RTAP
BULLETIN
FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
SUMMER—VOL. 22, NO. 3

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2024 Triple Crown Roadeo Wrap-Up

During a very warm weekend on April 19-20 Florida's best bus operators and maintenance technicians participated in the 2024 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo in Jacksonville, Florida. The 2024 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo once again combined the FPTA and RTAP Roadeos into a single, colossal weekend honoring all of Florida's maintenance technicians, paratransit and fixed route operators. Over 250 competitors, judges, sponsors, guests, and dignitaries participated in the two-day event, making it a great success. The paratransit operator division included 21 cutaway drivers, of which 11 were competing for the first time as rookies.

The year's event was 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 were training opportunities for the participants. Then the bus operator participant's skills were tested with a written test, pre-trip inspection and the on-course competition. The cutaway operators also performed wheelchair securement and lift deployment competitions. The maintenance technicians faced similar challenges with a written test and a series of diagnostic tests. This year the cutaway operators had a six-way tie in the written test, Morgan Carr won by tiebreaker.

As always, the event concluded with an Awards Banquet that crowned and recognized the 2024 champions in the paratransit cutaway division, the fixed route bus division, the individual paratransit maintenance technician, and the maintenance technician's team competition.

William Hernandez from Big Bend Transit took the top honors in the annual paratransit maintenance technician competition, outpacing his fellow paratransit technicians. Calhoun County Senior Citizens' Michael Wimberly drove away with the Cutaway Category Championship. Michael traveled to West Palm Beach where he represented Florida at the 33rd National Community Transportation Roadeo on June 9, 2024.

Congratulations to all the Roadeo Competitors!!!

2024 Cutaway Roadeo Competitors

Roadeo Paratransit Category Winners

Cutaway Division

- 1st place: Michael Wimberly, Calhoun County Senior Citizens
- 2nd place: Morgan Carr, JTrans
- 3rd place: Gabe Cole, Breeze Transit

Paratransit Maintenance Technician Division

- 1st place: William Hernandez, Big Bend Transit
- 2nd place: Mailoha Woods, VOTRAN
- 3rd place: Trevor Morea, StarMetro

Individual Awards Cutaway Division

Highest Written Test Score: Morgan Carr, JTrans

Highest Pre-Trip Inspection Score: Michael Wimberly, Calhoun County

Yardstick Award: Gustavo Briceno, MV Transportation

Rookie of the Year: Morgan Carr, JTrans

Overall Champions:

Big Bend Transit captured the 2024 Overall Paratransit Grand Champion with combined cutaway, and maintenance scores. Big Bend Transit was represented by Willie Hernandez, James Gautier, and Travis Daniels.

Overall Paratransit Grand Champions

L-R: Willie Hernandez, James Gautier, and Travis Daniels

Paratransit Maintenance Technician

William Hernandez, Big Bend Transit

Paratransit Operator (Cutaway Division)

Michael Wimberly, Calhoun County Senior Citizens

33rd National Community Transportation Roadeo Competitors

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Rural Transit Assistance Program

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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

Rookie of the Year SPOTLIGHT—Morgan Carr, JTrans

Congratulations to Morgan Carr for placing 2nd overall and winning the Rookie of the Year and Highest Written Test awards. This Spotlight feature introduces Morgan to the RTAP community.

Sharon Peeler, Executive Director of JTrans had the following to say "When Morgan was recruited from a local grocery story and hired as a driver at JTrans we stepped out of the norm in our selection process. We normally look for a retired person or someone late in their career with a desire to serve others."

"Morgan was certainly much younger and less seasoned than her co-workers. We did have to endure some growing pains as she found her way in this business. However, growing in maturity is what we have witnessed. She is without question a people person and finds good in all. She is a quick study learning safe practices and techniques to transport individuals with a variety of abilities and disabilities."

"She has become very dependable and can take on every task we have here at JTrans. While small in physical stature, she has the strength to transport larger passengers with mobility devices, securing them properly for a safe ride. Morgan has found her calling and would like to make transportation her vocation and career. Morgan would be successful in whatever she chooses to undertake. We are glad to have her as a part of our JTrans family!"

Name: Morgan Carr

Agency: JTrans

Title: Operator

Birthplace: Marianna, FL

Education: Marianna High School (Class of 2014); and CDL license in 2018

Professional History: Leon County School bus driver (2018-2020); JTrans (2021-current)

Years Working with Current Agency: 3 years

Years Working as an Operator: 5 years

Biggest Surprise in Paratransit/Rural Transit: The areas people live in. I've seen more of my county working this job than ever before. Seeing the sights is one of my favorite parts of the job.

Biggest Challenge in Paratransit/Rural Transit: Learning how to deal with people with varying mental disabilities. You have to change your approach for every individual.

Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit/Rural Transit: Learning to have patience and empathy for people. This job has taught me to slow down and handle people with care.

Community Involvement: On occasion, I drive my church's bus.

Personal Background: I lived in foster care starting at the age of 6 until I was adopted at 9 into a loving family. I had a son when I was 20 years old. He is currently 7. I have a wonderful boyfriend; we've been together for over a year, and he has 2 sons (7 and 10). I love to play golf.

Childhood Ambition: I wanted to work in the medical field, but after working as a CNA for a few months I realized that wasn't my path in life. I also wanted my CDL license as a child so decided to pursue that. I quickly realized driving was my life path.

Inspiration: Growing up I didn't see many women driving big vehicles, and wanted to change that. I believed that no matter your age or gender, you could do whatever you wanted to in life.

Favorite book: "Love You Forever" by Robert Munsch (because it illustrates the bond between mother and son.)

Favorite Color: Yellow

Favorite Candy: Wonka brand candy or a Snickers bar

My Motto: "You can do anything you put your mind to!" (My mom loved telling me this) "Be true to yourself, after that everything in life will fall in place."

Congratulations, Morgan!

Photos from the 2024 Triple Crown Roadeo

Provided by the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA)

SPOTLIGHT—James Burke, FDOT Central Office

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 James Burke, Transit Safety Program Manager from the FDOT Central Office.

Name: James Burke

Agency: Florida Department of Transportation Central Office

Title: Transit Safety Program Manager

Birthplace: Stony Brook, New York

Education: B.S. in Sports Management from University of West Florida

Professional History: I worked for the Department of Financial Services doing workers compensation auditing for 7 years then 2 years with FDOT IG Office doing inter-modal auditing. I've been with the Transit Office for a few months now.

Years Working with Current Agency: 2+ years

Years Working in Transit Industry: Less than 1 year

Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit/Rural Transit: Realizing how many benefits there are for people in communities all across the State of Florida.

Personal Background: I have recently became engaged and we have a 1 year old pup named Chewy and he definitely lives up to his name. I also work as a fitness trainer at F45, as well as, coaching little league baseball in my spare time.

Childhood Ambition: I have always wanted to help people.

Inspiration: My family

Favorite Color: Red

Favorite Candy: Kit Kats

My Motto: Be kind, everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

Wakulla Transportation Partners with Florida RTAP to Conduct Bus Operator Refresher Training

Florida RTAP staff worked closely with Shannon Dekle at Wakulla Transportation to develop and deliver bus operator refresher training in Crawfordville. The team worked closely with the agency to provide The Art of Defusing Conflict: De-Escalation Techniques for Transit Operators and Curbing Transit Operator Distracted Driving training programs. The curriculum was modified to include relevant agency policies and procedures. Gennaro "Rino" Saliceto delivered the onsite training session.

Shannon Dekle had the following to say about the operator training "the lessons were well-structured, and the use of multimedia resources effectively enhances each session. Mr. Saliceto was a strong communicator, was very professional, and a relaxed instructor. We are eager to have Rino back in the future and for the partnership with Florida RTAP." The operators echoed Shannon's sentiments and noted, Rino did an "amazing job".

Each operator received two training certificates: one for each training class. They were filed for the next triennial review. If you would like more information about agency specific training, please contact Florida RTAP Project Manager, Stephanie Lewis zavacki@usf.edu.

Rural Transit Day — Movie Titles

The nation's sixth #RuralTransitDay Twitter Chat on July 16, 2024 was moderated by Stephanie Lewis of Florida RTAP, Caitlin Musselman from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC), Kevin Wassom from Michigan Department of Transportation, and John Andoh from Redding Area Bus Authority. The online discussion focused on what agencies are doing to recognize passengers and staff on Rural Transit Day and throughout the year, and included a discussion about challenges, solutions, and best practices. There were over 23,758 impressions and over 38 individuals and organizations participated.

Florida RTAP reached out to the small and rural transit community to respond to the question: "If you were to describe your agency/organization using a movie title, what would it be and why?" Here are some of their answers:

"As Good As It Gets" *because HART is literally the heart of Tampa Bay....it doesn't get any better than that!*

Susann Moody, Hillsborough Transit Authority

Little Giants
We may be small but we are mighty!

Omar De Leon, Collier Area Transit

"Driving Miss Daisy" *While our Senior Volunteers are not chauffeurs they are Seniors helping Seniors with transportation and other needs.*

Stephanie Leonard, Dr. Piper Center for Social Services, Inc.

Planes, Trains and Automobiles (and Buses too!)
How do you get home when your flight is canceled and you have to travel through every rural town from Chicago to New York for Thanksgiving? By taking rural transit, of course! You'll laugh, you'll smile, and you'll sit back and relax and enjoy the trip with friendly drivers, helpful dispatchers, and scenic views. There WAS a bus in the original 1987 movie, and the National RTAP Rural Transit Day 2024 version is ALL about buses.

Cara Marcus, National RTAP

The Avengers
Everyone brings their own strength to the team. Working together we can achieve spectacular feats.

Stephanie Lewis, Florida RTAP

Change of Date Notice Mark Your Calendars!

2025 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo

February 13–14, 2025

This event will be hosted for the first time in Gainesville.

FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit Was a Huge Success

On June 3-5, 2024, 268 transit professionals throughout Florida gathered in Tampa at the USF Embassy Suites for the 2024 FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit. For over two decades this statewide workshop has been the source of exceptional professional development opportunities for Florida's public transportation supervisors, front-line employees, and other key staff in operations, maintenance, planning, and administration. It consistently provides public transit professionals with an excellent opportunity to learn from industry experts, attend professional development training, learn about research updates, and network with their peers. Workshop attendees participate in educational training classes and general session discussions that stimulated new ideas and identified creative solutions to problem solving and strategic planning.

A total of 88 speakers presented topics during this year's workshop related to transit planning, operations, maintenance, safety, and security. Additionally, there were many other professional development sessions on topics such as journey mapping, general transit feed specification (GTFS), drug and alcohol program updates, succession planning, and multimodal transit facilities, just to name a few.

This year, FDOT Transit Immersion Leadership Experience (TILE) program Cohort 2 participants presented their final applied learning projects and were honored during the graduation ceremony. Additionally, certificates of appreciation were presented to each host property for their invaluable contributions to the development of future transit leaders. TILE is a dynamic year-long leadership development program for leaders at all levels. Participants engage in shared learning, innovation, and skill enhancement throughout the program, gaining invaluable insights into partner agencies' operations.

Personal and professional growth are two key components to this workshop. An attendee remarked, "All of the presenters were very informative and involved the audience, which gave insight into what other agencies may be experiencing and how they handle those issues."

Thank you to everyone that attended, presented, facilitated, and provided feedback. Save the date for the 2025 FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit – June 9-11, 2025.

Marlene Connor from Marlene Connor Associates, LLC made a presentation and answered questions during the Small and Rural Transit Agency Roundtable session discussing the new transportation guidance for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT).

Scott Zadakis, eLearning Project Manager from National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) provided an overview of the Active Shooter Preparedness Training for Rural Transit Systems for operations personnel and managers.

Denise Barnes from Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at USF presented strategies to identify, support, and facilitate successful transportation for persons impacted by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Gold Star Moment—Transit Hero: Peter Borges, LeeTran

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.

Peter Borges

Submitted by: Stacey Perkins, Marketing & Communications Manager

I would like to share a heartening story featuring one of our own esteemed "transit heroes" here at Lee County Transit (LeeTran). Recently, our County's Human Veteran Services Department, received a call from a homeless Veteran in need of shelter for the night. Swiftly, they arranged accommodation for the client at a local shelter so long as he arrived within a certain time frame. However, a hurdle stood in the way – the client lacked the means to reach the shelter, both in transportation and bus fare.

Enter Peter Borges, a dedicated LeeTran Supervisor. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, Mr. Borges personally intervened. Despite providing the client with a free bus pass, he remained concerned that time might still elude them. Comprehending the significance of ensuring shelter for this gentleman in need, Mr. Borges made a remarkable decision. He resolved to drive the client to the shelter himself, guaranteeing that the individual would have a warm bed for the night. True to his commitment, they arrived within the stipulated timeframe.

The Human & Veteran's Services Department expressed profound gratitude for Mr. Borges's altruistic gesture. In recognition of his selflessness, the Lee County Board of County Commissioners will honor him publicly. Such acts of kindness and dedication exemplify the spirit of service that enriches our community and brings pride to what we do every day at LeeTran.

FDOT District 1 Hosts Bus Collision Investigation Training

Transit agency personnel from RATPDev/SunTran, LYNX, PSTA, Charlotte County Transit, PalmTran, Citrus Connection, FDOT District 1, and Sunrise Community spent two-days at the FDOT District One office in Bartow attending "How to Perform a Bus Collision Investigation - A Short Course" with instructors Roberta Yegidis and Paul Goyette. The participants worked together on group activities, shared their knowledge and experiences as they discussed best practices, and learned lessons in identifying and analyzing collision factors. The attendees also learned: how to document evidence, interview witnesses, and take on-scene photographs. The class will help the participants improve their ability to conduct thorough collision investigations, while focusing on the prevention of similar events in the future.

Training participants with instructors at the FDOT District 1 office in Bartow.

Agency Spotlight – Louise Graham Regeneration Center

The Louise Graham Regeneration Center (located in St. Petersburg, Florida) mission is "to provide opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities to maximize their independence through the provision of quality life skills training, paid employment and participation in the community at large." The Center recently completed their FDOT Triennial Review. The COTA team identified the following best practice, all employees receive the National RTAP START training to better understand what each employee's responsibilities are when transporting and interacting with developmentally disabled clients. Learn more about the Center from their website.

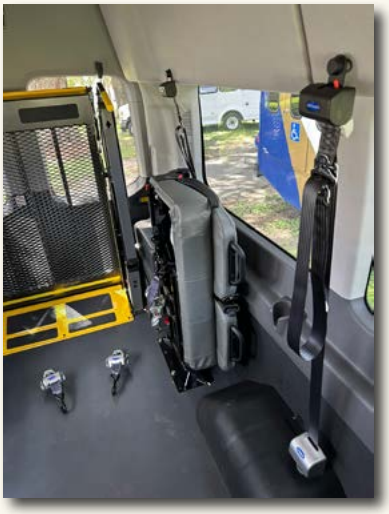
Louise Graham Regeneration Center, Inc.

Wheelchair Securement Retractors and Securement System Inspections: The Operator Perspective

Bus operators, whether they serve on fixed routes or paratransit services, have many tasks to accomplish during their workday, but one of their top priorities is ensuring the safety of all passengers, including those using mobility devices such as wheelchairs or scooters. This requires daily inspections and regular maintenance of the securement systems, specifically the wheelchair securement retractors, also known as wheelchair tie-downs. There are different types of securement systems, which include a forward-facing four-point tie-down system, a forward-facing autodocking system, and a rear-facing-wheelchair passenger system. The autodocking systems, whether forward or rear-facing, do not employ tie-downs or retractors, and their inspections consist of conducting an operational test on the securement system to ensure that it is functioning appropriately. The securement system should be able to hold the wheelchair tightly and release it smoothly when required.

This article focuses on the process of inspecting the forward-facing four-point tie-down system and specifically the retractors that are crucial for the safety of all passengers.

Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Inspections



Thorough pre-and post-trip inspections enable an operator to determine safety-related defects and potential failures before a vehicle is dispatched into service and it is crucial to avoid passengers' exposure to possible risks with unpredictable consequences. Similar to wheelchair lift inspections discussed in the RTAP Bulletin Winter edition, conducting thorough inspections of the wheelchair securement restraints and the securement system is essential for identifying any issues with the retractors and the securement system. In addition, it is a requirement outlined in state and federal regulations.

The pre-trip inspection procedure should include a detailed assessment of the securement system to verify its condition. This entails inspecting the retractors for possible signs of damage, ensuring their free retraction and release, and verifying that the securement straps are clean and in working condition.

During the inspection, operators should pay special attention to the following:

Retractors: Verify the retractors operate smoothly without any obstructions or unusual noises. Check for any signs of wear and tear that may affect their performance.

Securement straps: Inspect all securement straps for cleanliness, wear, and functionality. Ensure they can be easily adjusted and secured to provide a safe and secure ride for passengers.

Securement tracks: Check the condition of the securement tracks to ensure they are free of debris and capable of securely holding the wheelchair in place during travel.

Number of tie-downs: Ensure the correct number of tie-downs (4 for each wheelchair position) and scooter securements are present.

Shoulder and lap belt: Ensure the shoulder and lap belts are clean and without signs of wear and tear, and that they function properly.

After the inspection and each use, the operator should make sure all the tie-downs are stored in the proper bags, as failure to do so can pose a trip and fall hazard if they are left on the ground, or they might turn into projectiles against the window or a passenger in case of emergency braking. In addition to daily inspections, the wheelchair system and the tie-downs should also adhere to a regular maintenance schedule as indicated by the manufacturer. This includes conducting preventative maintenance inspections at specified intervals to address any potential issues and ensuring ongoing safety and functionality.

Complete daily checks and scheduled maintenance inspections of wheelchair securement retractors and the securement system are crucial for the safety of passengers using mobility devices. By following the steps outlined above, bus operators and maintenance teams can ensure that these systems are in good condition and function properly.

2024/2025 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.*

September 17, 2024
Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operator Training Program (Train-the-Trainer)—CUTR, Tampa, FL

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

October 8-9 2024
How to Perform a Bus Collision Investigation – A Short Course—JTrans, Marianna, FL

Save the Date: February 14-15, 2025
2025 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo—Gainesville RTS, Gainesville, FL

National RTAP Rural Transit Agency Spotlight – The Arc on the Gulf, Inc.

The following agency spotlight is featured on the National RTAP's social media accounts.

The Arc on the Gulf is a hidden gem of Florida's "Forgotten Coast." They are a non-profit organization that serves Northwest Florida's Gulf, Bay, and Franklin Counties. Their website states, "We love our customers" and it shows.

They offer transportation to Medicaid recipients and local residents, who call their insurance provider and request that Gulf County Association or ARC on the Gulf Transportation to transport them. Trip destinations include medical appointments, educational institutions, access to healthy food, including food banks, shopping, employment, and social enrichment. Special services are available for riders with cognitive disabilities. Group trips are available for seniors, including residents of assisted living centers. They also offer Transportation Disadvantaged Services to members who apply and are eligible. The application can be mailed, emailed, or picked up at their headquarters office in Port St. Joe, Florida.

Appointments must be called in by phone at least 48 hours ahead; however, there are certain circumstances where the staff works to seat a member within 24 hours' notice. Riders who are not Medicaid-sponsored will be required to pay a co-pay of $4-$15 round trip, depending on the distance of the trip and the person's income. While the service area is largely rural, Arc on the Gulf, Inc. also provides transportation to many urban areas to meet rider needs, including but not limited to, Tallahassee, Gainesville, Orlando, Jacksonville, Tampa, and many more locations throughout Florida and even Alabama. Office hours are 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM ET, Monday – Friday (850-229-6550, gulftran2@fairpoint.net)

This multi-faceted transit agency also assists in evacuations during adverse weather conditions (anyone who's been to Florida know there can be hurricanes).

Leslie Coleman, Client Relations Manager for Arc on the Gulf, Inc., succinctly sums up the spirit and the services of Arc on the Gulf, "We are a small outfit that does big things!"