RTAP BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

FALL—VOL. 22, NO. 4

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2024 Transportation Disadvantaged Awards

The 2024 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference + EXPO took place from September 22-24 at Hilton West Palm Beach in West Palm Beach, Florida. On the final evening of this three-day event, the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged presented the 2024 CTD Awards to the following:

2024 Dispatcher/Scheduler of the Year: Jodi Milisavic, Votran

2024 Driver of the Year: Cheryle Armaganian, Citrus County Transit

2024 Designated Official Planning Agency of the Year: MetroPlan Orlando, Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties

2024 Urban CTC of the Year: Hillsborough County Sunshine Line, Hillsborough County

2024 Local Elected Official of the Year: Chelsea Reed, Mayor, Palm Beach Gardens

2024 Outstanding Coordinating Board of the Year: Martin County Local Coordinating Board

2024 Safety Award of the Year: Senior Resource Association, Inc., Indian River County

2024 Sheila Winitzer Shining Star Award: Felicia Piechowiak

William G and Budd Bell Lifetime Achievement Award: Edie Biro

Congratulations to all 2024 CTD Award Winners!

Registration is Open!

2025 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo

February 14-15, 2025
RTS Gainesville

https://floridatransit.org/roadeo

JTrans Hosts Bus Collision Investigation Training

Transit agency personnel from Big Bend Transit, Manatee County Area Transit, Suwannee Valley Transit Authority, LYNX, JTrans, ARC on the Gulf, and Liberty County Transit spent two days at the JTrans office in Marianna attending "How to Perform a Bus Collision Investigation - A Short Course" with instructors Paul Goyette and Gennaro Saliceto. 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, maintain compliant accident files, and take on-scene photographs. The class will help the participants improve their ability to conduct thorough collision investigations, document their investigative activities, and implement corrective actions focused on the prevention of similar events in the future.

National Center for Mobility Management and Transit Workforce Center Resource

Creating Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities in the Transportation Workforce

A new training module from our partners at the National Center for Mobility Management and the Transit Workforce Center identifies key strategies that can be used to recruit people with disabilities into the transportation workforce and how to best accommodate them once hired.

https://ow.ly/zemV50SSjay

Marion Transit Refresher Training

In October, the transit team at Marion Senior Services was fired up for extinguisher training! Marion Transit partnered with Ocala Fire Rescue to receive hands-on training to ensure the team knows how to handle fire situations while providing safe public transportation.

Learn more about Marion Senior Services dba Marion Transit www.mariontransit.org

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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

2024 FPTA Paratransit Technician of the Year — Mailoha "Mo" Melendez-Woods, Votran

Congratulations to Mailoha "Mo" Melendez-Woods, for being selected as the 2024 FPTA Paratransit Technician of the Year. This Spotlight feature introduces Mo to the RTAP community.

Rick Kazawitch, Director of Maintenance, at Votran, had the following to say, "Mo is a pleasure to work with. It is clearly evident that she has a passion for understanding mechanical and electronic systems and having the ability to diagnose and repair them. She is self-motivated and strives for professional development. She will welcome any training opportunities available, to add to her skillsets. In the few short years Mo has been with Votran, she has become one of our top technicians. She always has a positive attitude and that positivity rubs off on her fellow technicians. We are glad that Mo chose transit to be her career path, and also grateful that she chose Votran to become part of the transit community."

Name: Mailoha "Mo" Melendez-Woods

Agency: Votran

Birthplace: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Education: A.S. Computer Science and A.S Automotive and Diesel Technology

Professional History: Calibration Engineer at SCT, Votran B Technician, Votran A Technician, Votran 2023 Nominee for FPTA Bus Technician of the Year, 2nd place overall Florida 2023 Triple Crown Roadeo Paratransit

Years Working with Current Agency: 2 years

Years Working in Transit Industry: 2 years

Biggest Surprise in Paratransit: I was surprised with how long most transit personnel have stayed in transit and with the community as a whole. With everyone working together for so long it gives you a sense of family.

Biggest Challenge in Paratransit: I would say the biggest challenge would be working the early 4:00am shifts.

Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit: I enjoy giving-back to the community by keeping the buses safe and on the road.

Personal Background: I have 3 sisters and a brother. I enjoy spending time with my family and working on our vehicles.

Childhood Ambition: I wanted to be an architect when I was younger.

Inspiration: To be a business owner

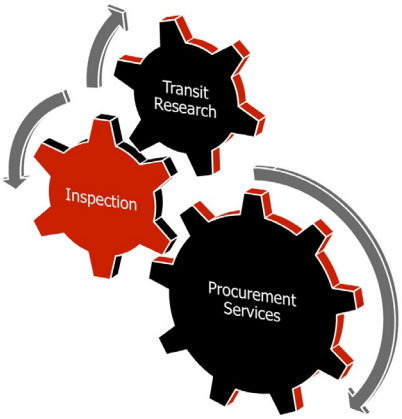
Favorite Book: The Alchemist

Favorite Color: Red

Favorite Candy: Almond Joy

My Motto: Life is short, make it count.

TRIPS wants to hear from you and your staff!



As we are planning for future RFPs, we are interested in how TRIPS can better serve your agency, operator's, technician's, and passenger's needs.

We are looking for feedback on how to better improve the vehicle specifications and options in our future contracts.

www.surveymonkey.com/r/HGN67Y7

2024 CTD Driver of the Year — Cheryle Armaganian, Citrus County Transit

Congratulations to Cheryle Armaganian for being selected as the 2024 CTD Driver of the Year. This Spotlight feature introduces Cheryle to the RTAP community.

Lori Hall a Transit Supervisor at Citrus County Transit, had the following to say, "Cheryle is an excellent role model for her peers and promotes relationships of trust and respect with her passengers as well as her co-workers. Cheryle is responsible and dependable. The quality of her work, timeliness, and professional attitude while ensuring her passengers' safety makes her a great asset to our agency."

Name: Cheryle Armaganian

Agency: Citrus County Transit

Birthplace: Providence, Rhode Island

Education: GED

Professional History: 30 years of transit driving

Years Working with Current Agency: 4 years

Years Working in Transit Industry: 30 years

Biggest Surprise in Paratransit: How large the demand is for the service we provide.

Biggest Challenge in Paratransit: Not becoming too personally involved with the clients I serve on a regular basis.

Personal Benefit of Working in Paratransit: It's a very fulfilling occupation.

Community Involvement: I try to be the best neighbor possible and help everyone in my community.

Personal Background: I enjoy cooking. I have 2 daughters, 4 grandchildren and 4 dogs.

Childhood Ambition: Growing up, I wanted to cook professionally.

Inspiration: Helping the community

Favorite Book: Jaws

Favorite Color: Green

Favorite Candy: Sugar free Lifesavers

My Motto: Treat others the way I want to be treated.

2024 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference + EXPO

The Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA) and Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) hosted its 2024 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference + EXPO at the Hilton West Palm Beach from September 22-24, 2024.

To maximize the program outreach, Florida RTAP leveraged the annual conference to help inform and educate Florida's rural transit professionals to host breakout sessions.

Martin Catalá presented about a Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) analysis for JTrans in Jackson County to identify potential service opportunities and is used as a first step in understanding already existing travel patterns.

Neil Rodriguez, Tribal Transit Program Manager from National Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) provided updates of products, training, and resources available.

Florida RTAP was honored to host Lina Aragon's session "Barriers to Transportation: Demystifying Staff's Perception of People with Disabilities."

Gold Star Moment—Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority

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.

Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority

On September 25th, the evening before Hurricane Helene was set to arrive, Good Samaritan Church on Park Boulavard informed the Emergency Operation Center that they had lost power. Temperatures in the church were increasing to 90 degrees. The church had a congregation of over 280 members, most of which had accessibility needs.

PSTA and Transdev were informed and immediately jumped into action. The mission to evacuate folks to safety began at 10:45pm on September 25th and lasted until 6:45am the following morning. With the help of PSTA and Transdev, the job was completed in successfully evacuating almost 300 Good Samaritan Church Members to shelters.

A huge thank you to all of our essential staff here at PSTA for safely connecting Pinellas County residents as we weathered the effects of Hurricane Helene.

2024 FPTA Bus Safety and Security Excellence Award

Each year the Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA) and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) are given the opportunity to recognize bus transportation systems that have implemented programs or projects and have achieved documented success in addressing specific safety and security program areas. During the 2024 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference + EXPO the submissions for both Tier II, and Tier III Awards and the selection of award recipients were recognized. Committee members with representatives from FDOT, FPTA and CUTR had a very difficult task on selecting winners in all three categories where there were outstanding nominations that can be easily implemented at other agencies. The award recipients implemented practices and procedural changes that led to safety and/or security improvements to enhance public safety.

2024 Tier III: Gold Award (City of Ocala – SunTran)

For the development and implementation of a comprehensive and successful PTASP. SunTran has adopted the principles and methods of Safety Management Systems (SMS) as the basis for enhancing the safety of its public transportation system.

2024 Tier II: Gold Award (Votran)

Votran implemented a comprehensive review of all safety and operational standards for all drivers, regardless of their tenure, they identified one potential level of complacency that was deemed high priority and implemented an extensive review of the daily pre-trip process and procedure. They also implemented a covert audit process of the pre-trips being conducted to aid in identifying any factors that could be a resource for the drivers.

Congratulations to SunTran and Votran for their outstanding attention to safety and security with the distinguished 2024 FPTA Gold Awards.

Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operator Training Program (Train-the-Trainer)

The Florida Department of Transportation's Florida Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), administered by the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR), presented the Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operator Training Course in a train-the-trainer format. The course was held at CUTR in Tampa, FL on September 17, 2024. Instructors for the course were Stephanie Lewis and Gennaro "Rino" Saliceto, with over 20 transit professionals in attendance. Representatives came as far as Tri-County Community Council in Bonifay to participate in the training session.

The provision of transit services in a safe, secure, and customer-oriented manner demands that bus and van operators are well-trained and knowledgeable about the equipment they operate, the conditions under which they drive, and the passengers they serve. The training programs provide trainers with the materials and tools needed to train both new and veteran operators. This program is customizable to agency-specific documents and can be modified based on an agency's needs and size. All participants were provided copies of National RTAP instructor and participant manuals, Rule Chapter 14-90, Florida Administrative Code and the State Management Plan, and an all-inclusive jump drive.

The training session provided a comprehensive overview of essential topics aimed at ensuring bus operators remain knowledgeable, compliant, and equipped to perform their duties effectively. Discussions began with an introduction to the training program and reviewing key resources available to operators, focusing on their practical application. A portion of the session was dedicated to drug and alcohol training, a federally mandated requirement for bus operators. Attendees explored the importance of maintaining compliance with these regulations, emphasizing how adherence ensures operational safety and legal accountability. The instructors also spent considerable time reviewing agency-specific policies, procedures, and guidelines. These discussions highlighted how operators can apply these policies in their daily responsibilities, particularly when addressing challenges on the road or managing unexpected situations. Additional training resources were discussed to ensure operators have ongoing access to tools that enhance their skills and understanding of their role.

Another area of focus was records retention, with an emphasis on the importance of organizing and maintaining accurate documentation. Best practices, such as using checklists, obtaining signatures, and maintaining sign-in sheets, were shared to help attendees streamline their record-keeping processes. This section tied directly to the broader discussion of compliance, particularly concerning FDOT Triennial Reviews. The instructors outlined the safety and maintenance requirements agencies must meet to pass audits successfully and shared strategies to address common findings. The session concluded with a conversation about what it means to be in compliance, emphasizing the collective responsibility of operators and agencies to uphold safety standards, follow procedures, and maintain accurate records. Attendees were encouraged to ask questions and share their experiences, promoting a collaborative environment and reinforcing the importance of ongoing learning and adherence to regulatory requirements.

For information on the Florida RTAP program and the professional development opportunities available for Florida rural transit agencies, contact Florida RTAP Project Manager Stephanie Lewis at zavacki@usf.edu.

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.*

January 13-17, 2025
Transit Bus System Safety (FT00533)*—CUTR, Tampa, FL

March 25-28, 2025
Effectively Managing Transit Emergencies (FT00456)*—CUTR, Tampa, FL

February 14-15, 2025
2025 Florida Triple Crown Roadeo—Gainesville RTS, Gainesville, FL

Save the Date: June 9-11, 2025
2025 FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshgop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit—USF Embassy Suites, Tampa, FL

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

Agency Spotlight – Ridge Area Arc in Avon Park, Florida

Founded in 1957 by Franklyn and Mary Ellen Ward, Ridge Area Arc has been a beacon of hope for individuals with disabilities in Highlands County. Inspired by the needs of their son, Rob, the Wards established the organization to provide essential services. Today, Ridge Area Arc offers 10 programs, serving approximately 200 individuals and making a significant impact on the lives of those they serve. The not for profit 501(c)3 provides the following services:

- Adult Basic Education
- Adult Day Training
- Group Homes
- Lab For Independent Living (Coming soon)
- ProjectSEARCH
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation
- Special STARS (Sports Training and Recreational Services)
- Supported Employment
- Supported Living
- Vocational Training

During their recent FDOT Triennial Review, Dale Hansen at FDOT District 1 noted, "Ridge Area Arc's culture and staff teamwork continue to work tremendously well together at strengthening their efforts to be in compliance. This has resulted in their outstanding 2024 Triennial Review, which indicates their continuous efforts throughout the year. I am very proud of them and thankful for the safe transportation services they perform in the community!"

The Compliance Oversight and Technical Assistance (COTA) Program said "the agency had a remarkable triennial review. It was a pleasure working with the agency and observing the services that they provide to the community."

Learn more about Ridge Area Arc and their mission "Serving and advocating for individuals with developmental and other disabilities so they may have the opportunity to choose and realize their goals in work, life, and play." www.ridgeareaarc.org