When Is Small Too Small?

By Anne Lowder and Pat Weaver

Choosing the right vehicle size for your agency.

In today’s high fuel-cost environment, it is sometimes tempting for rural transit agencies to replace a larger vehicle with a smaller vehicle like a ramp-equipped minivan. Smaller vehicles do generally have better fuel efficiency and cost less initially than some of the larger vehicles. As a transit manager, you may have wondered whether going to smaller vehicles in your fleet would make sense. As with any decision a manager makes, it’s important to consider all the factors that should go into a vehicle-purchase decision. This article will review some of those selection factors, share some of the experiences of other transit agencies using ramp-equipped minivans in their operations, and make some recommendations on some of the steps you should take when you get ready to procure your next vehicle.

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Serving ADA and Non-ADA Riders Together

By Erik Berg

Paratransit service has long been a staple of urban and rural transit systems. Disabled individuals often depend on this service to meet many of their most important transportation needs, including access to jobs and medical care. The Americans with Disabilities Act dramatically expanded the requirements for paratransit operations, and increased demand for paratransit from newly-ADA-eligible riders. Not all paratransit riders are ADA-eligible, but non-ADA riders often obtain funding from other sources and may require the same services as ADA riders.

The Transit Cooperative Research Board’s Report 143 is a resource guide for transit operators who want to offer paratransit services for ADA eligible and non-ADA eligible riders together. Combining riderships is an important consideration for fixed-route and rural transit organizations that often must find

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Which smaller vehicles are available for transit?

The Kansas Coordinated Transit District Council (KCTDC) conducts a courtesy bid on behalf of transit agencies that procure under the Section 5310, 5311, 5316 or 5317 programs. One of the vehicle options is a ramp-equipped minivan, which includes several seating configurations. Minivan options range from a vehicle that carries six to seven ambulatory passengers and no wheelchair occupants, to a ramp-equipped vehicle that will transport two or three ambulatory passengers and up to two wheelchair occupants.

What are the factors in choosing vehicle size?

Several primary considerations go into vehicle selection, such as vehicle capacity, durability, purchase price and operating costs. Secondary factors for some agencies may be the type of driver's license required for a vehicle, and different registration requirements for larger and smaller vehicles. Transit managers should consider the pros and cons of both primary and secondary considerations in the vehicle selection process.

Capacity. When preparing to purchase a new vehicle, first identify the capacity needs for your agency's services. In other words, how many people do you transport on a regular basis? If you miscalculate your current demand for services or if your demand for services increases, then you may be unable to meet the needs of your area. Of course, you could always buy more vehicles, but those come at a cost to your bottom line.

Rider characteristics. Another dimension to vehicle capacity is the general profile of the passengers you transport; that is, how many ambulatory and non-ambulatory riders do you typically transport at the same time on a regular basis? For example, if you purchase a minivan without wheelchair access and then later you need an accessible vehicle, you have not correctly determined or forecasted capacity in your area, and you likely not be able to meet requirements to provide equivalent service to people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Accessibility and securement. Decisions about capacity requirements of your fleet also dictate that you know the types of mobility devices your passengers use, both current and potential. Current Kansas courtesy bid specs require two wheelchair securement areas. However, mobility devices come in all sizes and shapes, including four-wheeled or three-wheeled powered chairs that are much larger than a standard manual chair.

It is unlikely that two powered chairs can fit forward-facing (another Americans with Disabilities Act requirement) in a ramp-equipped minivan. Lyle Martin, of Four County Mental Health Center, said “basically the chairs we transport are too large to accommodate two [in a minivan]. We really use the minivans for long trips and normally there is only one wheelchair occupant and two or three ambulatory occupants.” Debbie Atkinson, OCCK, Inc., stated that one of her drivers is able to get two manual wheelchairs into a minivan but normally only one powered chair. Atkinson said that having more than one powered chair secured in a minivan makes driving the van physically difficult. Both managers agreed that, for their typical use of a van (transporting one wheelchair occupant
at a time), one chair fits nicely and meet the needs of their passengers as well as the agency’s needs.

Securing two wheelchairs in a minivan generally requires that the front passenger seat be removed from the vehicle. In choosing your new vehicle, find out in advance how to remove the seat and how easy it is to remove if it will be done routinely. Also determine where the seat will be stored when not in the vehicle.

Atkinson said that the seats on her manual ramp-equipped minivans are relatively easy to remove. The seats unclip and roll out and are stored in their maintenance shop. One of her drivers prefers that the wheelchair occupant be secured in the front passenger area and he removes the front seat each time he drives, she said.

One manager of a Kansas transit agency recently shared that they dispatched a ramp-equipped minivan to pick up a passenger about 20 miles outside of town, but upon arrival, it became apparent that the customer’s mobility device was too large for the van. The driver had to return to town to get a larger transit bus with a lift. While this can happen with any vehicle, it is important to know that securement flexibility is especially limited with a smaller vehicle like a minivan. It’s prudent to put procedures in place to help identify any potential securement difficulties and how you will address them.

**Durability.** Durability is an important factor in the cost-effectiveness of a vehicle purchase.

One issue is wear and tear on the road. On what type and conditions of roads will that vehicle operate? Do you operate mainly in urban areas, with highway mileage, or are your operations more rural, in areas with a lot of gravel roads? Atkinson said she prefers using minivans instead of larger transit vehicles on country roads. The larger vehicles “shake and rattle” to distraction.

We asked OCCK, Inc., and Four County Mental Health about the durability of their larger and smaller vehicles. Both agencies agree that ramp-equipped minivans are relatively easy to remove. The seats unclip and roll out and are stored in their maintenance shop. One of her drivers prefers that the wheelchair occupant be secured in the front passenger area and he removes the front seat each time he drives, she said.

One manager of a Kansas transit agency recently shared that they dispatched a ramp-equipped minivan to pick up a passenger about 20 miles outside of town, but upon arrival, it became apparent that the customer’s mobility device was too large for the van. The driver had to return to town to get a larger transit bus with a lift. While this can happen with any vehicle, it is important to know that securement flexibility is especially limited with a smaller vehicle like a minivan. It’s prudent to put procedures in place to help identify any potential securement difficulties and how you will address them.

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We asked OCCK, Inc., and Four County Mental Health about the durability of their larger and smaller vehicles. Both agencies agree that ramp-equipped minivans hold up well with few problems. Toshio Sharp, maintenance supervisor for Four County Mental Health, said: “Maintenance problems mainly center on the automatic ramp operations.” He explained that the lift is not the problem as much as the safety sensors equipped on the door that tell the automatic ramp not to operate because the door is not open.

OCCK, Inc. has manually-operated ramps on their minivans. Atkinson’s experience is that a manual ramp is more durable than an automated ramp when the vehicle is used by more than one driver. An automated ramp seems to work better if just one driver is assigned that vehicle to work with the ramp’s quirks.

An automated ramp will need a certain amount of additional maintenance after so many cycles compared to a manual lift. Automated lifts have built-in safety features that need to be maintained, such as door sensors and ramp-leveling sensors. Four County Mental Health has had difficulties with their automated ramp not retracting because it did not completely extend at deployment. Uneven terrain is generally the reason an automated ramp does not fully extend. When one of ramps malfunctions, maintenance staff have to go out and maintain the lift in the field, Sharp said.

**Vehicle costs.** The three primary considerations in determining cost of the vehicle are purchase price, operating costs, and durability—which affects maintenance costs and how many miles it can be driven before it has to be replaced. While it’s tempting to consider purchase price alone in a vehicle purchase, operating costs and durability are just as important.

Generally, a ramp-equipped minivan costs about $10,000 less than a larger capacity body-on-chassis lift-equipped vehicle, depending on the options you choose. And certainly, fuel cost per mile is lower for ramp-equipped minivans. The manufacturer specs on the 2009 Dodge Caravan with a 3.8 liter V-6 engine, for instance, has an estimated EPA city/highway fuel economy of 16/23. The heavier and higher the capacity of the vehicle, the more it will cost to operate. Maintenance costs per year on the ramp-equipped minivans will vary significantly by how they are driven.

In Useful Life of Transit Buses and Vans (2007), durability and longevity of the minivans compared to body-on-

**Sources**

- Walleirus, Patrick, OCCK, Inc. August 24, 2012 telephone interview.
- Atkinson, Debbie, OCCK, Inc. August 24, 2012 telephone interview.
The most important elements for successfully operating comingled service are sustained education campaigns, effective record-keeping and proper funding mechanisms.

Chassis vehicles was not significantly different; both were listed with a useful life of four to five years. The factor that seemed to be most important in whether the vehicles lasted a little longer was the presence of higher-capacity truck axles with dual rear wheels, higher capacity springs and other suspension components, a somewhat heavier-duty frame, and a slightly wider body. These features support higher passenger capacities and some additional durability as compared to vehicles that may only last four years.

The FTA standard for replacement of ramp-equipped minivans is four years or 100,000 miles, which is an average of 20,000 miles per year.

Martin cited costs on two of their automated ramp-equipped minivans over a three-year period. One was at 127,000 miles with total maintenance cost of approximately $14,000. The second minivan had 134,000 miles with a total maintenance cost of about $13,000. Comparably, a lift vehicle with 127,000 miles had a total maintenance cost of $20,000.

A larger vehicle had an overall higher maintenance cost, but the minivans can have more down-time in maintenance for repairs. Atkinson notes that her minivans have the lower floor and don’t seem as streamlined as previous vehicles, increasing fuel cost, but the overall cost is still lower than for larger transit lift vehicles.

Driver’s license and vehicle registration requirements. A commercial drivers license (CDL) is usually not required for the ramp-equipped minivans because they typically transport fewer than 16 people. A CDL is required based on rated vehicle capacity, regardless of the number of passengers actually transported.

While not expensive, some agencies do consider CDL requirements in the purchase decision.

Another difference between the larger vehicles and ramp-equipped minivans is the requirement for vehicles with a capacity of eight or more transporting passengers to meet the safety provisions of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Act (i.e., driver physicals, logs, etc.) The smaller vehicles do not fall under this provision.

Conclusion

Considering price alone in purchasing a vehicle doesn’t necessarily lead to the best, or even the most cost-effective, choice. Over time, salaries and overhead will be far more significant factor in your budget. The right vehicle to provide the necessary service for your clientele is essential to meeting the needs of your community. Do your homework: Read the specs carefully and read the vendor literature. In addition, make sure that you take the opportunity at vendor exhibits at statewide meetings to get on the vehicles, talk to managers of other agencies who operate services similar to yours, and talk to KDOT staff. In the end, you’re more likely to procure a vehicle that meets the needs of your agency and your community.
study found that as many as 21 states had specific legislation mandating the coordination of ADA and human service transportation. The decision to offer combined service may not always depend on state requirements and incentives, but when present, these factors are very persuasive in the decision to offer such service. Transit services should learn about state regulations regarding combined paratransit services, as well as financial incentives available for operating such a service.

3) How paratransit services have evolved within the transit agency to date. Many transit agencies offered paratransit service long before the advent of the Americans with Disabilities Act. For these agencies, the decision to add ADA services to their existing non-ADA paratransit service proved fairly simple, and has been largely successful. Transit operators new to offering paratransit service can also be successful, but the learning curve is steeper, as these operations must understand the regulations and funding mechanisms for the ADA and non-ADA services they plan to offer. A transit operator must consider the agency’s past experience with paratransit and whether or not to tackle this learning curve when deciding to operate a combined service.

Models of ADA/non-ADA combined paratransit service
The authors identified four models that combine ADA and non-ADA paratransit service:

1) The cost-sharing structure. Transit systems and human service agencies can realize cost savings by combining service, but this only works when there is a clear and equitable cost-sharing structure between the ADA and non-ADA programs that fund riders. If the cost-sharing structure is not clear, coordination becomes more difficult because the transit agency won’t always know which programs to bill for each individual rider’s trips. Confusion over cost allocation, service quality and operational control issues may make combined service among transit providers and human service agencies unworkable. Transit agencies and human service providers should consider whether they can reach a clear and equitable cost-sharing agreement before deciding to operate a combined service.

2) The level of state commitment for coordinating these types of ridership. Some states have coordination requirements and provide incentives for it. According to the report, a 2005 study found that as many as 21 states had specific legislation mandating the coordination of ADA and human service transportation. The decision to offer combined service may not always depend on state requirements and incentives, but when present, these factors are very persuasive in the decision to offer such service. Transit services should learn about state regulations regarding combined paratransit services, as well as financial incentives available for operating such a service.

Factors to consider when deciding to operate a combined service
A transit agency’s decision to serve ADA and non-ADA riders with the same service depends on three key factors:

- Define the purpose and objectives for comingling riders.
- Identify available capacity and funding.
- Evaluate service compatibility. A rural transit agency must consider the types of ADA and non-ADA riders it would serve on a comingled service. Not all passenger types may ride well together, and their needs may be very different.
- Consider primary service parameters: service area, service span (days and hours of service), reservation time period, and fare structure.
Serving ADA and non-ADA riders together  Continued from page 5

with ADA paratransit service. This system may be the result of consolidation of rural transit services to save on costs and eliminate duplication.

The fourth model is a two-tiered paratransit service where an ADA paratransit service offers enhanced demand-response services beyond the minimum service distance from ADA-serving fixed-route corridors. Because of the fixed-route element of this model, it is more typically seen in larger city transit systems. The system may simply be serving ADA riders at a greater distance from fixed routes than the ADA requires.

Report 143 was written with a focus on paratransit agencies that most closely identify with the second model, because these are the most common type of paratransit service providers. Paratransit systems that predate ADA legislation were found to be more likely to offer ADA/non-ADA service together, as were services operating in areas where sharing resources was more critical to service.

Lessons learned about serving ADA and non-ADA riders together

The researchers learned that the most important elements for operating comingled systems successfully were sustained education campaigns, effective record-keeping, and proper funding mechanisms.

State and local conditions matter, especially in terms of funding and the need for service. The decision whether to offer ADA/non-ADA paratransit or to keep them separate will depend on these conditions.

Planning, flexibility, and determining eligibility is critical for running an effective ADA/non-ADA comingled service. The planning process must identify key aspects of the combined service, develop contingency plans, assure adequate sources of funding will be available, and work through potential obstacles before the service starts operating. Flexibility with the service is key, as transit agencies must fine-tune the service to suit the needs of their specific area. No planning process can predict all possibilities and outcomes, so a transit system that allows for flexibility will be more successful with their comingled service.

Successful ADA/non-ADA systems also recognize the importance of continuing education efforts aimed at specific target audiences. Educated policy makers can provide effective supportive when issues arise about funding and continuing service. A transit system staff that is well-educated about the ADA/non-ADA service can help ensure smooth operation with the right service for the right rider, and effective and well-maintained billing for services. Paratransit riders must be continuously educated, too, about the type of service they receive and any changes to the service, as well as any changes to the funding they receive.

Determining the eligibility of participants for either ADA funding or funding from other sources is paramount to running the combined service. If funding sources for non-ADA riders are not clearly identified, cut back, or if they are ended, operating the service becomes very difficult. Systems that offer ADA/non-ADA paratransit service must be meticulous about maintaining their record-keeping so that the right human service programs are billed for transportation services.

ADA regulations for paratransit may be different than those for non-ADA. For example, ADA paratransit does not require documentation for trip type or individual service use by riders, but other funding programs may require such information. Transit systems must consider the varying requirements for ADA paratransit and other funding

The TCRP Report 143 recommends that paratransit operators follow the decision steps listed in the report’s flow chart for planning first, and then turn to operational decisions. The following are major steps for operating a comingled paratransit system:

- Establish passenger eligibility requirements. The U.S. DOT ADA regulations are described in 49 CFR §37.123, and ADA determination process requirements are described in 49 CFR §37.125. Consult with your KDOT program consultant with any questions you have on ADA and Non-ADA eligibility.
- Develop operating and cost allocation policies and procedures.
- Identify reporting requirements and assess technology needs. Operators of ADA/Non-ADA service must fulfill reporting requirements for both ADA and Non-ADA paratransit funding.
- Develop marketing, education, and monitoring programs.

Contact KDOT for Assistance

These individuals can help answer questions you may have about establishing comingled ADA/non-ADA service at your transit agency in Kansas.

- For CTD #s 1, 2, 12: Scott Lein, 785-368-7091, slein@ksdot.org
- For CTD #s 3, 4, 5, 9, 13, 15: Stacey Cowan, 785-296-5284, staceyc@ksdot.org
- For CTD #s 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14: Connie Spencer, 785-296-5194, connies@ksdot.org.
- KDOT Public Transportation Manager: Josh Powers, 785-296-4907, joshuap@ksdot.org
sources when deciding whether to offer comingled service.
Finally, managing system performance and demand is very important to an effective comingled service; a job made easier with new technologies for reservations, scheduling, and dispatching.

To learn more about offering ADA/non-ADA paratransit service, and determine whether such service is right for your agency, read the full TCRP Report 143. A link to the report is listed below. Also, contact your KDOT Program Consultant at the Kansas Department of Transportation. See list of contacts on page 6.

Source


MARKETING

Make Business Part of Your Transit Business

By Erik Berg

Rural transit managers think of citizens groups, human service agencies, and elected officials when considering stakeholders and partners, but often overlook another important and potentially-profitable source of partners: local businesses. In big cities, small towns, and rural areas, transit service can be a vital resource connecting workers to major employers and educational opportunities. A well-run and business-savvy rural transit system can even be part of an area’s economic development plan. It just takes an effort to connect with and respond to the needs of the local business community and a focus on becoming customer-centric businesses and their employees and customers.

The National Rural Transportation Assistance Program (National RTAP) has a five-part webinar series focused on how rural transit can thrive and ensure a solid future by becoming more customer-centric for business. The program has several technical briefs and presentations online to assist rural transit agencies in serving the transit needs of industrial and commercial employers. These materials offer a guide to understanding what being customer-centric means in this context, reasons rural transit can be a key asset for area businesses, and 10 steps for improving the business focus of rural transit. Let’s explore them now.

A key strategy for the future of transit

Becoming customer-centric and developing closer relationships between rural transit and the local business community is one of National RTAP’s 10 Strategic Imperatives for the Future of Rural Transit. National RTAP defines a customer-centric focus as “how to get closer to customers to better serve their mobility needs, and how to do so in a manner that turns them into apostles for your rural transit system.” This approach means making transit an integral part of the community, rather than just a service. Good connections with local economic development agencies and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the business community itself, are a must. Businesses must have a seat at the table concerning the community’s transit system, and it is up to transit agencies to establish those relationships.

Rural transit and local economic development

Transit has become an important consideration for business leaders throughout the nation as fuel prices climb. Rural transit managers can offer major businesses a transportation alternative to keep their workforce moving and productive. RTAP lists the following reasons rural transit is important to business:

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It’s All About the Customer

By Aliza Chudnow

Customer service and public transportation go hand in hand. Public transit workers must treat customers with the best care possible so they will come back to use the public transportation system. Customer service not only increases business for the transit industry, but it also enhances transit’s overall image. If a customer is satisfied, they are more likely to use the transit service again—and tell their friends.

The best form of advertisement is word-of-mouth, so if customers have pleasurable experiences, they will share how great their experiences were with others, bringing in new customers. However, not everything works smoothly at an agency all the time. If something goes wrong during a ride, or in trying to access the ride, the right customer service approach can turn a negative situation around, allowing the particular situation to become a way to build even greater loyalty among transit customers.

An example of turning a negative situation into something more positive would be a bus breaking down. In this situation, it would be best for the driver to remain calm, apologize to the riders for the inconvenience, and call in another vehicle to pick up the passengers. Further, the driver could tell the riders that another vehicle is coming and give them periodic updates, instead of just sitting there saying: “We’re working on it.”

Here are some customer service tips adapted from a National RTAP technical service brief titled “Customer Service in Rural Transit: How to Identify and Meet Customer Needs.” See the Source below for a full reference.

Seven rules to putting customers’ needs first

Follow these rules to orient your agency around customer needs.

1) Customer service starts at the top.
Make customer service an organization-wide promise to guide all aspects of your agency’s people, practices and processes. The entire senior management team must support a customer service ethic. For a very small agency, that may be just one person—perhaps you—who leads the charge. Having support at the top will allow the rest of the staff to feel supported in their customer-service efforts as well.

2) Make customer service part of your transit culture. Turn your motto into the customer promise: “We Serve You.” If you treat all customers like they are honored guests, they will hold an appealing image of rural and community transit.

3) Understand how customers interface with your agency and what they need.
Map out major customer points-of-contact by sketching-out how people interface and use the public transit system. This involves not only mapping all key customer touch points, but also identifying customers’ expectations and your ability to meet those expectations at each major touch point. Some examples of touch points include when a passenger schedules a ride, when a passenger calls back to cancel or modify a previously scheduled trip, when a rider boards a vehicle, or when a passenger calls the agency to voice a complaint.

Source

4) **Consider customer input.** All transit agencies should measure overall customer satisfaction levels, expectations and performance on an ongoing basis through customer-service assessments. The goal of this is to continue improving by inserting the "voice of the customer" into everyday operations.

5) **Improve customer service by using and sharing data.** Look for ways to communicate that your agency takes customer service seriously. One idea is to share customer service scores with agency staff and board members, the stakeholders and the public. Examples of customer service-related data are the number or percentage of on-time arrivals, number of vehicle breakdowns, number of passenger complaints and results from an on-board survey, conducted periodically.

6) **Explore un-met needs.** Identify un-met needs by talking to community leaders, riders and prospective riders. There are many low-cost ways to tackle this task, such as partnering with a radio station or newspaper to gather information, setting up a Facebook page for input, or asking riders to fill out an on-board survey. Use the information gathered to identify un-met needs and create new partnerships.

7) **Consider customer service a full time job.** It takes time to build a customer service culture. The goal is to have everyone thinking about customer needs, from the bottom up—and from the top down—thinking and practicing customer service with each action taken.

**Conclusion**

Customer service is extremely important in all aspects of operating a rural transit system. If riders are shown that you are there to serve them, they will return, spread the word, and new customers will be more likely to use public transportation.

For more information regarding the topic, read the National RTAP technical service brief referenced in the Source on page 8.

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**Make business your business** Continued from page 7

- Rural transit provides a direct link to workers who are often spread over large geographic areas.
- Businesses usually don’t want to operate a transit service for workers, and turn to rural transit providers to provide the efficient, cost-effective service they need.
- Businesses want to support the local economy; having the business community promote and use rural transit is a clear and highly-visible way to do this.
- Businesses want the communities they locate in to be vibrant and therefore are motivated to contribute to the local quality of life.
- Rural transit provides vital links to neighboring communities and tribal lands, links beyond the local community that business interests appreciate more than most others.

When looking at these core reasons, it is easy to see why rural transit can be a vital resource for local business. Rural transit can and should pursue relationships with local businesses. National RTAP provides guidance for a well-thought plan of action, outlined below.

**Steps for improving the business focus of transit**

National RTAP lists 10 easy steps to assist rural transit operators in reaching out to their local business communities. While each transit manager should adapt and tailor these steps to fit their agency's situation, these steps are a great starting point toward a proactive plan. The 10 steps, with tips, are listed below:

1) **Put on your best suit.** Develop a brief presentation that tells your story and includes case studies where transit has effectively partnered with business. National RTAP can assist transit operators with obtaining such case studies.

2) **First stop: Visit the recommenders.** Local chambers of commerce and economic development departments are vital resources for business development, and can help transit operators refine their presentations and put them in touch with key businesses.

3) **Second stop: Visit likely prospects.** Identify the largest employers in your region and visit them personally.

4) **Keep an open mind.** The greatest needs of a business may not have immediately clear links to transit, so the ability to just listen can be an asset. Make your own luck, and don’t be afraid to ask deeper questions of business leaders.

5) **Be creative.** A challenging problem is a great opportunity for a creative solution—one that can come out of dialogue between you and business leaders.

6) **Crawl, walk, run.** The best approach is to start small—with new service that meets the needs of a business, and then slowly build on that success. This enables easy experimentation and keeps any funding and operations risks to a minimum.

continued on next page
Rural transit operators throughout the country are putting into practice the National RTAP’s 10 steps for improving their customer-centric and business related focus. National RTAP notes several rural transit systems that showcase how to be creative in cultivating business relationships. Here are three examples:

**Kings Area Rural Transit (KART)** is an example of how to approach likely prospective businesses that may be interested in partnering with rural transit. Residents in rural portions Southern California’s San Joaquin Valley needed better transportation options to get to their jobs on farms, state-run correctional facilities and other regional employers; many impoverished farm workers depended on unsafe and unreliable vehicles to get to their jobs. Workers also needed long-distance commute options that would also be available during off-peak shift hours. KART’s solution was to start a vanpool program with rural employers that could safely and reliably serve workers’ varied needs that involved multiple and often-changing work sites and non-traditional working hours.

**Blue Ridge Community College** of rural Virginia needed to be creative to meet the transportation needs of students and faculty. The college is located in a rural area between the small towns of Harrisonburg and Staunton, and needed a public transit option. Though they needed special service, Blue Ridge had little funding; their solution was to partner with a local rural transit operator to obtain the funds and service they sought. The rural transit operator could use federal and state dollars to fund 68 percent of the new service if it was a general public bus service. Most stops on the new route were on the college campus and in the most populated areas of the neighboring towns. Both towns were transfer stations tied into local bus systems. The successful service runs two buses 15 hours a day, carrying 4,000 people a month to the college.

**Augusta Health** of Staunton, Virginia and rural transit also got creative to provide patients with transit options after the health care organization built an expansion hospital near the town of Waynesboro. Many residents of Waynesboro started using the new facility, but ran into trouble when they were referred to the base hospital in Staunton but had no way to get there. Augusta Health partnered with rural transit to establish a shuttle bus system between hospitals and the towns the facilities serve. For the past seven years, the health care firm has contributed $60,000 per year to help keep the two-bus service running. The service operates 12 hours a day, and carries 3,600 riders a month. Success stories like KART, Blue Ridge Community College, and Augusta Health show that rural transit operators and businesses can be great partners, serving community needs through positive working relationships and a little creativity.

7) **Work it, don’t just watch it.** If you are going to serve business interests, it helps to think like them. The hard work starts after the deal is made, so give it time to work, ride the service, and ask questions of the riders. See if there are adjustments to make that would improve the service.

8) **Measure and record program impact.** Successful businesses constantly monitor their performance, so transit systems can be a good partner by doing the same. Keep track of operational costs, ridership, rider satisfaction, and community impact, and communicate frequently with the partnering business.

9) **Package your new program’s success (but keep yourself out of the limelight).** Use the data you gather about your service’s success to develop a marketing campaign. Use social media, write press releases and create advertising for the system, and make your business partners the heroes in it all. Business will support any success stories they are involved with, and the more you try to stay out of the limelight, the more you will be in it.

10) **Celebrate & fuel the buzz.** Celebrate success and distribute case studies and information sheets about it to regional chambers of commerce and local economic development departments. The more you put the word out about the successful transit service your business partners have contributed to, the more support you will receive from the business community.

For more information

National RTAP has assembled several resources to assist rural transit managers with making their business-relationship development plans, including technical briefings, presentations, and webinars. Visit the link at the Source below and search for “Make Business Part of Rural Transit’s Business” in the site’s Search bar.

**Source**

Using the advanced search is a great way to find out what materials have been developed by National RTAP. There is a drop-down menu for publisher, and if you choose “National RTAP,” and sort the search by date, you will see list of resources in the resource library entered by National RTAP, with the most recent resources listed first. You can enter additional search criteria, such as subjects, to narrow your search.

The library does not require that you know the entire title; you can just enter part of the title, or as close as you can get it, and it will search for materials that match that information as closely as possible. You can then place your order online. All resources are free.

If you prefer to just contact us at Kansas RTAP to ask us for resources on a particular topic, please continue to do so. However, if you prefer to do a little “digging” yourself, the National RTAP resource library is a great place to start.

To get to the National RTAP resource library, all you have to do is type in http://www.nationalrtap.org. The resource library search bar is one of the first things you’ll see on the site near the top of the page (see above). There are two search choices, a “simple” search or an “advanced” search.

A simple search just requires entering part of a title, subject, author, or anything else you’d like to enter to find a resource, and press return. There are many types of resources: publications, CDs, DVDs, webinars, toolkits, and many more. If you want to narrow it down a little more, choose the advanced search. Then you can enter keywords, any part of the title, a publishing organization, publication date, or subject, then hit “search,” and you’re on your way.
Carrot or Stick?

By Chris Wichman

A mix of both will help build a safety culture within your transit agency.

Lazaro has three recommendations for creating such a structure:

1) Designate one employee as program safety officer—whether it is the agency manager or otherwise, to be the point person for safety-related policy inquiries or concerns.

2) Establish a communication process for safety policies and concerns. This can be formal, such as an internal safety committee, or an informal open-door policy with the program safety officer.


The stick: Progressive discipline

Transit agencies must have a process for evaluating and responding to incidents (employee or rider injuries) and vehicular crashes. First, a formal investigation must be done to decide if the incident or crash was preventable. In smaller agencies this is typically completed by one or more agency administrators (e.g. the director or operations manager), who examine the incident report, the police report, and any other information needed to conduct the investigation. If the incident is found to have been preventable, the agency can choose to retrain the individual, or in the case of an egregious error, discipline the individual with either suspension or termination.

Traditionally, transit agencies have used a form of “progressive discipline” as the primary tool to respond to negative employee behaviors. Progressive discipline is a series of consequences that increase in severity over time in an attempt to modify the negative behaviors. According to the TCRP Synthesis 97, this technique is most often used to address poor performance and violations of company policy such as absenteeism and tardiness, but can also be applied to unsafe behaviors.

Larger, urban transit systems are likely to follow a...
formal procedure for disciplinary action agreed upon through collective bargaining with a driver's union. This process would include verbal meetings that are recorded and filed and a written notice with the possibility for suspension or termination of the employee depending on the severity of the offense.

Lazaro pointed out that many smaller, rural systems do not have collectively-bargained employee agreements and therefore have more flexibility to decide how discipline will be applied. Smaller systems may find suspension difficult to implement given already limited staff resources. A written warning may be more appropriate in this setting. Retraining is also a good technique to help ensure future employee compliance. If the offense is found to be egregious and preventable, a rural transit agency may choose to move directly to termination.

The carrot: Incentive programs
Transit agencies across the country have begun to develop new and innovative safety programs that complement traditional progressive discipline tools with employee incentive programs. Incentives are any form of proactive rewards given to staff members who have achieved safety or performance milestones. The TCRP Synthesis 97 found that safety incentive programs are most successful when employees are encouraged to exceed program expectations. Continually setting a higher bar raises employee awareness of their agency’s commitment to safety. Incentive programs can engage and educate employees, encourage positive behavior change, and reward and recognize employees for contributing to a safer work environment.

Some rural transit agencies may be leery of paying for employee incentives while facing tight budgets and increasing operating costs. However, relatively inexpensive approaches can also be effective. “Any incentive is better than nothing, it can come in the form of cash or gifts, but also patches, awards, certificates or public recognition of good performance,” said Lazaro.

Carrot and stick
With progressive discipline alone, employees may begin to think that management only notices when mistakes are made. Incentives allow the transit agency to balance out the stick with a carrot to meet program safety objectives.

The research in the Synthesis showed that agencies that have safety reward programs saw improvements in employee morale and improved employee–employer relationships. The research also found that a majority of survey respondents considered those agencies that combine consistent discipline programs with employee incentives to be good model programs from which to draw new ideas.

One such model program, the Wind River Transportation Authority (WRTA) in Riverton, Wyoming utilizes a progressive discipline process but also recognizes driver safety achievements through a variety of low-cost incentives. For drivers reaching special milestones such as five years of accident-free driving, WRTA treats the staff member to lunch. WRTA also

continued on next page

A Few Driver Safety Tips from Ream Lazaro

Have a “Most Helpful Driver” award. Typical rural transit drivers, primarily part-timers, retirees and even volunteers, often draw their motivation from the opportunity to help others rather than high wages or job security. Consider tailoring rewards and incentives to what motivates your drivers to excel in safety.

Meet the riders’ needs. Customers with functional difficulties and elderly riders may require special securement and at times require door-to-door service which, by nature, has greater safety risks. Ensure that all employees are properly trained to assist all passengers with special needs.

Train and retrain. To keep driver skills sharp, consider annual behind-the-wheel evaluations and periodic refresher training to revisit the skills of defensive driving, passenger assistance, and emergency response. Ongoing training will remind drivers of the agency’s commitment to safety.

Sources

• Interview with Ream Lazaro, Safety and Security Consultant/Trainer to the Community Transportation Association of America.
Carrot or stick?  Continued from page 13

recognizes employee achievements that are not directly related to safety, however all contribute to an overall culture of excellence and safety. For example, their annual “Clean Bus Award” earns the winning driver a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

Conclusion

It is the responsibility of every transit agency to provide a safe riding experience to its customers. Each agency will differ in its methods and level of organizational commitment for accomplishing safety goals, but a need across all agencies is a formal disciplinary process to address driver incidents and accidents. Some transit agencies use employee incentives in conjunction with progressive discipline to recognize, motivate, and reinforce the organization’s safety culture. From the findings of TCRP’s Synthesis 97, it is evident that agencies incorporating safety incentives find them to be effective tools to improve employee morale, encourage employees to work safely, and improve employee-employer relationships.

Implementing employee incentive programs for rural transit agencies in Kansas should not be abandoned as too costly. Any incentive is better than nothing. Consider finding a local business to sponsor your program. An annual gift certificate to reward safe practices is a good first step toward balancing the stick with a carrot in how you approach safety in your transit agency.

Accessing Public Transit Buses Using a Ramp

A study funded by the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation is requesting survey participants.

You are invited to participate in a research study by taking an anonymous survey to identify factors that contribute to ramp-related incidents and injuries when entering or exiting a public transit bus using a wheelchair ramp. If you’ve never experienced a ramp-related incident, we would still like to hear from you, as that is important information too.

If you are 18 years of age or older, use a wheelchair or scooter as your primary means of mobility, and you have accessed a public transit bus using a wheelchair ramp similar to those shown below during the past three years, we welcome your participation in this survey. Or if you are a family member or personal assistant for someone who meets these criteria, you may complete this survey.

Find the survey at: https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WheelchairRampSurvey
Transit Resources

National RTAP’s Website Builder
National RTAP’s website templates have all of the features you need to build and manage a great looking website, all designed via familiar web-based tools, with no programming or HTML knowledge needed. Create pages using text, images, links, and even add video to your site. Blogs, calendars, file downloads, photo galleries and more are easy to create and maintain.
http://nationalrtap.org/WebApps/WebsiteBuilder.aspx

Community Transportation Association of America DigitalCT
Contains articles on nothing short of a new way to do this business we call community transportation—new ways of providing affordable transportation; new planning methods; new coordinated partnerships; and new ways of serving our communities.
http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/articlefiles/Summer_12_Innovative_Coordination.pdf

Improving ADA Paratransit Demand Estimation: Regional Modeling
(September, 2012). This is TRB’s Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 158. It sketches a planning model and regional models designed to help metropolitan planning organizations and transit operators better estimate the probable future demand for Americans with Disability Act (ADA) complementary paratransit service, as well as predict travel.

Guidebook for Evaluating Fuel Purchasing Strategies for Public Transit Agencies
(August 2012). This is TRB’s Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 156. It is designed to help identify and evaluate risks and uncertainties with respect to fuel prices. The guide also describes tools and techniques for minimizing the impact of fuel price uncertainties over time.
Download at http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_156.pdf

Developing, Enhancing, and Sustaining Tribal Transit Services: A Guidebook
(July 2012.) This is TRB’s Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 154. It offers guidance about the various steps for planning and implementing a tribal transit system. The steps that are described may be used for planning a new transit system, enhancing an existing service, or taking action to sustain services.

Training Adult Learners: How to Reach and Engage Your Audience.
Technical Brief, National RTAP, 2012. Download at http://www.nationalrtap.org ... or check here for hard copy and order below from Kansas RTAP.

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 at 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.

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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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