In larger cities, commuters often have a variety of choices in how they get to work. The convenience of having reliable public transportation is not only a great asset, but still the only way some citizens can afford their increasingly longer commutes during an era of economic uncertainty. However, it’s a fiscal challenge to provide transportation choices to those who reside in rural or small communities. While paratransit service can help serve most of these individuals, a more convenient option for groups of people with a common destination is a vanpool service. This article describes the characteristics of different types of vanpool services, gives examples of successful vanpools in other rural areas, and offers suggestions as to how your agency could establish vanpooling in Kansas.

How have agencies responded to increases in 5311 funding?

Federal Non-Urbanized Area Formula Program (Section 5311) funding has grown significantly since SAFETEA-LU was enacted in 2005. What are transit agencies experiencing as a result of this increased funding? KFH Group, Bethesda, MD, is analyzing what the increased funding has achieved in rural America, and this article will report on their preliminary findings and provide some examples from Kansas.
can implement this service in your own community.

**What are vanpools?**

Simply put, vanpools are a more formal arrangement, among a larger number of interested people, than are carpools—usually between five and 15 people. According to the Kansas Energy Council, riders benefit from participating in a vanpool as opposed to a carpool when their commute exceeds 15 miles. While each person’s commute time will likely increase due to the increased number of stops to pick up riders, the overall cost of commuting will decrease, especially as the vanpool carries more riders.

**Types of vanpools**

There are four common types of vanpool services: third-party vanpools, employer-sponsored vanpools, owner-operated vanpools, and public transit vanpools. In **third-party vanpools**, a private organization administers vanpool services for commuters, companies, and government agencies. The vendor covers maintenance, insurance, and administration of the vanpool, while the vanpool members are responsible for promoting their program, identifying a driver and driver backups, and collecting fees. The fees charged to the riders are used for the gas and the cost of leasing the van from the organization. An example of a third-party vanpool service is one offered by Enterprise Rent-A-Car in California.

The second type of vanpool service is an **employer-sponsored vanpool**. This is generally the least expensive vanpooling option for riders in the long-term, where employers purchase or lease the vans and cover maintenance, insurance, and administration. However, the start-up costs associated with buying or leasing vehicles may make this an unattractive option for employers. Also, these types of programs are often limited to employees of one company who may be charged a fee for their participation. These fees often cover overhead costs of the vehicles as well as gasoline and insurance.

An example of an employer-sponsored vanpool is the State of Kansas Vanpool Program that is provided by the Kansas Department of Administration. Established since the mid-1980s, this program has provided efficient transportation for riders commuting daily to Topeka. Although anyone can participate in one of these state-sponsored vanpools, at least 50 percent of the riders must be state employees. Also, the driver of the vanpool—called the vanpool coordinator—is responsible for finding riders and standbys, determining the fare for each rider, collecting fares, scheduling maintenance on the van, and completing all paperwork for the Department of Administration.

According to Abe Rezayazdi, a vanpool coordinator from the State of Kansas Vanpool Program, the fee structure for riders is based on mileage, how old the specific van is, and a state-mandated assumption about the price of gasoline. The fees generated go toward repaying the Department of Administration for the cost of the van. For a vanpool that operates from Lawrence to Topeka, for example, riders can expect to pay between $2.50 and $3.50 for the 60-mile roundtrip drive, including toll charges. This amounts to approximately five cents per mile per rider. For a van that holds between 10 and 12 riders, this amounts to a fee of 50 to 60 cents per mile charged to the vanpool as a group.

The third type of vanpool service is a **rider-operated vanpool**. While capital costs can be minimal if a rider already owns a van, issues of affordable and adequate insurance coverage arise. Also, personal liability can become an issue, leading many rider-operated vanpools to organize as corporations. Further, the vehicle owner(s) must arrange for maintenance, insurance, and billing.

The final type of vanpool service is a **service operated by a public transit agency**, where maintenance, insurance, and billing are the responsibility of the transit agency, as is the cost of the vehicle and all operating expenses (including gas). The van is leased to one driver, a designated collector pays the agency (usually monthly), and the promotion of the vanpool is the responsibility of the members. The fees charged to riders go toward repaying the transit agency for the cost of the van and operating expenses.

Vanpooling allows a rider a chance to relax during the commute.
Benefits of vanpools
Implementing a vanpool program benefits everyone: the vanpool driver, riders, employers, and the community and environment. Since the vanpool driver is responsible for storing the van and is usually allocated a set number of personal miles for use of the van, the need for the driver to purchase a personal vehicle is reduced. Also, because the driving responsibility can be transferred to any eligible member of the vanpool, a long-term commitment is not required of a vanpool driver. Further, the driver does not typically pay for his or her ride to work.

Perhaps those who benefit the most from a vanpool program are the riders themselves. At a minimum, travel stress is reduced; access to job markets is increased for those with no transportation of their own; commuting costs, such as gasoline, maintenance, toll charges, and insurance premiums are reduced; and the depreciation of riders’ personal vehicles is reduced.

Employers can also benefit from their employees using vanpool services. According to the American Planning Association, construction of paved surface parking spaces can cost up to $5,000 per parking space; the reduced need to provide employees with parking can provide significant savings. Additionally, vanpools can increase an employer’s access to labor markets because vanpools can provide mobility to riders who may be unable to commute via personal vehicle. Finally, employee productivity and morale can improve due to the reduction of stress from no longer having to drive.

The benefits of a vanpool program transcend those immediately connected to such a program. The community and environment at large benefit from reduced rush-hour congestion, improved air quality, and reduced dependence on fossil fuels. In more rural areas, a vanpool program can serve communities not served by transit, it requires fewer passengers than a bus, and it can help increase allocated funding to a transit agency.

Implementing a vanpool program
The process a transit agency must undergo to implement a vanpool program includes four major steps:

1) Prior to purchasing vehicles, funding sources should be identified to decrease the costs to the transit agency as much as possible. A list of possible funding sources appears above. It is adapted from a vanpool program report published by the Arizona Department of Transportation. (See complete sources at end of this article.)

2) The second step in implementing a vanpool program is to establish ridership fees. Current vanpool programs operate at an average rate of 50 to 60 cents per mile, although this rate can vary considerably depending on the vehicle and the cost of gas, insurance, and maintenance. Some programs offer a fixed fee rate, regardless of ridership numbers, while other programs charge each vanpool based on its success in attracting and keeping riders, or on miles traveled. However, a primary component in establishing ridership fees is creating partnerships within the community.

3) Establishing partnerships, the third step, is essential in helping reduce fares for riders, as well as promoting the program to would-be riders. For example, employers who realize the benefits of vanpool programs can encourage employee participation in a vanpool by using tax incentives provided by the Internal Revenue Code’s Section 132, Commuter Choice Program. Under

Sources of funding assistance for vanpools

“Capital Cost of Contracting.” This is an FTA policy that allows for the allocation of more federal resources for vanpooling. FTA has specific guidelines and procedures for eligible expenses.

Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Funds (CMAQ). Allows funding for various vanpool-related activities meeting criteria under CMAQ guidance.

FHWA Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds. Provided by the state DOT, funds are used to promote vanpooling and ridematching services.

FTA funds. Provided by the state DOT, funds are used to promote vanpooling and ridematching services.

Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) funds. Matched with state operating funds, the state DOT can help pay for rural vanpool programs.

Municipal lease purchase. A financing method that allows transit agencies to purchase equipment on an installment basis at tax-exempt interest rates.

Advertising revenue. An advertising technique where vans are externally “wrapped” with adhesive advertisements, with fees used to finance a portion of operating expenses.

Using state contracts to purchase. A technique that saves both time and money by purchasing vehicles off of state contracts.
VANPOOLING, continued from page 3

This program, an employee’s transit or vanpool cost, up to $100 per month, is deducted from his or her pay. The employer then uses these funds to purchase a transit or vanpool pass or voucher for the employee. The employee’s taxable income is reduced, thereby saving payroll taxes for both the employee and employer, and income taxes for the employee. Additionally, if congestion is a major issue in a community, partnering with businesses to provide “vanpool only” parking entices potential riders to join.

4) The final step in implementing a vanpool program is identifying and anticipating future challenges before they arise. Most of these challenges take the form of marketing the vanpool service. Advertising is a key component in securing future riders. Strategies to address this can include face-to-face outreach and electronic communication, outreach at an employer worksite event or transportation fair, and, ultimately, word of mouth.

However, according to Abe Rezayazdi, the biggest challenge in maintaining a vanpool program is keeping up with the maintenance of the vans and completing all the necessary paperwork. In any case, anticipating challenges is crucial to the long-term success of the program.

Examples of successful transit agency vanpool programs

There are a number of successful vanpool programs throughout the nation. In New Jersey, for example, a state-promoted Vanpool Sponsorship Program is run by NJ Transit. NJ Transit uses FTA funds to provide eligible vanpools with monthly operating subsidies of $150, which are divided among each vanpool’s riders. The program has 144 vanpools and over 1,250 riders.

The Utah Transit Authority has two programs that individuals can use to establish and operate vanpools. The first helps individuals purchase vans, the second leases vans. Under the lease program, $540,000 is used per year in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) money to purchase vehicles. Because these vehicles are purchased under state contract, they are considerably cheaper than individuals could hope to pay normally. In addition, the leases cover fuel, insurance, and maintenance.

In Connecticut, a vanpool service called “Easy Street” operates a 300-vehicle vanpool program. CMAQ monies are used to purchase vans and operate the program. The monthly rate for a person commuting 50 miles roundtrip per day is $112, including fuel. A passenger can also receive a $25 or $50 reward for recruiting a new passenger. However, perhaps the biggest selling point to riders is the “guaranteed ride home program” that guarantees a ride any time during the work day in the case of an emergency.

The Washington Department of Transportation has the largest vanpool program in the country, operating over 2,000 vanpools statewide. Vans that hold eight, 12, and 15 passengers are purchased under state contract, and are considerably cheaper than individuals could hope to pay normally. In addition, the leases cover fuel, insurance, and maintenance.

However, according to Abe Rezayazdi, the biggest challenge in maintaining a vanpool program is keeping up with the maintenance of the vans and completing all the necessary paperwork. In any case, anticipating challenges is crucial to the long-term success of the program.

Conclusion

Vanpool service is becoming an increasingly desirable mode of transportation for many commuters. The benefits transcend those who are directly involved—drivers, riders, and employers—and impact the entire community and environment. Although implementation of a vanpool program does take some thought and work, there are many great examples of successful programs nationwide, and the funding sources are plentiful. With these strategies, perhaps your agency can implement the next successful vanpool program and have a positive impact in your own community.

Sources:

Personal assistance when your employees need it

As a transportation manager, you are often juggling 10 things at once, so be sure to remember that an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to you and your employees. KDOT contracted with TMHC Services, Inc. in Topeka to provide agencies with their Employee Assistance Program as part of the Drugs and Alcohol Testing Program. The service is for employees who are facing a variety of issues and personal problems.

How the EAP Works
The EAP provides counseling for employees and their immediate family members for personal problems, depression, stress, marital and relationship issues, harassment, financial and legal problems, job-related problems, alcohol and drug abuse, separation and loss, balancing work and family, and problem gambling. Should an employee test positive for drug use, the EAP program can also refer a patient to substance abuse professionals. The program connects participants with well-trained professionals who specialize in these areas to provide support and unbiased assistance.

When issues arise, your employees can call TMHC Services, Inc., anonymously, to discuss their concerns. Qualified master's level professional counselors answer the toll-free number 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. The only reference question the counselors will ask is for the caller to identify his or her employer. The counselors answering the calls can provide brief crisis intervention and assessment. They are also able to refer callers to other resources if necessary.

Should your employee want to meet with a counselor in person, TMHC Services, Inc. will schedule an appointment with a professional in the employee’s community. To make the process easier, the scheduling of the appointment will be handled by the counselor and TMHC Services, Inc. All the employee needs to do is arrive at an agreed-upon time and location.

The EAP service also provides callers with access to trained financial and legal experts. Participants receive an initial telephone or in person consultation free of charge. If the employee needs subsequent service, consultation services are provided at a 25 percent discount as a benefit for participating in the EAP.

In the unfortunate circumstance that a traumatic event occurs, a team of trained professionals will come to your workplace to provide what TMHC Services, Inc. calls Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD). The professionals will help staff and family members respond to the situation. TMHC Services, Inc. believes that confronting the problem in a timely manner can help mitigate long term consequences associated with traumatic events.

Informing your employees of this resource
TMHC Services, Inc. will provide EAP promotional materials to inform employees of the available resources. The company supplies agencies with posters and wallet cards. TMHC Services, Inc. also offers educational seminars during employee and supervisor training sessions twice a year. By reinforcing the availability of this resource, employees will hopefully contact TMHC Services, Inc.’s counselors when they need assistance.

How will your agency benefit from the program?
TMHC Services, Inc. has found that agencies actively participating in the program see a reduction in absenteeism, overall health care costs, workplace accidents, re-training costs, and lost productivity. All of these benefits will result in a healthy work environment and improved service for your clients. By using the program, you will have the peace of mind that your customers are being served by transit staff that has adequate access to services designed to maintain their health, well-being, and ability to serve.

Cost
If you receive KDOT funding and participate in the Drug and Alcohol Testing Program, the Employee Assistance Program is already available to your agency for free. As a part of the service, each employee and his or her immediate family is eligible for six free visits at their local mental health clinic for each problem, in addition to unlimited access to professionals over the telephone.

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Making efforts to improve dialysis transportation

by David Murray

The Kansas University Transportation Center (KUTC) is conducting a study to assess the transportation needs of dialysis patients in Kansas. The purpose of the study is to gather information from patients and transportation providers to be used in developing techniques to improve access to dialysis treatment within the state. This article will provide a little insight into the KUTC study, explain aspects of dialysis centers that pose challenges for collaboration, and discuss some partnership efforts that are underway in the Wichita area.

The forum provided an opportunity to begin to find solutions to meet the need for transportation to dialysis treatment centers.

For those of you who do not receive KDOT funding, you can expect to pay between $1.50 and $2.50 per employee per month for the EAP program through TMHC Services, Inc. The cost is determined by the number of covered employees and the number of face-to-face visits your agency wants to provide for each employee.

Regardless of the level of service you choose, all contracts with TMHC Services, Inc., give employees and family members unlimited access to counselors through the toll-free number. If a counselor isn’t able to answer a caller’s question, they will connect the caller with another counselor who specializes in the particular area.

Conclusion
TMHC Services, Inc.’s Employee Assistance Program offers your agency a great opportunity to support your employees with the personal assistance needed to maintain a positive workplace. Please be sure to take advantage of this opportunity. It is a useful resource for you and your employees, and it will likely improve morale around the office and ensure better customer service.

For more information, please contact Deb Chenoweth, Vice-President of Drug and Alcohol Testing Services, at (800) 886-1123, ext. 123, or via email at dchenoweth@tmhcservices.com.

Source:
providers who decide to take it upon themselves to get the collaboration ball rolling by dropping by the center. I would recommend contacting a social worker at your local dialysis center by telephone and setting a meeting to discuss your mutual concerns. This method may help prevent an awkward extended wait outside the dialysis unit.

Dialysis transportation forum
In response to the growing need for improved services, Valerhy Powers, director of transportation & physical disabilities for Sedgwick County Department on Aging, organized a dialysis transportation forum in Wichita. The forum was held a day before the November 4th elections, but the importance of this topic even attracted a campaigning councilman to attend. In addition, more than 25 representatives from dialysis agencies and transportation providers attended to discuss ways to better serve area clients.

Prior to the forum, the Sedgwick County Department on Aging and Wichita State University Center for Community Support and Research surveyed dialysis providers to determine the transportation needs of patients in the Sedgwick County area. The respondents discussed accessibility issues and provided comments about the primary problems affecting their patients.

The meeting began with introductions from all of the participants. This provided an opportunity for the attendees to describe their concerns about dialysis treatment accessibility. Following the introductions, a WSU Center for Community Support and Research representative presented the results of the provider survey. According to her findings, the majority of the patients living within Wichita’s city limits have adequate access to treatment via personal or readily available public transportation. In contrast, survey results showed that obtaining adequate transportation was a far greater concern for many clients living in less urbanized areas surrounding Wichita.

Following the discussion of survey results, Valerhy Powers described many of the obstacles that are confronting transportation agencies and patients regarding gaining access to the lifesaving treatment. Specifically, she described the exorbitant costs to patients and transit providers and discussed how dialysis treatment times often do not correspond with transit service times.

These two presentations got everybody on the same page. The floor was then opened-up for an informal discussion about ways to improve services to dialysis facilities, and it gave Michael Vinson (Wichita MTA Director) an opportunity to discuss the regulatory requirements limiting paratransit service, such as a cap on the number of “standing appointments” to 50 percent of total ridership. However, Vinson and all of the transit personnel represented at the forum showed a great deal of interest in working with the dialysis centers to better serve their clientele.

This forum proved to be very successful in illustrating how many people are concerned with addressing the issue of travel to dialysis treatment. The forum gave dialysis workers and transportation providers an opportunity to begin to find some solutions to meeting this growing problem. In fact, the meeting was such a success, participants agreed to work together to research a variety of topics and report their findings at a follow-up meeting. Some of the assigned tasks included mapping the zip codes of patients receiving dialysis treatment in the Wichita area and developing a list of best practices from other states that have been used to better serve patients’ transportation needs.

Conclusion
Providing adequate access for critical medical services is an important concern for many transit providers throughout the state. The Kansas University Transportation Center hopes to facilitate improved collaboration by gaining a better understanding of the issues confronting transportation providers and patients seeking dialysis service. Through this study, and with the help of concerned parties, we hope to provide some solutions that may improve access for dialysis patients. Stay tuned for additional information about this study.
More ideas for marketing your agency

When it comes to public transportation and local communities, there are many inventive ways to get people “on board.”

Speakers bureaus. Several local business clubs and groups (Chambers of Commerce, Optimists and Jaycees) as well as retirement homes, youth centers and churches, regularly hold meetings in your community. Reach out to these groups and arrange to speak at an event or meeting. This will generate exposure and support for your transit system. Oftentimes, just a simple phone call will get you in touch with the right individual.

Community events. Easter is just a few months away, and many communities have town-wide Easter egg hunts. Your agency could bring a bus to these events and give your agency free and simple advertising. [Be sure to review limitations on the use of your vehicles under the charter rule to ensure you comply.] The Easter Bunny could ride on the bus and offer free rides for the first week or month of a new service and advertise this by printing up a small ad in your local newspaper. You could title the ad “Try Transit for a Week” or something similar and have your coupons printed up. If you print them yourself, make sure they cannot be photocopied; passes for the KRT system in Charleston, WV, have a unique hologram that cannot be easily duplicated.

Giveaways and discounts. Free or discounted tickets are an effective no-cost way to boost ridership. You could offer free rides for the first week or month of a new service and advertise this by printing up a small ad in your local newspaper. You could title the ad “Try Transit for a Week” or something similar and have your coupons printed up. If you print them yourself, make sure they cannot be photocopied; passes for the KRT system in Charleston, WV, have a unique hologram that cannot be easily duplicated.

Essay contest. A great way to promote community participation in public transportation is to hold an essay contest. Kids could write an essay in 100 words or less on “Why I Like to Ride the Bus.” The winning essay could be published in your community’s local newspaper and the first place award could be a monthly or yearly pass.

Promotional posters and signs. When using promotional visuals, remember these helpful tips:
1. KISS – Keep it short and simple.
2. KILL – Keep it large and legible.
3. The “six by six” rule – Use no more than six words per line and no more than six lines per visual.


Hundreds of Kansas transit employees trained at recent RTAP courses, statewide

Consider holding an essay contest for kids on a transit-related topic.
SAFETEA-LU background and major changes to Section 5311 funding

SAFETEA-LU designated over $244 billion in funding for highways and public transportation, which represents the largest amount of money appropriated for surface transportation in America’s history. Between 2004 and 2008, rural transit funding increased by 74 percent. According to the National Transit Database (NTD) findings, 5311 grantees provided 115 million rides during each of the first two years of SAFETEA-LU’s functional life (1). State DOT survey results show that the number of trips has increased by 13 percent since SAFETEA-LU’s adoption (1).

The FTA’s Web site lists five primary goals of the non-urbanized formula program. These are: 1) to enhance the access of people in non-urbanized areas; 2) to assist in the maintenance, development, improvement, and use of public transportation systems in rural and small urban areas; 3) to encourage and facilitate the most efficient use of all federal funds…through the coordination of programs and service; 4) to assist in the development and support of intercity bus transportation; and 5) to provide for the participation of private transportation providers in non-urbanized transportation to the maximum extent feasible” (2).

To better serve rural areas, SAFETEA-LU established a new tiered formula to distribute funding. Under the formula, 20 percent of 5311 appropriations were distributed based on land area and the remainder was allocated based upon each state’s rural population.

Another major change associated with the adoption of SAFETEA-LU dealt with reporting service levels, costs, and revenues to the National Transit Database (NTD). The FTA did not have a standardized reporting method for non-urban providers before SAFETEA-LU was implemented. Prior to standardizing the reporting system, states and the FTA found it difficult to assess the successes and failures of rural transit. It also made it difficult to quantify and compare year-to-year levels of service.

Under the SAFETEA-LU reporting standard, information is collected from Kansas transit agencies by KDOT and reported to the FTA through the NTD. The annual report gives the FTA a mechanism for assessing the level and quality of service throughout the country. Additionally, accurate service and funding information allows Congress, other federal agencies, and the American public to see how transportation providers are using federal funding for public transportation.

Initial finding from the TCRP Quick Response Study

KFH Group has begun to analyze the effects of funding increases for passenger transportation in rural areas under SAFETEA-LU. The consultants presented the study’s initial results at the 18th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation on October 21, 2008. Below you will find a detailed discussion of their preliminary findings.

The consultants began their study by providing State DOTs with a survey to assess how the increased funding has impacted their state’s level of service. The surveys requested a wide variety of information.
including data from 2004 to 2008 for apportionments and data from 2004 to 2006 for obligations. Next, telephone interviews with 5311 grantees from around the country were conducted to assess the effects at the local level.

According to preliminary findings, many agencies reported using the increased funding to improve services to customers, increase employee salaries, enhance interagency coordination, and purchase new vehicles. Others reported using the increased funds to absorb escalating operating and capital costs.

Section 5311 funding highlights

Many states reported that the agencies that were in existence prior to SAFETEA-LU’s adoption used the increased funding to begin paying employees living wages, improve interagency coordination, increase training for grantees, and maintain existing services. While the benefits of these service improvements may not be clearly visible to the public, they certainly have translated into improved service quality.

The wage increases have benefits that extend far beyond the employees themselves. Agencies reported improved retention rates through wage increases, which were only made available through increased funding. Additionally, the employees are better able to provide for their families and financially contribute to the community.

Others reported using the funding to expand existing services, create new services, and increase the number of grantees. Sue Knapp, President of KFH, noted that the State of Montana has increased the number of Section 5311 recipients from nine to 33 providers since SAFETEA-LU was implemented. In Kansas, there are currently 95 recipients of Section 5311 funding organized under 15 coordinated transit districts.

Many agencies reported using the additional funding allocated through SAFETEA-LU to purchase new vehicles. In 2006, 5311 funding was responsible for the purchase of 1,039 new vehicles. Comparatively, only 419 vehicles were purchased through 5311 funding in 2004. Between 2005 and 2008, the total number of 5311 vehicles has increased by 16 percent (1).

Finney County Transit (also known as FIT), operating out of Garden City, has experienced significant growth since SAFETEA-LU’s authorization. FIT used 5311 funding to purchase three new vehicles and the agency created fixed route service, with four routes in Garden City. Additionally, the agency was able to convert its demand-response service to complementary paratransit service. In July 2008, FIT changed its operating hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. due to greater demand.

According to staff at FIT and KFH, the fixed route system has created a sense of community and become a public gathering space for people of diverse backgrounds. Within months of the service expansion, Finney County Transit reported an increase in ridership of 94 percent, and the agency has seen a large increase in paratransit ridership. The agency says the increases were made possible through an aggressive marketing campaign using increased 5311 funding. All of these service improvements provide direct benefits for the residents of Finney County.

Intercity bus obligations (Section 5311(f))

SAFETEA-LU has provided more than an 80 percent increase in federal funding for the Intercity bus program (5311(f)). Prior to its implementation, the Intercity program received $22 million in federal obligations for 2004. Following SAFETEA-LU’s adoption, federal funding jumped to $40 million for fiscal year 2006. Nationwide, the Intercity program has seen an increase in ridership of 34 percent between 2004 and 2008 (1). These statistics show how crucial this program is for rural residents, and KDOT is working to improve intercity public transportation so residents can gain access to the resources that are unavailable in the rural regions of our state.

Currently, only one Kansas agency receives 5311(f) funding for intercity transportation—OCCK, Inc. of Salina. OCCK uses the funding to provide route service between Belleville and Salina. Until June 2008, DSNWK, a Hays area provider, also received 5311(f) funding, but the agency was unable to secure a local match this year. KDOT has shown an interest in reinstating this service for residents in northwest Kansas if another local match is found.

Soon KDOT is planning to launch a statewide Request for Proposals to fund new intercity programs. While the agency is looking to improve service throughout the state, KDOT is specifically seeking applications for two priority corridors that can coordinate with existing Greyhound routes. These corridors link Salina with Wichita and Wichita to Lamar, Colorado. Lisa Koch, KDOT Public Transportation Manager, said “these two routes will have priority because they will be the most expensive, and KDOT would be able to fund these systems at 100 percent due to interlining regulations through 5311(f).” These routes are important because they would reinstate services that were discontinued in 2005.
Flat tires while driving are always annoying, costly and all-around bad news. But when a flat or blowout occurs when traveling an interstate or other high-traffic roadway in a large vehicle with passengers, the situation becomes especially dangerous. Use these tips to be safe while solving the problem:

- At the first sign of tire trouble, grip the steering wheel firmly.
- Don't slam on the brakes.
- Let the vehicle slow down gradually by taking your foot off the gas pedal.
- Work your vehicle toward the shoulder or, if possible, toward an exit.
- If it is necessary to change lanes, signal your intention to the drivers behind you and then change lanes smoothly and carefully, watching your mirrors and the traffic around you.
- Steer as your vehicle slows down. It is better to roll the vehicle off the roadway (when you have slowed to 30 mph) and to a safe place than it is to stop in traffic and risk a collision.
- When all four wheels are off the pavement, brake lightly and cautiously until stopped.
- Turn emergency flashers on.

One of the best ways to avoid a flat tire is to make sure you thoroughly check your tires during your daily pre-trip inspection.

- It’s important to have the vehicle well off the pavement and away from traffic before stopping, even if it means driving along slowly with the bad tire flapping. You can drive on a flat if you take it easy and avoid sudden moves. Don't worry about damaging the tire. It is already ruined.
- Once off the road, call for assistance and put out reflectorized triangles behind your vehicle. Keep your emergency flashers on. Reassure passengers that help is on the way.
- Don't stand next to or behind the vehicle. If no passengers are on board, stand away from the vehicle and wait for help to arrive. With passengers on board, you'll need to make a judgment about whether you and your passengers are safer inside the vehicle or whether it would be safer to evacuate the vehicle.

**Most important**, remember this:

- Don't stop in traffic.
- Get your vehicle completely away from the roadway.
- Call for help.
- Finally, have a qualified mechanic check your vehicle after having a flat tire, to be sure no damage was caused to the vehicle.

One of the best ways to avoid a flat out on the road is to make sure you thoroughly check your tires during your daily pre-trip inspection before going out for the day. Make sure there is no excessive wear, no cuts or bulges, and that the tires are properly inflated. Remember that being safe takes precedence over your schedule or other concerns.

These tips were adapted from a safety fact sheet produced by the National Safety Council, an international non-profit organization committed to improving safety in the workplace, on roadways and in homes and communities. Visit www.nsc.org for more information.


One of the best ways to avoid a flat tire is to make sure you thoroughly check your tires during your daily pre-trip inspection.
Many states have organized regional transit districts, established at a level between the state and local. Districts provide financial and administrative assistance to local transportation systems that receive federal assistance such as the Section 5310 and 5311 programs, and in some cases, state or other sources of funds. [These programs provide funding to private, non-profit transit organizations (5310) as well as public systems in rural and small urban areas (5311).] In Kansas, recipients of federal or state grants are required to join a coordinated transit district (CTD) as a provision for participation in the Section 5311 and 5310 programs.

Of the many objectives with which these CTDs are charged, one is public relations challenge: making both the public and other agencies aware of the transportation resources around them. To address this issue, regional transit districts are using the Web to provide this information. Read below to find out about several such sites, and how different regional transit districts inside and outside of Kansas are discovering what the Web can do for them.

Kansas CTDs & the Web
For one CTD in Kansas, the Web provides a space where both basic and detailed information about the agencies within the region can be distributed. Kansas CTD 10, online at www.kansasctd10.org, established their site with help from Kansas RTAP. The site provides a list of the area’s transit agencies, each with further information available through a link. Each agency’s page contains a service profile with contact info, the agency’s service hours, service area, and fares. This profile also identifies the system type, the clientele served by the system, and the type of trips the agency provides.

Finally, each agency page includes a system performance profile, describing the type of funding received by the agency through the various federal and state programs. This profile shows the organization type (government or private), service type, and the number of vehicles and lift vehicles currently used by the agency. Check out the Kansas CTD 10 site and see how these pages work.

Another CTD in Kansas that has incorporated Web technology is CTD 12. Valerhy Powers, Director of Transportation & Physical Disabilities for the Sedgwick County Department on Aging and the Central Plains Area Agency on Aging, describes the new Web site: “CTD 12 has put together a Web site that has two sides: one viewable to the general public (www.paratransitrides.org), and the other only for transit providers (www.paratransitrides.org/providers/History).”
Technology

River Bend Transit uses JAWS and JOOLA technology to make their Web site more accessible for those with disabilities.

The transit-agency side of the Web site, meanwhile, includes more details about the CTD, including a brief history of the organization, a mission statement, bylaws, current membership, membership dues and minutes from the CTD meetings. There is also a section for new transit providers, providing information about resources, possible mentors and their specialties, types of funding and explanations, and future training opportunities on the local, state, and national levels.

According to Powers, the idea for their Web site grew from CTD 12’s transportation summit in March 2007. The CTD turned to an IT professional in the Sedgwick County Department of Aging for the Web site’s development.

“We basically hired him as a consultant, and he designed and developed the site during the evenings,” Powers said. “It really turned out to be a bargain; the site looks great. He included graphics and things that make the Web pages look like a road, with road signs.”

Example from a regional transit district outside Kansas
Outside Kansas, other regional groups also use the Web as a means of communication and organization. In Iowa, the state DOT set up Regional Transit Districts, much like the Kansas CTDs. We spoke with Steve Swisher, Director of Business Development at River Bend Transit, about his organization’s use of technology and about their site, www.rivverbendtransit.org.

“We talked about a Web site for years, and the idea came along in stops and starts,” Swisher said. “What really prompted us was the realization that some people with disabilities couldn’t access some aspects of our services under the ADA (American Disability Act), and that could potentially leave us open to a lawsuit. That made it essential to finish the project.”

A non-profit organization, River Bend Transit (RBT) is the regional public transit agency for four counties in eastern Iowa. The Bi-State Regional Commission—a private organization composed of five counties and 43 municipalities in eastern Iowa and western Illinois—aided RBT in developing the Web site by providing a Web site designer. With this help, RBT’s site was up and running in about three months.

“Our expectations were basically for an electronic brochure, containing all the information about our program and services, but also with a flexibility that is unlike a written document. This way we can change information when necessary,” Swisher said. “We also wanted to use the technology as a means of communication, both for our patrons and with other transit services.”

The River Bend site contains similar information to that on the Kansas CTD sites—routes, schedules, fare information, contact information and links to other relevant Web sites. There is also a log-in so that users can quickly access the data they are looking for. However, special considerations that went into the site also make it unique.

“The site was designed to be especially accessible to those with sight, hearing, mental and other disabilities,” Swisher said. “We set up the site to be compatible with the JAWS computer program, which provides cues for those with visual impairment. We also included the ability to change font sizes, and other features that make the site accessible for any potential patron.”

The RBT site lacks any changing colors or flashing graphics, as Swisher explained that these can be a concern for patrons with photosensitive epilepsy. The site uses a content management system called JOOLA, which ensures the site is in step with ADA standards. By taking these considerations into account while developing the site, RBT is able to effectively reach their clientele.

“The technology lets our clients use what works for them, and with so many people connected and computer-literate, this site has proved very helpful,” Swisher said.

Using the Web and other technology to communicate and provide information is the next logical step for transit agencies. Those interested in developing a Web site for a Kansas CTD can contact Pat Weaver at weaver@ku.edu or at (785) 864-2595. Check out the sites discussed above, and see how the Web can help you!
Regions VII and VIII to secure a singular procurement for the Wichita to Lamar route. Koch explained, “We are currently in communications with Greyhound with hopes of participating in the SAFETEA-LU ‘soft-match’ pilot that would allow us to fund these two systems at 100 percent. They have been very supportive thus far.” She concluded that, “This project seems relatively feasible, because both DOTs have funds to spend.”

Funding barriers
While additional federal funding has been beneficial for many rural agencies, a number of funding barriers still pose problems throughout the country. According to the KFH survey results, the biggest obstacles have been attributed to a lack of state and local matching funds, increased costs for fuel and insurance, and a shortage of state staff to manage the program.

To put the staffing issue in perspective, KDOT has funding for six employees who oversee roughly 180 transportation agencies. They are making every effort to improve transportation services throughout the state, but KDOT’s resources are stretched at this point.

Many communities have used the increased funding solely to offset the increased cost of fuel, insurance, administration, and vehicles. While this was not the intended purpose of the funding, it has allowed agencies to maintain service levels in this tough economic climate.

When asked how reauthorization could improve non-urban transportation, Knapp said rural agencies could benefit by having the federal government “make one big program for all of the existing rural programs.” This could reduce much of the administrative confusion and ultimately benefit the customers.

Conclusion
The increased funding under SAFETEA-LU has had an overall positive effect upon rural and small urban providers throughout the United States. Nationwide, Section 5311 grantees are providing roughly 115 million trips annually, resulting in an increase of 13 percent from previous years. The TCRP study has only developed preliminary findings, with more work still to be done. Complete data on the benefits of the program are essential to provide justification for the critical need for this program and to help identify corrections needed, if any, for delivery of the program.

Sources:

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Section 5311, continued from page 10

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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.

Resources from our catalog


Online resources

Transit Pass Toolkit. http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=342&z=37. This toolkit is designed to help human services agencies and public transit providers work together to assure affordable customer access and mobility. Transit passes are a strategy that can help these be the proverbial “win-win” partnership.

Passenger Assistance Certification Class coming up — February 11-13, 2009
Kansas RTAP will host the (PASS) Driver Certification Program in Wichita on February 11-13. The PASS program is a 3-day class to certify trainers. Some of the advantages of offering the PASS certification program are the ability to reduce organizational liability; comprehensive, up-to-date training on assistance drivers should be providing to passengers with special needs; intensive emergency situation training; certification oversight provided by national leaders in the community transportation field; and updates for all participants on relevant regulatory changes. For more information on the course, or to register, please visit the Kansas RTAP website at http://www.ksrtap.org. Space is very limited.

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

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