Finally, the updated charter rule provides for a much more efficient and streamlined reporting process which uses the internet for both charter registration and information reporting. Private charter companies must now register online with the FTA if they

wish to be considered a “willing and able” charter provider for a given area. When an entity wishes to engage a public transit operator for charter services, the FTA will notify all registered private charters based on the online registry. If no private charter wishes to accept the offer, then the public system will be granted an exemption to provide service, given the contract meets all applicable regulations. This change will undoubtedly reduce the burden on both public and private transit operators that exists under the current protocol.

*Where can I find more information on the charter regulations?* Because navigating federal legislative documents can be challenging, the FTA encourages transit managers to contact the Ombudsman for Charter Services with any questions regarding the charter service rule. The current Ombudsman, Crystal Frederick, can be reached at (202) 366-4063, or via email at [ombudsman.charterservice@dot.gov](mailto:ombudsman.charterservice@dot.gov).

If you wish to review the charter rule yourself, the document can be accessed at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov). Once there, search for “Charter Service; Final Rule” and select the desired file format. The Kansas Department of Transportation is another source of information regarding charter regulations. Transit managers should contact their respective CTD program consultant with any questions.

It is imperative that all transit managers become aware of the FTA charter rule if they wish to provide transportation services that are outside the scope of regular operations. The FTA, with input from transit professionals across the country, has worked to improve the rule to make it easier for transit managers to provide valuable transportation services in a timely and efficient manner without jeopardizing private charter companies. ▲

## Do your volunteers need to be drug tested?



by Jacob Bustad

A recent point of confusion among transit agencies throughout the state has been the status of volunteers regarding FTA’s mandatory drug testing. We talked to Cheryl Fisher, drug and alcohol program manager at KDOT, about this.

According to Fisher, volunteers *do not* have to be included within the drug and alcohol random testing pool under current FTA guidelines. Citing the Code of Federal Regulations 49, part 655 (Prevention of Alcohol Misuse and Prohibited Drug Use in Transit Operations), the regulation states that any covered *employee* is included in the random testing pool.

### Rules were changed

When the FTA regulations were originally published in 1994, volun-

teers were not exempt from the testing process. However, after a large volume of responses indicated that many agencies felt this regulation would limit an agency’s ability to retain volunteers, it was changed.

Definition of “volunteer” is key. The FTA defines volunteers as non-employees who perform a service as a charitable act without the expectation of receiving a benefit. Those who provide charitable services in return for some benefit (i.e., workfare, community service as an alternative to a criminal sentence, academic credit, or payment by another agency) remain covered by the rule and must be drug-tested.

### Drivers of vehicles requiring a CDL have different rules

Transit systems should also note that volunteers who operate a vehicle requiring a Commercial Drivers License are exceptions to the rule—they must be drug-tested.

According to Fisher, there are no current discussions about chang-

## Volunteers who operate a vehicle requiring a commercial driver’s license must be drug-tested.

ing the FTA regulation. For more information, contact Cheryl Fisher at [cherylfi@ksdot.org](mailto:cherylfi@ksdot.org).

Source:

<http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/DrugAndAlcohol/Newsletters/issue01/html/fta1.htm> ▲



## Ahead of the curve: KDOT and small transit vehicles

by Jacob Bustad

A recent study conducted by SURTC—the Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, located in North Dakota and supported by FTA—focuses on the small transit vehicle industry and how to improve the experience of manufacturers, transit agencies and patrons alike. The study was led by SURTC researcher Del Peterson, and included analysis of bus-purchasing trends over the last 20 years, as well as FTA and local procurement policies and how these policies impact the industry.

The study produced four basic recommendations:

- State DOTs should better coordinate procurement efforts with local agencies so that specific needs are not ignored in order to attain volume discounts. State DOTs should assemble multiple transit agencies to develop specifications for these procurements.
- Transit agencies and DOT officials should consider all factors, not only cost, when planning procurements.
- Transit agencies and procurement officials should consider dividing vehicle procurements into separate groups or “segments” to allow for distinct approaches in procurement of each. For example, classifying vehicles as vans, cutaways or small buses allows for unique treatment of each segment based on the characteristics of each group.
- FTA should develop standards for

the industry, which would reduce costs and simplify maintenance. This would emphasize agencies’ needs while allowing manufacturers to standardize models and classes of vehicles.

Often such studies provide insight that can be used immediately, and this study is no different—but that isn’t the case in Kansas. That’s because KDOT has already addressed many of these issues. When it comes to small transit vehicles, KDOT is ahead of the curve.

Kelly Broxterman, Public Service

“In Kansas, we have developed the Kansas Coordinated District Council (KCTDC), which is composed of one member from each of the 15 Coordinated Transit Districts (CTDs) in Kansas,” Broxterman said. “Each CTD provides input on the specifications for procurement, and the KCTDC meets annually to discuss problems from the previous year and new equipment in the industry. Based on this meeting, appropriate changes are made to each specification before it is bid.”

Broxterman said that the KCTDC and KDOT also meet annually, discussing any problems experienced with previously-purchased vehicles and also new options being developed by manufacturers. As part of the bid process, information is solicited from vendors on products that both work well or are considered inferior. This includes a pre-bid meeting with all interested vendors.

While cost does play a part, it is not the deciding factor. “While we do use a “low bid” procurement policy, we certainly consider past performance of a vendor and/or manufacturer,” Broxterman said. “If they do not supply a quality product or service, they may be asked to sit out a year in the bidding process while all matters are corrected to our satisfaction.”

Similarly, the recommendation for segmenting the industry is already being followed in Kansas— each year KDOT accepts bids for 10 different vehicle types, ranging from a minivan to a 20-passenger small transit bus. Each agency is able to apply for the



*SURTC’s study on small vehicle procurement provides insight for improvement, but, to their credit, KDOT is already doing many of the suggested practices.*

Administrator at KDOT, explained how the study wouldn’t have as much impact in Kansas.

“Each of the recommendations may be valuable to other state DOTs and their agencies, but we have addressed several of these issues,” Broxterman said.

The first recommendation, that state DOTs change their perspective towards small vehicle standards and create groups of transit agencies to develop necessary specifications for vehicle procurements, is one example.

vehicle that best fits their needs, with the only stipulation from KDOT being that a certain percentage of the agency's fleet be ADA accessible. Each agency's request must be ranked and approved by KDOT staff before an order is placed.

The study concludes that FTA should develop some standards for both procurement policies and actual vehicle manufacturing, Broxterman explained that Kansas is on top of this, as well.

"To get the best price, we do a form of pooled procurement. The KCTDC accepts courtesy bids for the 10 different types of vehicles, and once all courtesy bids have been awarded and a list of approved vendors is compiled, all agencies approved to receive vehicles for the model year are invited to a day-long meeting with both KDOT staff and the approved vendors," Broxterman said. "At that time, each agency can ask the vendor questions and must place their order—typically this is when all the orders are placed for the upcoming year." Between 80-100 vehicles, including those from each of the 10 KDOT-approved vehicle types, are ordered on this day.

The bid process attracts multiple vendors and assures lower pricing than if only a few vehicles were being purchased by a single agency. After the order is delivered, the KCTDC inspects the first vehicle of each type to ensure it meets specifications. If there is a problem, it can be corrected before the rest of the vehicles of that type are built.

To access the SURTC study, go to <http://www.ugpti.org/pubs/pdf/DP181.pdf>. For more information about the procurement policy, vehicle standards and other related information in Kansas contact Kelly Broxterman at [kellyb@ksdot.org](mailto:kellyb@ksdot.org) or (785) 291-3030. ▲

# Why do we need to report all this data?

.....  
by Tom Worker-Braddock &  
Christy Lane  
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*FTA provides a spreadsheet for entering the data along with line-by-line instructions.*

Every year transit agencies in Kansas must report ridership and other data to KDOT, and this year they began asking for even more data. Why? This article will explain how the data is used, and how it ultimately benefits transit agencies.

KDOT is required to submit this data to the National Transit Database (NTD). This is the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) primary national database for service and safety statistics on the transit industry. Data from the NTD is used to prepare summary reports for Congress. Data analyses have also been used to assist with the apportionment of over \$4 billion of FTA funds to transit agencies in urbanized areas.

Now nonurbanized areas are required to comply with SAFETEA-LU and report the previous year's data for use in the NTD. Because of this new requirement, data provided

by rural transit providers to KDOT is more detailed than was previously required. This data provides the big picture of ridership in rural areas, nationally, and may help with apportionment of funding down the road.

Agencies that receive Section 5311 funds directly from the federal government, including states and some Indian tribes, must submit data to the federal government. Subrecipients of Section 5311 funds, such as local transit agencies, are required to submit NTD data to the state designee (that's KDOT, in Kansas).

Fiscal year data must be submitted to KDOT sometime after June 30 each year, with the exact deadline to be announced by KDOT.

There are three types of forms that KDOT submits for the NTD, using an online data entry system:

- **State Agency Identification Form (RU10)**—Completed by KDOT or Indian tribes that are direct recipients.
- **Rural General Public Transit Service Form (RU20)**—A one-page form of basic data completed by KDOT for each provider of general public transportation. A separate form is completed for each rural provider of general public transit service within the state or an Indian tribe. Information on this form is completed based on agency reports to KDOT.
- **State Summary Form (RU30)**—Automatically generated from data reported for individual providers on

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**NTD reporting in Kansas**, continued from page 7

the RU-20.

The subrecipient transit provider may not have all the data asked-for on the form, but must report all data that is available. In addition to reporting Section 5311 data, subrecipients must provide data to KDOT for all general public transportation services where public resources are used. Examples, from the *2007 Rural Reporting Manual* include:

- Medicaid
- Meals-on-Wheels
- sheltered workshops
- independent living centers
- social service agency programs

KDOT's NTD "Rural Contact" is Kelly Broxterman. Kelly is responsible for entering the data into the NTD reporting system and is available to answer questions about the completion of the RU20. Her contact information is below. ▲

FTA provides a spreadsheet for entering the data along with line-by-line instructions, available at:

[http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/pubs/RuralRM/2007/html/2007\\_Rural\\_Manual.htm#41](http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/pubs/RuralRM/2007/html/2007_Rural_Manual.htm#41)

**NTD Rural Contact for Kansas:**

Kelly Broxterman, [kellyb@ksdot.org](mailto:kellyb@ksdot.org), (785) 291-3030

**Web site for RU20 and instructions:**

<http://www.ntdprogram.gov/ntdprogram/rural.htm>

**Resources:**

*2007 Other Than Urbanized Area (Rural) Reporting Manual* located at: [http://www.ntdprogram.com/ntdprogram/pubs/RuralRM/2007/html/2007\\_Rural\\_TOC.htm](http://www.ntdprogram.com/ntdprogram/pubs/RuralRM/2007/html/2007_Rural_TOC.htm)

**What is reported on the Rural General Public Transit form (RU20)?**

- Transit provider name and information
- Modal classification
- Service area
- Volunteer resources
- Number of vehicles and characteristics
- Number and ownership of maintenance facilities
- Annual operating expenses
- Operating revenues
- Annual capital costs
- Sources of capital funds
- Annual vehicle miles
- Annual vehicle hours
- Annual passenger trips
- Safety information
- Information on intercity bus and Indian reservation services

Note: All financial data must follow accrual accounting principles.

**What are the Accrual Accounting principles?**

- Revenues are recorded when earned, regardless of whether or not receipt of the revenue takes place in the same reporting period.
- Expenditures are recorded as soon as they result in liabilities for benefits received, regardless of whether or not payment of the expenditure is made in the same reporting period.

## Kansas RTAP to host dispatching and scheduling course in Wichita in June

Effective dispatching can make or break a community transportation organization. A two-day training program will be offered in Wichita on June 17-18, 2008 designed especially for demand-responsive transportation services, hosted by the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP). The Professional Dispatching and Scheduling (PDS) program focuses on operational efficiency as well as customer service techniques. Those who successfully complete this course will have developed and demonstrated their expertise in maximizing the efficient delivery of demand-responsive transportation, conveying riders' requests into affordable and appropriate trips, and in making effective use of their system's transportation resources.

To register for this course, visit the Kansas RTAP registration site at <http://www.ksrtap.org>, and click on "View the RTAP Calendar." For more information, contact Kristin Kelly at 785-864-2594 or [kbkelly@ku.edu](mailto:kbkelly@ku.edu).





## Gaining consensus for transit in your community: Marketing your program through dialogue

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by Pat Weaver  
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*Another dimension of marketing is gathering information from your customers and other stakeholders about services provided and services needed. The affinity process is a tool you can use with small groups in your community to find out what's really important.*

When we hear the word “marketing,” we often think of ads and logos, public service announcements, and logo-imprinted key chains. It’s all about giving information to the public about our transit service, either visually or verbally. However, there’s another dimension to marketing: asking customers, potential customers, funding agencies, partner organizations in your community and others what is the highest priority in taking the next right steps to improve your service. That may mean changing services, adding service or even discontinuing some portion or feature of your operations.

The problem with asking lots of people their opinions about anything is how to get to the final answer. Many people have ideas about your service but may not be able to tell you what’s most important. Others may have good ideas, but it’s difficult to get them to share their thoughts in a large or even small group setting. The “affinity process” of group facilitation provides an excellent tool to develop priorities when bringing people together to discuss an issue or a problem.

### **What is the affinity process?**

The affinity process is a method for getting a group to react from a creative level and a logical level. The process helps groups organize their ideas in innovative new thought patterns. In addition, the process encourages true participation because every person’s ideas are represented in the process. It’s a whole new take on “brainstorming,” where usually the most vocal get their ideas represented disproportionately on a list. There are several steps to the process and imbedded within each step is a strategy to make sure that everyone is involved but without making them feel uncomfortable or on the spot.

### **When can you use the affinity process?**

You can use the affinity process when you need to generate and organize large amounts of information into groupings based on natural relationships among the ideas. It’s a good technique when breakthrough creativity is desired, when facts or thoughts are chaotic, or when the topic itself is emotional or highly charged. The affinity process also helps build support for a solution or direction to help lead to successful implementation.

The process requires groups of about 4 to 8 people. If you have a larger group, it can be divided into smaller groups that will later report out to the larger group.

### **What are the steps to conducting an affinity process?**

There are four primary steps in an affinity process. The first step is to

create the “question” on which you want to get input. In the case of a marketing-related question it might be something like “How can we make the community more aware of the transit services we offer?” or “How can we improve transit service to our community to serve more needs?”

The second step is to allow each person to spend a few minutes writing answers to the question on individual post-it note cards. Encourage them to be creative and provide as many ideas as possible, but at least 8-10 phrases, preferably 3-4 words each with a noun and a verb. This is the brainstorming phase of the exercise.

Next, with newsprint or poster paper attached to the wall, ask the members of the group to move to the poster paper and place their ideas randomly on the poster paper. Without talking, individuals in the group can move the post-it notes to form clusters of related ideas. They should be encouraged to move quickly and go with their “gut” reaction. Anyone can move a note into another cluster if they feel it’s more related. The group should be encouraged to allow new groupings beyond familiar categories.

The final step in creating an affinity is to create headers for the idea-clusters. The members of the group can now talk, read the notes aloud and discuss the major theme of each grouping. Give each theme a name, using a phrase that describes the central idea of the group of notes. The phrases should be concise, limited to 3-5 words, and should be able to stand alone.

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## Sensitivity to passengers' special needs is especially important during an emergency

.....  
by Kelly Heavey  
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**B**eing a first responder to transit emergencies requires unique skills. Whether you are a driver reacting to an emergency on your bus or a police officer or emergency medical provider, you may be providing the earliest emergency assistance with individuals who may respond in unexpected ways. The Center for Development and Disability has just issued the second edition of *Tips for First Responders*. This handbook provides quick, easy-to-use procedures for assisting persons with disabilities during emergencies as well as routine encounters.

Transit has obvious challenges in passenger assistance, such as elderly riders who may be frail with limited mobility or passengers traveling with service animals. But some challenges are harder to recognize quickly, like encountering a person with a cognitive disability. How should a first responder react to keep the situation under control? Specific tips are provided in this book.

*Tips for First Responders* has nine sections and includes two subjects not included in the first edition: autism and chemical sensitivities. As research continues on treatment of persons with these conditions, the rules of responding keep changing. Here is a condensed list of the topics the handbook provides, along with a useful tip from each one.

### Seniors

"Always ask the person how you can best assist them." Repeat your ques-

tions, if necessary and determine whether or not the person truly understands your words. Use patience and be reassuring. An elderly person with hearing loss may appear disoriented or confused.

### People with service animals

The term "service animal" often refers to seeing-eye dogs, but keep in mind that there are many other types of service animals. If an emergency



*If an emergency occurs and evacuation is necessary, do not separate the service animal from its owner.*

occurs and evacuation is necessary, it is important not to separate the service animal from its owner.

### People who have mobility impairments

"Every person and every disability is unique...respect their independence." This section has subheads listing

types of mobility assistance you might encounter in an emergency evacuation, including crutches and lifting techniques for motorized and non-motorized wheelchairs. Generally, you'll get better results if you ask individuals how you can help them. How you assist people using wheelchairs will depend on whether the chair is manual or motorized, and how many people you have to help.

### People with autism

"Speak calmly—use direct concrete phrases." This topic covers communication, social rules, and sensory and behavior tips when helping an autistic individual are areas this topic covers. The person may respond to your questions by repeating a phrase over and over or talking about unrelated topics. This, the book says, is their attempt to communicate, not to disrespect.

### People who are deaf or hard of hearing

"There is a difference between hard of hearing and deaf. People who are hearing-impaired vary in the extent of hearing loss they experience." The provided tip of flickering lights in a room to get a deaf or hard of hearing person's attention can be applied to flickering a flashlight on a bus if you have a nighttime emergency. Carrying a pen and paper to communicate during a crisis also comes in handy with a deaf or hard of hearing rider. Keep your words as simple as possible to aid understanding.

### People who are visually impaired

"Some people who are 'legally blind'

have some sight, while others are totally blind.” These tips stress the importance of acting naturally around a visually impaired rider during an emergency. They can probably understand your words perfectly, so there is no need to shout. Avoid physically assisting them without asking first.

**People with cognitive disabilities**

“Say... show...give...use...predict...ask/look for...repeat...reduce...explain...share.” These words are the subheads of this category, and the book lists very simple and direct instructions under each, useful when assisting a cognitively disabled person in a stressful situation. For example, say, “My name is...I’m here to help you, not hurt you.” Give extra time, if possible, for the person to process and to lower stress and fatigue.

**People with multiple chemical sensitivities**

“Ask what the person is sensitive to, including his or her history of reactions to various drugs you may have to administer.” If you evacuate a person with chemical sensitivities from a vehicle, the handbook recommends taking the person’s own medical supplies and equipment with them, in case they are sensitive to the hospital’s or shelter’s care.

**People who are mentally ill**

“You may not be able to tell if the person is mentally ill until you have begun the evacuation procedure.” If you suspect a mental disorder in a rider, the book says to ask them if they have one, calmly. It then lists how to comfort them, including showing empathy and calmness.

To find your own copy of *Tips for First Responders* for a complete list of tips, visit <http://cdd.unm.edu/products/tipsforfirstresponders.htm> ▲

# New preparedness guide

.....  
by Kelly Heavey  
.....



**K**ansas is smack-dab in the middle of tornado alley, due to the collision of winds from the arctic North and from the balmy Gulf of Mexico. It is prime ground for billowing super-cell thunderstorms, which may produce tornadoes. Many Kansas residents recognize this and prepare by means of family emergency plans. A transit agency needs to be prepared, too.

The National Weather Service may issue a tornado watch or tornado warning for your area during a strong storm. Knowing the difference between the two is essential. During a watch, the conditions for a tornado exist, but there is no tornado on the ground. During a tornado warning, either a funnel or a tornado on the ground has been spotted.

So how does a transit agency prepare for severe weather? It depends whether you’re in the office or driving. Either way, pay attention to the conditions outside. Be aware of the alerts

that may occur around you, such as sirens or radio broadcasts.

In the office, designate a shelter in which to seek cover. The safest place is in an interior hallway on the lowest possible level, under a staircase, or in a designated shelter area. Use your arms and hands to protect your neck and head, and stay away from windows. The University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture’s *Disaster Handbook* recommends having a briefcase or small suitcase on hand to take important documents with you to shelter. The *Emergency Preparedness Guide for Transit Employees* by FTA and NTI suggests avoiding large open areas

*Go to next page*

**A tornado**, Kansas’ most violent natural occurrence, has an average speed of 30 mph, but can reach speeds above 250 mph. The tornado that destroyed Greensburg in May 2007 whipped around at 200 mph; however, most tornadoes (83 percent) are considered weak with winds of less than 110 mph, according to the National Climate Data Center.

## Preparedness guide,

continued from page 11

such as auditoriums and cafeterias, and to be aware that mobile structures will offer little-to-no protection from a tornado, even if tied down.

On the road, a bus driver should have discussed the weather conditions with a supervisor prior to beginning a shift. Open communication should be maintained, especially if the weather worsens. A bus should not accept riders if there is a tornado warning in effect, said Iowa's State Transportation Director Terry Voy, cited in a North Carolina School Bus Safety's Web site resource called *Tornado Preparedness*. If a tornado touches down en route, Voy says the driver should be aware of any possible shelters on the route, such as buildings, caves or any other strong structure to protect people. Do *not* take shelter under an overpass.

If a shelter cannot be found, the rider should locate a ditch on the side of the road and instruct riders to take cover in it. The bus should be parked far away from the people to prevent strong winds from blowing it onto them. Do not ever try to outrun a tornado.

At all times during a period of severe weather, communication should be maintained between the driver and an individual at the transit office if possible. If communication does not work due to storm damage, develop and know the policies and recommended steps of your office in a severe weather situation, and continue efforts to get in touch with the office after those steps have been carried out and also when you and your riders are secure.

A NOAA weather radio programmable for your service area is a low-cost investment to keep informed 24 hours a day, seven days a week on weather conditions and

more. Radios are plugged into the wall but tend to have a long battery life of around 30 hours in case power is knocked out by a storm. The weather radio alerts listeners to all hazards in the area, whether the emergency is natural such as a tornado, environmental like a chemical release, or public safety such as Amber Alerts. Weather radios can be purchased for as low as \$20 or as high as \$200, depending on how many features you desire. They are available at retail outlets or online merchants. It may be your only reliable source of weather updates when the power goes out.

To learn about severe weather by other sources, simply turn on the TV, radio, or Internet—directed to a weather Web site. All three will

always provide up-to-the-minute coverage on your area during severe weather. [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) provides a nearly immediate local forecast after you type your zip code in.

Create a severe weather plan in your office with these suggestions, and have your employees learn it. It may protect the lives of your employees and your riders during tornado season.

Sources:

[www.itre.ncsu.edu/ghsp/tornado.html](http://www.itre.ncsu.edu/ghsp/tornado.html)

[www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/ttl.pdf](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/ttl.pdf)

University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture's *Disaster Handbook*, <http://disaster.ifas.ufl.edu/PDFS/CHAP10/D10-05.PDF> ▲

## Affinity process, continued from page 9

### What about larger groups?

If you have a larger group of people, it is possible to divide the group into sub-groups. Don't be tempted to make your work groups too large; stick with 4-8 people. If each person contributes 10 ideas, there soon will be too many to consider in a short period of time.

Allow all of the groups to work through the steps of the affinity process through creating headings. Once they have done that, each group can report out to the larger group to identify common themes or ideas. Headings that are identical or nearly identical from the various groups might be combined into one.

### Setting priorities

You now have lots of ideas on how to proceed. What's the next step? One strategy is go through a prioritization exercise, providing each person with ten adhesive dots, all

receiving the same color. Each individual should be instructed to "vote" for their favorite ideas by affixing a dot or multiple dots next to the ideas that they favor. They can vote for ten ideas or they can vote for fewer multiple times, up to 10. Higher priority ideas start to emerge visually when you see an idea with lots of dots.

Those priorities can be taken back to the office with the task to develop action plans around one or more of those higher priority ideas.

### Getting more information on the affinity process

Information in this article was adapted from materials provided by Millennia Consulting, LLC, as part of the DePaul University Group Facilitation Certificate Program. For information on their Group Facilitation Certificate, visit <http://www.learning.depaul.edu/> ▲



## Share dispatch with your neighbor-agencies

by Tom Worker-Braddock

**S**AFETEA-LU mandates that transit agencies increase coordination with other agencies. This is done in Kansas through Coordinated Transit Districts (CTD) where transit agencies agree on goals and objectives to increase coordination. Most CTDs specifically listed centralized dispatch as a goal in the recent coordination process.

CTDs and transit agencies should look at centralizing their dispatching service if the following conditions apply:

- vehicles and drivers serve only one client or trip type.
- multiple dispatch facilities serve the same geographic area.
- vehicles and routes serving only a few passengers.
- low passenger count per mile.
- duplication of routes, times and services among different agencies.
- unusually high per trip costs.

### Benefits

Centralized dispatching provides clear benefits for transit agencies and CTDs meeting the above conditions. First, a CTD or numerous transit agencies that agree to order the same equipment from the same vendor in one large order can get a better deal from the vendor than if multiple transit agencies each placed small orders with different vendors. These savings can then be used to increase overall service.

Secondly, centralized dispatch can later be integrated into a larger ITS (intelligent transportation system). An ITS includes automatic vehicle locator (AVL) technology which provides real-time location of



Multiple agencies using one dispatch center can offer a wider range of benefits to their clients, including one-stop access to more types of transportation providers.

transit vehicles, and mobile data terminal (MDT) technology which is basically a computer and screen in the vehicle allowing the driver to get new rider and route information even after they've left the garage. These technologies can lead to quicker trip scheduling; instead of requiring 24 hours advanced reservations, rides can be scheduled and dispatched while the vehicle is en route to a different customer.

Centralized dispatching can either be stand-alone, or it can be the first step in creating a complete intelligent transportation system, and a way to spread the implementation costs across several phases.

Centralized dispatching is usually associated with two components; 1) an organizational approach and agreements that allow multiple agencies to use one dispatch center (with

agreements ranging from just dispatching, to vehicles and maintenance sharing); and 2) a technological system that allows an organization to easily dispatch and track multiple vehicles and passengers.

### Centralized dispatching examples

Multiple agencies using one dispatch center can offer a range of benefits to their clients.

Kandace Bonneson runs the Sedgwick County Transportation Brokerage

based out of the Sedgwick County Kansas Department on Aging. The agency only owns two vehicles, but uses a variety of private vendors and provided over 25,000 rides last year. It offers a one-stop shop where clients apply for eligibility to the program, and once approved, call to make reservations and are assigned a provider depending on their characteristics and needs. The brokerage uses a variety of private transportation vendors, but manages federal, state and local funding to keep costs at \$3.00 one way per ride. Human service agencies in Sedgwick County contract-out with the transportation brokerage to ensure rides for their clients.

The other part of centralized dispatch uses computerized dispatch systems. Currently, two systems in Kansas use a system that pairs com-

*Go to page 14*

## Rural Transit Conferences and Workshops

### Kansas RTAP Fall Driver Training Programs

Apr 10 – Topeka  
Apr 15 – Great Bend  
Apr 22 – Chanute  
Apr 24 – Olathe  
For more information, contact Kristin Kelly, Kansas RTAP, 785-864-2594, [kbkelly@ku.edu](mailto:kbkelly@ku.edu)

### May 2-May 7, 2008

APTA Bus & Paratransit Conference & International Bus Roadeo. Austin, TX. For more information: [http://www.apta.com/conferences\\_calendar/bus/](http://www.apta.com/conferences_calendar/bus/)

### June 17-18, 2008

PDS: Effective, Efficient Dispatching and Scheduling. Certificate Program. Wichita, Kansas. For more information: Kristin Kelly, Kansas RTAP, 785-864-2594, [kbkelly@ku.edu](mailto:kbkelly@ku.edu)

### August 5-7, 2008

State Public Transit Partnerships Conference & FTA State Programs Meeting. Providence, RI. For more information: (202) 624-3625.

### September 15-17, 2008

Kansas Public Transit Association Annual Meeting. Wichita, KS. For more information: <http://www.kstransit.com>

### October 6-8, 2008

San Diego, California. EXPO 2008. American Public Transportation Association. <http://www.apta.com>

### October 19-22, 2008

18th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation. Omaha, Nebraska. For information: <http://www.trbruralconference.org>

**April 30, 2008. 2:00 pm CDT.** ADA Paratransit (Part V of Transportation Series). This Webcast is the fifth in a series of five once-a-month Webcasts on ADA Transportation featuring Marilyn Golden of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF). Sponsored by DBTAC Southwest ADA Center, a project of Independent Living Research Utilization. Phone: (713) 520-0232, E-mail: [ilru@ilru.org](mailto:ilru@ilru.org). URL: <http://www.ilru.org/html/training/webcasts/calendar.html>

**May 13, 1:00-2:30 p.m. CDT.** Using Google Transit as a Planning and Customer Information Tool. Learn how your community could use Google Transit to provide trip planning services to your customers. Google Transit's features can also be used in conjunction with other applications for many other purposes, such as providing real-time travel information, being used in planning services, and reducing duplication of existing services. Sponsored by CTA. E-mail: [price@ctaa.org](mailto:price@ctaa.org). Register at: <https://ctaa.webex.com/ctaa/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=662256277>

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Editor's Note:  
Send information on workshops and events to Pat Weaver at [weaver@ku.edu](mailto:weaver@ku.edu)

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## Central dispatch, continued from page 13

puter databases with automatic vehicle locators and mobile data terminals. Ellis County has a fleet of 61 vehicles that gave over 53,000 rides last year. DSNWK, Inc, which coordinates most transit services in Ellis County, has used a centralized dispatching system called Trapeze Pass since March 2005 when it received a grant from KDOT.

Ron Straight, General Manager for DSNWK, Inc., says the software has great possibilities, but it still isn't as smooth as possible. For example, since transit systems in both Ellis County and Reno County share the same database and software, typing in "Dillons" (grocery) as a location or destination will bring up locations in

both counties. The dispatcher needs to know which location the rider needs to travel to.

Lisa Loeb, director of Reno County Area Transit (RCAT), credits centralized dispatch with lowering stress levels of staff and reducing radio chatter after implementation. The system provides consistency by making sure that each dispatcher handles every call the same way.

### Funding

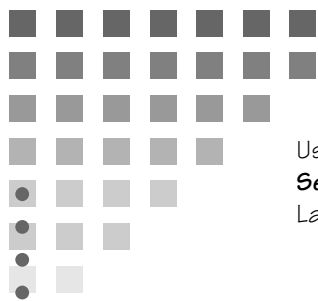
In the above examples, KDOT provided the funding for the centralized dispatching as a pilot project. Other funding for centralized dispatching can come from FHWA, CMAW, Surface Transportation Programs,

National Highway System and Section 5309 earmarks for capital purchases. For more information on these funding sources, contact your KDOT CTD coordinator.

For more information on centralized dispatching in general, the source for this article, listed below, is a great reference.

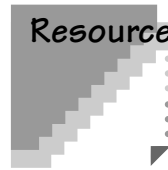
Source:  
TCRP Report 76. *Guidebook for Selecting Appropriate Technology Systems for Small Urban and Rural Public Transportation Operators*. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 2002. ▲

## Resources Order Form



Use this order form to order the resources listed here. There are two ways to order:  
**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 to access or download



**Charter Service Final Rule Fact Sheet.** Federal Transit Administration, 2008, 1 page. FTA published a final rule for charter service with an effective date of April 30, 2008. This one-page fact sheet provides a summary of the features of the revised charter regulations. [Download](#) from the Kansas RTAP web site. <http://www.ksrtap.org> under "what's new," or  request hard copy.

**Disaster Response and Recovery Resource for Transit Agencies.** 41 pages. Based on lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and other events, FTA has documented practices and procedures to improve emergency preparedness. The purpose of this guide is to provide local transit agencies and transportation providers with useful information and best practices in emergency preparedness and disaster response and recovery. [Download](#) from <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/publications/safety/DisasterResponse/PDF/DisasterResponse.pdf> or  request hard copy.

**Emergency Preparedness Guide for Transit Employees on the Job and at Home.** 2008. <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/EPG/default.htm>. This Emergency Preparedness Guide is divided into two parts. Part I addresses emergency preparedness while on the job and Part II addresses emergency preparedness at home. The overall objectives are to help you learn how to: Protect yourself and assist your customers if disaster strikes, Protect your family if you are at work, and stock and maintain job and home preparedness kits.

**Kansas Department of Transportation Vehicle Specifications.** <http://www.ksdot.org/burTransPlan/pubtrans/index.asp> Access the set of vehicle specifications for each type of transit vehicle available from KDOT's courtesy bid process. Files include bid specifications for twelve different types of vehicles.

Name	Title		
Agency	Phone		
Street address	Email address		
City	State	Zip + 4	Date materials needed

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# Kansas Trans Reporter

The *Kansas Trans Reporter* is an educational and technology transfer newsletter 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 RTAP 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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Other services



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

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

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Kansas RTAP staff

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

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