RTAP
BULLETIN
FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
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Florida Attends 5th National RTAP Conference

Florida transit agency employees and members of the Florida RTAP project team attended the 5th National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference: Navigating the Tides with Rural and Tribal Transit. The conference was held on December 3-6, 2023 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The agenda included training, hands-on workshops, keynote sessions, panel discussions, roundtables, and a vendor expo. This provided attendees an opportunity to interact with industry experts and agency representatives from around the country.

Tony Brandin, FDOT Transit Operations Manager with support from Carlton Allen, TRIPS Program Manager, and Tina Roberts, Procurement Director presented during the *Vehicle Procurement and Asset Management Strategies to Navigate an Uncertain Market* session with representatives from Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, New Mexico DOT, and NC DOT. The session brought together research on safety, vehicles, and asset management with practical procurement strategies to purchase the correct vehicle configuration.

Jodi Godfrey, CUTR Senior Research Associate, also had an opportunity to present during the *Human Trafficking: From Awareness into Action* general session. Jodi shared the session with staff from Pelivan Transit (Oklahoma), Musocgee Nation, and Idaho DOT. These presenters provided how state, rural, and Tribal communities are responding to human trafficking. Jodi gave an overview of the Human Trafficking Response Procedure Template, a tool that provides transit agencies an opportunity to ensure front line employees, dispatch, and safety supervisors know the appropriate response if they suspect a human trafficking situation. Jodi shared that "Raising awareness about this heinous crime is paramount to the fight against human trafficking. It was an honor to get to join voices with passionate professionals who are committed to the fight against human trafficking."

Overall, the conference was a huge success. Thank you to our friends at National RTAP for helping our state learn and grow while navigating the tides of change in rural and tribal transit. Presentations and other documents from the conference are available on the National RTAP website.

FDOT

CUTR

Vehicle Procurement and Asset Management
Strategies to Navigate an Uncertain Market

Human Trafficking:
From Awareness into Action

Human Trafficking Response Tool: How you can join the fight against human trafficking

Have you ever recognized a situation that seemed to be just a little off? Maybe it was a passenger that didn't have their own pass, that was accompanied by someone else that seemed to control their choices, a person who avoided eye contact. Have you ever overheard a passenger offering another passenger sex for money? Have you ever seen flyers posted around the transit center that advertise the opportunity to become a star in the next local movie? If you answered yes to any of those scenarios, you may have witnessed a potential human trafficking situation. Once we learn the signs to recognize, it is important that we know what to do with the details of the situation we just witnessed.

[Insert agency logo here] Reporting Suspected Human Trafficking Procedure #

Effective Date: (date adopted)
Version: (to be increased incrementally for version control and include version effective date)
Approved by: (accountable executive)
Administrators: (may not be appropriate/necessary for smaller agencies)
Editors: (people/titles that are entitled to edit the procedure)
Viewers: All employees
Division: (Likely Safety & Security and/or Operations – may not be necessary for smaller agencies)
Department: (Likely Safety & Security and/or Operations)
Purpose:

To inform stakeholders of the process for reporting and documenting cases of suspected human trafficking.

Definitions:

Human trafficking – a modern form of slavery involving the exploitation of a person for involuntary labor, services, debt bondage, or commercial sex through the use of force, fraud, or coercion; or in which the person induced to perform such acts has not yet attained 18 years of age.

Human trafficking victim – a person who is exploited under fraudulent pretenses, forced, or coerced into labor, services, debt bondage, or commercial sex.

Trafficker – a person who is exploiting a victim for labor, services, or commercial sex.

Victim-centered approach – a response to a suspected human trafficking event that considers the wants, needs, and wellbeing of the suspected victim in each step of the response.

Roles and Responsibilities:

This procedure accompanies training that teaches front line employees signs to recognize human trafficking. All employees have the responsibility to report suspected human trafficking in a safe and prompt manner.

Resources:

National Human Trafficking Hotline: (888) 373-7888

Truckers Against Trafficking Training and Materials:
https://truckersagainsttrafficking.org/transit-motorcoach/

DHS 'Blue Campaign' to End Human Trafficking: https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign

Procedures:

Procedures are defined for frontline employees, dispatch, and safety supervisors. Each of these types of employees plays a significant role in reporting, documenting, and potentially responding to human trafficking situations.

When [red text is in parentheses], choose the appropriate selection for your agency and delete the alternatives. Red text with no parentheses is optional, for your agency to remove if appropriate.

FDOT

The Florida Department of Transportation's Statewide Transit Training and Technical Assistance (STTAT) Program, in partnership with Truckers Against Trafficking, supported the development of the human trafficking response procedure template to provide transit agency representatives a tool that can be adapted to and adopted at their agency to ensure front line employees, dispatch, and safety supervisors know the appropriate responses if they suspect a human trafficking situation. The development of the procedure template included input from Florida transit agency representatives to ensure the language was clear, concise, and similar to other procedures in their agency. The template is designed to easily incorporate the agency logo for ease of adoption. The use of this procedure template may potentially lead to many saved lives in our local communities.

Download the response template.

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Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program

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RTAP BULLETIN

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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—Paul Goyette, Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida

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 Paul Goyette, Research Project Manager from the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida.

Name: Paul Goyette

Agency: Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR)

Title: Project Manager

Birthplace: Rhode Island

Education: High School

Professional History: I began working immediately after high school for a local vending machine company servicing, re-building, and repairing vending machines in the New England area. I took my first transit job with Rhode Island Public Transit Authority as utility worker in 1990. I moved through the ranks as a bus driver, transit clerk, supervisor, and training instructor. In 2003, I joined Lee County Transit in Fort Myers, Florida as a transit supervisor and was promoted to acting director. I began working for CUTR in 2019 and I am currently a project manager for two FDOT contracts, Florida Transit Safety and Operations Network (FTSON) and Statewide Transit Training and Technical Assistance (STTAT) Program.

Years Working with Current Agency: 4.5 years

Years Working in Transit Industry: 34 years

Biggest Challenge in Paratransit/Rural Transit: Limited resources, large geographic areas, and underserved rural areas.

Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit/Rural Transit: A sense of helping people in remote areas with transportation services.

Community Involvement: I have participated in several large food drives for a local food bank in Fort Myers Florida, as well as toy drives for families impacted by HIV.

Personal Background: I enjoy my time away from work spending it with family, friends, and grandchildren. I love music and supporting my son and daughter-in-law in their musical journey! I am a novice woodworker and very much enjoy making items from wood.

Inspiration: Great leaders and music. I like all genres of music and a novice piano player and singer.

Favorite Color: Red

Favorite Candy: Necco Wafers

My Motto: Find ways to get things done by overcoming obstacles, find solutions by focusing on progress instead of problems.

2024 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo

On April 19-20, 2024, Florida's best bus drivers and technicians will gather in Jacksonville to participate in the 2024 Annual Florida Triple Crown Roadeo. The event combines the FPTA and RTAP roadeos into a single, colossal weekend honoring all of Florida's bus maintenance technicians, paratransit and fixed route operators.

The year's event is a joint effort of the Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA), the Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), and the Florida Association of Coordinated Transit Systems (FACTS) and hosted by Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA).

There will be training opportunities available. The bus operator participant's skills will be tested with a written test and an on-course competition. The maintenance technicians will face similar challenges with a written test and a series of diagnostic tests.

As always, the event will conclude with the Awards Banquet that crowns and recognizes the 2024 champions in the paratransit cutaway divisions, the fixed route bus division, and the maintenance technician's team competition.

Registration for the 2024 Annual Florida Triple Crown Bus Roadeo is now open at https://floridatransit.org/roadeo and closes on March 22, 2024!

CFRPC Partners with Florida RTAP to Conduct Supervisor and Bus Operator Refresher Training

Florida RTAP staff worked in partnership with Florida Department of Transportation District 1, Commission for Transportation Disadvantage, Central Florida Regional Planning County (CFRPC), and MTM Transit, Inc to develop and deliver supervisor and bus operator refresher training. The team worked together with agency representatives to identify topics, develop the curriculum, and ensure the topics covered followed agency specific policies and procedures. In preparation for this training, Florida RTAP completed its site visit with CFRPC staff. They provided staff with resources from National RTAP and Florida RTAP, and discussed agency organization, goals, and future projects.

The training team, which included members from the Substance Abuse Management Oversight and Technical Assistance program, spent two weekends in January training transit providers, contractors, bus operators, and supervisors for refresher training. The refresher training for the supervisors included the following modules: Accident Investigation Fundamentals; Accident Evidence Collection and Documentation; Event Photography Techniques and Documentation; Interactive with Witness and Medi; Proactive Measures in Accident Prevention; Post-Accident Drug & Alcohol Testing Thresholds and Decision-Making Process; and Reasonable Suspicion Determination Training for Supervisors, in accordance with FTA 655.14. The bus operator refresher training session included six modules covering the following topics: Importance of Vehicle Inspections – Regulatory Requirements; Vehicle Inspections – Procedures and Common Findings; Defensive Driving Techniques; Accident Investigation – Report Writing, Witness Statements, and Photography; and What Employees Need to Know about FTA Drug & Alcohol Testing. Operators and supervisors had the opportunity to interact with industry experts to understand the importance of completing thorough inspections forms and conducting accident investigations.

Roberta Yegidis, Diana Byrnes, and William Mayer delivered the training onsite that was divided into classroom and hands-on demonstration. During the hands-on demonstration, Bill and Roberta walked the operators through conducting a thorough pre- and post- trip inspection. The staff utilized the agency's daily vehicle inspection forms to guide the demonstration. The hands-on portion was supported by Thomas Messing at MTM Transit, to provide additional agency specific guidance when completing thorough daily inspection sheets.

Executive Director, Jennifer Codo-Salisbury at CFRPC had the following to say about the training session: "As an agency that works to be a conduit for transit funding to the rural communities, we appreciate the support and guidance of FDOT, CUTR, and RTAP, as they provide the technical assistance needed to ensure the compliance and safety of the transit programs that serve DeSoto, Hardee, Highlands, and Okeechobee Counties."

In reviewing the post training course evaluations, one participant noted that the instructors provided "Lots of detailed information specifically related to the agencies attending." A second attendee stated, "The class size was conducive to asking questions and personalizing the instruction."

If you would like more information about agency specific training, please contact Florida RTAP Project Manager, Stephanie Lewis zavacki@usf.edu.

Training participants and instructors from CFRPC, MTM Transit, JJ Transport, Elite Medical Transport, FDOT District 1, Florida RTAP, and TD Commision.

We've had an EXHAUST-ive Itinerary...Florida RTAP Visits the Panhandle

Florida RTAP continued its rural agency site visits during the week of February 5. The trip started with a visit to Tri-County Community Council in Bonifay, with a final stop in Tallahassee at Big Bend Transit. The trip consisted of seven site visits with a review of materials from both National RTAP and Florida RTAP. Each transit director received a printed copy of the National RTAP Transit Manager's Toolkit with the supplemental compendium Florida Transit Manager's Toolkit.

These meetings provided the agencies an opportunity for an open forum to discuss agency specific goals, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. The Florida RTAP project team also solicited topics for the Small and Rural Transit Agency Roundtable Discussion session at the FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit in Tampa, as well as encouraging both operators and technicians to compete at the Triple Crown Bus Roadeo in Jacksonville.

A few other topics discussed during these site visits included: emergency management preparedness, accident data analysis, funding issues, future plans and projects, and attracting and retaining talent.

One key takeaway from each site visit:

Tri-County Community Council: Due to their four county service area, they are often called upon by each county simultaneously to provide emergency response.

JTrans: Currently provides stretcher service and will be purchasing a new power stretcher.

Calhoun County Senior Citizens Association: The agency is in the process of purchasing adjacent property to expand dedicated parking for their vehicles.

Liberty County Transit: A systemic challenge for Liberty County is not only their diverse topography, but much of the land in their geographic area is either a state or federal reserve, limiting economic and residential growth.

Gulf County ARC: A safety concern for them is the deer population, which they have addressed by purchasing deer whistles, which only deer can hear. This prevents unwanted deer and vehicle collisions.

Wakulla Senior Citizens Council: The agency is currently in the process of re-branding their buses.

Big Bend Transit: The agency plans to build a new state-of-the-art facility in Gadsden County. The other rural agencies rely on Big Bend Transit for support as they often make long medical trips to and from Jacksonville and Gainesville.

The week went by too quickly. Florida's small and rural agencies go above and beyond to support the individual needs of their riders and play a huge role in supporting their communities. The Florida RTAP Project Team would like to individually thank each of these agencies for their time. There are only a few agencies left to visit.

Where to next? You never know what's around the bend! Find out where we are headed to next in future editions of the Florida RTAP Bulletin. To schedule a site visit, please contact Stephanie Lewis, RTAP Project Manager zavacki@usf.edu.

Gold Star Moment—Sun is Shining on Stream

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.

Stream gets a New Look

Buses in Hendry and Glades counties are getting a new look. Buses are transitioning from the old blue and white colors to this new colorful design.

2024 Transportation Disadvantaged Legislative Day A Success!

On January 18, 2024, the Florida Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) held the 25th Annual Legislative Awareness Day at the Capitol Courtyard in Tallahassee.

Adam Gaffney addresses the attendees

Even though the event was early this year and the temperatures were low, advocates still traveled from all over the state to participate and promote the TD program. We had some incredible speakers this year, including Rep. Melony Bell from Polk County, Assistant Secretary Kim Holland from FDOT, Karen Deigl representing the Florida Public Transportation Association, Director Valerie Breen from the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Adolfo Covelli from St. Lucie County, and Adam Gaffney, a rider advocate in Tallahassee.

Attendees listened to speeches, viewed the vehicles on display, and stopped by the informational tables that were exhibited outside of the Capitol. There were also exhibitors and organizations that brought their vehicles to the Capitol for display, including Big Bend Transit, City of Tallahassee-StarMetro, Calhoun County Senior Citizens Association, Inc., RideOn Commuter Services, American Cancer Society, and the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities. Additionally, the Florida Channel did a great story about the event: Capitol Update – Nightly During Session – Friday, January 19, 2024 (thefloridachannel.org) (see minutes 19:51 to 21:04).

The day was capped off by a free lunch in the Capitol Courtyard. Many thanks to those advocates, sponsors, and exhibitors.

Celebrate!

Rural Transit Day

Tuesday, July 16, 2024

Save the Date:

National RTAP Twitter Chat

#RuralTransitDay

Tuesday, July 16, 2024

2024 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* 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.*

March 4 – 8, 2024
Fundamentals of Bus Collision Investigation (FT00435)*—CUTR, Tampa, FL

March 13-15, 2024
Substance Abuse Management and Program Compliance (FT00465 -A)—CUTR, Tampa, FL

April 19 – 20, 2024
2024 Triple Crown Bus Roadeo—JTA, Jacksonville, FL

March 25-26, 2024
How to Perform a Bus Collision Investigation – A Short Course— St. Johns COA, St. Augustine, FL

April 30 – May 2, 2024
SMS Principles for Transit (FT00564)—CUTR, Tampa, FL

Save the Date: June 3 – 5, 2024
FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit—USF Embassy Suites, Tampa, FL

Save the Date: September 22-25, 2024
FPTA/CTD Annual Conference + EXPO—Palm Beach County Convention Center, West Palm Beach, FL

** Courses required for Transit Safety and Security Program (TSSP) Certificate*

Big Bend Transit Installs New Bus Shelters

Big Bend Transit installed two new bus stops in Jefferson County, located east of Tallahassee. One additional bus stop will be installed in the near future. The bus stop shown is located near a Winn Dixie grocery store. These shelters are designed to provide safe, well lit and comfortable accommodations to encourage ridership.

Big Bend Transit, Inc. was founded in 1978, the agency provides safe, reliable, courteous, and affordable transportation in Jefferson, Leon, Gadsden, Taylor, and Madison counties. Learn more about Big Bend Transit.

BIG BEND TRANSIT