

# RTAP

## BULLETIN

FLORIDA RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SUMMER—VOL. 17, No. 2

2 RTAP SPONSORED TRAININGS

3 SPOTLIGHT—ROD DELOSTRINDS,  
KEY WEST TRANSIT

"GOLD STAR" MOMENT

4 RECORD ATTENDANCE:  
2019 PDW AND SUMMIT

5 FDOT TRIENNIAL  
COMPLIANCE REVIEW

7 WHAT DOES  
RURAL TRANSIT  
MEAN TO YOU?

8 2019  
UPCOMING  
EVENTS

2019  
FPTA/CTD  
ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE

## ADA Paratransit Gets On-Demand Option in Pinellas County

For those who use ADA paratransit, spontaneity has not been an option – but now that spice of life is becoming increasingly more available, just as it is for fixed route passengers.

Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) has been partnering with private sector transportation providers to deliver service to ADA paratransit passengers for over twenty years. The current contractor averages over 98% on-time performance and usually under ten complaints per month while performing as many as 1,400 trips per day. Yet PSTA wanted to do more, so it applied for and was awarded an FTA Sandbox grant to measure the equity and feasibility of delivering origin to destination trips to ADA passengers without an advance reservation. This new Mobility On Demand (MOD) pilot project began ramping-up this spring, and is now up to 400 paratransit customers taking trips countywide for the same \$4.50 fare they would pay for a trip reserved by 5 pm the day before travel on the traditional ADA paratransit service. Currently, MOD trips are provided by the customer's choice of two wheelchair and two ambulatory contractors, with the latter being United Taxi and Lyft.

"It is a big paradigm shift for us", says Ross Silvers, PSTA's Mobility Manager, adding, "From focusing on the ADA regulations and the rules and restrictions they bring, to the freedom of movement and responsiveness we are seeing in other sectors of our society." PSTA is using Goin' software to create customer accounts that include notes for



drivers about addresses, mobility devices, and assistance needs to help bridge the gap between the eight hours of disability sensitivity training the traditional ADA drivers are required to have, and the simple directive not to discriminate given to Lyft drivers. MOD customers call PSTA staff to request a ride, use their e-wallet to pay their fare, and within two minutes a driver has usually accepted their ride. PSTA staff tell them the drivers' name, vehicle information, and ETA which is also sent to their cell phone by text or voice message. Lyft rides usually arrive at their pick-up address less than ten minutes after the customer called PSTA.

Examples of trips include meeting a friend who called last-minute to go see a movie to pick-up a prescription for a flare-up of their chronic condition. What they share is that they are all so appreciative of the service's flexibility, which makes up for some drivers' lack of disability experience, and even lack of English skills. "It's not for everyone", says Silvers, "But for those who are willing and able to be proactive in using the tools we give them to make their rides successful, it is a great taste of freedom of movement which people without disabilities take for granted."



CUTR

# RTAP Sponsored Trainings Hosted by JTrans in Marianna

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 Program on August 7, 2019 and How to Conduct a Bus Collision Investigation Short Course Workshop, on August 8-9, 2019 at JTrans in Marianna, Florida. Roberta Yegidis and Bill Mayer instructed the Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operation Course and Gennaro Saliceto joined Roberta Yegidis and instructed the two-day Accident Investigation Course.

The provision of transit services in a safe, secure, and customer-oriented manner demands 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. This inaugural offering of the Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operation Course specifically addressed the training categories of:

- Safety and Security
- Customer Service
- Agency Specific
- Regulatory
- Technical Operator Skills (on the bus training)
- Route/Line Training (on the job training)

The Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operation Course suggests minimum training standard for new bus operators, which can be adjusted at the discretion of the bus operator trainer to accommodate for training more experienced operators. Training times by category can vary to accommodate the needs of each class, but the overall percentage of time spent per topic is defined in the training.

Participants were enthusiastic as they learned key takeaways from the Chapter 14-90, FAC and the importance of addressing agency specific policies and procedures. The training was tailored to accommodate the class, as the attendees recommended that two topics be added, sexual harassment and service/comfort animal procedures.

Additional training discussion topics included road types, necessary skill sets for rural operations, the range of mobility devices and the challenges of proper securement, as well as Medicaid broker requirement burdens on small agencies.



How to Conduct a Bus Collision Investigation Short Course was conducted the two consecutive days following the Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus Operation Course, with the majority of the participants attending both training sessions. The main topics of the Bus Collision Investigation Short Course were:

- Why investigations are necessary (specific reference to SMS and the proactive investigative approaches)
- How to recognize evidence
- How to use evidence
- How to prepare the supporting material for the investigation (interviews, photography, and sketches)
- How to write an accident report
- Recordkeeping

Attendees offered thorough and considerate solutions during the exercises, with each group developing the same basic recommendations. The course emphasized the importance of current, complete and accurate documentation, including photographs from all angles that include the vehicles involved. The key takeaways from this course focus on the importance of facts as opposed to hearsay, how photographs can support the investigation, and NIMS/ICS protocols.

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@cutr.usf.edu](mailto:zavacki@cutr.usf.edu).



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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.

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# SPOTLIGHT—Rod Delostrinos, Director of Transportation, Key West Transit, City of Key West

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 Rod Delostrinos, Director of Transportation, Key West Transit, City of Key West.



**Name:** Rod Delostrinos

**Title:** Director of Transportation, Key West Transit, City of Key West

**Education:** Master of Public Administration, Norwich University

**Professional History:** Served 22 years active duty with the U.S. Army in the logistics and maintenance field. Transitioned to municipal government with the City of Key West with almost eight years in the Community Services Department and now over two years in the Department of Transportation.

**Years Working with Current Agency:** 10 years

**Years Working in Transit Industry:** 2 years

## "Gold Star" Moment

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 story that highlight the great work being done by Florida's rural transit community.



### MCAT Operator Goes Above and Beyond

On June 13th, 2019 Harry Quinter demonstrated his commitment to his passenger's safety. Harry was pivotal on helping a female passenger who had fallen inside her residence. Had it not been for Harry's concern, this passenger would not have been able to

**Biggest Challenge Working in Rural Transit:** Providing quality service with the limited resources of a small property. We must do many of the same things as larger agencies. It is not uncommon for one person to wear many hats. Recruiting operators from a smaller population is challenging as well.

**Personal Benefit Working in Rural Transit:** We really get to know our customers. They are not afraid to tell us what they think. This is a good thing.

**Community Involvement:** Active member of the local and regional Veterans of Foreign Wars; Volunteers with the Monroe County School District; Coached American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) team locally.

**Personal Background:** Married for 23 years. We have three children and a dog named Willow. We spend time on the boat fishing, tubing, and relaxing. I like to consider myself a DIYer tackling projects around the house.

**Inspiration:** Serving family and friends in my hometown. It makes me work harder.

**Favorite Color:** Blue

**My Motto:** Do something. If it doesn't work, try something else.

receive any assistance because of her living conditions and lack of a next of kin. Harry's concern for her safety when she failed to show for her scheduled time was key to providing medical assistance and help to this passenger. Harry is always willing to go above the call of duty for the safety of all his passengers and co-workers.



Harry Quinter, MCAT

Congratulations, Harry!

Have something to share? Submit your "Gold Star" Moments to be featured in the next issue of the RTAP Newsletter! Fill out the form available online.

[www.floridartap.org/a-gold-star-moment-to-share/](http://www.floridartap.org/a-gold-star-moment-to-share/)

# Record Attendance: 2019 FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit

**W**ith record attendance, 300 transit professionals representing Florida transit systems, Florida DOT central and district offices, consultants, and other organizations gathered in Tampa at the USF Embassy Suites on June 3-5, 2019 for the 18th Annual FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations Summit. The workshop and summit were jointly sponsored by the Florida Public Transportation Association, Florida Department of Transportation, and the USF Center for Urban Transportation Research. The workshop theme was “Building the Foundation for Your Agency’s Success.”

The sixth annual Summit, hosted by the FDOT Florida Transit Safety and Operations Network (FTSON), kicked off three days of professional development and attracted 115 transit professionals. State operations and safety experts were provided with informative presentations about Hurricane Michael response, non-punitive employee reporting, and transit cybersecurity.

The eighteenth Annual Professional Development Workshop offered a unique professional development opportunity for Florida's public transportation supervisors, front-line employees, and other key staff in operations, maintenance, marketing, planning and administration. The one-stop workshop provided attendees with 27 different sessions that offered an excellent opportunity to learn from industry experts, attend professional development training, learn about research updates, and network with their peers. All of Florida's transit networks – safety and operations, maintenance, marketing, and planning – played active roles in developing and presenting workshop content. During Tuesday's lunch, 29 transit agency personnel graduated from two FDOT sponsored training programs. Thirteen maintenance technicians graduated from the Certified Technician Training Program and 16 graduates from the Florida Transit Operator Trainer Training Program. A special ceremony was held to honor the transit agencies and staff who were deployed in the impacted region of Hurricane Michael.

This year's workshop included four sessions sponsored by the Rural Transit Assistance Program, the first being Transit's Role in Identifying and Reporting Human Trafficking. The issue of victims being “hidden in plain sight,”



*FDOT recognized staff from Big Bend Transit, JTA, Lee Tran, and CUTR for their efforts while being deployed in the region impacted by Hurricane Michael.*

at bus terminals, train stations, and other high traffic areas. The FBI Special Agent discussed warning signs of how to recognize victims of human trafficking, and ways to report suspected incidents.

The second RTAP sponsored session was the Small and Rural Transit Agencies Roundtable. Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged representatives joined the discussion to present on funding opportunities and to explain how funding is allocated. Topics also included lessons learned from the FDOT Triennial Review process provided by two transit agencies, Nassau County and Levy County, on their experience during the review, how to prepare, and what to expect.

RTAP also sponsored two sessions presented by Easterseals Project Action. *Lifts, Ramps, and Securements*, addressed the best way to use lifts, ramps, and securement systems, ADA requires, and how to improve operator proficiency. Easterseals also instructed *Reasonable Modifications to Policy and Practice*, specifically the final USDOT ruling for reasonable modifications/accommodations regarding policies, procedures and practices and how to avoid discrimination claims. This session also addressed how this final rule is impacting transportation services.

For information about the professional development workshop, please contact the Workshop Coordinator Stephanie Lewis at [zavacki@cutr.usf.edu](mailto:zavacki@cutr.usf.edu).

# FDOT Triennial Compliance Review

A quarterly feature of the RTAP bulletin will highlight the FDOT Triennial Compliance Review. The three main parts are bus system safety, preventative maintenance, and drug and alcohol. Each program has provided a brief introduction to their specific section and requirements. Supplemental issues will provide additional details about the review process.

## Bus System Safety

The Triennial Review process is a Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) detailed management tool for examining grantee performance and adherence to current compliance requirements. It examines how recipients of state and federal funds meet statutory and administrative requirements. The bus system safety review process certifies compliance in areas such as safety, security, vehicle maintenance, training, and recordkeeping. In addition, the overall process affords FDOT the opportunity to provide technical assistance identified within the State Management Plan (SMP) and rule 14-90 F.A.C.

The FDOT bus system safety review team produces a compliance report and is submitted to the FDOT District Office for approval. Any identified deficiencies are turned into a corrective action plan (CAP). The compliance review document is evaluated periodically to identify common trends and to define action plans to correct recurring findings. The compliance document also offers the transit agency, district and central office a tool to evaluate the level of safety practices in Florida transit agencies. As an example, during a recent review of a transit agency identified two important best practices: (1) differentiation between hours of service versus hour of driving and (2) availability of review documents provided onsite.

Florida agencies must ensure that their operators do not drive more than 12 hours in a 24-hour period and do not exceed 16 hours on-duty during the same timeframe. Additionally, they cannot be on-duty for 72 hours in any period of seven consecutive days without having 24 consecutive hours off-duty prior to returning to duty. Many rural agencies transport their clients to distant medical facilities to receive their medical treatments. As a result, the driver waits for their client to finish their treatment, which may last several hours. Not all transit agencies differentiate driving time from waiting time, resulting in a violation of the rule.

*“For example: an operator drives for a total of 5 hours and waits for the client for 8 hours, the total on duty time is 13 hours. If the agency does not have a method in place to capture how many hours are spent driving and how many hours are spent waiting, the reviewer will interpret the 13 hours as driving time, which is a violation of the driving time rule. Recently, the review team witnessed an agency providing their driver with a prepared timesheet where they can note driving time versus non-driving, including the break time (e.g. lunchtime).”*

This practice can avoid confusion and ensure agency compliance with the state rule.

The other best practice is to have the required documents readily available at the location of the review. This is important for transit agencies managed by the county, where files are stored in different locations. While onsite, reviewers need to have immediate access to drivers’ personnel files, such as medical exams, criminal and driving background checks, and payroll records. Having these types of documents ready at the review location will avoid unnecessary delays. Agencies can always reach out to their district office to confirm the list of documents required for their onsite visit.

## FTA Drug and Alcohol Testing Program Compliance Reviews – What’s Included

As we discussed in the Spring Edition of the RTAP Bulletin, the FDOT Bus System Safety Triennial Review includes the agency’s compliance with federal (FTA and USDOT) drug and alcohol testing regulations. The reviewer examines the agency’s testing records to determine compliance in ten key program areas: policy, training, service agent compliance, previous DOT employer background checks, pre-employment testing, random testing, post-accident testing, reasonable suspicion testing, post violation testing, and records management. Over the course of the next few issues of the RTAP Bulletin, we’ll identify best practices, training resources and some of the common findings in each of the ten program areas. This edition of the bulletin will focus on the substance abuse policy requirements.

An agency’s substance abuse policy is the cornerstone of their program and as such, Drug and Alcohol Program Managers should be

*continued on p.6*

well-versed in their agency's policy provisions. Although the policy is a legal document, it should be written in plain language so that all employees understand their role and responsibilities within the FTA mandated testing program. When an employer inserts additional testing provisions within the policy, the employer's provisions must be clearly delineated from FTA mandated provisions, to ensure that employees are clear under which authority they are being tested. For example, when an employer conducts post-accident testing following events that do not meet the FTA post-accident testing thresholds, the policy must state that the testing is performed under employer authority and must also be distinguished in some manner, such as by use of bold or italic text.

Once a policy is prepared and adopted by the agency's governing board, it must be provided to each safety-sensitive employee at time of hire and also when there are major revisions made to the policy. Electronic distribution of the policy is permitted; however, it is important to maintain documentation that the employee has received the policy.

Florida's Section 5311 sub-recipients are required to adopt one of two policy templates disseminated by FDOT. Agencies can select the policy template that best suits their organization's position regarding the consequences an employee faces following a violation, commonly referred to as "Zero Tolerance" or "Second Chance". The FTA and FDOT approved policy templates can be viewed and downloaded from the FDOT Substance Abuse Management website: <https://sam.cutr.usf.edu/regulations/>

### **Establishing Target Intervals for Maintenance**

Transit agencies must establish target intervals for conducting preventative maintenance activities such as safety inspections, oil changes, and other long-term maintenance services, like engine tune-ups and transmission services. FDOT requires these target intervals to meet their minimum requirements described in the *FDOT Preventative Maintenance Standards Manual*, as well as the vehicle manufacturer's requirements outlined in the *Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) Manual*. The *FDOT Preventative Maintenance Standards Manual* states that preventative maintenance (PM) inspections and oil changes should be conducted at a minimum of every 6,000 miles. The OEM manual provides recommended target intervals for oil changes, engine tune-ups, transmission services, and other long-term maintenance services for vehicles to maintain eligible warranty

status. Transit agencies should use the recommendations for severe duty service in the OEM manual as a guideline for establishing their maintenance target intervals to account for things like climate, road conditions and the increased stop and go nature of providing transit services.

In some cases, the OEM recommendations for oil changes and other maintenance services may exceed the FDOT minimum maintenance requirements stated in the *FDOT Preventative Maintenance Standards Manual*. Transit agencies may opt to use the extended OEM recommended target intervals. In order to do this, the transit agency should list all of their chosen maintenance target intervals in their maintenance plan along with a brief justification for the extended intervals that states the intervals were recommended by the vehicle manufacturer and keep the OEM manuals on file as a reference during future triennial maintenance reviews. If transit agencies want to extend oil change intervals past FDOT minimum requirements and OEM recommended target intervals, the agency must have a systematic approach that includes an oil analysis program that monitors wear metals and fluid contamination. In these cases, the agency should also include in their maintenance plan a justification for the modified maintenance program and extended target intervals used for PM inspections and services and they should be ready to provide evidence during future triennial maintenance reviews of how the extended PM intervals have improved overall vehicle performance.

Transit agencies should carefully consider the target intervals they wish to use to conduct their maintenance work and consider things like vehicle downtime and scheduling. Many transit agencies choose to conduct PM inspections and oil changes at the same time in order to reduce their vehicle downtime and mitigate passenger service interruptions. Using multiple target intervals to conduct preventative maintenance work will result in additional coordination efforts to track the various intervals and to ensure vehicle availability for revenue service demands. Ultimately, transit agencies should choose the best method of establishing target intervals for maintenance that meet their unique needs. For additional information on establishing target intervals for PM inspections and services, please visit [www.prmpt.org](http://www.prmpt.org).

## What does Rural Transit Mean to You?

The nation's first #RuralTransitDay was celebrated with a Twitter Chat on July 16, 2019, moderated by Kari Banta of Texas DOT, Julia Castillo of HIRTA, and Juanita Risch of Idaho Transportation Department. The chat focused on what agencies are doing to recognize passengers and staff on #RuralTransitDay and through the year, and shared thoughts about challenges and solutions for rural transit.

Florida RTAP reached out to the small and rural transit community to respond to the question: "What does rural transit mean to you?" Here are some of their answers:

*"Access to daily activities of life especially health care, employment and other life sustaining activities. A dollar invested is saved when a trip is made available to rural and urban areas. It also means coordination with other available modes and enhancing the use of technology to further stretch limited resources."*

Jo Ann Hutchinson, Community Transportation Association of America

*"To me "rural transit" means lending a helping hand to those in need, developing a sense of community, and providing residents with the ability to live their lives. It can be shopping, religious services, visiting friends, or obtaining required medical care. Most importantly, providing passengers with a sense of self-worth and pride in maintaining their freedom. Rural Transit" is the friend of those often forgotten!"* Roberta Yegidis, CUTR

*"Small transit is a beautiful beginning of hope. It offers options to members of the community to have mobility. It is how large systems started, so cheer on and support the small transit agencies!"* Cathi Petagno, BOCC St. Lucie County Transit Division

*"Connecting our neighbors, who are our friends and family with each other."* Andrew Rutherford, Gulf County ARC

*"To me it means commitment, passion, and endurance. Many clients live alone and they rely on the operators for companionship."* Rino Saliceto, CUTR

*"It means staying connected to the community and having a better quality of life for those who are dependent on others for access to transportation."* Lisa Bacot, FPTA

*"Rural transit means everyone, no matter where they live, are connected with all of life's opportunities, services and needs - and with each other."* Michael Hays, NassauTRANSIT

## 2019 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@cutr.usf.edu](mailto:zavacki@cutr.usf.edu) or Roberta Yegidis at [ryegidis@cutr.usf.edu](mailto:ryegidis@cutr.usf.edu).

**September 15-18, 2019**

2019 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference—  
Orlando, FL

**September 18, 2019**

Assault Awareness and Prevention for Transit  
Operators (Train-the-Trainer)—Orlando, FL

**October 15, 2019**

Florida Small and Rural Transit Agency Bus  
Operator Training Program (Train-the-Trainer)—  
St. Augustine, FL

**November 12, 2019**

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

**Save the Date: June 8-10, 2020**

FPTA/FDOT/CUTR Professional Development  
Workshop & Transit Safety and Operations  
Summit—Tampa, FL

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## 2019 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference

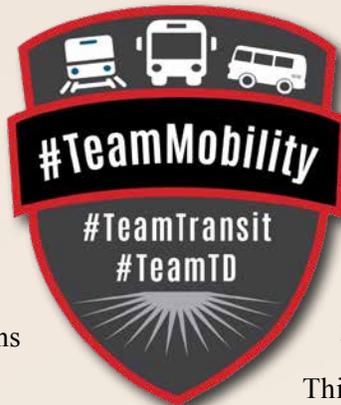
**T**he 2019 FPTA/CTD Annual Conference will take place from September 15-18 at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate in Orlando, Florida. A wide variety of training sessions will be conducted to promote professional development and networking with your peers.

The two RTAP sponsored training sessions include:

### **Roundtable for Small and Rural Transit Agencies**

Tuesday, September 17 at 3:45 – 5:00pm

This session will feature a roundtable format to discuss a variety of challenges and successes met by small and rural transit agencies. Topics will include a discussion on potential training needs, Rural Transit Day, FDOT's Mobility Vision Plan, and specific chal-



lenges associated with summer weather. Attendees will be encouraged to bring their questions, stories, and issues to share with the moderators and their peers.

### **Adapting Resources for Small and Rural Agencies**

Wednesday, September 18 at 3:45 – 5:00pm

This session will feature a discussion on scalable resources. After a review of documents obtained from other agencies, the presenters will provide an overview of documents that can be modified to fit the need of their agency. A few resources provide will include electronic mobile device policy, onboarding and employee file procedures, passengers in mobility devices, and accident and incident reports.

Please join Florida RTAP at these two sessions.