Vanpooling: Is it Right for You?

Useful resources if you are thinking about starting a program for your agency or community

By Pat Weaver

As hard as we might try, traditional public transit services can’t solve all the mobility problems in rural communities—communities with diverse transit needs, lots of miles in the service area, lack of enough density to support frequent and comprehensive fixed-route service, and employers with work hours that span the clock with more than one shift or hours outside a traditional 8-5, five days a week. What’s a transit manager to do? One strategy is to help get alternative services going, either provided directly by the agency or by working

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A Look at Nontraditional Funding for Transit

By Jon Moore

Funding your service is always a challenge, and it’s particularly tough when demand for your services keeps growing right along with your fuel bill. A new guidebook by Transportation America, Thinking Outside the Farebox: Creative Approaches to Financing Transit Projects, may provide some ideas for addressing that challenge. Transit agencies are sometimes forced to look for alternative funding mechanisms to support their community’s growing transportation needs. Diversity in funding options is critical in sustaining the availability of service for transit riders. The more diverse a transit agency’s funding sources are, the less likely a decrease in service will be necessary if a particular source of funding is lost. This article will outline opportunities transit agencies might pursue to fund transit service projects.

Eligibility requirements or the amount

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with other partners to bring in these alternatives. One such alternative is commuter vanpool program, a service strategy that has been very successful in meeting commuter needs in some states. What about in Kansas? There is no one answer; but there are many resources available to help you determine whether it might be a partial solution for your community and your agency. This article provides an update of an article and a Kansas RTAP fact sheet produced in 2009. It has a number of new resources for you to read if you’re considering vanpools as at least a partial solution to commuter needs in your community.

Investigating vanpools in Region VII

In September 2012, Region VII United We Ride (Kansas, Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska) and Kansas RTAP co-hosted a one-hour webinar entitled “Vanpooling: Is It Right For Your Agency?” The webinar was organized by Region VII United We Ride Ambassador Margi Ness and included two guest speakers with lots of experience in establishing and running vanpools throughout the country: Justin Rison, CEO for TRANSITions Commute Solutions, and Shamus Misek, Statewide Rideshare Program Manager for the Washington Department of Transportation. In addition to his work in Washington State, Misek previously worked for PACE in Chicago and...
established an extensive vanpool program there. The recorded webinar is available online, along with copies of their presentations and other hand-outs. (See the sidebar on page 2 for the link to this webinar).

**Considerations for developing a vanpool program**

Innovative programs in rural communities can include ones that are owner-operated, programs sponsored by transit agencies or employers, and vanpools administered by third-party operators. Our previous article on the topic in the January 2009 issue of the *Kansas Trans Reporter* (http://www.kutc.ku.edu/pdffiles/KTR2009-Jan.pdf), provided a good explanation of types of vanpools and the many benefits to the commuter and to the employer.

In the September webinar, Rison outlined several considerations when moving towards a vanpool program—basic considerations such as identifying your customers, determining the commuting corridor(s) needed, potential sources of funds, and how involved you want to be in the program. Rison said you will need to determine what role your agency will play. Options might be to manage the program, provide the fleet along with managing the program, or move towards a “P2” program (public-private), contracting out with a vanpool provider.

Misek, in his comments during the webinar, shared many unique aspects of the Washington State vanpool program with its nearly 3,000 vanpools in operation statewide, the largest vanpool fleet in the country. Approximately 20 transit agencies in Washington State operate vanpools, from as few as three vanpools to King County with its more than 1,100 vanpools.

Misek outlined several non-traditional vanpool uses in Washington State, one of which was to authorize the transfer of retired vanpool vans to non-profit organizations and local governments. Another example of a non-traditional vanpool use was the Special Use Vans Program which provides not-for-profit agencies with accessible vans, fuel, insurance and maintenance to transport seniors or people with disabilities specifically to work or training. The JobSeeker Van Program provides assistance to selected community-based organizations that transport low-income and welfare clients who are transitioning into the workforce.

Misek advises transit agencies interested in establishing a successful vanpool program to be flexible, creative and responsive to customers. He admonished agencies to not fall victim to the standard response of “it can’t be done,” instead approaching and talking to other agencies to share ideas of potential approaches and learning from the successes and failures of others.

See the sidebar on page 2 for a list of resources on vanpools to help you get started.

• MAP-21 (P.L. 112-141) makes a provision for “assistance for local match needs specific for P2 programs for vanpooling,” said Rison. Public sector agencies that contract for vanpool service may use passenger revenue as a source of local match for creation and expansion of a vanpool program.

• Another change was in the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (also known as the “fiscal cliff” bill) which provides the option for most employers to provide transit and vanpool tax-free benefits to their employees up to $240 per month (under Section 132 (f)). This increase from the $125 per month benefit level restores the equity lost in 2012 between transit/vanpool tax benefits and the now $240 benefit provided for parking benefits.
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Five years ago, the Riley County Area Transportation Agency had an annual ridership of 21,000. By October of 2012, it had increased to 125,000. Anne Smith of the Riley County ATA attributes this substantial growth in ridership to the partnerships made in Riley County with private and non-profit organizations. By taking advantage of a service contract model developed in partnership with KDOT, 12 different funding sources, including Kansas State University, federal and state, apartment complex, school districts, and the YMCA, have increased the ATA budget from under $100,000 ten years ago to last year’s budget of $1.3 million. Smith said, “By claiming this income as local match versus project income, KDOT has been able to leverage a larger amount of federal and state dollars.”

Kansas State University is credited with being the largest contributor to the ATA’s local funding, of around $230,000, and it was the partner that got the ball rolling in the first place. KSU seeks to provide more transportation options to its students, like those pictured above on the campus.

Another partnership is with an apartment complex that funds bus service for a deviated fixed route to the complex, the tech college and the KSU campus. The demand response service was originally requested by the Junction City YMCA. A shuttle is then driven from Junction City to Fort Riley and then on to Manhattan. Smith said, “By thinking on a regional scale, transit service has benefited greatly.”

With this diverse group of funding partners, ATA has continued to grow. Funds have also come from grants secured from philanthropic organizations as well as ATA fundraisers. The ATA will be hearing back from the United Way next year to see if they will participate in their next partnership.

Value capture
One method for generating local funds to support transit growth includes value capture, or a tax, assessment, or fee to appropriate a share of the surrounding land value for new developments in the community to generate funding. Three strategies that fall under these criteria include 1) tax increment financing (TIF); 2) special assessments districts, and 3) development contributions.

Tax-increment financing. In the case of TIF, a general tax rate increase is not included. Instead, property value increases that occur from the transportation project generate additional revenue which is then used to pay off the project’s debt. These funds are gathered from a defined area around the project until the debt is paid.

Transit-oriented TIF districts are used in Maine to capture revenues in transit-served areas to use for transit and alternative transportation improvements and coordinate land uses favorable to transit. Because a new tax is not collected, this option can be attractive to voters. However, a public policy question is whether the money is better used for transit or other city services, especially if city services need to be extended or improved to serve the project.

Special assessment districts. The second strategy, establishing special assessment districts, does include an increase in general tax, but only to those properties located in a defined area around the project. This tax may be a property tax or sales tax. The idea is that the property-owners who are directly benefiting from the project are also given the responsibility for paying for a portion of it. Special assessments can be less politically desirable than TIFs because the increase in tax is sometimes passed on to the consumers of services of any commercial property owners in such areas being developed.

Development contributions. The third strategy, assessing development contributions, is considered a one-time fee on residential and commercial developers to cover the cost of needed infrastructure. This is administered when a developer proposes an extension to the infrastructure that would directly benefit their property. So, in exchange the developer may contribute to the project’s cost.
### Characteristics of Nontraditional Funding Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue Sources</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Equity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tax Increment</td>
<td>Variable, depending on the size of the tax increment district boundary around the transit facility</td>
<td>Land values tend to be stable over time providing predictable revenues</td>
<td>Revenues tie project benefits (increased land values) to funding the transit project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assessment District</td>
<td>Variable, depending on the size of the district and the tax rate applied to the properties</td>
<td>Land values tend to be stable over time providing predictable revenues</td>
<td>Ties project funding to taxes levied on surrounding landowner who are direct beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Contributions</td>
<td>Specific amount negotiated between project sponsor and developer</td>
<td>Typically a one-time contribution</td>
<td>Ties project funding to real estate development that will benefit directly from then new transit facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Tax</td>
<td>Sales taxes are broad-based and generate robust revenue</td>
<td>Sales taxes are a little less stable than property taxes but still provide a great deal of predictability</td>
<td>Sales taxes are regressive although this may be addressed by exempting certain items such as food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolls</td>
<td>Robust</td>
<td>Toll revenues are steady – especially for established highways with predictable travel demand</td>
<td>Regressive like all other flat user fees – not a concern for transit dependent residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Registration Tax</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Vehicle ownership rates are stable</td>
<td>Regressive like all other flat taxes -- not a concern for transit dependent residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Fees</td>
<td>Variable, depending on total number of spaces and travel demand</td>
<td>Peak period travel demand is mostly stable, through riders are sensitive to price changes</td>
<td>Regressive – not a concern for transit dependent residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel Tax</td>
<td>Robust</td>
<td>Driving rates are historically steady (subject to increasing fuel efficiency standards and recent changes in driving patterns)</td>
<td>Regressive – not a concern for transit dependent residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Sales</td>
<td>Variable, depending on the local market and the size of the parcels</td>
<td>Land sales provide one-time revenues</td>
<td>Few equity concerns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Transportation for America, “Thinking Outside the Farebox,” pg. 47.

While value capture can connect project funding with a project’s expected revenue benefits, other local funding options for public improvements involve the taxing of the users of the project, through their vehicles. These opportunities can include tolling, vehicle registration tax, parking fees and fuel tax.

### Local sales tax

Simply increasing the local sales tax is another commonly used alternative, but it can be difficult to get the support of voters. In Lawrence, KS, for example, a two-part increase in sales tax supporting public transportation was passed in 2008. This special sales tax, expiring in 2019, was divided into two separate ballot questions. A 0.2 percent increase is dedicated to public transit operations and capital investment while a 0.05 percent increase goes toward providing route enhancements and vehicle and facility improvements including bus service frequency and alternative fuel buses. The funds also enabled the city to merge its transit system with that of the University of Kansas which combines their resources to serve both the community’s and the students’ transportation needs.

### Transit funding

The funding strategies in the sidebar at left can be especially helpful to those who are transit dependent by not applying the cost burden only on them to fund all aspects of the system, i.e. with an increase in fare. If fares were to increase, this may be perceived as regressive, or imposing a greater burden on the poor, who tend to have higher than average transit ridership in a community. With this said, it is important to make sure those who are taxed understand they are helping to mitigate congestion in your community, assuming transit ridership will grow.

### Public-private partnerships

Another funding mechanism includes organizing public-private partnerships (called P2 or P3 agreements). A P3 agreement is a contractual agreement between a public agency and a private partner that allows the partner to continue on next page

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**A Look at the Numbers: Local and Regional Funding Sources Among Small Urban and Rural Systems**

The information below was gathered from a survey of 383 public transportation systems in 45 states:

- 53 percent use contract revenue from public or nonprofit agencies, another 18 percent do the same, but from private agencies or organizations.
- 10 percent use property tax revenues and 9 percent use local sales tax.
- 32 systems selected “other” forms of revenue and of those transit systems:
  - 31 cited local, county and state based grants
  - 15 cited donations/fund-raisers
  - 12 cited United Way contributions
  - 4 cited programs on aging

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participate in project implementation beyond traditional procurement practices. P3 agreements have their own individual set of specifics, but P3 agreements typically involve financing, design and engineering, construction and operations and maintenance. Access to private capital is a major benefit when considering the use of P3s because fewer tax dollars are then needed. By accessing this resource, the public is less at risk for local tax increases. See sidebar on page 4 for an example of a P3 agreement from Riley County.

Conclusion

While transit ridership is increasing nationwide, the limited amount of available funds will affect how much transit providers can continue to grow their services. A transit agency must depend more heavily on its own ability to acquire appropriate funds. Even when funds are available, the process is competitive for a smaller amount of money. Considering the recent success of both Riley County ATA and the agencies mentioned in the article, especially in an economic downturn, it may be possible to find diverse funding opportunities with willing parties working for mutual benefits.

As rising costs in labor and operations are limiting the level of service provided, the consequences of a two-year surface transportation program, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), are costing agencies more time and effort (see sidebar on this page). By taking advantage of the outlined opportunities to fund transit service projects, cuts in service can be lessened. Depending on a community’s willingness to invest in transit service, funding mechanisms, like local sales tax, can be a way to fill in the funding gap, as was seen in Lawrence. If a community wants to go a different route, developing public-private partnerships is another valuable financing tool, as seen in Riley County. The struggle for resources may not be won by a single funding mechanism, but rather an approach that aims at sustaining a diverse set of non-traditional funding mechanisms.

Changes Made to Federal Funding for Public Transit According to MAP-21

- Consolidation of the Elderly and Disabled and New Freedom programs into a single program; eliminates the Job Access and Reverse Commute program (JARC) but allows funding for these purposes under the urban and rural formula programs.
- Allows urbanized transit systems operating fewer than 100 buses in peak service to use a portion of their Section 5307 grant funds for operating expenses.
- Streamlines the New Starts program; makes core capacity projects eligible for funding.
- Within the Rural Program, provides $30 million for the Public Transportation on Indian Reservations program within the Rural Program ($5 million to be distributed to tribes competitively each year, and $25 million as formula grants to tribes).


A transit agency must depend more heavily on its own ability to acquire appropriate funds. Even when funds are available, the process is competitive for a smaller amount of money. It may be possible to find diverse funding opportunities with willing parties for mutual benefits.

Sources

- Phone Interview with Anne Smith, Riley County ATA. October 31, 2012.
Calculate Your Agency’s Senior Friendliness

By Aliza Chudnow

When your services are convenient to seniors and they feel comfortable with your drivers, vehicles, and scheduling process, you create an inviting service for them to use and from which they can benefit.

Accessibility: If the transit service offers supportive assistance, more seniors will likely use public transportation. One way of making transit service more accessible is to have the driver come to the door to assist the rider in getting to (and into) the vehicle.

Acceptability: If your service is welcoming and predictable, you will be more senior-friendly. Having a set schedule can really help senior citizens plan their trips. Other factors that would be attractive to seniors would be the cleanliness of the vehicles, the driver’s sensitivity to senior passengers, and not having an extensive wait time to board the vehicles.

Adaptability: Transportation services that can be adapted to the needs of seniors contribute to senior friendliness within the agency. Services can accommodate seniors’ needs by scheduling multiple stops, and providing additional support such as assistance with walkers and wheelchairs, as well as help when riders reach their destinations.

Affordability: Many seniors are on a limited income. Offer low-cost rides, a senior discount, or partner with organizations that have senior customers or clients to be able to provide rides at no cost.

To get started on making your service more senior-friendly, or to assess in what areas you might improve, take the senior friendliness survey on page 14 of this newsletter.

In sum
Adopting the Five A’s of senior friendliness will very likely attract more senior riders. You will not only gain customers, but retain some of the best customers you already have.

To find out more on senior friendliness visit http://beverlyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/SeniorFriendlinessCalculatorTransitPrograms.pdf

Source


Turn to page 14 to take a quick survey to find out how senior friendly your transit agency is.
I was asked by a transit driver: “How can we protect ourselves against viruses or other types of diseases?” The answer is by practicing “standard precautions.” Standard precautions are safety practices developed by Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 1996 for health-care workers, but they also apply to other professions where there is a risk of exposure to bloodborne and other pathogens. Being out in public, you and your passengers can be exposed to a variety of infectious diseases, but being aware of how these diseases are spread—and what you can do to minimize exposure—can increase safety.

How diseases are spread

Diseases are spread:

- **Through touch** (such as touching a germy door knob then rubbing your eyes),
- **By respiratory droplet transmission** in the air (from a sick person sneezing in your vicinity),
- **Through ingestion** (usually by eating something that has been contaminated by touch, like not washing your hands before you eat), and
- **By vector-borne transmission** by being bitten by an infected animal or insect or being pricked by a contaminated sharp object.

Standard Precautions to minimize exposure

Touching a contaminated surface is the most common way people are exposed to infectious diseases. Your transit vehicle is used by many people. They touch the handrails on your vehicle, touch the seat backs as they stand or sit, and touch money that is deposited for their fares. Each provides an avenue for contact transmission. For example, an infected person uses the handrails to board. Saliva on his hand comes in contact with the handrails. You and your other passengers who use the handrails to enter or exit the vehicle have been exposed through contact transmission.

A standard precaution to prevent being infected through touch is practicing good hygiene, such as hand washing or sanitizing when possible. Keep hand sanitizer on your vehicle. To further protect yourself and your passengers, wipe down the handrails, seats and seat belts on your vehicle with a disinfecting surface cleaner and disposable towels as many times during the day as possible.

Breathing contamination can occur by respiratory droplet transmission through the air by someone sneezing on you or you sneezing on someone. Be professional and always cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent spreading an infection. The proper way is to cough or sneeze into a tissue and then put the tissue into a waste basket. If you do not have a tissue, then cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not into your hands.

Measures to avoid the spread of respiratory secretions among your passengers should be promoted. Elements of respiratory hygiene and cough include providing supplies such as tissues, waste baskets and, hand sanitizers for your passengers. Also place cough etiquette signs (such as the Centers for Disease Control poster at left) where the general public can see them.

Ingestion contamination usually occurs by eating something that has been contaminated by touch. The standard precaution is to avoid hand-to-face contact. Hand-to-face contact is a common way that people catch infectious diseases. If your hands are germy and you eat or apply lip balm, smoke, or handle your contact lenses you have just contaminated yourself with those germs. The best prevention is washing your hands before eating, applying lip balm, rubbing your eyes or putting in your contacts.

Vector-borne transmission is when a person’s skin is penetrated by an infectious source, such as an insect bite or sharpie such as a needle. Standard prevention is to use insect repellent and be cautious when handling trash. Proper PPE for handling trash is to wear heavy gloves. Err on the side of caution and know that any trash bag may contain a needle or other sharp object. Never use your hands, feet or unprotected skin to compress trash, never hold bags close to the body, and keep trash loads light to avoid splitting the bag (and back injury from awkward lifting).

**Skin is a barrier but personal protective equipment (PPE) is better**

Unbroken skin is an effective barrier against bloodborne pathogens. However, infected blood or other bodily fluids can enter the skin through open sores, damaged skin (sunburns or blisters), paper cuts, hangnails or even acne.

The most basic protection is a barrier
between you and the contaminated material. For example if someone is bleeding, give that person a clean bandage or rag to absorb the blood instead of doing it for them. If you have to provide first aid to stop the bleeding, put on your nitrile gloves in your first aid kit or bloodborne pathogen kit. Make sure in your pre-trip inspection you verify the gloves will fit you and that they have been changed out on a regular basis. Gloves that have been in the kit over time will have a higher chance of splitting due to exposure to changing temperatures.

Only use PPE that you have been trained to use, such as gloves, goggles, face mask, ty-v-ek body suit and shoe covers. Do not use PPE that is torn or punctured. Take off any PPE that you use before leaving the contaminated area and properly dispose of it by bagging it and putting it into the trash. Also it is very important to wash your hands and exposed skin immediately after removing your PPE.

Summary

Understanding how diseases are spread and taking Standard Precautions can help you to prevent exposure to infectious diseases. When in doubt, treat all bodily fluids, whether bloody or not, as potentially infectious material. Always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment for the job.

Practice good hygiene on your vehicle by disinfecting surface areas. And practice good personal hygiene by always washing your hands thoroughly whenever possible. Keep facial tissue and hand sanitizer on your vehicles for use by yourself and your passengers.


Sources

I once read (and saved) a Dilbert cartoon in which several people sat around a table at a meeting and the chairperson said, “There is no specific agenda for the meeting. As usual, we’ll just make unrelated emotional statements about things that bother us…”

That pretty much sums it up. Too many meetings are unstructured, uninspiring, and unproductive. This article is aimed at achieving a productive board meeting. It will give you tips for helping to structure board work and engage your board members.

Where to start?

The foundation for an effective board meeting is an effective board. The National Rural Transit Assistant Program (NRTAP) resource titled Boards that Perform examines 10 steps to creating an effective board. We’ll focus on a few of them here.

The first step is to refer to your mission statement—your agency's lighthouse. If you lose track of why or what you are doing at board meetings, look back to your mission statement to be reminded of your overall purpose. The mission statement is there to inform employees, customers, (and you) of what your agency is all about and where it is headed.

Effectiveness comes with leadership

Leadership requires planning, preparation, and trust. A board facilitator must delegate responsibility and must be able to trust board members to live up to the responsibilities they have accepted. To build that trust, leadership also requires evaluation, education, and inspiration. The board must be committed to the agency's mission statement and strategic plan. Board members should be given written job descriptions that reflect the duties that are expected of them.

Conduct an annual board review to determine if everyone is on track. The review should focus on both: 1) how well the board member and 2) how well the chair or facilitator is maintaining the mission statement and the goals and objectives set for that time-period.

Help your board to participate. Do this by educating your board members. Provide informational packets linked with agendas that will help answer key questions. Help board members keep up with the rapid pace of change in the transit field and in your agency. Often board packets include reports from the board’s committees.

Who does what?

Executive director. The executive director's responsibility is to run the daily operations of the agency. The realm of the executive directors' authority (not the board) is the operations of the agency, i.e., hiring or firing of personnel, budget needs and other operational tasks. Decisions made by the executive director, though, should be guided and constrained by board-approved policies.

The executive director also typically provides administrative support to the board. For example, board meeting agendas and board packets are usually developed by the executive director with input from the board chair and committee chairs. Other board support is usually in the form of drafting board correspondence, sending out meeting reminders, securing a location for the meeting, obtaining and distributing information for the board from staff or committee members, and assisting new members with their board responsibilities.

Board of directors. Board members typically have a general understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, some are confused about their responsibilities concerning day-to-day operations. As a result, the line between management and the board can be blurred.

The role and responsibilities of the board must be clearly defined and understood by those who fulfill them. Upon entering board service, and ideally before accepting a board appointment, all members should be provided a written job description that clearly delineates their roles and responsibilities.

Committees. A committee’s responsibility is to research and make recommendations to the board. Transit committees might include finance, personnel, marketing and planning, operations, external affairs, and safety and security. These subject areas can be combined, added, or eliminated as needed by the agency.

Consider committees as an opportunity avenue to tap into community resources. For instances, if you have a finance subcommittee, look to people in your community with that expertise—exceptional fund raisers, accountants, or financial consultants—and make them part of the committee. They do not need to be members of your board. Another committee might focus on advocacy for public transportation. In that case, tap into members of organizations or individuals that use your services. The bottom line: Committees bring added expertise to your board activities and help you to obtain broader community support.

It’s meeting time

The main activities of the board are conducted during its meetings. How can you be sure those meetings are productive? The answer is planning, preparation, and thoughtful leadership. In saying that, I have been the chair of several committees and the best piece of advice I received
was from a prior chair: “Make an agenda and stick to it!” An example of a poorly planned meeting is producing an agenda 30 minutes before the meeting. Why? No buy-in from the participants and confusion and lack of focus from an unprepared board.

Set a firm agenda. The Executive Director should work ahead of time with the board chair and committee chairs to request items for the meeting agenda and how much time they would like to discuss them. Agendas should also include items that occur annually, like discussion of new board members, a board self-evaluation and the yearly review of the executive director. Agendas still need flexibility, but this will work as a tool to allow individuals to think about what they want to accomplish during the meeting. Send out the agenda ahead of time (at least two weeks) to allow board members to know what to expect to discuss and how much time to set aside to prepare for the meeting.

Committee reports. The advantage of having committees is that during the board meeting you do not have to get bogged down lengthy discussion of important details. The longer and more detailed discussions are held in committee meetings with the best expertise at the table. The committees then report recommendations to the board for discussion and approval. Having committee reports during a board meeting helps to create structure to keep your meeting tightly focused.

Assign a note-taker. Do this before the meeting starts, and make sure the note-taker has some guidance about the level of detail to include in the notes. After the meeting, when attendees are trying to remember what decisions were made and what actions need to be taken, they can simply review the notes.

Discourage internal politics; use data. “He said – she said,” is not productive in a meeting. Are you discussing a complaint about the agency? Ask about the actual number of complaints on this topic and how they were responded to. Keep to the facts in your discussions.

Stick to the clock. The board chair or designee needs to keep track of the time and keep items to the time periods printed on the agenda. This will help make your meeting successful and the chair will gain respect from everyone attending. (Remember, their time is important.)

In summary, an effective board meeting starts with planning and preparation. Use your mission statement to guide your agenda. Understand and stay within the roles and responsibilities of the executive director (day-to-day operations), board members (policy and fiduciary responsibility) and committee members (expertise, research and recommendations). It is also important to periodically review your management and governance processes. Finally, the key to a successful board meeting is a carefully-planned agenda (and sticking to it). Planning a well-thought-out agenda takes some work and skill, but with good planning, preparation and leadership, successful board meetings can be the building blocks for success to your agency.

Sources
What kind of “first impression” do people have of your agency? First impressions are now often made through websites. In the National RTAP article “Driving Your Online Presence,” a good first impression was listed as an important criterion for evaluating an existing website. But what else is important? This article will explain why it is important to have an online presence, provide guidance on how to create a new website or update an existing one, and also inform you on what the site should say about your agency.

Importance
Rural residents are disadvantaged by lack of mobility and by increased distance between the workplace, health care, and shopping as compared to their urban counterparts. Your transit agency can increase access for rural residents by decreasing gaps in transportation services. So how does an online presence fit into solving these issues?

Websites are important for your transit agency, according to National RTAP, because they can:
- attract customers and expand your base,
- advertise routes and schedules,
- provide a trip planning self-service,
- receive customer feedback, and
- build awareness of the agency and its services within the community.

The internet allows your website to be viewed at anywhere with access to the internet. This is an opportunity for free exposure and advertising via the internet. By providing your information online, users can access the schedules and routes online and are much more easily updated.

Trip planning can be included on the site through an interface or through a link to Google Transit. Trip planning is a feature adopted by many transit agencies operating fixed-route service that allows users to plan their trip using the scheduling and stops built into the agencies database. This feature creates a personalized user experience and provides attractiveness as a user tool.

Your website should also be a space for customer feedback.

What about access to the internet?
Recent data from Statista indicates that 70 percent of rural residents have access to computers. Rural passengers are becoming more comfortable using computers. Having a website just makes good sense.

How to create a new website
Now that we know why websites are so important to your transit agency, let’s look at how to create one.

“Driving Your Online Presence,” lists five steps for establishing a website:
- First pick out a domain name that is unique to your transit agency. A domain name is what users will type in to find your website. For example http://www.ksrtap.org/ is the Kansas RTAP web address.
- Next create a site map, similar to a table of contents, of the pages to include in your site. This will organize your site structure. The next step is to write text and informative content. Once the site map is created, the information to be displayed on each page should be easy to read and written for your intended audience.
- Find a model website on which to base your website design. The design should allow users to navigate easily and quickly through all its pages.
- The final step is to build the website. Free website content management systems (WCMS) such as Word Press can be used to build your site.
- If you think your agency does not have the in-house comfort level to create the website, alternatives for creating it include outside resources such as local high schools and community colleges with technical programs for website design or simply visit the National RTAP website, http://www.nationalrtap.org, for free helpful tools for building websites such as the Website Builder application.

Updating an existing website
According to “Driving Your Online Presence,” the first step in improving an existing website is to develop evaluation criteria. The could include first impression, ease of navigation, content, findability, and user satisfaction.

The next step is to develop a survey with questions that evaluate these criteria to send out to riders or a selected
The results should then be used to reevaluate the site and make improvements. To view an existing survey by MARTA visits http://www.itsmarta.com/textver/marta-survey.aspx.

The TCRP Synthesis 43: Effective Use of Transit Websites described a website redesign by the Chicago Transit Authority’s (CTA). The report said “[The] redesign efforts are aimed at producing faster download times, minimizing the number of mouse clicks to key information, and making information easier to locate” and that large graphics were eliminated and the site structure was flattened and reorganized.

In Salina, Kansas, OCCK’s Inc. has redesigned its website. According to OCCK’s Jan Pfannenstiel, “[We] wanted to update our appearance on the web, update all department information, make the site easier to use, and add flexibility so that staff could make minor text changes, etc.” OCCK also recently made changes to reflect fare and route changes.

OCCK and an outside marketing firm devised a makeover of the website that included:

• New design and layout
• Revamped logo
• Updated buttons
• Email function
• Language translator
• Updated maps, routes, and schedules.

Pfannenstiel said that the old website needed to be revamped because it functioned inefficiently and was unattractive for users.

To increase interaction for users, OCCK provided links to staff email addresses so users could directly contact the staff with their inquiries. The updated buttons on the website increased user interaction, provided for a more functional design layout, and increased user-attractiveness.

Creating That First Impression: What Does it Communicate?

A first impression is captured by a user within seconds of visiting your website. A 2010 study by the Missouri University of Science and Technology, titled Eyes Don’t Lie: Understanding Users’ First Impressions On Website Design Using Eye Tracking, found that users initially gravitate to seven different “Areas of Interest” on a website. These areas include, in ranking order:

• logo,
• main menu,
• search box,
• social networking links,
• main picture,
• body of the website,
• bottom of the website.

The “Areas of Interest” are the elements that create the first impressions for your users. The first impression elements are opportunities to create your agency’s unique experience. For more information on the Missouri University of Science and Technology study visit https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10355/30859/Dahal_2010.pdf?sequence=1

What should a first impression “say?” Website users need to be reassured that your service fits their needs. Elements of a website that appeal to users are reliability, perfect information, efficiency and relevance to them. These elements translated into you site should read something along the lines of:

Our agency:

• Cares that customers have information whenever they need it
• Provides frequent updates so information is useful
• Provides information for all levels of riders
• Includes diverse customers of all ages
• Cares about customer needs.

Conclusion

Transit agency users are looking for easily-accessible information, 24/7, and a website does that. Good information on your website can increase ridership and helps decrease gaps in transportation options for users. One goal of your agency’s website should be to provide reliable and up to date information at a moment’s notice. A redesign goal could be to increase the operating efficiency of the website and provide services that other agencies’ websites do not provide, such as trip planning. So craft your transit agency’s online presence today with an eye to the future, and it will be a service that can benefit riders and your agency.

Sources


• Phone Interview: Jan Fanestil, OCCK, Inc., March 8, 2013.

• Illustration on page 12 from http://www.shutterstock.com / Dimitri Skordopolous
Senior friendliness  Continued from page 7

How Senior Friendly is Your Agency? Use This Calculator to Find Out

If you want to review your program’s senior friendliness, all you have to do is follow the instructions provided by the Beverly Foundation, listed below.

1) Check each of the factors below that are represented within your program. (Each check equals one point)
2) When you have completed your review, add up your score and look at the scoring key at the bottom of the page to know where you are on “the road to senior friendliness.”

Availability: The Transportation Service…. 
- _____ provides transportation to seniors
- _____ can be reached by the majority of seniors in the community
- _____ provides transportation anytime (day, evenings, weekends, 24/7)
- _____ can take riders to destinations beyond city & county boundaries
- _____ maintains organizational relationships with human service agencies

Acceptability: The Transportation Service…
- _____ uses vehicles that are easy for seniors to access
- _____ offers “demand response” with no advance scheduling requirement
- _____ provides driver “sensitivity to seniors” training
- _____ adheres to narrow “window of time” for home and destination pick up
- _____ ensures cleanliness and maintenance of vehicles

Accessibility: The Transportation Service…
- _____ can accommodate the needs of a majority of elders in the community
- _____ has information program for improving senior transportation knowledge
- _____ can provide “door-thru-door” transportation when needed
- _____ can provide services to essential and non-essential activities
- _____ can link seniors with “more appropriate” transportation options

Adaptability: The Transportation Service…
- _____ will provide transportation escorts when needed
- _____ can provide multiple stop trips for individual passengers
- _____ can access vehicles that accommodate wheelchairs and walkers
- _____ maintains a policy of “adapting the system to meet needs of seniors”
- _____ undertakes annual senior customer survey for service improvement

Affordability: The Transportation Service…
- _____ offers reduced fares (or free transportation) to senior passengers
- _____ secures funding specifically to support senior transit services
- _____ offers opportunity to purchase monthly pass instead of paying cash
- _____ offers options for purchasing tickets by mail or the internet
- _____ uses volunteer drivers to reduce costs for providing “extra” services

Your Road to Senior Friendliness Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Just Starting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Out of the Garage</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>On the Road</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Chugging Along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Good Show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Senior Friendly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How to Reach Us

For a free subscription to the Kansas TransReporter or to contact one of our faculty or staff, call toll-free (800) 248-0350 (in Kansas) or (785) 864-2595 (outside Kansas). Send correspondence to:

Kansas TransReporter
Kansas University Transportation Center
1536 W. 15th Street, M2SEC Room G520
Lawrence, KS 66045

Send e-mail messages to Pat Weaver at weaver@ku.edu or Lisa Harris at LHarris@ku.edu. Visit our website at http://www.ksrtap.org

Other Services

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

- Publication dissemination
- Program planning assistance
- Technical assistance
- Video lending library
- Telephone consultation
- Computer database searches
- Training development
- Referral services
- Website
- Email discussion group

KANSAS RTAP STAFF

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

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Transit Resources

PUBLICATIONS and TOOLS

Web Apps for Sharing Information.
National RTAP: National RTAP has unveiled two web apps that have been renamed “ResourceShare” and “EventShare” calendar web app to indicate technology tools used for sharing information. March 11, 2013. http://www.nationalrtap.org.

Easter Seals Project Action: The Participation of Human Services Organizations in Mobility Management.
This report details the results of the ESPA Mobility Management Rapid Response Study in which we sought to understand the participation of human services organizations in mobility management. December 12, 2012. http://www.projectaction.org/.


ONLINE TRAINING

Frequently Asked Questions on the ADA: Fixed Route and Paratransit (webinar).
April 13, 2013. For more information http://www.projectaction.org/.

People on the Move: The ADA and Beyond Fixed Route and Paratransit (online course).

National Transit Institute NTD Safety and Security Reporting - Basic Setup/Non-Major Incident Reporting (webinar).

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.

Name ________________________________ Title ________________________________

Agency ________________________________ Phone ________________________________

Street Address ________________________________ E-mail address ________________________________

City __________________ State ________________ Zip + 4 __________________________
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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Rural Transit Training and Conferences

2013 Kansas RTAP Drivers Training:

Defensive Driving and Emergency Procedures
April 4 in Salina
August 29 in Russell

Defensive Driving and Passenger Assistance
April 3 in Oakley
July 11 in Manhattan
August 23 in Lawrence

Advance Mobility Securement
June 19 in Lawrence
June 20 in Onaga
August 28 in Great Bend
September 12 Elwood
September 25 in Independence
October 29 in Leavenworth

Defensive Driving and Crisis Communication for Transit Employees (New)
April 10 in Holton
April 11 in Leavenworth
May 16 in El Dorado
July 24 in Topeka
October 16 in Ottawa
October 24 in Salina
November 6 in Emporia

Defensive Driving and Evacuation Techniques for Individuals with Disabilities and the Elderly (New)
May 15 in Great Bend
June 13 in Olathe
August 1 in Paola
August 22 in Seneca
September 26 in Pittsburg
October 17 in Topeka
October 23 in McPherson

Defensive Driving and Infectious Disease Awareness and Prevention
October 2 Garden City
October 3 Wichita

Conferences:

May 5-8, 2013

June 2-7, 2013
Community Transportation Association of America’s Annual EXPO Conference, Albuquerque, NM. http://www.ctaa.org

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