Cost Benefit Analysis of Rural and Small Urban Transit

By Clifton Hall

An important economic principle to many Americans is that “we get what we pay for.” When it comes to public transit, many officials, citizens, and policy-makers are very concerned that the money invested in public transit, among other things, produces a return on that investment. Skepticism about transit’s effectiveness does exist, but so does the need for transit, even in rural or smaller urban areas. The average commute for rural communities is 21.0 miles compared to 15.5 miles in urban areas (Godavarthy, Mattson, & Ndemb, 2014) with fewer opportunities to walk or bike to work. Transit in non-urban areas gives residents access to work, medical treatment, and recreational trips that may either be unavailable or overly expensive.

So how is the effectiveness of investment in transit measured? One common practice is a cost-benefit analysis, which simply compares the benefits an investment produces compared to the size of the investment itself. This article reviews the types of

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As a transit manager, you can play a key role in your community to help relieve anxiety around the belief that access to the community will be gone once those keys are gone. So, what can you and your transit agency do? This article provides an overview of a recent project completed by the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) titled *Travel Training for Older Adults* (TCRP Report 168, 2014). Travel training is just one strategy, but a useful one in the toolbox of strategies to make older persons and others using our roads safer.

**Older driver safety and the Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan**

As the Kansas Department of Transportation works on strategies to improve older driver safety through its work on the Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan, it is important to consider how transit services in both urban and rural areas can play a prominent role in providing options when an individual transitions from driver to non-driver (for any reason). However, transit is only a viable strategy if the individual in need of transportation knows about the services and knows how to use them. That’s where travel training services can help.

The recently released TCRP report provides some useful guidance to transit agencies considering ways to make their services more “visible” and accessible to older adults in their communities—those who have never ridden transit, and may not even know it exists in their community. And service certainly doesn’t exist for them, or so they believe.

**What is travel training?**

The simplest definition of travel training is education and training to encourage and support individuals to use public transportation, particularly fixed route services, independently. Not only does travel training make the individual more aware of public transit travel options in their community, but it is also intended to teach each individual how to use the services: read bus schedules, find bus stops, make transfers, and get back home. “Taking the keys away” from an older adult whose driving skills have deteriorated is a particularly daunting task when no mobility alternative is offered or available.

Travel training programs grew in urban areas to provide individuals with limited mobility (e.g. persons with disabilities) and limited resources to be able to make use of the transportation resources in their community, to increase independence, reduce the costs associated with paratransit service by encouraging more fixed route transit use, and increase the capacity of paratransit service to meet the needs of those who cannot use fixed route service.

For older individuals who may have recently lost access to or the ability to drive a car, travel training services may have even broader application. As the authors of Report 168 point out, many individuals in rural communities, particularly older residents, probably have had very limited or no experience with public transportation. An individual may not fully understand what transit services are available, understand how to use them, or even know that they exist in their community. Complicated by the more limited transportation resources in rural communities and the typically longer distance travel required in rural communities, establishing an effective travel training program may be quite a challenge (Burkhardt 2014). Travel training in rural communities usually will focus on helping the individual to identify the resources that are there (usually not fixed route) and helping them feel comfortable in making use of those services to meet their needs.

**What makes the program successful? What outcomes are we looking for?**

From the older adult’s perspective, and from their family’s perspective, the desired outcome is that the individual is able to travel safely and conveniently in

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**Resources on Travel Training**


Project Action provides a number of resources, including online training, in-person training and printed resources on Travel Training. http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/TravelTraining.aspx

Monitor and analyze program impacts on an ongoing basis, and
Integrate travel training into agency marketing and branding efforts.

Travel training for older adults in rural communities: What’s different?
In general, the steps for starting a travel training program in a rural community are not significantly different than for urban areas. However, rural programs are more likely to focus on how to use demand-response services if there are no fixed route services, and trips may be of much longer distances than in urban areas. Where fixed routes are available, the travel trainer will need to be aware of potential lack of infrastructure, such as sidewalks, to make access possible.

In rural areas the proportion of the population that has no experience at all with transit is typically greater than in urban areas, and the service may need to be more personalized to develop enough travel options to meet their needs, coming much closer to the definition of a mobility management program. Indeed, there are many similarities between features of travel training and mobility management, and travel training can certainly be one of the tools in the toolbox for a mobility manager to help the older person become more independent in using transit to meet their needs.

Delmarva Community Services in Cambridge, Maryland provides an interesting example of travel training in a large, low-density service area (over 1,400 square miles). Delmarva Community Transit links their travel training and mobility management programs, operating from a “one-stop” community service area. The users of their travel training program generally have had no previous experience with public transportation and their focus is on “overcoming initial fears and misconceptions” about the services. Their program isn’t limited to transportation, but focuses on access to a variety of community services. Their group training sessions are held in the format of “field trips,” going to enjoyable destinations—a strategy that has been particularly useful in reaching certain minority groups. The training is offered at no charge.

What about marketing?
According to the authors of the TCRP report, the key to marketing travel training program is to promote the lower cost of public transportation and, in the case of communities with fixed route service, increased flexibility, as an alternative to demand-response services. Marketing efforts let older drivers, their families and service providers know that there are mobility options in your community, and that loss of the ability to drive a personal automobile doesn’t mean the end of mobility. Brochures with success stories are particularly effective, and training about your services to staff and volunteers.

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Getting Started: Tips for Creating Your Own Travel Training Program

The authors of TCRP Report 168 have this advice for creating an effective, sustainable program:

• Set clear goals.
• Develop the program with end outcomes in mind.
• Recognize that successful sustained use of public transportation often requires customized, one-on-one training to meet an individual’s needs, in addition to group travel training.
• Identify stable and sustainable funding. Costs for travel training vary widely depending on the type of travel training program, and good data are not available assigned to typical training programs, or methods to determine benefits of travel training.
• Employ travel trainers with the right characteristics and qualifications: relevant experience, good knowledge of the transit system, good communication and connection with their customers, and an understanding of how travel training can improve quality of life.

of partnering organizations (senior centers, parks and recreation, libraries, health care facilities, etc., will help get the word out.

In Kansas, as part of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, one of the strategies in the works is for Department of Revenue staff to have a directory of public and specialized transit service providers in their motor vehicle license examining offices so that when an individual comes in and is deemed no longer able to drive, the examiner can provide options right on the spot (Kansas Department of Transportation 2015). The next step will be to encourage these programs to provide rider orientation and travel training when necessary to encourage the use of their services.

Conclusion

The data on travel training programs for older adults are limited. However, the case studies in TCRP Report 168 provide helpful guidance if you are considering implementing a travel training program. There is a growing awareness across states that a program that forcing older drivers to give up the keys without helping identify mobility options is not a viable option; it leads to more resistance to stop driving in cases where safety is an issue, or it leads to premature loss of independent living, or demands on family members than cannot be met. Rural public and specialized transportation services are key partners in helping to solve this dilemma, but often individuals who have not used transit as younger adults, their families, and even community support services may not be aware of the critical resources available through transit agencies. A travel training program can help provide visibility for your services and increase peace of mind for your riders (or potential riders). Success with travel training in selected systems around the country should give systems in Kansas the go-ahead to move forward with travel training.

Employ travel trainers with the right characteristics and qualifications: relevant experience, good knowledge of the transit system, good communication and connection with customers, and an understanding of how travel training can improve quality of life.

Sources

Cost-benefit analysis in a rural context  Continued from page 1

benefits transit makes available to the public as well as the costs these services requires. The effectiveness or transit in Kansas will also be examined based on current research by the National Center for Transit Research (NCTR) on cost-benefit analysis in transit nationwide (Godavarthy, Mattson, & Ndembe, 2014).

Two unseen benefits of transit

Unlike the conventional idea of investments, which are private and monetary in nature, public transit is a public good, which means its benefits do not realize a return of money or goods, but rather give various benefits to the general public. This makes the measurement of transit benefits hard to measure, since those benefits flow out to the public and not back to the government. This is especially true in rural areas, where transit use is less prominent; approximately 10 times as many people commute via transit in urban areas compared to rural areas, for example (Small Urban & Rural Transit Center, 2012). However, understanding the benefits of transit and their associated costs can help your organization communicate its public value with other stakeholders and decision-makers.

Benefit 1) What transit replaces: Reducing the cost of transportation.

Simply put, the United States is an auto-oriented culture, and public transit gives people the opportunity to not drive. Owning a vehicle is often necessary in rural areas, but transit can offset at least some of the operating costs or reduce the number of automobiles needed to be owned. Costs of automobile use can be broken into two categories: fixed costs associated with ownership such as debt payments, insurance, and registrations fees; and variable costs such as fuel, maintenance, and depreciation.

Table 1 (below) from the NCTR study shows that it costs an average of $0.65 per mile for personal vehicle ownership and operation, assuming a vehicle is driven 15,000 miles per year. ($0.65 is the average of all vehicles in that column in Table 1.) The 2012 Rural Transit Fact Book shows that it costs an average commute length in 2012 as being 3 miles in urban areas and 6 miles in rural areas. Lower gas prices are one of the primary reducers of variable automotive costs, and can often be extremely variable, which should be kept in mind when considering the results of the NCTR study (Godavarthy, Mattson, & Ndembe, 2014).

Another auto-associated cost is related to chauffeur non-drivers in personal vehicles. Chauffeur trips are distinct from taxi trips or rideshare in that by definition the trip is unpaid and would not be made if not for the non-driver’s request. These trips are often thought of as rides given by family or friends to a non-driver for work, school, medical facility, or other for purposes. Chauffeur trips include not only the costs of automobile use, but the costs of the driver’s time consumed by providing the trip. A study cited by NCTR shows that half of transit users who choose to use an automobile that is not their own use rideshare, which leaves the other half as chauffeured trips. The same study

Overall, the cost-benefit calculation for rural transportation in Kansas is above average. Kansas is the fifth highest state in the US in terms of rural area benefit-cost ratio (BCR). It is noteworthy that two of the states with higher rural BCRs than Kansas are densely populated, while the other two have large tourism industries in rural areas that fulfill work-related trip needs on a regular basis for transit customers. This is a positive sign for rural transit in Kansas, as tourism in the state is relatively low, and rural areas are often remote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vehicle Type</th>
<th>10,000 miles per year</th>
<th>15,000 miles per year</th>
<th>20,000 miles per year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Small sedan</td>
<td>59.5 c</td>
<td>46.4 c</td>
<td>39.8 c</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium sedan</td>
<td>78.0 c</td>
<td>61.0 c</td>
<td>52.3 c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large sedan</td>
<td>97.5 c</td>
<td>75.0 c</td>
<td>63.5 c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4WD SUV</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
<td>77.3 c</td>
<td>65.7 c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini van</td>
<td>84.0 c</td>
<td>65.3 c</td>
<td>55.7 c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Vehicle Operation and Ownership Costs

Source: NCTR, 2014
estimated each chauffeur trip cost $1.05 per mile, with a time cost for the drive of $0.80 per mile included. The NCTR study includes savings from taxi fares, saved travel time, collision costs, and environmental emissions. The average taxi fare in a rural area is several times higher than urban areas. Travel time calculations account for time spent reading, working, resting, or socializing instead of driving, walking, or bicycling ($7.50 per hour driving, $3.75 for car passengers and non-motorized travelers, and $2.50 for rural transit riders,) based on a percentage of mean US wages. Small amounts of money were added per mile in each mode to account for reducing the risk of an automobile accident by taking transit, while emissions savings were considered negligible for rural and small urban transit.

**Benefit 2) What transit prevents:**

**Valuable missed trips.** In addition to cost-savings from taking regular trips via transit vs. personal automobile, public transportation can help individuals make medical and work trips that may be missed otherwise. Persons with chronic or severe health conditions, especially the elderly, often do not have access to personal transportation, especially problematic in rural areas. Separate studies have shown an estimated 3.6 million people miss medical treatment because they lack transportation, and that transportation-disadvantaged persons are more to be low-income, female, minority, and elderly. Using information from these studies, NCTR estimates an average $713 round trip benefit for medical trips. Work trips can also be monetized, in a similar way. The NCTR study values work trips based on potential government savings at $49. Obviously, the amount of money a trip is worth is contingent on how much a given employee is reimbursed and the cost of alternative transportation modes, compared with vehicle ownership and maintenance. The $49 estimate is based on reduction of SNAP (food stamp) program participation costs, which cost approximately $24,400 per year for a four-person household. By maintaining steady

employment, workers could overcome the need for such benefits and discontinue SNAP participation.

**Rural transit costs and revenue**

According to the National Transit Database, the 1,393 rural transit agencies who reported data had operating budgets of $1.3 billion in 2011. Sources for funding include the federal government ($456M), state ($243M) and local ($323M) governments, fare collection ($100M) and contract income ($247M). For capital expenses, the federal government spent $253 million while state and local governments both spent $23 million each.

Tables 2 and 3 (above) show the NCTR study’s estimation of rural transit operating expenses based on the National Transit Database (NTD). These numbers are the basis for the study’s “cost” side of its calculation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicators</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Fixed-route</th>
<th>Demand-response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operating Expense (million $)</td>
<td>1,581</td>
<td>1,216</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trips (million)</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle revenue miles (million)</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per trip</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>21.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost per mile</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fare revenue (million $)</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farebox recovery</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What makes a good cost-benefit ratio “good?”**

Whenever a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) is higher than 1.0, it is a sign that there is some kind of measurable return on the investment. The NCTR study shows a 2.16 BCR for small urban areas and a 1.20 ratio for rural transit. In other words, for each dollar invested, $2.16 is realized in a small urban setting while $1.20 is returned in rural transit.

Typically, fixed-route service has higher BCRs than does demand-response, since demand-response service is more time and labor intensive, typically serving few passengers per hour (Burkhardt, Hedrick, & McGavock, 1998).

BCRs can vary greatly between systems. An older study of 22 systems by the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) showed certain systems with BCRs as high as 4.22. This included in-depth study of eight systems and desk audits.
of 16 other systems. Other studies cited by TCRP show results similar to those of NCTR with 2.06 and 2.12. The TCRP results have a small sample size, and focused on programs with a variety of goals besides general public transportation, but noted that systems were grouped together, some with BCRs close to 4; others, close to 2 and some, closer to 1. The highest-scoring systems in the TCRP study had lower operating costs (Burkhardt, Hedrick, & McGavock, 1998).

How does Kansas compare regionally and nationally?

Figure 1 (below, from NCTR 2014) shows that, overall, the cost-benefit calculation for rural transportation in Kansas is above average, with a BCR of 2.01 in rural areas. Small city performance in the state is similar with a 2.26 BCR in fixed-route systems and 0.45 in demand-response, averaging to 1.94.

Kansas is the fifth highest state in terms of rural area BCR, and twenty-sixth in small urban areas. It is noteworthy that two of the states with higher rural BCRs than Kansas are densely populated, while the other two have large tourism industries in rural areas that fulfill work-related trip needs on a regular basis for transit customers. This is a positive sign for rural transit in Kansas, as tourism is relatively low, and rural areas are often remote. (Burkhardt, Hedrick, & McGavock, 1998).

Transit benefits to the public

Skeptics of rural and small urban public transit often cite a lack of return as a reason transit is not effective. These studies show that the return is there; it is often simply difficult to measure monetarily. While transit is not a necessity for most people in less populated areas, for some it offers enormous benefits that they might not have otherwise. Transit availability in rural areas is not typically about overwhelming need for coverage; it is more about providing choice in mobility. The estimated benefits of transit in Kansas have shown to well exceed the associated costs, something to keep in mind when you're educating your stakeholders about your services.

Sources

- "The Economic Impact of Public Transportation in Rural Kansas." Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet, 2011.
Troubleshooting Your Braun Lift

What operators should know about the Braun lift.

By Anne Lowder

Kansas RTAP hosted BraunAbility workshops at four Kansas transit agencies this past February. The training, provided by Jeff Tellez, after-sales field trainer with BraunAbility, was designed to help operation supervisors and maintenance personnel maintain, operate, and troubleshoot Braun lifts. During the three hours of instruction Tellez covered basic electrical connections, operating procedures, adjustments and lubrication points, and common troubleshooting tools to test and diagnose a Braun lift. Seventy-six participants registered for the workshop from 36 Kansas transit agencies. Each participant received a BraunAbility troubleshooting book along with a certificate of completion.

The training was targeted to lift mechanics, but some great tips were identified of use to operators who conduct pre-trip and post-trip inspections. This article highlights five areas covered by Tellez to help operators better understand the operations of a Braun Lift.

Inspecting and troubleshooting your Braun lift

1) Platform. Platform won’t unfold.

The Braun lift operation is hydraulic. Hydraulic fluid expanding, contracting or seeping may result in platform drift (failure to hold the platform in the folded or raised position). Platform drift (sometimes called weekend drift) may occur between extended periods when a lift is not in use, such as over the weekend. In the event that the platform does not unfold when you push the unfold switch on the hand pendant, the hydraulics have likely “bled off.” The fix is to press the fold switch. This will pressurize the hydraulic system. The lift will then unfold.

Platform weight sensor does not work.

The platform of the Braun Lift has a weight sensitivity of 50 lb of pressure. While cycling the lift, check this weight sensitivity while pressing the fold switch on the hand pendant. Simply put your hand the platform and press down while pressing the fold switch. If the lift continues to fold, take the vehicle out of service until this is fixed. Working the lift while not being sensitive to weight could lead result in catapulting someone on the lift to the inside your vehicle.

2) Threshold.

Issues with the threshold buzzer alarm.

The threshold warning buzzer warns of danger. The buzzer sounds if weight is on the threshold plate when the lift is 1 inch down from floor level. At this time the inner barrier has engaged and is in vertical position, and there is open space between the vehicle and the platform that someone could step off of and become injured. If the buzzer is continuously engaged there is an adjustment in Tower 3 that your mechanic can tighten or loosen that will fix the situation.

Threshold platform rattles.

Operators often complain that the threshold platform rattles. The first technique to try is pressing the fold switch on the hand pendant to pressurize the hydraulics. If this does not work there are two adjusting screws on the threshold plate that can be manually adjusted by your mechanic to solve the rattling. Tellez
Jeff Tellez of BraunAbility provides tips to Section 5311 maintenance staff to keep their wheelchair lifts in top operating condition.

Lift Terminology

Pump Module: The lift-mounted pump module consists of the hydraulic pump, the manual hand pump, the electronic control board and electrical components that power the lift electric/hydraulic systems.

Hand-Held Pendant Control: The hand-held attendant’s pendant control is connected to the pump module. The handheld pendant is equipped with two rocker switches, (UNFOLD, FOLD, DOWN, and UP). The momentary switches activate the automatic lift functions.

Lift Frame: The lift frame consists of the base plate, threshold warning plate, towers, parallel arms, vertical arms, platform pivot arms and handrails. Two main hydraulic cylinders are housed in the parallel arms. The electrical/hydraulic powered lift frame components mechanically unfold, lower, raise and fold the lift platform assembly.

Platform Assembly: The platform assembly consists of the steel tubing frame with grating surface upon which the wheelchair is positioned, the outer barrier, outer barrier latch, the inner roll stop barrier, and the hydraulic cylinder assembly that powers the outer barrier.

Outer Barrier: The cylinder powered automatic outer barrier provides a ramp for wheelchair loading and unloading at ground level.

Inner Roll Stop Barrier: NL Series lift models are equipped with an automatic inboard roll stop that also serves as the bridge plate. The roll stop bridges the gap between the lift platform and the vehicle floor. The inner roll stop automatically rotates from the horizontal position to the vertical position as the lift lowers and raises.

4) The lift chatters. The number one reason the lift chatters (makes lots of noise) while driving is that the hydraulics need to be pressurized. Once again, to fix possible lack of pressure in the hydraulics, hit the fold switch. The lift will tighten up, thus quieting the noise from the lift.

The second reason for the lift chattering is missing rubber bumpers. At any point that the lift could touch metal-to-metal, a rubber bumper has been engineered into that area. These bumpers wedge the lift snugly into its folded position and reduce chatter while the vehicle is moving. If the bumpers are not aligned correctly or are missing, the lift will chatter.

5) The hand held pendant does not work properly. The hand held pendant...

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Troubleshooting your Braun lift  Continued from page 9

is the key to trouble-shooting the Braun lift. If the micro switches are in working order, the pendant will be illuminated. If the pendant is not illuminated, the lift needs troubleshooting to find what is not properly connected.

The hand held pendant itself also receives the brunt of abuse from operators, Tellez said. The pendant gets dropped or banged against the vehicle and the cord gets pinched during lift operations.

A malfunctioning pendant may get switched out and replaced from a “used parts” bin. However, the pendant needs to be replaced with the part number that was engineered for that lift or it will not work properly with the lift.

When a pendant is not operating properly, first check that the inner and outer lift barriers are locked into position. This engages the micro switches which will illuminate the hand pendant. If the hand pendant can’t be illuminated it could be that the pendant is the wrong replacement part or that the barriers are unable to engage the micro switches. Either way the vehicle should be taken out of service until the items are fixed.

Maintenance is important

Regular preventive maintenance will reduce potential lift operation downtime and increase the service life of the lift, as well as possibly detect potential hazards. Exposure to harsh weather elements, environmental conditions, or heavy use may require more frequent maintenance and lubrication. Preventive maintenance visual inspections are important, but Tellez said they do not take the place of the procedures specified in the Maintenance and Lubrication Schedule for your lift. Proper maintenance will keep lift problems to a minimum.

Sources

- BraunAbility Maintaining and Troubleshooting Your Braun Lifts workshop with handouts and notes. Salina, Garden City, Girard and Lawrence, KS. February 16-19, 2015
- BraunAbility training resource at KS RTAP website: http://www2.ku.edu/~kutc/pdffiles/BraunAbilityPPT.pdf

Do the Smart Thing: Embrace the Smart Phone

By Anne Lowder

Are you using your smart phone to its potential? Maybe not... (as my 15 year old has pointed out to me on more than one occasion). For instance, did you know about the “key chain” app? It will load up all those loyalty cards you have accumulated on your key ring. Then when you are in the store, you pull up the image of that loyalty card on your phone, and the store scans it off your phone. No more cluttered key chains.

Smart phones can help make everyday life more efficient, and that includes using transit services. Embrace the possibilities of the smart phone to help your agency provide better customer service—such as offering promotions and a mobile compatible web site. This article will explore some of the tools (including social media) and the hardware they run on (smart phones) that are being used more and more by people who use transit, and how to use those tools to improve your communication with them.

Reach customers with Facebook™, other social media and text messages

Accenture, a global management consulting, technology-services and outsourcing company, conducted surveys in September 2012 and January 2013 on public transportation. While the 4,500 travelers surveyed were in urban areas representing major cities all over the world, including the U.S., there may be some lessons for smaller communities, if not now, then certainly in the future as these technologies become more and more commonplace.

Accenture found that customers wanted transportation to embrace better technology and social media. The survey found that fewer
than 25 percent of those surveyed received communications from public transportation. However, more than 90 percent of those surveyed said they would be interested in hearing about the latest public transportation prices and promotions and receiving information on delays or changes via social media.

Surprisingly, the survey also showed little difference by age group when it came to using social media. Sixty-three percent of respondents over 65 years old used Facebook and Twitter, and they were open to receiving notifications via social media.

“Consumer technology is driving a huge expectation for flexible travel—an expectation that transit agencies cannot afford to ignore,” said Philippe Guittat, Global Managing Director of Accenture’s Transportation Practice.

Social media interaction with customers can happen in any size or type of transportation agency. Start a promotion to collect mobile numbers from your customers and then advertise and promote specials through text messages. You could also use text messages to let your customers know that a vehicle is running early or late for a pickup, or a customer could let you know that he or she is ready to be picked-up from their appointment. You could also direct people to your website for route maps and time schedules.

**Surveying with Facebook™**

Want to know how your agency is meeting customer expectations? Send a survey using a survey tool like SurveyMonkey™ and a social media tool like Facebook™. A survey can be just one or two questions. Some survey tools are designed to launch through Facebook™. Social media allows you to have quick interaction with your customers to show them what you can do for them.

**Make your website mobile-compatible**

A mobile-compatible web site is also a must for your agency. Today, most people are using their phones or tablets to look at websites. So it is important that when you build your website that it can be accessed by these devices. The benefit to having a mobile-compatible web site is customer service. It is all about the customer, and the easier you make it to find out about your services, the more potential customers can find you.

Google Developers provides a website for running a “mobile-friendly test” on your website at https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/. The site provides a list of the reasons a website may not be mobile-friendly (text too small, links too close together, content wider than screen, for example), and then offers suggestions on how to make the page more mobile-friendly. Web-development software today typically offers guidance on making your site mobile-friendly as it is being developed.

**Real Time Transit Information Tips**

- Make sure the site is easy-to-see and performs better on phones and tablets as compared to normal websites.
- Make sure that the website is mobile-friendly offering options in the event of travel problems.
- A mobile friendly website has the potential to bring in new customers who are searching for transportation on their phones by providing on the move and in real time transit information.
- A mobile friendly website allows you keep your customers informed about delays, time changes, routes and promotions.


**For more information**

For technical assistance on building a website for your agency using mobile-friendly specifications, contact National RTAP at http://webbuilder.nationalrtap.org/WebAppsInTheCloud/WebsiteBuilder.aspx. There are a number of templates available, and step-by-step instructions for creating your own website. While earlier templates developed under the service (prior to 2015) were not necessarily mobile-friendly, new templates have been developed that are. Moving forward, any new sites created after January 1, 2015 using the National RTAP tools should be mobile friendly, according to Frank Condon, director of technology for National RTAP. In addition to templates for building your website, National RTAP also provides a service for free website hosting.

**Conclusion**

The ability to have lots of information at our fingertips is here to stay. Mobile technology will boost your transit agency by increasing communication and value with your customer. As more and more transit agencies incorporate mobile phone technology into their systems it will be easier to catch a ride on public transit because customers will have the information they need in their hands.

**Sources**

- Email correspondence with Frank Condon, Director of Technology, National RTAP, February 5, 2015.
Most people think the only reason to interview a prospective driver is to find a person qualified to drive vehicles. That’s one reason, but you can accomplish more than that. This article explains three reasons to conduct an interview for the overall benefit to your agency, and provides answers to some of the most-frequently asked questions by transit managers about interviewing for new drivers.

The most important people in any transit service are the drivers. Without safe, qualified, customer-focused transit drivers, no service can survive. Most of the work of transit drivers is done without direct supervision; meaning you cannot give corrective guidance for the bulk of the work. Speaking metaphorically, when you hire a driver and send her or him out with a vehicle, you are providing a store with a complete inventory with no way for you to always watch the store or know what is happening to the inventory. This means an agency must hire drivers with good work habits and who are self-motivated to serve your customers in all the best ways.

I have found that few transit managers will say they have enough great employees who have good work habits and are reliable, safe, and give great customer service. Fewer still will say they have enough time in the day to find and train new employees. So it is important to allocate your management time wisely and think beyond “hands on the steering wheel” when interviewing drivers. With a carefully constructed interview plan—with thoughtful questions and a good interview team—you have a better chance of hiring the right people now who will require less time from you later in training and trying to improve job attitudes and customer service skills.

Three reasons to conduct an interview

1) Hiring: Finding the person with the skills you need. Your primary objective is to find people who have the skills necessary to do the job, are a good fit for your agency, and have positive attitudes towards the work at hand. But it’s also helpful to have some of your interview questions address two other service aspects: training and marketing.

2) Training: What training will this applicant need? The interview needs to hint at what will be covered in a training program and assess the prospect’s “trainability,” so that when the training program begins, concepts have already been introduced and you know the trainee will be on-board.

3) Marketing: Sharing the word about transit. An interview that paints an upbeat, attractive picture of the job and the workplace, along with the importance of the work, can create believers in your service who will spread the good word about your service even if they don’t get the job.

Frequently-asked questions about the interview process

Over the years, I’ve been asked many questions about how to structure interviews and best practices for hiring qualified bus operators. Here are a few of those questions. And here are my responses for structuring interviews for the best outcomes—for the agency, the customer, the applicant and the community.

Q: “I understand the concept of making sure a person is qualified to drive, but could you explain more about the concept of “interviewing for training” and “interviewing to create a believer in your service?” I think everyone knows when you interview and screen prospective drivers, they must possess certain qualifications concerning the ability to drive safely and being part of a team, but prospective drivers must also be trainable in your style of driving and your style of service.

In the interview, ask questions that assess what a driver knows about defensive driving and customer service. That will give you guidance on what you have to emphasize in training to get him or her up to your desired level of proficiency.

It is critical to involve the people who do your training in the development of the interview questions. Let your training people add questions to your interview plan and, if possible, have them be part of the interview team.

When I interview prospective drivers I always make sure there is time in the interview to describe to them how the...
service positively impacts the community and how the elderly, persons with disabilities, and job seekers benefit from the services. When consulting, sometimes I encourage transit systems to give all interviewees complementary bus tickets along with a schedule and a brochure about the service. The object is to create “sneezers” (people who spread the good germ about the good things your service does). I always want people to leave the interview and go home and tell others about the good things a service does.

The best drivers love their job and understand that their work makes the world a better place. Building those positive feelings (which, by the way, make all the difference in customer service) starts in the interview. If an overly formal and high-stress interview is conducted, with emphasis on agency rules and pay scales, the “love” necessary for success likely will not be established.

On the other hand, be careful in the interview to not oversell the job. Realism is important to avoid the “I – F – D” Syndrome (Idealization, Frustration, Demoralization). When the daily required paperwork or some of the normal difficulties of any position come into play, a driver may become frustrated, demoralized, and even quit or get fired, if not given a realistic picture of the job in the first place. So, in the interview paint a positive picture of the benefits of driving a transit bus, and also share some of the challenges a driver might expect in day-to-day work.

Q: “Okay I understand that when we interview we should have three goals in mind—finding a person with the skills we need, discovering what training a person will need and sharing the good that our service does—but what are the general areas we should focus on?” Each transit service will have its own specific areas of focus in the interview, but here are six primary areas I recommend to cover in a comprehensive, thoughtful interview plan.

• Understanding of the job and your transit service.
• Approach to job and work habits (focus, self-management, attendance, team spirit and relationship with others, honesty and ethics).
• Attitudes towards safety and knowledge of safe driving techniques.
• Knowledge of streets/sites in your service area.
• Customer service (attitudes toward older persons, persons with disabilities, and other populations likely using transit, knowledge of customer service techniques, and techniques to apologize for something that is not their fault.)
• Sense of humor.

In working with transit services across the United States, I have found that the area that gets the least attention in interviews is customer service. And as most managers know, the most frequent complaints about drivers are about customer service. Therefore it is important to get a sense of how a potential driver would defuse customer problems or address people with special needs.

Unfortunately, almost no transit service assesses a person’s sense of humor in the interview. This flies in the face of the Chinese proverb, “Don’t open a shop unless you like to smile.” I mentioned previously that sending a driver out in a bus is like giving them a shop with inventory; so you will do well to hire a “shop keeper” who smiles easily and has a sense of humor. I am not talking about telling jokes. I am talking about a healthy outlook on life with the ability to smile and take life as it comes without being dour or mean-spirited about the bumps in the road of life or the bumps in your service.

Continued on next page
How To Reach Us

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

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Kansas University Transportation Center
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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

Q: “You mentioned the need for an interview plan. What are some specifics of an interview plan?” Each question in your interview plan should be created with careful thought and have a rating scale to quantify answers. (See sidebar on page 13 for some examples of rating answers.)

Questions should follow from the list of topics I previously mentioned, and any others of your choosing. Ideally, all questions should be reviewed by a Human Resources expert to make sure no question violates laws and regulations about discrimination and fair play.

Q: “You have given some broad guidelines on interviewing potential drivers and how to make an interview plan, but can you give us some specifics or tips on hiring drivers that we can consider?” I always try to hire a driver with a good work attitude and a good customer service attitude. I worry less about driving experience because I feel most people under proper supervision can be trained to operate a bus or van.

Q: “How many people and what positions would make an ideal interview team?” For small transit agencies, having more than one person available do an interview can be a problem, but ideally I like to have at least two people on an interview team, and preferably three. The three people I recommend are: 1) The person who is ultimately responsible for the driver: i.e., the general manager or operations manager; 2) The person who trains your drivers (a full-time trainer or a lead experienced driver); and 3) in a large system, an administrative staff person from Human Resources; in a small system, the individual who handles paperwork, such as the office manager.

A good interview plan is one in which each member of the interview team:
• Knows in advance which questions they will ask,
• Does not significantly vary from the questions as written, and
• Has training in which questions cannot be asked (e.g., religion, marital status, national origin).

With training, just about any transit service employee can be part of the interview.

I believe strongly in a minimum of a two-person interview team so impressions and scores on the interview plan can be shared. As the saying goes, “Two heads are better than one, as long as they are not on the same person.”

In sum
Take time to create a good interview plan for your prospective drivers. It will pay off in a number of ways for your agency and community.

Peter Schauer, principal, Peter Schauer Associates in Boonville, Missouri, gave a presentation titled “Not Just for Finding a Qualified Candidate: Three Reasons to Conduct an Interview and How to Construct an Interview Plan” at the Transportation Research Board Rural and Intercity Bus Conference held in October 2014 in Monterey, California. Peter Schauer was the first general manager of the OATS bus service in Missouri. He directed the growth of OATS from three buses to 150 buses and still consults with and advises the now 800 bus service. In his OATS position, he hired many drivers and trained other OATS employees on how to hire drivers. He has advised transit services throughout the United States on how best to hire and train bus drivers. For questions, or more information about interviewing and hiring transit drivers, contact peter@peterschauer.com.
CONFERENCES

April 28 – April 30, 2015  
10th Annual FTA Drug and Alcohol Conference, Atlanta, GA.  

May 31 – June 5, 2015  
Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) EXPO 2015, Tampa, FL.  

August 3- August 5, 2015  
Kansas Public Transit Association (KPTA) Annual Conference, Manhattan, KS.  
http://kstransit.org/

October 11 – October 13, 2015  
National Transit Institute Transit Trainers’ Workshop, New Orleans, LA.  
http://ntionline.com/courses/courseinfo.php?id=176

October 27-30, 2015  
National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference: Reaching New Heights in Rural and Tribal Transit, Denver, CO.  
http://webbuilder.nationalrtap.org/conference2015/Home.aspx

PUBLICATIONS

Using Easter Seals Project Action Resources for Training and Development: Incorporating ADA Transportation Topics into Your Annual Training Schedule.  
☑ Order hard copy. Fill out and fax order form below. Or download at http://www.projectaction.org

Open Data: Challenges and Opportunities for Transit Agencies.  


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 in 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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If you know individuals who would like to receive our newsletter, please have them go to: http://www.ksrtap.org and sign up for the Kansas RTAP email list. There is a box to check to request electronic notification of each new issue of the TransReporter. Back issues are available at our website in the newsletter archives section.

The Kansas TransReporter is an educational and technology transfer newsletter published quarterly by the Kansas University Transportation Center (KUTC). The newsletter is free to rural and specialized transit providers and others with an interest in rural and specialized service.

The Kansas TransReporter is co-sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration under its Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP) and the Kansas Department of Transportation.

The purposes of the RTAP program are to: 1) educate transit operators about the latest technologies in rural and specialized transit; 2) encourage their translation into practical application; and 3) to share information among operators.

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Calendar

2015 KANSAS RTAP TRAINING:

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<th>Passenger Assistance for Rural Transit Operators</th>
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<td>April 15  Pittsburg</td>
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<td>June 25  Wichita</td>
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<td>August 19  Winfield</td>
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<td>Responding to Emergencies in Rural Transit</td>
<td>Violence in the Transit Workplace – Prevention, Response and Recovery (An NTI train-the-trainer course)</td>
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Host a hands-on workshop at your location:
- Advanced Mobility Device Securement
- Evacuation Techniques for Rural Transit Passengers

Contact Anne Lowder at 785-864-1469 or alowder@ku.edu to schedule either of these workshops in your area July - November.

**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 kbkelly@ku.edu.**