

# RTAP BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

WINTER—VOL. 21, NO. 1

2 RANDOM DRUG & ALCOHOL TESTING

3 SPOTLIGHT—PIA THOMAS, FLAGLER  
COUNTY BOCC

GOLD STAR MOMENT—  
CITY OF KEY WEST

4 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
FOR RURAL TRANSIT

5 WHEELCHAIR LIFT  
INSPECTION AND  
MAINTENANCE

6 EPA SECTION 608  
CERTIFICATION  
ANNOUNCEMENT

7 UPCOMING  
EVENTS

FLORIDA RTAP  
VISITS ITS  
RURAL  
PARTNERS

## A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Accident Investigation Photography

The ancient Romans used to say “Verba volant, scripta manent” which literally translated means “spoken words fly away, written words remain”, highlighting the importance of



documentation. This is especially important in accident investigations where it is often necessary to defend a case in a courtroom. Documentation in an accident investigation is also important from a compliance standpoint.

Photography is a major step in the accident investigation process. When agency personnel arrive at the accident scene, there may be chaos and many moving pieces. In this environment, debris from the accident can quickly be displaced, collected, or moved as other vehicles or people enter the scene. Therefore, having pictures of the scene before it is contaminated is crucial to reconstruct the accident as it occurred.

Photographs record facts, conditions, and often describe circumstances better than words. Pictures establish visual proof of violations of procedures, policies, or laws, and become a permanent record of things that investigators may not have observed at the accident scene, or may not recall a day, or months, after the accident occurred. Additionally, photographs support field sketches and other pertinent documentation like operator and supervisor reports. Photographs also play a crucial role in determining responsibilities and in seeking

reimbursement from insurance companies.

Investigators should have a plan of what to photograph upon arrival, and photographs should be taken as soon as possible. Investigators should keep in mind to:

- Ensure to photograph the relationship of objects to each other
- Identify vehicles and locations, including vehicle identification numbers and license plates
- Start taking pictures from far-away and narrow down the scene to focus on the actual event
- Include photos of instrument panels and vehicle dashboard – including interior damage, evidence of food, beverages, cell phone use, or other personal items
- Take pictures of seatbelts, airbags, wheelchairs, and restraint systems
- Take pictures of bodily fluids or other evidence

As they say, a picture *is* worth a thousand words. More information regarding the proper way to document any accident, including the importance of photography can be obtained by enrolling in [How to Perform a Bus Collision Investigation – A Short Course](#) to be held in Lake City on April 18-19, 2023.



CUTR

# 2022 Random Testing Reveals Increase in Positive Drug & Alcohol Tests

An evaluation of the 2022 random testing data from Florida's transit agencies revealed that the number of verified positive drug tests increased by **127%** over the 2021 data, and the confirmed alcohol violations *doubled*.



testing is unannounced and unpredictable. For example, conducting random testing only within an agency's administrative hours creates a predictable pattern. Substance abusers will recognize that random testing is not being performed in the early morning, late evening, or on weekends, if applicable.

While the majority of Florida's safety-sensitive transit employees do not use illicit drugs or misuse alcohol, this testing data forces us to recognize that transit employees are not immune to the perils of substance abuse, and we must look for ways to renew our effort to deter prohibited drug use and alcohol misuse in the transit workplace. Three ways that employers can revitalize their deterrent efforts are to conduct refresher drug awareness training for safety-sensitive employees, increase the training frequency for supervisors who are authorized to make reasonable suspicion testing determinations, and improve random testing practices to ensure that the testing is unpredictable.

Some additional items to note:

1. **Drug awareness refresher education** can be provided to employees using posters, booklets, memos, and informative newsletters that help to remind employees of their obligation to remain drug-free. The message should emphasize that all forms of THC are prohibited, including medical marijuana.
2. **Refresher training for supervisors** who are authorized to make reasonable suspicion testing determinations is a best practice and if possible, should be implemented on an annual basis to remind our transit supervisors of the importance of their role in identifying potential threats posed by impaired safety-sensitive employees.
3. **An effective random testing program** is key in deterring safety-sensitive employees from using prohibited drugs or misusing alcohol. Transit agencies must ensure that

- Of the verified positive test results in 2022, the most frequently detected illicit drug was marijuana at 73%, followed by cocaine at 24%.
- National RTAP offers a free e-learning course "Reasonable Suspicion Training for Supervisors" that can be used for initial or refresher training.
- **Did you know?** Safety-sensitive employment status is not a consideration in the application process for a Florida Medical Marijuana card. Employers must ensure that FTA-covered employees are aware that marijuana use is prohibited, as a condition of their employment.

## Registration is Open

### 2023 Annual Florida Triple Crown Bus Roadeo

Orlando, Florida

March 31 – April 1, 2023

[www.floridartap.org/roadeo/](http://www.floridartap.org/roadeo/)



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Please direct all questions or comments to:

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#### OUR MISSION

The Florida RTAP provides training, continuing education, and technical assistance to those who provide or assist in the provision of public transportation services in rural and small urban communities in order to promote the coordinated delivery of safe, efficient, and effective transit services.

Editor and Designer: Stephanie Lewis

## SPOTLIGHT—Pia Thomas, Flagler County Board of County Commissioners

Each SPOTLIGHT highlights one of our many energetic Florida RTAP transit professionals and allows these individuals to introduce themselves in their own words. In this issue, the SPOTLIGHT is on Pia Thomas the Transportation Coordinator from Flagler County Board of County Commissioners.



**Birthplace:** Viborg, Denmark

**Education:** Nursing Degree from Thisted College in Denmark.

**Professional History:** Store manager, nursing home lead, school bus driver, paratransit driver, assistant route coordinator and safety and training coordinator.

**Years Working with Current Agency:** 1 ½ years.

**Years Working in Transit Industry:** 11 years.

**Biggest Surprise in Paratransit/Rural Transit:** The large network of transit personnel always willing to help.

**Biggest Challenge in Paratransit/Rural Transit:** The growing need for transit service and the shortage of drivers.

**Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit/Rural Transit:** The strength and the satisfaction I receive from helping the people in my community.

**Community Involvement:** Help transporting clients in our community during emergencies.

**Personal Background:** Married to Ed for 27 years. We have three children named Ditte, Lisa and Eddie. We also have two cats named Frankie and Simon. I love the ocean, good books, and vacations to the mountains of NC.

**Childhood Ambition:** Helping people in need.

**Inspiration:** “You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you” John Bunyan

**Favorite Book:** Fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen.

**Favorite Color:** Blue

**Favorite Candy:** Licorice

**My Motto:** Live today like it is your last; so make it exceptional.

## Gold Star Moment—City of Key West

Each quarterly bulletin we will share your agency news, best practices, and success stories with the RTAP community. Every transit agency has numerous successes, which may be beneficial to others throughout the state! These "Gold Star" moments highlight where an employee went above and beyond, exceeded customer service expectations, training successes, or any other stories that highlight the great work being done by Florida's paratransit and rural transit communities.



### Key West Transit

Check out Key West Transit's display that is used as photo booth prop at community events. There's a working overhead signage and steering wheel!

If you are ever in Key West, stop by and visit Rod, Carolyn, and Rogelio!!



### Have something to share?

Submit your "Gold Star" Moments to be featured in the next issue of the RTAP Newsletter!

Email: Stephanie Lewis, [zavacki@usf.edu](mailto:zavacki@usf.edu)

# Emergency Management for Rural Transit

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), and individual transit providers, regardless of their size and funding sources, have established as their top priority the provision of safe and reliable transportation. Safety has always been the traditional transit's focus; however, over the last decade and as a result of the September 11th terrorist attacks, this focus on safety has expanded to include security aspects. The aftermath of recent natural disasters also raised awareness of threats and vulnerabilities that transit providers face during times of crisis. In addition, the increase in social disturbances demonstrates, even more, that safe and reliable transportation cannot be conceived without a solid emergency management plan.

Emergency management is the organizational function of any agency or business focused on reducing vulnerability to hazards and coping with disasters of any type. Its basic mission is to deal with risks and risk avoidance to reduce vulnerability, increasing the security of employees and passengers. Therefore, the mission of transit providers today switched from providing safe and reliable transportation to providing safe, reliable, and secure transportation that focuses on less vulnerability. Emergency management is an essential role of the government because it protects communities by supplying the necessary tools to cope with emergencies, which is exactly what the FDOT does by requiring transportation providers to develop and implement a comprehensive emergency management plan.

Rural transit providers that receive 5310 funds only are not required to develop a Security Program Plan (SPP) that covers a wide range of security and emergency management aspects; however, they are required to describe and document their procedures for handling emergencies that could occur when their vehicles are being used away from the facility as well as the training provided to handle such emergencies. The emergency plan for these rural agencies must contain at minimum clear procedures on how they face emergencies that can occur in their areas. In Florida, for example, flooding, tornadoes, strong winds, and hurricanes, just to mention some, are recurrent emergencies that must be addressed in any emergency plan. The recommendation is to have a clear knowledge of the area of operation that can be acquired through collaboration with the local Emergency



Operation Center (EOC) and law enforcement agencies. Rural agencies are not required to document drills and exercises on the emergencies addressed in the emergency plan. However, it is strongly recommended to test the level of response to the emergency procedures described by the agency in the plan. Another crucial part of the emergency plan is the training provided to each employee on the emergency procedures. Although there are no requirements on the frequency of training it is a good practice to have initial training and conduct an annual refresher session on emergency management. The training not only has to be provided but has to

be well documented to be in compliance with the FDOT requirements. The [Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program](#) provides a large number of resources and documents on emergency management.

In conclusion, emergency management is a core portion of the daily operations of rural transit providers, and since the majority of emergencies cannot be predicted each agency should be prepared by developing, implementing, and training on the emergency management plan. A key to success is developing and testing your emergency management plan to determine its effectiveness during an emergency and making changes where necessary. To summarize, plan for the worst and hope for the best.



## Public Transportation and Transportation Disadvantaged Day

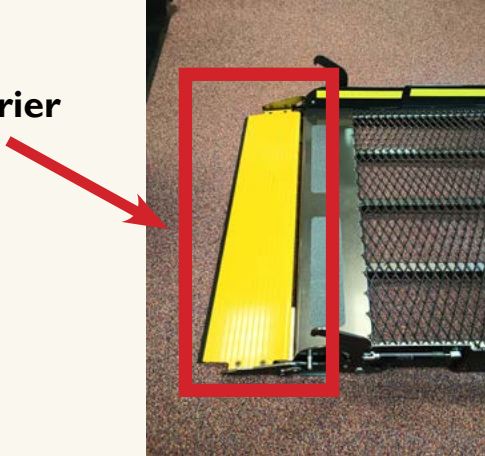
March 16, 2023  
Tallahassee, Florida

<https://legislateday.com/>

# Wheelchair Lift Inspection and Maintenance

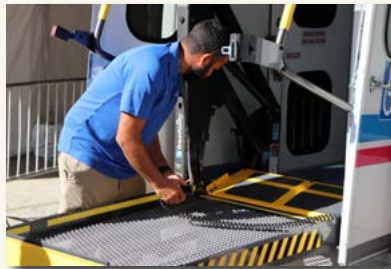
**D**uring FDOT Triennial Compliance Reviews, the onsite inspection team has noted an increase in the outer barrier not functioning correctly. The following two sections of this article focus on the importance of proper pre- and post- trip operator vehicle inspections and preventative maintenance inspections of wheelchair lifts. If you are experiencing an issue with your wheelchair lifts outer barriers, please contact Tony Brandin at the Florida Department of Transportation, [Tony.Brandin@dot.state.fl.us](mailto:Tony.Brandin@dot.state.fl.us).

**Outer barrier**



## Bus Operator Pre- and Post-Trip Inspections of the Wheelchair List

**A** complete pre-trip inspection is conducted to ensure safety and identify any safety-related defects before the vehicle goes into service. A thorough vehicle inspection is a proactive approach for vehicle, driver, and passenger safety. These types of inspections are critical in preventing accidents, incidents, or injuries.



There are four components to the pre-trip inspection: the approach, under the hood, the walk around and on-board. Breaking it into these four parts makes it easier to quickly identify signs of trouble. Repetition and routine are crucial. Consistently using the same method each time will result in quicker and more accurate inspections.

Pre-trip inspections are focused on assessing the safety of the main vehicle parts, their operability, and their usage conditions. Two key components to inspect are the lift and its securement system. As a public transportation provider, where riders use mobility devices, developing a compre-

hensive and consistent lift and securement inspection process is important.

According to the National RTAP Safety Training and Rural Transit (START) training program, they identify the following process for inspecting the lift and the door:

- Doors open and close properly
- Light above lift door turns on when door is opened
- Lift controls are secured, toggle switches and wiring harness in good shape
- Backup manual lift handle is present
- Lift cycles down/up, unfolds and folds properly
- Check that no hydraulic fluid is leaking from lift pump
- Check for signs of tampering or attached objects
- If the vehicle is equipped with additional securement devices (wheelchair extension securement straps, oxygen tank holders, etc.), these items need to be checked also.

Another important step often overlooked is to cycle the manual backup system which will be needed in an emergency. Once the lift/ramp inspection has been completed, it is necessary to check all securement straps and systems in all vehicle wheelchair securement areas. All straps and tracks should be clean and functional. When securement straps are not in use, it is important to properly store them to prevent a trip hazard.

Remember, critical safety defects should have been reported during your shift. Noting mechanical failures or other service problems allows repairs to be made and alerts the next person taking over use of the vehicle to any problems.

## Wheelchair Lift Certification Safety Checklist

*Note this is a reprint of an article included in the [Fall 2021 edition of the Florida RTAP Bulletin](#).*

**T**he Florida Department of Transportation recommends wheelchair lifts used in paratransit public transportation are inspected daily before use and at each vehicle preventative maintenance inspection (PMI). While operator training is a key part of safe wheelchair lift operation, best maintenance practices contribute to safe operations, reduced time out of service, and lower unit life costs.

The following functions must be verified for safe operation:

- **Vehicle movement is prohibited unless the lift door is closed.** Lift operation shall be prohibited until the

*continued on pg.6*

vehicle is stopped, and vehicle movement is prevented. Vehicle movement shall remain prevented until the lift is stowed. This feature of the vehicle interlock requires the vehicle transmission to be in the park position with the parking brake applied before allowing lift operation. *This can be checked by opening the vehicle lift side door and attempting to put the transmission into gear with vehicle parking brake applied. It should not come out of park.*

- **The platform will not fold/stow if occupied.** This prevents the lift from folding with someone onboard. The lift has a feature that limits the amount of weight needed to fold the platform. *This feature can be checked by holding the platform by hand at floor level and attempting to fold the platform. It should remain at floor level.*
- **A visual and audible warning will activate if the threshold area is occupied when the platform is lowered at least one inch below floor level.** This alerts if someone attempts to exit the bus with the lift lowered. *This can be checked by carefully standing or putting a minimum of 25 lbs. of pressure on the yellow threshold, with the lift in a down position, which should result in both a red warning light and an audible buzzer alert.*
- **Platform movement is prohibited beyond the fully up position.** This prevents someone from rolling backwards off the lift, falling between the bus and lift platform. *This can be checked by stopping the lift about half-way down, then attempting to fold*

*the inner barrier back. The lift pendent control light should go out and the lift will not operate.*

- **Platform movement is interrupted unless the outer barrier is folded in the up-right position.** This outer barrier keeps someone from rolling off the outer side of platform. *This can be checked by lowering the lift to ground level, placing your foot on the outer barrier and pushing the up button, the lift should not raise more than an inch before stopping.*

All Braun wheelchair lifts are equipped with a lift cycle counter that tracks lift operation. The cycle counter is located on the top off lift control box, next to red warning light. Braun recommends maintenance inspections every 750 lift cycles. Consult information for your specific lift to verify maintenance intervals and requirements. Proper wheelchair maintenance can reduce downtime and the cost of operation over the life of vehicle.

The Lively Paratransit Instructional Program offers several levels of Braun wheelchair lift maintenance instruction and repair. From basic operation and maintenance to technician level troubleshooting and repairs. This includes preventive maintenance and lubrication, light and heavy repairs, including electrical and hydraulic systems, and diagnostics. Training may be done at agency location or at an outsourced maintenance provider shop, with courses offered throughout the year. Contact LPIP for more information at [www.livelypip.com](http://www.livelypip.com).

## EPA Section 608 Certification Announcement

**T**he Florida Transit Technician Program, under the direction of the Florida Department of Transportation and Lively Technical College, is offering onsite EPA Section 608 Certification training during June and July. Training is available the weeks of June 5, June 19, and June 26 and in July the weeks of July 3, July 10, and July 17.



required for testing purposes. Sessions will be limited to 5 participants. Multiple days may be required depending on the number of technicians needing certification. Agency employed technicians and outsourced vendors providing vehicle maintenance related services are eligible to participate.

Lively Technical College HVAC instructor, Stephen Johns will provide the training. If EPA Section 608 certification meets a training need, please e-mail Randy Free at [freer@leonschools.net](mailto:freer@leonschools.net) [randy@redroseconsulting.biz](mailto:randy@redroseconsulting.biz) or call (850) 556-1656 for registration details.

This training is offered at the agency, free of charge and will be one day sessions. Computer availability is

# 2023 Upcoming Events

The classes and conferences listed below are sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation and the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa. If you would like to attend any of the courses, you will find a course announcement and registration form for each course at [www.floridartap.org](http://www.floridartap.org) in the Training Calendar section. Click on the course name to download or view training class details. If you have an idea for a training course or would like to host a course, please contact Stephanie Lewis at [zavacki@usf.edu](mailto:zavacki@usf.edu).

March 13-17, 2023

[Transit Supervisor Certification Course \(FT00545\)](#)—CUTR, Tampa, FL

Save the Date: May 15-19, 2023

Instructor's Course for Transit Trainers (FT00562 -A)—LYNX, Orlando, FL

April 18-19, 2023

[How to Perform a Bus Collision Investigation – A Short Course](#)—Lake City, FL

Save the Date: August 7-11, 2023

Instructor's Course for Transit Trainers (FT00562)—CUTR, Tampa, FL

## We're Having a WHEEL-y Fun Time...Florida RTAP Visits its Rural Partners

One priority of Florida RTAP is to visit the rural transit agencies across the state. Florida RTAP project team members visited Marion Senior Services in December 2022 and Nassau County Council on Aging in January 2023. RTAP staff met with key agency personnel to provide a variety of resources including: the Florida Transit Manager's Toolkit, National RTAP Transit Manager's Toolkit, Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operator Training Program, and a variety of other documents. Discussions focused on agency goals, future projects,

areas required for support, and upcoming training opportunities. Each agency expressed their gratitude and the on-going support they receive from Florida RTAP.

A future site visit is scheduled for Levy County Transit. To schedule a site visit, please contact Stephanie Lewis, RTAP Project Manager [zavacki@usf.edu](mailto:zavacki@usf.edu).

We'll share more about our endeavours in future editions of the RTAP Bulletin.

### NassauTRANSIT



(L-R) Jules Cherney, NassauTRANSIT; Roberta Yegidis and Stephanie Lewis, Florida RTAP; and Mike Hayes, NassauTRANSIT (retired)

### Marion Senior Services



(L-R) Clayton Murch, Marion Senior Services; Roberta Yegidis, Florida RTAP; and Herman Schultz, Marion Senior Services