Getting the Ball Rolling on Rural Transit Innovation

By Chris Wichman

What makes a rural transit system innovative? The recently released TCRP Synthesis 94 describes innovation simply as a “change for a useful purpose.” In most of the cases cited in the Synthesis, managers found innovation to just be common sense—the obvious response of an organization to meet ever-changing demographics, technology and economic factors. However, the timing in initiating change can significantly influence the success of a rural transit agency. Some agencies change out of necessity as a reaction to a problem and some change as a proactive measure. Which describes your agency?

This article will summarize key takeaway points and case studies from the TCRP Synthesis 94, review the innovative shift to regional governance in ways to increase mobility for the elderly Hispanic population in Butler, Harvey and Sedgwick counties. This article will describe the results of the HETA action-planning process and progress made so far in implementing CPAAA’s plan.

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Hispanic Senior Mobility: An Update from CPAAA

By Chris Wichman

In our July 2011 issue we published an article highlighting the Hispanic Elder Transportation Access (HETA) grant received by the Central Plains Area Agency on Aging (CPAAA) in March of that year. This grant allowed the CPAAA to initiate a collaborative effort to find ways to increase mobility for the elderly Hispanic population in Butler, Harvey and Sedgwick counties. This article will describe the results of the HETA action-planning process and progress made so far in implementing CPAAA’s plan.

Stakeholder involvement

Developing the action plan relied on the participation of a specially-formed stakeholder group known as the HETA Alliance. This included representatives from organizations, businesses and

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Kansas rural transit, and provide tips for making your organization more innovative.

**What innovation looks like**

Innovation in rural transit can be generally separated into `organizational innovation` and `service innovation`.

Agencies, as organizational innovators, are those that can remain flexible and responsive to community transit needs, and are well positioned to innovate.

Service innovation is defined by TCRP as:
- New, different and unique techniques;
- Techniques newly applied to a rural transit setting but not necessarily unique; or
- Modification of an existing practice with a nuance or twist that makes it different.

It is safe to say that few practices in rural transit are truly original or new. As the TCRP Synthesis states, in most cases one transit agency’s “innovation” is simply a practice borrowed from elsewhere. Your agency should not shy away from learning innovative practices from agencies around the country.

The TCRP Synthesis offers six criteria for evaluating innovation in rural transit. These include:
1) Innovative agency characteristics,
2) Service responses to changing demographics,
3) Involvement in the transportation planning process,
4) Alternative service modes,
5) Outreach, education and training, and
6) Leveraging funding opportunities.

The TCRP Synthesis used these criteria to identify unique case studies on organizational or service innovation. The following sections profile two of those case studies and discuss innovative activities also taking place in Kansas.

**Organizational innovation**

A good example of organizational innovation comes from Addison County Transit, a one-county program in Central Vermont. A change in management led this agency to reinvent itself. A new director took over and immediately issued a mission and goals statement to reflect his desired direction for the agency (see sidebar, above right). In his words: “I gave my staff responsibilities for results and worked to ensure they had the resources to achieve them, things they didn't have before. Once results started happening, then it became self-reinforcing.” This is a case of proactive change in organizational culture. Innovation was inspired by strong leadership. Addison County Transit staff soon noticed that the community was supportive of more vibrant transit service. In this case, it simply took strong leadership to kick-start innovation.

Kansas has its own example of organizational innovation in the pilot programs developing in Kansas for rural transit agencies. Transit managers, local elected officials, and other key stakeholders in each of those pilot regions have come together to provide leadership in expanding service and increasing coverage throughout the state. Joel Skelley, state multimodal planner with KDOT, said that the shift towards regionalization has allowed providers to become more operationally coordinated to avoid redundancy in service while also covering service gaps by using resources more efficiently. Skelley cited the lean economy as the primary cause for the shift to regionalization, but also mentioned increased use of technology in communications and scheduling, as well as changing demographics that have fueled demand for transit. Local transit providers in Kansas are looking to the pilot programs to most efficiently maintain transit supply as circumstances change around the state.

Kansas transit agencies statewide also are developing a common measurement system with benchmarks to provide feedback for participating agencies, called “TRACK.” Performance monitoring is closely related to the regional efforts for efficiency. Skelley said TRACK is a new web-based entry format for inputting operational measures, customer demographics, safety and fiscal efficiency data. The data will be entered into a website by local providers, which will then be tabulated and reported out monthly or quarterly by KDOT. This system will simplify the process of data collection for both KDOT and local providers, and it represents a major innovation to Kansas rural transit.

**Service innovation**

A good example of service innovation highlighted in the TCRP Synthesis comes from the TRAX transit service of the Ark-Tex Council of Governments in northeastern Texas. As a result of losing Medicaid funding, TRAX was forced to change its service to attract new riders. The agency sought new funding geared towards demographic groups that were previously not a priority. TRAX reoriented services to receive JARC and New Freedom funding for projects. The agency has broadened its scope to include transit services for the general public for job access and coordinating with...
human service agencies for persons with disabilities. This change in their transit market required TRAX to be more innovative in outreach and education as well.

The agency also started a “Meeting on a Bus” program to allow residents in the service area to hold meetings on vehicles rather than requiring people to travel to meetings at a central location. This innovation in outreach has eased the transition in expanding service to a new transit market.

As for service innovation in Kansas, several regions have already reinvented their transit service. They transitioned from what was once solely human service transportation to comprehensive community public transportation service using multiple funding sources, building and expanding transit facilities, and reaching out to all demographics. Flint Hills Area Transit in Manhattan, OCCK in North Central Kansas, RCAT in Hutchinson, and Finney County Transit are just a few examples of agencies that have 1) expanded service to include fixed routes, 2) built transit-specific facilities in recent years and 3) built tremendous community support.

Skelley cited partnerships as a key to service innovation. For example, Flint Hills Area Transit has partnered with local institutions (Kansas State University and Fort Riley) to improve fixed route service. In Finney County efforts have been made to partner with major employers including the meat processing industry. Skelley recommends that local transit providers identify the opportunities for partnerships and start the conversations necessary to provide expanded service.

**Fostering innovation in your agency**

TCRP’s Synthesis 94 recommends that transit agency managers inspire an organizational culture conducive to innovation. Encourage your staff to come up with or search for new ideas and practices implemented in neighboring communities. Allow all ideas to be vetted in staff meetings to encourage creative thinking. However, you must be able to recognize plausible ideas given the realities of your service area and funding constraints. Not all innovations can be applied in every case. Identify the innovations that can meet your needs and explore the necessary steps toward implementing those innovations.

Innovative thinking requires agencies to think outside the constraints of day-to-day operations. The TCRP Synthesis 94 recognizes that certain agencies are better positioned than others to think in the future tense. If your situation allows you to look ahead, encourage the creativity of your staff. For example, give them a number of “what if” scenarios, such as: What if we implemented the “Meeting on a Bus” program in our service area? Would this method of outreach work for us?

Simply being open to new ideas is a first step toward innovation. Once your agency begins to think through new ideas and take small steps to meet changing circumstances, it will reinforce a culture of innovation.

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Rural transit innovation  Continued from page 3

Conclusion
A culture of innovation starts at the top. The key driver of innovation and change in all of the TCRP Synthesis 94 case studies was a dynamic, entrepreneurial agency manager. As an agency manager, you must be able to understand and anticipate future patterns, trends and needs of your service area. This will allow your organization to change or innovate in a timely manner rather than continually play catch-up.

The innovators profiled in the Synthesis are continually looking for new partners, new services and diverse funding sources. To be a successful innovator, the Synthesis advises managers to operate their transit services like a business. Like any business, your organization must be on the lookout for the next advantage or opportunity for improvement. Transit agency managers must serve as community agents of change by exploring all resources, embracing beneficial technologies, maintaining diverse revenue streams and providing a service that meets the needs of customers.

Hispanic senior mobility update  Continued from page 1

public transportation providers that work closely with Hispanic populations in the CPAAA service area.

Valerhy Powers, director of transportation & physical disabilities with Sedgwick County and the CPAAA, summarized the contributions of the HETA Alliance to the planning process by saying, “None of this would have been possible without the group.” She said Alliance members are individuals already involved in the community, with the existing relationships and necessary contacts to serve as a bridge to Hispanic elders. Throughout the process Alliance members served as spokespersons and ambassadors for the HETA project and were very active in developing and overseeing the public involvement process.

Powers admitted that she had some trouble making contacts in the Hispanic community in the beginning. In fact, transportation agencies around the country are finding that traditional public involvement techniques are inadequate when targeting specific demographic groups. Once Powers identified key stakeholders, personal contacts snowballed. Relationship building was a necessary and vital first step.

Community outreach
Powers emphasized the importance of building a level of trust in personal relationships to reach the Hispanic community. The HETA Alliance turned to local church leaders who are highly respected and known throughout the community. With their support, a series of focus group meetings were held in church facilities directly following services. The pastors made announcements at the end of service, encouraging the congregation to attend and participate in the meetings. This is a good example of finding a creative way to improve on traditional public meetings with the use of another forum or meeting location to better reach and connect with groups that are unlikely to otherwise participate.

Out of the eight focus groups held, five took place at different local churches. Participants included both Hispanic seniors and their family members.

Focus groups began with a series of questions to gauge the participants’ knowledge of the transportation services available to them and to pinpoint possible barriers that prevent them from using services. The second component of the focus groups was education. At the end of each session, the facilitators provided educational materials and handouts on the transportation resources available in the community.

The meetings were facilitated in both English and Spanish, with the Spanish Horizons community group providing a native speaker to serve as the translator. Spanish Horizons is engaged in a number of activities to enrich life for the
What is a traditionally underserved population?

Traditionally underserved populations can be defined as those specifically identified in the U.S. Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice—that is, low-income populations and minority populations including Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans/Blacks, Asian Americans, Native American/Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders—as well as other populations recognized in Title VI and other civil rights legislation, executive orders, and transportation legislation, including those with limited English proficiency such as foreign-born, low-literacy populations, seniors, persons with disabilities and transit-dependent populations.

Source: NCHRP Report 710

Hispanic community in Wichita, but their primary purpose is to provide language instruction and translation services.

It was important that Spanish Horizons provided a native speaker who knew how to phrase things in a way that was not offensive to participants. Powers recommends that transit agencies interested in a similar outreach process find someone to serve in this role—it could even be a volunteer if funding is not available. However, Powers said that it was important in her case to have grant funds to pay the translator, because the process required so many public meetings with a large time commitment from that individual.

The second part of public outreach involved distributing surveys to Hispanic seniors. The surveys included questions about the modes of transportation commonly used and barriers to using available transit services. A total of 325 surveys were distributed, with 132 responses received. Handouts were in both English and Spanish, however some residents do not read—even in their native spoken language. To overcome the literacy barrier, members of the HETA Alliance would read aloud what was on the handouts and make telephone calls to gather survey responses.

Powers said it was important that surveys were distributed by people familiar with the respondents. To Powers, the surveys were an effective tool to reach Hispanic seniors directly, rather than in focus groups where she found that more input was provided by family members than from seniors. Overall, the focus groups allowed the agency to gain in-depth information and provided an opportunity to educate participants, while the surveys proved important for targeting the key demographic.

To Powers, the public involvement process for the HETA action plan was a resounding success. “The results went above and beyond my expectations. The whole plan is based on community input,” she said.

For the community, by the community

In the end, many of the needs identified in public outreach reaffirmed what had previously identified by members of the HETA Alliance, including the need for group training on how to ride the bus, transit information in church bulletins or newsletters, and more bilingual staff and drivers.

In total, 20 barriers to public transit use by Hispanic seniors were identified, and the HETA Action Plan sets out six possible strategies to overcome these:

• Hire a Hispanic mobility manager as a starting point,
• Organize a volunteer escort program,
• Provide staff with language training,
• Distribute transit education materials in Spanish,
• Build more bus shelters,
• Improve general transit service.

Implementation

Since the creation of the HETA plan, efforts are under way to make transit more accessible to Hispanic seniors. Wichita Transit has held two staff education programs in Hispanic Sensitivity Training, aimed at improving customer service to Hispanic seniors. At one session, 130 employees of Wichita Transit were trained by the Spanish Horizons group on social interactions, including interpersonal communication tips to break down barriers between

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Sources

• Phone interview: Valerhy Powers, HETA project director, Central Plains Area Agency on Aging, April 16, 2012.
• Email interview: Chris Navarro Alonzo, director, La Familia Senior Center.
transit employees and Hispanic seniors. In particular, the importance of a proper greeting was stressed. Hispanic seniors are often more formal in greetings, and an informal phrase can be seen as disrespectful. The emphasis on customer service was a first step towards growing ridership among Hispanic seniors.

A major boost to the effort occurred in late April of this year as Wichita Transit received the FTA 5307 formula funds necessary to fill the Hispanic mobility manager position. The long-awaited funding of this position is welcome news to both Powers and the HETA Alliance as it allows the plan to move forward into implementation. The Hispanic mobility manager will be in charge of creating and translating educational materials, starting the volunteer escort program and implementing a number of initiatives outlined in the plan. There will be continuing efforts to engage the public after the mobility manager position is filled, to begin building the community’s familiarity with the manager and to confirm the process is on the right track.

**Conclusion**

Overall, Powers is pleased with what was accomplished in public outreach and recommends that other Kansas transit agencies look to CPAAA’s HETA plan as a replicable process for increasing transportation access to Hispanic seniors. When initiating public outreach, she said it is important to understand the potential barriers to planning for traditionally underserved populations such as the meeting location, lack of personal relationships, language barriers, and cultural norms. A first step would be to pursue funding similar to the “Breaking New Ground” grant received by the CPAAA. If funding is not available, enlist stakeholders in the community to initiate public outreach. The HETA Alliance stakeholder group is a good model for other communities in Kansas. Identifying key individuals, organizations, businesses and transit providers that work closely with the Hispanic community is an important step. From here a community-wide dialogue can be initiated that could result in an Action Plan to improve mobility for an underserved population in your service area.

A copy of the report is available on the Kansas RTAP website at http://www.krstap.org.

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**Q&A with a key HETA stakeholder**

Chris Navarro Alonzo, Executive Director of La Familia Senior/Community Center in Wichita, offered additional insights into the HETA planning process in response to the following questions:

**Kansas RTAP:** One key theme in this article is this idea of building a “level of trust” when engaging and reaching out to Hispanic community members. Can you elaborate on the importance of the HETA stakeholder alliance, including your involvement in particular, that allowed for the trust barrier to be overcome?

**Ms. Navarro Alonzo:** I believe the fact that the HETA stakeholder alliance provided key Hispanic community leaders for this project [was very important]. My involvement as Executive Director of La Familia Senior/Community Center for the past seven years has been very instrumental for this well established organization/nonprofit for the community. La Familia has been in existence in Wichita since 1989. If the Hispanic community can see that key community leaders support a specific project, that is key—for then they will obtain that “level of trust” which is vital to a project.

**Kansas RTAP:** Can you elaborate on the importance of holding focus group meetings in places of worship? Was this the key to engaging residents who would have otherwise not participated?

**Ms. Navarro Alonzo:** Holding focus group meetings in places of worship [gave] the HETA project [access] to a lot of persons, as a lot of persons do attend places of worship. The level of trust is [an important aspect of places of worship], and this is very key, [however], providing information to the media, such as Spanish newspaper(s) Tiempos or TV/radio stations [is] just as important. Additional locations such as La Familia, Plaza Mexico, Mexican restaurants, and Super del Central grocery stores are some key locations to provide and/or obtain information.

**Kansas RTAP:** We would venture to guess that this was the first time many of the local Hispanic residents had been involved in such a participatory public process. Was it well received by community members? Did residents feel as if their concerns were heard and addressed by the planning staff?

**Ms. Navarro Alonzo:** I believe this is one of the first times many residents were able to be involved in such a public process. I commend Valerhy Powers for this wonderful insight and her approaching me/La Familia regarding the HETA plan. It was definitely received well by community members. I do feel that the residents felt their concerns were heard and therefore addressed thus far.

**Kansas RTAP:** Do you have any recommendations for what other agencies could do differently in developing a similar public involvement strategy aimed at Hispanic community members?

**Ms. Navarro Alonzo:** I think if key Hispanic community leaders can be invited and engaged in the process/project, this will definitely allow the Hispanic community to have the level of trust that is pertinent in so many situations.
In the July 2011 issue of the Kansas TransReporter, we reported on some ways rural communities have improved livability through transit. We provided examples of several small towns throughout the country that were building better communities by following the livability principles created by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. This article will present transit managers with information on some of the resources and programs available to help support your own livable rural communities.

According to Kathleen Merrigan, USDA deputy secretary, “Coordinating federal investments achieves better results on the ground, meeting multiple economic, environmental, and community objectives with each dollar spent.” Merrigan is referring to the coordination among the agencies included in the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, those being:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture;
- U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD);
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT); and the
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

David Doyle, land revitalization coordinator at the EPA, said the Partnership allows the agencies to get together and see how they can share resources to meet needs. The following sections describe the resources available from each agency.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture**

The USDA is committed to building and enhancing livability in rural communities. The USDA’s current strategic plan states the Department’s intent to “ensure that rural residents have decent housing and homeownership opportunities, clean water, adequate systems for handling waste, reliable electricity and renewable energy systems, and critical community facilities including health-care centers, schools, and public safety departments” (USDA Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2010-2015).

The **Rural Passenger Transportation Technical Assistance Program**, funded through a Rural Business Enterprise Grant by the USDA, is designed to increase economic growth and development in rural areas by improving community transportation services. According to its website, the program provides planning assistance for facility development, transit service improvements and expansion, new system start-up, policy and procedure development, marketing, transportation coordination, training and public transit problem-solving activities.

To qualify for technical assistance a project must be in a rural community with a population less than 50,000 and the project must be submitted by a private for-profit or non-profit organization or agency. Delaware County, NY (population 47,980 and decreasing) used funding from USDA and New York State Department of Transportation to plan for the development of a new coordinated public transportation program. The program is expected to improve access to medical and agency services, employment opportunities, job training, shopping, and all other destinations in rural Delaware County. To read more about this program and other case studies, go to [http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=258](http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=258).
Resources to support livable communities  Continued from page 7

The USDA’s Rural Development Agency provides loans, grants, loan guarantees and technical assistance to rural America. Resources are available to construct, enlarget or improve community facilities for health care, public safety and public services. The Rural Development Agency administers over $20 billion per year in loans, loan guarantees and grants.

Kansas received over $430 million in USDA Rural Development investment in 2011, with over $11 million in community programs. Here are some examples:

• Eleven Kansas ethanol facilities received payments from the USDA through the Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels totaling $16.5 million;
• Nine entities in Kansas, such as the Flint Hills Tourism Coalition and Harvey County Economic Development Council, received Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG) funds totaling $452,000.
• The Elizabeth Layton Center received a $2 million community facilities direct loan and a $255,067 community facilities loan guarantee to help purchase a 16,000 square-foot facility that will allow the Center to expand its mental health services in Miami County.
• USDA Rural Development’s Water and Environmental Programs provided the city of Horton with a $2.9 million loan and a $545,000 grant to improve the city’s wastewater collection system.


U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

According to the Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities report, HUD invests $6.2 billion per year in rural areas. HUD’s State and Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program provides rural communities with grants for infrastructure, equitable affordable housing, economic development, and community planning. Approximately $840 million is spent on economic development and public investment in rural areas through state governments.

HUD has been an active federal resource in community planning. The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant and Community Challenge Planning Grant programs help communities create plans that integrate economic development, housing, and transportation. Over half of the applicants to the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program were from small towns and rural areas.

In 2011, two Kansas organizations were awarded a combined total of over $3 million through HUD grants for sustainability. Grantees included: the Flint Hills Regional Council, for creation of a sustainable development plan for the Flint Hills eco-region; and the Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP), to create the Category 1 South Central Kansas Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. This plan will develop an integrated policy that addresses housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation, and infrastructure investments. To read more about these grants, go to HUD’s website at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities/sustainable_communities_regional_planning_grants.

U.S. Department of Transportation

Transportation and mobility play a major role in livable rural communities. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has programs that seek to prevent the economic and social isolation of elderly and low-income residents in rural areas. Over $500 million in FTA grants have been provided nationally for public transportation in and between rural communities. FTA provides grants to rural communities with a population of less than 50,000 using the Section 5311 Non-Urbanized Area Formula Grant Program. This program is used in Kansas to fund public transit service in the majority of rural counties around the state.

Rural areas have also received funding in the DOT’s discretionary livability grants programs. The TIGER (Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery) and TIGER II Programs have paid $288 million in funding to transportation projects in rural areas. TIGER II represented the FY12 round of TIGER discretionary grants, similar to the previous round of TIGER discretionary grants. For example, the City of Gladstone, Missouri (population 25,410) received $85,000 in TIGER II in planning grants to help establish standards to accommodate the addition of a

Sources

• Supporting Sustainable Rural Communities. http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/pdf/Supporting_Sustainable_Rural_Communities_FINAL.PDF
• Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities. http://www.icma.org/ruralsmartgrowth
future transit facility and regional transit services along the North Oak Trafficway.

Ames, Iowa (population 58,965) received $8,463,000 in TIGER grants to construct an intermodal hub to link public and private transportation modes for Ames and the Central Iowa region.

The City of American Falls, Idaho, (population 4,437) received $2,300,000 in TIGER II grants to transform five blocks in their downtown area to “complete streets” that accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation.

The City of Moline, Illinois (population 45,792), received $10 million in TIGER grants to convert an historic downtown building into the Moline Multimodal Station.

To read more about TIGER grants and see a map showing grant award recipients, go to http://www.dot.gov/tiger/.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

While not directly providing funds for rural communities, the EPA instead provides technical assistance to ensure the protection of the environment and public health. Doyle said the EPA is available to help transit agencies with asset analysis, transit-oriented development (TOD) studies, design work or other technical assistance.

One of the EPAs offices that has worked with rural communities is the Office of Sustainable Communities. Through its Smart Growth Implementation Assistance Program, it has helped communities design neighborhoods that give their residents and visitors the option of walking, bicycling, and taking public transportation as they go about their business. The goal is to create communities that are vibrant places to live, work and play. This high quality of life leads to communities that are economically competitive, creates business opportunities and improves the local tax base.

Littleton, New Hampshire (population 6,000) has created a compact, walkable small town with a thriving downtown. This has been accomplished through its master plan that emphasizes the ability of future development to protect and enhance the community’s character—an issue of both location and design. Littleton went from a storefront vacancy rate of 20 percent in the 1990s to only two percent now.

To read more about the EPAs Smart Growth program, go to http://www.epa.gov/dced/about_sg.htm. For a detailed look at Smart Growth initiatives in rural areas, check out “Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities” at http://www.icma.org/ruralsmartgrowth.

Besides Smart Growth, the EPAs Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program provides technical assistance to small towns and rural communities to implement development approaches that protect the environment, improve public health, create jobs, expand economic opportunity, and improve overall quality of life. The next round of technical assistance from the EPA under its Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program will cover:

• Complete Streets workshops that teach communities to make streets safe for all users, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders;
• Parking audits, designed to help communities manage their parking supplies; and
• Walking audits, which help communities create short-term and long-term improvements to sidewalks and streets.

Examples of assistance by the Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program in Kansas and nearby include:

—Hays, Kansas (population 20,510) will receive technical assistance, delivered through a day-long community workshop, to help identify changes to codes so that the city can implement a smart growth strategy in the future, as well as maximize the use of currently under-used infrastructure. Read more about this at http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/FC00197E252915138525799900739A5E.
—Blue Springs, Missouri (population 52,375) was recently selected to have a walking audit in their community.
—Wichita, Kansas (population 382,368) had a Complete Streets audit in their community in 2011.

To read more about EPAs Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities program, go to http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/buildingblocks.htm.

Conclusion

Resources to make your community more livable are available, but may take some creative searching beyond the national programs. Use the information found in this article as a starting point to research resources available through the USDA, HUD, DOT and EPA. Next, look into state or local organizations that may be willing to create a partnership with you, such as local economic development or housing group. Your community will be thankful you did.

A Livable Community in Action

The Town of Bennington, Vermont (population 15,764) partnered with the Green Mountain Community Networks, Inc., a private not-for-profit transportation organization serving rural Bennington County, to create an intermodal transportation and office facility. The partnership received $328,000 in FTA Section 9

5309 discretionary funds to construct an addition to the Green Mountain Community Network’s building (housed in a historic Victorian house) to include a heated indoor waiting room with bathrooms. The partnership also used the funds for paving and for improving bus, taxi and car access to the facility. In addition, the partnership received $2 million in USDA funds to rehab the building, including updates to the roof, heating, electrical wiring and plumbing.

The City of Moline, Illinois (population 45,792), received $10 million in TIGER grants to convert an historic downtown building into the Moline Multimodal Station.

To read more about TIGER grants and see a map showing grant award recipients, go to http://www.dot.gov/tiger/.
Framing your message to outside stakeholders involves not only what you’ll say, but also how, where, and why to make contact with elected officials, businesses or potential partner organizations. In this article, Scott Bogren of CTAA provides some key steps for framing your message.

Why is framing necessary?

Communicating with elected officials is a key element of marketing your transit program. Without their support, you would have little to no ability to affect change in local and state policies concerning transit.

Public awareness and support are also essential to the financial success of your program and for creating a service that is of the most value to your community.

Five simple steps

Follow these steps to tailor your message to your audience:

1. Have a purpose. Plan what you aim to do before you’re on the spot. Knowing your intended outcome lets you turn a discussion into a directed presentation.

2. Keep it simple. Make your points quick and concise so people understand you without even trying. Understand that they’re not going to know a lot about what you’re going to talk about. It also helps to be polite and friendly so people want to listen!

3. Communicate the importance of your service—its benefits and its impact—to local elected officials, local media and local partners. When working with federal elected officials, Bogren recommends making contact with their district offices instead of those in Washington. To find the closest office near you, go to http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/Federal/Legislative.shtml, click on the Senate and House home page links, and follow the prompts to find the webpages of Kansas senators and representatives. The webpages will list office locations.

4. Be brave. Getting your message out involves a lot of talking to people of influence in your community. Bogren said that engaging in these types of conversations can be stressful and far outside your comfort zone, but to remember that you’re speaking on behalf of citizens who have little access to transit stakeholders, and they need your help.

5. “Think and act locally.” Most important is to continue to focus on meeting the needs of your local customers and communities. Agencies that are best understood and most appreciated at the local level by riders, elected officials and the general public are the agencies that will thrive.

For more information

Bogren’s On the Move blog provides his perspective on the latest trends, news and legislation concerning transit, including information on marketing. Visit: http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=2078&z=5

Source

Fire Extinguishers at the Transit Agency

What you think you know... but maybe don’t.

By Anne Lowder

Do you know what type of fire extinguisher you should use on flammables such as paint or fuel? Are fire extinguishers suitable for the maintenance shop different than what you should use on a paper fire in your office? Conversely, will you be of any help if you grab the office fire extinguisher to help put out a shop fire? How many fire extinguishers should you have in the shop? Where should fire extinguishers be secured in the vehicle? These questions and more are answered in this article.

If there is a fire....

It is important to train your staff to deal with each possible case of fire, including knowing what type of fire extinguisher to use for different scenarios such as electrical fires, chemical fires, general fires and vehicle fires.

Types of extinguishers and number needed per area

The nature of each kind of fire is different and the fire extinguisher used on each kind of fire must be appropriate to the situation. Also, the number and placement of extinguishers in an area is determined by the potential type and size of the fire that can occur. A complete guide on size and spacing can be found at: OSHA, 29 CFR 1910.157(d) (1). See the first source in this article (page 12) for a link.

**Class A** extinguishers are used on ordinary combustibles such as paper, wood, fabric and other easily ignited materials. Offices and classrooms should place a 2-A extinguisher for every 3,000 square feet.

**Class B** extinguishers are used on flammable combustibles such as gasoline, solvents and grease. The extinguisher can rate from 5-B up 80-B depending on the type and amount of combustible materials in the work area. The fire extinguisher should be placed every 30 to 50 feet, again determined by the amount of combustibles in the work area.

**Class C** extinguishers are used on electrical fires. The extinguisher size and spacing is based on the Class A or B hazards in the area.

**Combination** extinguishers. Many fire extinguishers (such as the extinguishers on transit vehicles) are designed for use on more than one type of fire.

What does the label show?

Each extinguisher has a label that states the types of fires it can extinguish and also how big an area of fire it can take on. For example, a fire extinguisher marked 5-B, C would be designed to put out a five sq ft grease fire as well as an electrical fire, but not a paper fire. On the other hand, one rated 3-A, 10-B, C would be effective against a small paper fire and a larger chemical fire or electrical fire. There is never a numeric rating for Type C fires, because as soon as you cut power to the source of an electric fire by shutting down a circuit breaker or turning off your vehicle, the fire ceases to be a Type C fire and reverts to either Type A or Type B.

Does size matter?

You might be tempted to go out and buy the largest fire extinguisher available, but in most cases, that is not your best option. Large extinguishers can be hard to handle, especially for an inexperienced user.

The fire codes under the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) require commercial vehicles to carry at least one fire extinguisher, with the size/UL rating depending on type of vehicle and cargo. (UL rating is a government mark that assures manufacturers have tested the components to the highest standard.) For example, fuel tankers typically must have a 20 lb fire extinguisher, while most other vehicles can carry a 5 lb fire extinguisher.

Maintenance facilities must have at least a 10 B,C rated fire extinguisher placed every 50 feet and immediately outside certain storage areas (i.e. those with fuel or paint areas). A common fire extinguisher for a facility (or in a vehicle) is rated Type A, B and C. This is a multipurpose dry chemical extinguisher filled with the chemical monoammonium phosphate, a yellow powder that leaves a sticky residue.

Proper extinguisher securement and placement

To prevent fire extinguishers from being moved or damaged, they should be mounted on brackets or in wall cabinets with the carrying handle placed 3-1/2 to five feet
Fire safety at the rural transit agency  Continued from page 11

Placement in vehicles. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s (FMCSA) regulation 393.95 states that a fire extinguisher in each truck must be “located so that it is readily accessible for use” and securely mounted to prevent it from becoming a projectile in case of a crash. Mount your fire extinguisher in a highly visible location within your vehicle. You also do not want to have to move away from your avenues of exit to reach the extinguisher, so place the extinguisher near or en route to an exit. Fire extinguishers are under pressure and should not be located near any heat sources such as heat vents.

Placement in the shop. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommends that, to avoid putting workers in danger, fire extinguishers should be located throughout the workplace and readily accessible in the event of a fire (OSHA, 29 CFR 1910.157(c)). Maintenance facilities must have at least a 10 B,C rated fire extinguisher placed every 50 feet and immediately outside certain storage areas (i.e. fuel or paint areas).

Conclusion

An employee who knows the “ABCs” of fire extinguishers is an employee who will be more confident in handling a possible fire. It is important for all of your employees to learn, as part of fire extinguisher training, not only where your agency fire extinguishers are located but also what type and size of fire extinguishers you have in different areas, and what they should be used for.

Vehicle Fire Statistics

In the five-year period 2003-2007, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 287,000 vehicle fires per year. These fires caused an estimated 480 civilian deaths, 1,525 civilian injuries and $1.3 billion in direct property damage annually. In addition:

- Three-quarters of highway vehicle fires resulted from mechanical or electrical failures or malfunctions. Collisions or overturns caused only three percent of these fires but 58 percent of the associated deaths.
- One-third of non-fatal highway vehicle fire injuries occurred when civilians attempted to fight the fire themselves.


Sources


Kansas TransReporter | July 2012
“Clickers” are Coming to RTAP Classes

By Anne Lowder, KS RTAP trainer

Personal interaction in our Kansas RTAP driver workshops can be left wanting by large class size and simple human nature. A few participants may attempt to dominate the conversation, but more often than not, participants avoid interacting in class. However, bringing knowledge and experience to the group is important to the learning experience.

Interaction can be facilitated in a way that is more comfortable for participants by the use of hand-held training tools called clickers. Clickers can help facilitate specific discussions, small work-group cooperation, and driver-to-driver interactions. Clicker technology enables more effective, more efficient, and more engaging education.

What is a clicker?
A clicker, otherwise known as an “audience response device,” resembles a pared-down TV remote control unit. It uses infrared or radio frequency technology to transmit and record a participant’s responses to questions. A small receiving station is placed in the front of the room to collect and record responses. Each clicker can be registered to a participant and results can be tied to that participant—or not—by choice of the instructor.

Why use them?
I plan to use clickers in upcoming Kansas RTAP classes to add to the tools already used in the class. The clickers will be used to interweave questions within the training and to poll participants for responses to facilitate group discussion. The idea behind the use of clickers is to foster active learning and critical thinking about scenarios involving passenger assistance and emergency preparedness.

Using clickers in Kansas RTAP workshops will give me the ability to fine-tune the content of the class. For example, based on class responses, I could emphasize more scenarios geared towards serving the general public vs. community living organizations, or visa versa. This training method is referred to “as just-in-time teaching” or making adaptations as needed in any given situation. By asking questions of the class, I will be able to gauge their understanding of the material from the feedback the clickers provide. Results from class responses can be saved, displayed in a variety of formats (histograms, pie charts, and so forth), and shared with the participants on the spot. The results can also be used to inform future curriculum development. Clickers are unique to the classroom because they allow a certain degree of anonymity since participants do not have to raise their hand to answer the questions. At the same time participants must pay more attention to the lecture, knowing that interactive questions will be asked. Overall, clickers provide the opportunity for participants to improve their comprehension of the course material and better remember what is taught.

Clickers provide the opportunity for participants to improve their comprehension of the course material and better remember what is taught.

Sources / Resources


continued on next page
Clickers  Continued from page 13

Another advantage of using clickers in the classroom is that adult learners are best motivated by interaction (hands-on and discussion). Clickers represent an easy-to-adopt technology that can enhance the learning experience through interaction. Clicker responses to questions can be followed by a lecture or by small-group discussion that encourages participants to interact and apply their knowledge and experience. Using clickers helps evaluate participant knowledge of the content and identify areas that are difficult for participants to grasp. Clickers also let participants validate their own learning and help them identify any areas that need improvement. Using clickers in training can turn a passive lecture into an interactive exchange.

Example of Using Clicker Technology

Here’s an example of how clickers can be used in the classroom. Participants are asked to answer the following multiple-choice question:

What is the Americans with Disabilities Act definition of wheelchair?

A. Wheelchair means a mobility aid belonging to any class of three-or-more-wheeled devices, usable indoors, designed or modified for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered.

B. Any class of three-or-four-wheel devices, usable indoors, designed for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered. Does not exceed 30 inches in width and 48 inches in length measured two inches above ground. Does not weigh more than 600 pounds when occupied.

C. Both of the above.

D. None of the above.

Each participant selects an answer by pressing the corresponding button on his or her clicker. As the class “clicks” away, the results appear on the screen. The instructor may decide to display the responses anonymously by using a bar or pie graph.

If it turns out that responses are split among the answers, the instructor could facilitate a discussion of the Americans with Disabilities Act and safety and securement needs in transit. Or the instructor could divide the class into small groups and let the participants convince each other about which answer is right. After a few minutes of discussion the instructor could poll the class again.

The exercise produced two results: 1) some participants thought they understood ADA regulations, but they discovered they still have some things to learn; 2) the class now has more information to help them choose the correct response. By the way, what is the right answer? It is “A.” As of October 2011, the Americans with Disability Act has dropped all measurements from its definition of a wheelchair.
Transit Resources

A Cost-Benefit Model for Travel Training. A model budget was developed with line items and a formula to ascertain distinct costs and benefits of travel training services to trainees, the community and funders. Easter Seals Project Action, June 2012. 8 pages. Available for download at http://www.projectaction.org ... or hard copy available from Kansas RTAP.

Effective Transportation Advisory Committees. This guidebook can serve as a helpful resource both to transit agencies that are considering creating an advisory committee for the first time and to agencies that are looking to make their current advisory committee more efficient. Sections include Purpose, Structure and Membership; Making Meetings Accessible; Orientation; Running a Meeting; and Community Involvement. Easter Seals Project Action, May 2012. 20 pages. Available for download at http://www.projectaction.org ... or hard copy available from Kansas RTAP.

Community Transportation Association of America: Putting Transit to Work in Main Street America. A report that examines how smaller communities and rural regions are using transit and other mobility investments to revitalize their economies and connect residents to local and regional opportunities. May 2012. http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=23&z=2

Community Transportation Association of America: Returning Transit to the Community: Perfecting the Passenger Experience. Looks at the many ways in which community and public transit agencies can improve the customer experience -- and thus build the vital connection between the community and its transit operation. May 2012. http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=3026&z=60

Easter Seal Project Action: Including People with Disabilities: Communication & Meeting Etiquette is a pocket guide designed to raise awareness of the needs individuals with disabilities may have in a meeting setting or one-on-one conversation. The guide provides tips on hosting accessible meeting spaces for people who have physical disabilities, providing audio-visual accommodations, and offers considerations for when communicating with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments or who are deaf or hard of hearing. November 2011. http://www.projectaction.org/AboutESPA.aspx


ORDER FORM

A few of our above resources are available in hard copy for readers who do not have internet access. These resources have a checkbox near the end of the listing. Check the item(s) you would like to receive and fill out the form below. Fax to (785) 864-3199.

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The Kansas TransReporter is an educational and technology transfer newsletter published quarterly by the Kansas University Transportation Center (KUTC), under the umbrella of KU’s Transportation Research Institute. The newsletter is free to rural and specialized transit providers and others with an interest in rural and specialized service.

The Kansas TransReporter 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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Calendar

Rural Transit Training and Conferences — Summer / Early Fall 2012

**KS RTAP Training:**

Defensive Driving and Passenger Assistance
- July 18 in Great Bend
- October 10 in Winfield

Defensive Driving and Emergency Procedures
- June 13 in Pratt
- June 14 in Newton
- June 20 in Ottawa
- July 19 in Manhattan
- July 25 in Independence
- July 26 in Chanute
- September 12 in Olathe
- September 13 in Atchison
- October 11 in El Dorado

Advance Mobility Securement Devices
- July 12 in Leavenworth
- August 22 in Columbus

**Conferences and Meetings:**

July 18-21, 2012

August 10-12, 2012

August 13, 2012
Cost Allocation Techniques for Kansas Transit Agencies. RTAP Pre-Conference training to KPTA, (9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.) Dodge City, KS. Information and registration at http://www.kstransit.org

August 13, 2012
RTAP Train-the-Trainer Refresher Training. RTAP Pre-Conference training to KPTA (1 p.m. – 5 p.m.) Open only to RTAP trainers who attended Fall 2011 training class. Dodge City, KS. Information and registration at http://www.kstransit.org

August 13-15, 2012

October 14-17, 2012
20th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation. Salt Lake City, UT. http://www.ribtc.org

**To register for a Kansas RTAP workshop, go to http://www.kstrap.org. Click on “Register to attend.” Questions? Contact Kristin Kelly at (785) 864-2594 or kbkelly@ku.edu.**