Disabled military veterans and their mobility needs

by Nick Pappas

For every fatality in Iraq, there are 16 wounded or injured soldiers—a rate more than five times greater than Vietnam. With 40 percent of veterans living in rural America, some of whom rely on transit to access medical services, what will rural transit agencies need to do to meet this potentially growing demand for service? How can transit agencies provide transportation for disabled veterans when treatment facilities can be hundreds of miles away? By answering these questions, your agency may be able to respond to the needs of the growing number of disabled veterans in Kansas.

The statistics
According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA), there are approximately 23 million veterans in the United States today.

How will the proposed ADA revisions affect your agency?

by David Murray

Will your agency be ready if and when the proposed revisions to the ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Transportation Vehicles are adopted? Vehicles that are up-to-date with the specifications developed annually by the Kansas Department of Transportation in partnership with the Kansas Coordinated Transit District Council (KCTDC) may meet most of the anticipated changes. If they not up-to-date, you should be aware

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Kansas Trans Reporter

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Veterans needing assistance with medical transportation range from WWII veterans to younger soldiers who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For more information:
To view the PowerPoint presentation on this subject, presented at the 18th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation in Omaha, Nebraska, visit: http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/vapresent.pdf

All veteran statistics can be obtained from the USVA at their website: http://www1.va.gov/vetdata

Information about veteran mobility from DAV can be obtained from the DAV website: http://www.dav.org
member, a veteran must simply pay one-time fee ranging from $140 to $250, depending on age.

Due to a lack of public transit that travels across counties in some areas, and the potential lack of DAV volunteers in some sparsely populated areas, veterans who live in more remote areas must drive themselves to the nearest DAV pickup location as determined by a DAV transportation coordinator—or rely on transportation provided by a family member or friend to get.

USVA reimbursement program. For some veterans who arrange for their own transportation, the USVA offers reimbursement for mileage, with conditions. According to the USVA Web site, veterans who are most eligible for transportation benefits include those receiving VA pension benefits for all conditions, are in an authorized vocational rehabilitation program for all conditions, are traveling in relation to a Compensation and Pension Examination, or who can present clear evidence that they are unable to defray the cost of travel. The current reimbursement rate is $0.29 per mile, with mileage calculated by the veteran’s social worker using MapQuest or Yahoo Maps.

For ineligible veterans, the VA offers “Reduced Rate Transportation,” a reimbursement program that applies primarily to bus transportation, but can be used with any transportation service offered to the public. To receive reimbursement, a veteran must present the required form supplied by her or his VA social worker to the driver to fill out mileage information. After the form is completed, the veteran then submits it to the VA within 30 days of the medical appointment. The veteran pays the full fare up front, and receives reimbursement about two to three weeks after the form is submitted.

What transit agencies can do
Medical transportation for veterans is a major issue currently under inquiry at the Community Transportation Association of America. Here are a few ideas for your transit agency to consider to help provide more effective service for disabled veterans.

First, coordination is key in developing a cohesive transportation network. According to Anne Smith, director of Riley County Area Transportation Authority in Manhattan, Kansas, “Our purpose is to provide service for those who need it most. To get veterans to the VA in Topeka, we must coordinate with DAV to get the veterans to the DAV bus (which is owned and operated by the DAV) on time. This coordination can mean that our drivers may need to start their shifts early that day.”

By coordinating with the nearest VA hospital and DAV volunteer, you can help veterans travel to appointments independently, without the help of family.

Second, anticipating the needs of veterans is essential in providing the best service possible. According to Patty Gibbons, transportation coordinator at Independence Inc. in Lawrence, Kansas, “One time we had a veteran who wasn’t able to return to our bus at 2:30. We waited another—

## Table 1. Estimated number of disabled veterans in Kansas in counties with 20,000 or more residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Estimated number of disabled veterans</th>
<th>Percent of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barton</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler</td>
<td>1,547</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherokee</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowley</td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>2,102</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finney</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geary</td>
<td>1,281</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>6,590</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labette</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavenworth</td>
<td>2,195</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McPherson</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>658</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>1,069</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reno</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saline</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedgwick</td>
<td>10,425</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seward</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawnee</td>
<td>5,187</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumner</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyandotte</td>
<td>3,687</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

er two hours for him.” Anticipating this kind of layover for your drivers—although a rare event, according to Gibbons—can help you plan staff schedules more efficiently and improve dispatching in your agency during these times.

In addition, simple efforts can go a long way, such as helping your drivers understand how to fill out the appropriate travel reimbursement forms required by the USVA. To download the most current reimbursement form, visit http://www.usa-federal-forms.com/usa-fedforms-dod-va/dod-va-3068-nonclickable.pdf.

**Conclusion**

With VA hospitals few and far between in Kansas, lengthy trips for disabled veterans present a transportation challenge. Often, transportation services available in cities are seldom found in smaller communities where they are also needed. As more injured soldiers return from Iraq and Afghanistan and as aging veterans of previous wars require more services from their VA hospitals, it is essential that they have options when it comes to transportation. By establishing coordination between the nearest VA hospital and DAV volunteers and educating your drivers on how to assist disabled riders or how to fill out appropriate reimbursement forms, your agency can deliver the best possible service to those who need and deserve it the most—Kansas disabled veterans.

**Proposed ADA revisions, continued from page 1**

that the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (ATBCB or “Access Board”) is making revisions to the ADA guidelines for buses and vans that could affect your agency.

While the majority of the update consists of editorial changes, some amendments and new regulations have been included in the proposed **Accessibility Guidelines**. The most substantive changes focus on lift and ramp load capacities, emergency ramp and bridgeplate operation, front, rear, and side approach space requirements for mobility devices, and securement system guidelines. In addition, the proposed update uses plain language and a new format, making the guidelines easier to read and understand.

This article brings you up to date on the proposed revisions to ADA guidelines relevant to transit, originally issued by the Access Board in September 1991. It is important that your agency checks your vehicles, equipment and product documentation to ensure compliance, but rest assured that KDOT procurement procedures have kept your vehicles ahead of the pack.

**Proposed revisions**

*Lift design load.* “The lift design load shall be 300 kg (660 pounds) minimum” (T302.2). While most of this section is consistent with the previous edition, the amendment increases the design load from 600 pounds to 660 pounds. The 2009 Kansas transit vehicle specifications exceed the proposed regulations by specifying that all lifts must “be of sufficient strength to support an 800-pound load.”

*Ramp and bridgeplate design load.* “The design load of ramps and bridgeplates 760 mm (30 inches) or more in length shall be 300 kg (660 pounds) minimum. The design load of ramps and bridgeplates less than 760 mm in length shall be 150 kg (330 pounds) minimum” (T303.2). The existing regulations specify design loads of 600 pounds for ramps and bridgeplates 30 inches or more and design loads of 300 pounds for ramps and bridgeplates less than 30 inches. Kansas vehicle specs do not contain this requirement, so take care to ensure your vehicles meet the regulations.

The most substantive proposed changes focus on lift and ramp load capacities, emergency operations, approach requirements for mobility devices, and wheelchair securement guidelines.
Q&A about public transit and wheelchairs

On its Web site, the FTA Office of Civil Rights has answered some questions regarding public transit and wheelchairs. The answers are based on current ADA regulations and do not reflect any of the proposed modifications to the regulations. The complete Q&A session can be accessed at http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/ada/civil_rights_3894.html

What is a “common wheelchair?” The existing regulations define a common wheelchair “as a mobility aid belonging to any class of three or four-wheeled devices, usable indoors, designed for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered.” The description goes on to explain that the device does not exceed 30 inches wide and 48 inches long, and it must weigh less than 600 pounds when occupied. [NOTE: “In its discussion of its latest proposed revisions, the Access Board stated that: “[t]he definition of ‘common wheelchair’ has been removed. Some transit agencies have used the definition inappropriately to exclude certain wheelchairs and mobility devices from buses, even when those wheelchairs and mobility devices could be accommodated within the vehicle…[i]f DOT wishes to retain a definition of ‘common wheelchair’ in its regulations for other reasons, DOT can do so, and comments on that subject should be addressed to DOT when DOT updates its regulations.”]

Operators should remember that they are not permitted to deny transportation to a wheelchair user who does not have a wheelchair brake or for refusing to set the wheelchair brake. [If the passenger won’t set the brake, the driver should politely request that the individual set the brake and continue scheduled service.]

Are electric scooters and other mobility devices considered common wheelchairs? Electric scooters or other mobility devices that meet the physical specifications of a “common wheelchair” must be treated as such.

Can transit operators require that wheelchairs be secured to the vehicle? Yes, as long as the agency has an established policy in place. The DOT’s ADA regulations allow operators to require that all riders have their wheelchairs secured while aboard the vehicle. Thus, operators are permitted to deny service if a passenger refuses to have his or her wheelchair properly secured.

What securement equipment must be available on public vehicles? The regulations require that all vehicles have a two-part system; the first part secures the wheelchair and the second part consists of a seatbelt and shoulder harness to protect the wheelchair user.

May a transit operator deny boarding to a passenger whose wheelchair is difficult to secure? No. If the device meets the requirements of a common wheelchair, the driver must allow the rider to board. The ADA requirements stipulate that the operator must use their best efforts to secure any mobility device that meets the definition of a common wheelchair.

Does the wheelchair user have to use the provided seatbelt and harness? No, unless the agency has an established regulation requiring all passengers to wear seat belts. Under ADA non-discrimination provisions, individual passengers may not be singled out for specific regulations, but the operator may establish a policy that all passengers wear seatbelts.

What kinds of services must transit personnel provide? ADA regulations require operators to train staff to treat individuals with disabilities sensitively and to operate equipment safely. Attendant-type services, such as carrying personal belonging, are not required, but operators are required to assist passengers with boarding and disembarking.

Can a transit operator require passengers to transfer from a wheelchair to a vehicle seat? No. An operator may request that the rider transfer to a stationary seat, but the driver is not allowed to force the rider to transfer.
ADA revisions, continued from page 5

vehicles meet these specifications when they are finalized.

Ramp and bridgeplate emergency operation. “Power operated ramps and bridgeplates shall be capable of being operated manually and in a manner that is safe for the occupant and operator if the power fails” (T303.4). This proposed regulation is a new addition to the ADA guidelines. Kansas vehicle specs require lifts to be equipped with a hand pump for lifts, but there is no mention of emergency operation guidelines for ramps and bridgeplates.

Front or rear approach wheelchair space requirements. “Where the short side of the wheelchair space can be entered from the front or rear and the confined space is more than 610 mm (24 inches) deep, the wheelchair space shall be 915 mm (36 inches) minimum by 1220 mm (48 inches) minimum” (T402.2.1). This revision requires additional maneuvering space for wheelchairs that are confined on all or part of three sides. Standards from the ADA accessibility guidelines for buildings and facilities were used as the benchmark for this revision. Please take care in ensuring compliance because Kansas vehicle specs make no mention of front or rear approach wheelchair space requirements.

Side approach wheelchair space requirements. “Where the long side of the wheelchair space can be entered from the side and the confined space is more than 380 mm (15 inches) deep, the wheelchair space shall be 760 mm (30 inches) minimum by 1525 mm (60 inches) minimum” (T402.4.2). Similar to the front/rear requirements, the new guidelines use the ADA standards for buildings and facilities to provide additional maneuvering space where wheelchairs are confined on part or all of three sides. Again, Kansas vehicle specs do not mention side approach wheelchair space requirements, so please familiarize yourself with this regulation.

Securement systems. “Securement systems shall be capable of securing wheelchairs and mobility aids that can enter and maneuver within an accessible vehicle. Securement systems shall be automatic or easy to operate by a trained person (T403.1). This update clarifies that securement systems must be used to secure wheelchairs and other mobility devices that are able to enter an accessible vehicle.

Compliance timeline and safety

The Access Board began revising the ADA guidelines for buses and vans in late 2008, and the draft revisions were issued for public comment through January 20, 2009. Ketrina Nelson, from the FTA’s Office of Communications & Congressional Affairs, stated that the Access Board and DOT will each have to publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register, followed by a public comment period and a Final Rule for the new guidelines. She said, “In 1991, DOT and the Access Board published their NPRMs and Final Rules simultaneously… [but] the Access Board has not yet begun drafting its NPRM, [so], it is impossible to anticipate a timeframe” for mandated compliance at the DOT level.

The proposed revisions to the ADA guidelines can be looked at as a great opportunity to reevaluate the accessibility and safety of your transit vehicles.

The proposed revisions to the ADA guidelines can be looked at as a great opportunity to reevaluate the accessibility and safety of your vehicles. While public transit vehicles in compliance with Kansas transit specs already exceed some of the proposed federal guidelines, agencies should verify that their vehicles meet both the Access Board and KDOT requirements. Plus, a thorough evaluation of your vehicles can serve as a refresher course on ADA guidelines for transit managers and drivers. This may also be a perfect time to go over proper techniques for assisting passengers with boarding and securement.

A summary of the proposed revisions, along with a comparison with the existing 1991 Guidelines, is located at http://www.access-board.gov/news/vehicle-draft2.htm. A thorough reassessment will only ease your mind and reassure that your agency is providing the best service possible to riders with disabilities.

Sources:

Tips for drug and alcohol test scheduling

by David Murray

An article in our July 2008 issue provided a reminder that following the FTA protocol for drug and alcohol test scheduling is the responsibility of the transit agency. This article outlines the protocol so you can avoid problems if you are audited.

In the busy world of a public transit manager, it might be easy to put off or cut corners on drug and alcohol testing, but this program is essential to deterring prohibited drug and alcohol use and to ensuring the safety of your customers.

If your agency had ever been audited for compliance with the US DOT Workplace Drug Testing Program (49 CFR Part 40), you would understand how important it is to comply with the testing protocols required by FTA and enforced by KDOT. Not only does the protocol help ensure a safe workplace; agencies that fail to abide by the rules may be penalized if the FTA finds them directly at fault.

According to Annette McNaul of TMHC Services, Inc., some FTA penalties have resulted in a reduction or removal of transit funding.

To comply with DOT and FTA regulations, agencies receiving federal dollars are required to drug-test 25 percent of their safety-sensitive employees on an unannounced and unpredictable basis. The regulations also stipulate that 10 percent of the employees be tested for alcohol use.

Employees must be randomly selected for testing. TMHC Services, Inc. of Topeka is contracted with KDOT to oversee the state drug and alcohol testing program and they are the entity that generates a random listing of employees for testing.

Each agency must have a staff member assigned as the Designated Employee Representative (DER) for the drug and alcohol program. Your agency’s DER is responsible for:

- Knowing the program’s regulations;
- Making sure employees have access to drug and alcohol policies;
- Maintaining secure records separate from human resource records;
- Working closely with representatives from TMHC Services, Inc. and collection sites;
- Approving yearly data reports to submit to KDOT;
- Ensuring that collections are spread throughout the testing period; and
- Ensuring that pre-employment testing complies with FTA and DOT regulations.

The FTA consults agencies’ annual drug and alcohol testing reports in their audits to guarantee program compliance.

The scheduling protocol
Prior to the first day of each quarter, the transit agency’s DER generates a pool of all safety-sensitive workers and provides it to TMHC Services, Inc. A list of the randomly selected employees is returned to the transit agency’s DER via certified mail, and the DER works with the specimen collectors to schedule testing times spaced throughout the entire work period. McNaul emphasized that protocol compliance falls on the transit agency’s shoulders, and it is your DER’s responsibility to ensure that the sampling schedule remains unpredictable to your employees.

Testing should be performed either just before, during, or just after the selected individual has performed a sensitive function. For all testing it is important to schedule testing throughout the work day, work week and quarter to keep the testing truly unpredictable to your employees.

Monitoring and FTA audits
TMHC Services, Inc. supervises agency compliance throughout the...
year. The monitoring is performed to proactively prevent negative findings should the FTA conduct a statewide audit of Kansas agencies. McNaul noted that FTA audits typically occur early in the year, and they consist of 4-5 auditors who look at every aspect of the state’s drug testing program.

The auditors want to see that the transit agency has followed testing protocols, conducted sampling well spaced throughout the quarter (and not on a predictable schedule, such as the first Monday of each month), and complied with the regulations of 49 CFR Part 40.

McNaul stated, “We work closely with KDOT to ensure that correct protocols are followed.” TMHC Services, Inc. also works with the collectors and collection sites throughout the state to ensure they abide by DOT and FTA requirements.

**Noncompliance**

If your agency is audited and found to be noncompliant in its drug and alcohol test scheduling procedures, the FTA will give you a specific amount of time to address the citations. McNaul indicated that agencies typically have 90 days to rectify the identified issues. At that point, a written report detailing the steps your agency has taken to correct the citations must be submitted to the FTA.

For more information, contact Annette McNaul, TMHC Services, Inc.’s Director of Marketing and Customer Services at amcnaul@tmhcservices.com or (785) 291-9124.


Is your agency an “employer of choice?”

You can develop compensation and a working environment that will make your agency a place that attracts and retains high quality employees.

Two keys to successfully attracting and retaining quality employees are 1) creating a positive work environment, and 2) providing compensation that is competitive and adequately meets employees’ expectations. Above all else, these two factors will help transform a transit job into a transit career. These factors were identified by a group of researchers commissioned by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) to study hiring, retention, and compensation practices that provide agencies with superior employees.

The study

In 2008, the researchers, KFH Group of Bethesda, MD, created employee compensation guidelines based on their research findings for transit providers in rural and small urban areas. The researchers analyzed the characteristics and hiring and retention practices of 360 agencies in 45 states to help develop the guidebook. They found that the agency’s service area size and regional location, proximity...
Adopt these marketing strategies to promote local businesses and your transit agency

Most marketing efforts focus on directly promoting the services of the transit agency; here are two programs that focus on promoting other groups and companies, but the transit agency benefits monetarily and receives visibility as well.

Adopt-a-Stop
The City of Greeley, Colorado has developed a campaign to “Help Keep Greeley’s Bus Stops Accessible and Clean.” The program invites individuals, companies, public agencies, churches, schools, and other organizations to help maintain accessible and clean bus stops throughout Greeley’s fixed route system. The participants commit to volunteer for a period between six months and two years. During this period, they agree to clear their stop(s) of snow and ice, and they pick up litter around the stop on a regular basis.

Greeley’s transit agency posted a flyer about the program that included postage paid forms for those interested in volunteering. They followed up with advertisements on the government access television channel and notices in the city’s quarterly newsletter.

Greeley has 300 bus stops, 48 of which have been adopted so far. Lori Bernal, City of Greeley employee, estimates that half of those stops have been adopted by businesses as a means of free advertising for their companies.

Just like an adopt-a-highway program, a volunteer group that provides clean-up can have its name posted at the bus stop. This program not only maintains a clean environment around the stops, it also shows that the volunteers are committed to helping others. What a great way of getting the community involved in public transit!

Adopt-a-Bus
If your agency doesn’t have designated bus stops or if you’re just looking to generate additional funding, then an Adopt-a-Bus program might be for you. Your vehicles are traveling throughout the community all day, so why not turn them into moving advertisements?

The Big Sky Transportation District worked with the Montana Department of Transportation to develop a fare-free intercity route serving the communities of Big Sky and Bozeman, Montana. The Moonlight Basin resort learned that the new route was being developed, so resort representatives contacted the transit agency to see how they could participate. The District and the resort agreed to allow the resort to subsidize the equivalent of fare revenues in exchange for sponsorship of the route and [installing] advertising wraps on the motorcoaches that would serve the line. Representatives

by David Murray
from both parties saw this as a mutually beneficial alliance.

While the number of ski resorts in Kansas able to subsidize public transportation is slim (!), agencies might seek out local businesses that might welcome an opportunity to help offset the costs of public transit. These businesses will receive advertising benefits and they get the satisfaction of knowing that they are aiding a valuable service. Contracts of varying lengths can be created to meet the needs of the businesses and the transit agency supplying the advertising space.

The benefits

Adopt-a-Stop and Adopt-a-Bus programs provide agencies with publicity, free maintenance, and additional sources of revenues to meet the growing needs. Bernal said the City of Greeley considers the program successful because it promotes a needed service and “relieves the Streets Division.”

Adopt-a-Stop programs give customers the piece of mind that their bus stops will be clean and accessible when they need a ride, and Adopt-a-Bus programs create a mutually beneficial relationship that improves revenues and may create increased ridership. Whichever approach is best for your agency, these programs get the community thinking about transit.

Sources:


Getting and keeping the good ones

Your agency should strive to be a local employer of choice. This can be accomplished by creating an open work environment where employee input is encouraged.

Ways to create an open work environment

• Schedule regular staff meetings, performance reviews, and training reviews.
• Use employee surveys and suggestion boxes to gain employee insight.
• Encourage employees to share opinions with management and to ask for assistance when needed.
• Follow up on all concerns and show that employee input is important.
• Never restrict access to management or discourage complaints.

Tips for attracting quality employees

• Increase the applicant pool. A larger pool increases your chances of having quality employees apply. Post positions in the local newspaper and on Web sites.
• Offer employee referral bonuses. This puts the onus on your employees for finding quality co-workers, and the bonuses are a great catalyst for finding quality employees.
• Conduct background checks and screen applicants through temp agencies or their references. By asking about their work ethic and abilities, you are more likely to identify problem applicants before they become problem employees.

Tips for retaining quality employees

• Make wages and benefits competitive.
• Offer training opportunities and create an enjoyable work environment
• If possible, provide a growth path. If your employees see opportunities for career advancement, they are more likely to remain with the agency.
• Provide scheduling flexibility. This will reduce stress and your employees will likely work harder in response.

Remember, you can always train an employee to drive a bus, but you can’t train the person to be a good employee. More details about these recommendations can be found in the October 2006 edition of the Kansas Trans Reporter at http://www.ksrtap.org.
Do you know where to go if a tornado strikes near your office? Do you know how to take care of an elderly person at home if a flood occurs? The Emergency Preparedness Guide for Transit Employees on the Job and at Home by the Federal Transit Administration and the National Transit Institute is a resource for what an individual should do when emergencies such as these take place.

The resource is split into three sections: “On the Job,” “At Home” and “Emergency Supplies Kits Checklist.” A broad range of emergencies is detailed with easy-to-read bullet points and photographs throughout.

To prepare for emergencies while on the job, the book advises workers to be involved, alert and prepared. The guide discusses what to do before an emergency happens, what to do during any emergency and what to do in specific emergency situations. Readers will learn what to expect in various kinds of emergencies such as tornados, fires and power outages, as well as in security situations involving suspicious activity, explosions and hazardous materials.

In the section titled, “At Home,” the publication recommends emergency precautions that involve children, elderly persons, dependent relatives and pets. In this section the guide walks the reader through things to consider before an emergency, such as awareness of what emergency could potentially strike in your area, insurance coverage and more. This section contains information that your agency may also wish to share with your riders, especially regarding special considerations for home with elderly or dependent residents.

The “Emergency Supplies Kits Checklist” section contains helpful lists readers can consult to assemble their own emergency supplies kits both on the job and at home.

To view this publication, go to http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/epg/default.htm.

These are just two examples of the kinds of natural disasters that can, and do, visit Kansas communities. These events impact your services and your employees, on the job and at their homes. Advance preparation will help your employees respond to emergencies with greater assurance they are doing all they can.
Phone-based GPS — Low cost technology

As Internet and cell phone technology improves, transit agencies are finding that riders are demanding more flexible and faster information than paper maps and schedules. In addition, some agencies have already found that accessing real-time data on their bus fleets allows for more efficient dispatching. Implementing phone-based GPS is a worthwhile consideration for any transit agency seeking to improve efficiency and accountability.

What is phone-based GPS?
A phone-based Global Positioning System (GPS) uses satellites to locate a GPS-capable cell phone signal, and then spatial data is transmitted to a computer server that stores this information. Internet companies like Microsoft and Google have created applications that allow for this data to be interactively viewed online in real-time. Refresh rates (how often the data is updated online) are between five seconds and three minutes depending on the Web application used. Implementing phone-based GPS is a worthwhile consideration for any transit agency seeking to improve efficiency and accountability.

Why use it?
There are two primary reasons a transit agency might want to implement a phone-based GPS system—for their own dispatching purposes, or to allow riders to be able to view the location of a bus on their Website, or both. Since the cost and difficulty of implementing a system depends on the purpose for doing so, a transit agency should weigh the benefits and costs prior to using a phone-based GPS service.

How it’s done
There are a few options to consider for implementing phone-based GPS technology. Most transit agencies that use this technology today rely on Microsoft Virtual Earth or Google to display real-time data. These services are free and have refresh rates between one minute and three minutes, although to use these services, interactive maps must be embedded in the agency’s own Web site.

Agencies that do not already have a Web site must pay a small yearly registration and maintenance fee to own a Web site domain. In addition, some setup is required by the agency. For example, agencies wanting to go through Google will need to download a tracking device for their computer and GPS-capable cell phone(s). For more information or to download this device from Google, visit http://sourceforge.net/projects/gpsmapper.

For agencies wanting to improve only their dispatching procedures and not display any online information for riders, setup is a bit easier. A Web site in which to embed the information is not required. A recent innovation by Google—called Google Latitude—allows individuals to view locational data that is updated approximately every three minutes on Google’s Web server.

In addition to online setup, an appropriate cell phone and data plan is needed. The data plan can cost around $10 a month, while the cost of the phone depends on the particular device. Most agencies use the i335 Motorola provided by Sprint/Nextel that not only sends data but also allows for a push-to-talk feature that functions much like a two-way radio.

Other appropriate cell phones include:
• Any phone that is android-powered (such as T-Mobile’s G1);
• A Java-enabled device (such as many Sony Ericson devices);
• A Symbian S60 device (such as a Nokia smartphone).
• Any BlackBerry device with a color display.

by Nick Pappas
There are two primary reasons a transit agency might want to implement a phone-based GPS system—for their own dispatching purposes, or to allow riders to be able to view the location of a bus on their Web site, or both.

ed individuals to view locational data that is updated approximately every three minutes on Google’s Web server. Setup is free; all that is required is a Google account (which is free) and a GPS-capable cell phone. Although only 100 viewers can view the location of a particular phone, this should not be a problem for an agency only seeking to improve dispatching. For more information or to download this service from Google, visit http://www.google.com/latitude.

Conclusion
Implementing a phone-based GPS system is a great way to improve dispatching as well as provide better, timelier information to riders. Using free services, such as Microsoft Virtual Earth or Google, your agency can easily set up a system of its own. All that is required is a GPS-capable cell phone (and a Web site domain if your agency wants to provide information to riders). These low-cost improvements will certainly keep your agency at the forefront of transit rider service.

For more information:
For an overview of Larry Harman’s study on low-cost GPS and Web mapping for emergency response in rural areas, visit the GIS Development Website: http://www.gisdevelopment.net/application/natural_hazards/Overview/mi08_255.htm
To view Larry Harman’s presentation on phone-based GPS, as presented at the 18th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation, visit: http://location.net.in/india/2008/conference/UmaShamafnftp.ppt#266,8,Boston_to_Provincetown_A-GPS AVL_test_on_fast_ferry
To learn more about how Google Maps can be interactively embedded in your agency’s Website or to download the free software, visit Source Forge’s Website: http://sourceforge.net/projects/gpsmapper
For some examples of phone-based GPS Websites in Massachusetts, visit the GeoGraphics Laboratory: http://geolabvirtualmaps.com
For more information about Google Latitude, check out: http://google.com/latitude

A good example of a successful phone-based GPS system is the one developed by Bridgewater State College in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Using Microsoft Virtual Earth, BSC developed a Web mapping application in 2007 that effectively provides an interactive Web site for riders with data refresh times as little as one second.

Larry Harman, who led a study on using GPS-capable phones for transit, said, “It is important to implement this kind of technology in rural areas where headways are long and it is necessary to know where the next bus is. The customer is the most important consideration, where the end objective should be to help the consumer better understand travel. How to get this information to the people who need it, easier and more intuitively, should be our driving question.”

Although his team created their own computer program that ultimately allowed for the fast refresh times they experienced, Harman suggests that any community can take advantage of their local high school or community college to obtain a similar result. Computer departments—in his experience—typically welcome the challenge of creating such a program. However, for an agency wanting to improve dispatching alone, Harman agrees that a less sophisticated program with slower refresh times, such as Google Latitude, can be a useful starting tool.

“Google Latitude is a good alternative for providers who may not have the time or technology to develop better applications.” Still, Harman suggests, whatever has the potential to most benefit the customer should drive the implementation of this technology. To view the Bridgewater State College phone-based GPS system, visit http://www.geolabvirtualmaps.com/Bridgew.aspx.
Employee retention, continued from page 10

salaries and other nonmonetary forms of compensation. Based on the responses, the research team identified a variety of benefits that were commonly included in a full-time employee benefits package. These included vacation time, sick leave, employee health insurance, retirement plans, and life insurance.

While including all of these benefits may not be feasible for smaller agencies, prioritizing your compensation package to meet the needs of your employees may be the answer. Ask your employees what benefits they value and need most. Not only will this help you understand the relative importance of the benefits you provide, it will show employees you are concerned about their welfare.

The researchers also stress honesty when talking to employees about compensation and the possibility of promotions and raises. By being upfront from the outset, staff won’t be surprised by the outcome of their scheduled performance evaluations. This will also help employees set personal goals that will give them a sense of ownership and improve the overall productivity in the workplace.

Study yields computer-based compensation tool

The researchers developed a free Microsoft Excel-based tool that generates average wage rates and a listing of benefits typically offered in your service area. The formula was based on the provider survey results.

The tool, which can be found at the TRB Web page at http://trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=9282, provides an easy way to evaluate existing compensation levels and it allows you to compare your standards with those of similar agencies throughout the state. You can have the results in a matter of seconds once you enter a few simple details about your service area and staff.

Conclusion

These are not the most stable times, employment-wise, so there may be more quality employees looking for work right now, if your agency needs to fill positions. The research conducted by KFH Group provides a great set of guidelines for attracting, retaining, and compensating lasting employees. The successful transit agency has a staff of dedicated employees who are committed to serving their clients. Recruiting and maintaining a staff focused on these principles will only be possible if your agency listens and responds to the needs of your employees.

Sources:
Resources

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 66045. Or fax the form to 785/ 864-3199.

Online resources

Coordination—Myth & Realities. National Resource Center for Human Service Transportation, 2008, 8 pages. The first
issue in a series of myths and realities concerning coordination, this publication examines insurance barriers that make
coordination between public transit agencies and human service agencies difficult.
Download at http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/CoordinationMythsvol1no1_Insurance_080710.pdf
or Send hard copy

Other online resources:

this manual that provides minimum guidelines and requirements for accessibility standards. This guide establishes the pri-
mary guidelines upon which all revisions to date have been made.

What Employers Need to Know About DOT Drug and Alcohol Testing. Federal Transit Administration, 2008, 61 pages. FTA
published these guidelines and best practices to ensure that transportation employees are adhering to DOT alcohol and
drug testing regulations.

Employee Compensation Guidelines for Transit Providers in Rural and Small Urban Areas. Transit Cooperative Research
Program, Report 127, 2008, 214 pages. This guidebook assists transit providers to recruit, hire, and retain qualified employ-
ees by providing compensation and benefit data from comparable transit systems.

Automatic Vehicle Location Successful Transit Applications. Federal Highway Administration, 2000, 20 pages. FHWA pro-
vides a summary of Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) systems that have been implemented in various cities throughout
the country and gives recommendations for agencies wanting to implement a system of their own.

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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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- Video lending library
- Computer database searches
- Referral services
- E-mail discussion group

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

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