MISSOURI RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

MISSOURI RTAP

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First Quarter 2025

eNEWSLETTER

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The Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) was initiated in 1986 by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to provide resources, training and technical assistance to rural transit providers. The Missouri RTAP Center is located at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) in Rolla. Since April 2012, Missouri S&T has been contracted by MoDOT to manage the RTAP program.

National RTAP
Rural Transit Assistance Program

National RTAP is a program of the Federal Transit Administration dedicated to creating rural transit solutions through technical assistance, partner collaboration and FREE training.

LETTER FROM THE MANAGER

Dr. Heath Pickerill
Missouri RTAP Manager

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DEAR TRANSIT FRIENDS,

We made it through what felt like an unusually harsh winter only to be greeted by severe spring weather just over a week ago. Rolla was hit hard, and some in our RTAP office were without power for nearly a week. I'm happy to report everyone is safe, and things are slowly returning to normal around town as clean-up efforts continue. Events such as the recent storms highlight the importance of community resilience and public services such as rural transit. When communities are struck by natural disasters, the impacts can be felt throughout a community, not just through the disruption of utilities but other public services we have come to expect. Rural transit serves a critical function to communities regardless of weather or time of year.

I want to thank Tina Monson and Nicole Annis in my office for their ongoing efforts to finalize the RTAP data repository. Tina has been meeting regularly with ESX, the company developing the transit data repository. Nicole has met with MoDOT to ensure the system has the necessary features for reporting by transit agencies in the State. ESX is the same company that developed our new Missouri Local Training & Resource Center learning management system (LMS) with an integrated database. This new system will also house the transit data as a unique platform to be accessed by Missouri transit agencies to report on a variety of categories, including vehicles, passengers, funding, finance, and other agency information. Vehicles will be tracked by years in service, condition, mileage, and other state of good repair (SCR) analysis data while passenger statistics will focus on yearly volumes, the origin and destination of trips, pick up and drop off times, the purpose, and even payment methods. The reporting will follow NTTD categories. As with many projects, we have increased the original scope in order to add options for reporting and increase the users who will access the repository for reporting. These changes have increased the timeline for development; however, we remain optimistic that the system will be finished in the next few months. Once the system is ready for use, we will be providing training to transit agencies. Please watch for more information coming soon.

If you have any upcoming events you would like RTAP to participate, please let me know. Feel free to contact me at pickerillh@mst.edu or by phone at 573-341-7637 with any questions, comments, or suggestion. The entire Missouri RTAP staff wish you a wonderful spring and look forward to seeing you all soon.

Kind regards,

Heath Pickerill,
Missouri RTAP Manager

MAKING SUCCESSION PLANNING SUCCESSFUL

IT'S VERY LIKELY THAT SOMEONE WILL LEAVE YOUR ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR – EITHER THROUGH RETIREMENT, TAKING ON A NEW JOB AT A DIFFERENT ORGANIZATION, OR FOR MANY OTHER REASONS.

Are you prepared? Whether the staff member is a driver, supervisor, or the head of the agency, you need a succession plan to ensure a smooth transition whether you hire from within or employ an external candidate. Companies often make the mistake of waiting until the last minute to start succession planning – sometimes not even beginning until the staff member leaves and no one knows how to replicate their key processes and knowledge. Don't let this happen to you!

National RTAP provides several resources to walk you through the succession planning process, including:

* Succession Planning 101 eLearning course and accompanying introductory webinar
* Succession Planning template in MS Word and Access formats
* Succession to Transit Chat and Learnalong
* Succession Planning section of the Transit Manager's Toolkit

Here are some tips to make your succession planning program as successful as possible:

- Incorporate succession planning into all your existing planning efforts, including strategic planning.
- Align succession planning into the organization's mission, vision, and future direction, and determine what is really needed for each role before recruitment.
- Carve out time for this important effort rather than putting it on the back burner until it is too late.
- Involve senior leadership, human resources, and the board.
- Revisit and modify the succession plan every year to adjust to changing needs.
- Establish a mentoring program that allows employees to become familiar with processes and create opportunities for them to move up in the organization.
- Cross train staff so they may be able to take on new roles, even for short-term periods, such as when a staff person takes family leave.
- Use knowledge management approaches to capture the knowledge of staff before they leave, including job shadowing, work observation, and knowledge books and repositories.
- Try to have a period where the staff person who is leaving works side-by-side with the new staff person

or at least find out if the former staff person can be available for important questions.

If you are the person who is planning to leave, let your manager or the board know as soon as you can.

Then begin to document everything you can think of that your successor will need to know (the National RTAP Succession Planning template is perfect for this task) and work with the succession planning team to identify potential candidates both from within and outside the organization who may be a good fit for the role.

Just as autumn leaves enrich the soil for next spring's new seedlings, a successful succession plan will ensure the continuity and future growth of your organization.

Cara Marcus
Knowledge and Resource Manager
National Rural Transit Assistance Program

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR
Rural Transit Managers

Time Management

1.
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Doesn't it seem like there is less and less time in the day to get everything done?

Rural transit managers are increasingly finding their time stretched due to new regulatory and reporting requirements, new technological advancements, adapting operations toward more environmentally sustainable practices, and simply keeping up with the ever-expanding influx of information and communications. This National RTAP technical brief will offer best practices and recommendations for time management for rural transit managers, as well as ways to increase productivity and reduce stress caused by task and information overload.

What Takes Up Transit Managers' Time?

The answer is – everything! An "average" day in the life of a manager of a rural transit agency may include everything from testifying before elected officials, reviewing proposals that came in for a new initiative, to figuring out how to safely transport passengers during a major disaster. And that's in addition to the dozens, or even hundreds, of emails and other communications that flood transit managers' desks daily.

According to Dain Giesie, Vice President of Business Development, Enterprise Fleet Management, the most disruptive setbacks are those a manager can't anticipate, like accidents and unscheduled repairs. Even unexpected growth or new projects can be challenging.

Dunn County Transit Commission Manager Dolly Catlin feels that it is not one specific thing that takes the most time, but it's the myriad of details that transit managers

encounter each day that shape their workload. An average day for her may include working with her agency's board, preparing marketing materials, approving invoices, endorsing repairs, etc., all of which constitute extremely detailed work.

"Time management is really a misnomer -- the challenge is not to manage time, but to manage ourselves." Stephen Covey

"Anyone can be busy. All you need to do to feel busy is to try to get two things done at once–or seek to beat a deadline that is stressing you out. Productivity, on the other hand, has little to do with busy. Productivity requires bringing real skills to the table. Productivity is learned." Seth Godin

Regulatory Compliance

A 2007 study conducted by the Small Business Research Board and International Profit Associates found that 92% of small business owners in the transportation industry were spending more time complying with government regulations than they did two years ago. In the 18 years since then, 1 there have been dozens more Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations and circulars that transit agencies receiving FTA funds must comply with.

Compliance is time-consuming because there is so much to understand and potentially perform differently in order to act in accordance with regulations. Regulatory documents themselves can entail hundreds of pages, are not usually reader-friendly, and often lead to more questions than answers.

Technical assistance organizations can help managers. National RTAP provides technical assistance in many formats – toolkits, webinars, technical briefs, etc. – and can provide direct answers via phone, email, and chat. The National RTAP Procurement PRO technology tool quickly supplies the necessary federal clauses and certifications needed for any procurement using FTA funding. FTA also offers assistance through many sections of its website, including the National Transit Database (NTD) and Public Transportation Agency Safety Planning (PTASP). State DOT and State RTAP programs have specialists who can assist transit managers too.

In addition, the National RTAP Find Anything Toolkit includes a page listing many additional resources, including compliance policies from State DOTs and State RTAP programs.

There are also compliance management software tools and online platforms that keep necessary documents in one place and track compliance and grant management processes. Many provide access to updates to regulations to continually monitor compliance.

Personnel Issues

Deborah Bach, Rural Transit Programs Supervisor for the New Mexico Department of Transportation, Transit and Rail Division, finds that one challenge to getting things done at the state program management level is that many programs are never fully staffed. Process knowledge that has not been widely shared can cause production gaps, should an individual on the team move on and need to be replaced. One successful strategy Bach has implemented is cross-training her staff so multiple team members have the proper training to keep things moving forward during change, reducing the need for her to step in.

Transit agencies are only as effective as their managers and staff.

Effective delegation is a must for a productive agency. Managers should set clear expectations about what needs to be done by when and by whom, and provide their staff with the proper training and resources to get the job done. Regular informal walk-arounds and check-ins with staff can save time in the long run by catching issues that come up before they have a chance to escalate.

When staff conflicts arise, or when some members of a team are not carrying their weight, managers should promptly schedule a meeting with the staff involved (possibly with human resources personnel in attendance) to resolve the issues quickly so that projects and daily operations can continue as planned.

The Maine Department of Transportation created a video training on Time Management Solutions that introduced its RAC Method of time management that every worker can use. The first step is Recording – noting down everything you do in a day. The second step is Analyzing – highlighting 2 the chunks of time that are time-wasters. The third step is Change – coming up with a way to get time back by prioritizing, decluttering, and effective scheduling.

Making Training Count

Onboarding and ongoing training are needed for transit staff at all levels. While it may appear to be difficult to take an hour, a day, or a few days away from the office to dedicate to training, it pays off in the long run through increased efficiency of agency operations and productivity. Researchers from the Transportation Learning Center found that an investment in transit training can provide a five to twelve times return on investment.

TCRP's Guidebook for Recruiting, Developing, and Retaining Transit Managers for Fixed-Route Bus and Paratransit Systems provides examples of rural transit agencies offering training that helps managers save time:

- OATS, Inc. in Missouri gathers all managers for a monthly two-day meeting at their headquarters. The meeting has training built in so managers from different areas are all trained at the same time.
- OCCK, Inc. in Kansas offers all managers and staff voluntary monthly and quarterly lunchtime training sessions (with lunch included).
- Coast Transit Authority in Mississippi offers extensive online management training.

When planning training, consider:
- Choosing a time that is most convenient for everyone concerned (evenings or weekends can even be considered if that works)
- Developing or selecting courses that allow learners to become proficient within the training time frame allowed
- Utilizing self-paced online training and eLearning that can be completed when the learner has time
- Assigning a mentor to a new hire to answer questions about the nuts and bolts of the job

Data and Information Overload

Time management author Peter Bregman tells the story of a new manager who arrived at work on the first day of her new job to be greeted by 385 emails in her inbox. By the time she worked through them, there were hundreds more.

More sophisticated data and more sources of statistics have become available for making management decisions, which has challenged agencies who lack the time and/or expertise to learn how to use data, assess it, and incorporate it into their processes.

One organization found that it was tracking over 2,000 key performance indicators, leading to an excessive focus on short-term results and disjointed planning. They found a way to narrow the indicators they tracked to 30, which enabled managers to make better decisions based on the most effective information possible.

Electronic information and content aggregators such as Curator and Inoreader can collect emails and/or documents and compile them into one or a few folders or composite email messages. Subscribing to just a few of the major industry newsletters that capture the most relevant news to an 3 agency is also good practice. Librarians and knowledge managers, from organizations including National RTAP, National Transportation Knowledge Network (NTKN), and State DOTs can assist managers with pinpointing and synthesizing the most relevant information needed to plan and complete projects.

Meetings and Communications Strategies

Frequent and regular discussions with staff and colleagues result in clearer communication and less confusion from unwieldy email trails. If a manager only has a few direct-report staff, brief weekly one-on-one meetings (about 10-30 minutes long) can be used to report on progress, set goals, and troubleshoot issues.

Time management experts recommend spending less time on email by writing shorter emails and using email only when it is the best means of communication. A rule to strive for is to try to limit emails to five sentences or less, and if an email "chain" reaches five back-and-forth communications without any resolution, it is time to change strategies (pick up the phone, meet one-on-one, etc.)

Marc Shepard, a Tribal Technical Assistance Program (TTAP) course instructor, advocates an openhouse style for meetings, when appropriate, where participants can circulate around a series of exhibits on a project, watch a short video presentation, and/or chat with staff and outside experts. Attendees can comment on the project in writing or provide input to staff at a comment table.

Regular staff, team, work group, and committee meetings can become highly productive by implementing a few simple ground rules:

1. Before the meeting, set a clear agenda containing topics, what needs to be decided or done, and action items that will be assigned to specific individuals.
2. The meeting organizer should determine the timeframe based on Step 1 (try to keep meetings under 1 ½ hours).
3. A "scribe" should take notes as the meeting occurs, or the meeting can be recorded. People may not remember who volunteered for a committee unless that is written down.
4. A meeting leader should be in place to politely interject people who rant or ramble with something like, "That's a good point. We'll take that into consideration. Now onto our next agenda item."

While conferences and seminars are important for learning and sharing knowledge, and vacations are equally important for relaxation and rejuvenation, both result in time away from the office. While it would be nice to stop the barrage of emails and voicemails during the time away, that is wishful thinking. One solution may be to set aside a brief time in the morning or evening while away to attend to communications, so the rest of the trip could be focused on the conference or the vacation. Another solution could be to leave an out-of-office message to triage these communications to a trusted colleague or staff person, who could attend to most of them while the manager is away, or at least get things started. Mallory Meier, Deputy Director, River Cities Public Transit, also encourages staff to constantly amend their transition plans, this way if something happens and they need to be out of the office for an extended period the next person knows where to pick up at and succeed in the project.

More Effective Project Management

Transit agencies run smoothly when policies, processes, and procedures are in place to help employees do the best possible job.

Many tools can help, from simple printed calendars to sophisticated online project management platforms. What a manager uses is a matter of individual preference, and it may take some trial and error to find the right fit.

Many computers come with built-in calendars and task lists and can sync with existing email, phone, and notes documents. Users can arrange their work by hours, days, weeks, or months and automate reminders. Others may find that a whiteboard on their office wall, where they can write their tasks and erase them when completed, fits better for their working style. Mallory Meier extensively uses shared calendars with staff. Due dates are entered into a calendar repeating for those regularly scheduled

applications or reports that are due monthly or annually, then additional tasks are added to that calendar as needed. The Operations Team has a list of tasks each person oversees. Meier and her team also utilize Microsoft Teams to stay connected and do check-ins, as necessary.

Large projects should be broken down into manageable steps. For example, anyone tasked with "Create a strategic plan for the agency" may find it hard to know where to begin. The National RTAP Transit Manager's Toolkit Planning Section breaks this project into specific, tangible steps; here are the first three. Each of these steps can be completed within a specific and manageable timeframe.

1. Identify what elements should be included in the strategic plan
2. Set the timeline for completion of the plan
3. Identify stakeholders who should be included in the process

It is important for managers to access and leverage quality resources, so they do not have to "reinvent the wheel" for every new project. Templates and guidelines, such as the "Sample 5311 Timeline for Apportionment & Budget" created for the Budgeting and Finance 101 section of the National RTAP Transit Manager's Toolkit break down a large project into clear and manageable steps.

Dolly Catlin has worked in rural transit for three years and has developed some helpful strategies for time management. "Tell yourself that a project will probably take a lot longer than you anticipate," advises Catlin. When she was working on a three-year capital project, she set aside blocks of uninterrupted time every three weeks to work on it. She also believes that if something comes up suddenly that may be advantageous for the agency (like a grant or a community-building opportunity), one should make time for it. Catlin believes that transit agencies should always make time for marketing, which is about building connections with people in the community.

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Authority Executive Director Julia Castillo echoes that sentiment. "Make time for marketing," recommends Castillo, "Chunk into bite-sized pieces that you are more comfortable with and won't take as much time and resources to develop, and you can market quicker. Try scheduling 15 or 30 minutes each morning before you get into the day-to-day chaos of the day."

As a State RTAP Manager, Deborah Bach finds that she spends the majority of her time with questions and calls from individual transit agencies about day-to-day challenges. She also works on at least a half-a-dozen projects every day. While it's constantly "crunch time" with little room for error, she has found that prioritizing projects by due date is the most effective approach. She also is not afraid to ask for a project extension, realizing that one or two days can make a drastic difference in the outcome of projects with a large cognitive load.

One project that Bach managed that took an extended period of time was a statewide vehicle price agreement. Her goal was to obtain input from multiple manufacturers and subrecipients regarding transit vehicle specifications and needs to procure vehicles more proficiently. To achieve her goal, Bach created a project plan with a timeline that prioritized each deliverable.

Project prioritization is an important skill and presents its own set of challenges.

National RTAP's Roles and Responsibilities of Transit Managers reminds transit managers that while they must address immediate needs (such as "What vehicle needs to be repaired the most?" or "How can I get that extra person I need?"), an effective leader must stay focused on what counts – passengers. Use a proactive approach to spend less time simply reacting.

Nowadays, people want more and more and more. There are technological solutions out there, but cost and training time may be a barrier for small, rural systems. While technology such as an electronic grant management system can save valuable time by automating administrative tasks, Bach has found that technology learning curves can create more work for the transit managers who are often asked to provide technical support to the agency staff using the system.

Prepare for the Unexpected

While it is difficult enough to prepare for the everyday crises and interruptions that occur, incidents and emergencies can topple even the most well-intentioned plans. One transit manager was not able to meet a deadline because all her drivers were out sick with the flu at the same time, so guess who had to drive the bus? In National RTAP's Transit Disaster Response Twitter Chat, Florida RTAP staff discussed how a hurricane completely collapsed a public transit system, and that the area was still adjusting a year after the event.

Projects may become delayed due to factors beyond the manager's control. Dunn County Transit was awarded capital funding to work with the state of Wisconsin to purchase buses, but the project was delayed when a particular motor company stopped producing one model.

Projects can also be delayed by changes in personnel, both within and outside of the transit agency.

There are situations people don't usually think about – if the staff person who usually shovels is out and it snows, someone else has to shovel. If a driver's car breaks down, someone else may need to drive him to the depot so he can drive the bus.

When time is of the essence, it is important to have a well-designed emergency management procedure in place, as well as the infrastructure and resources to make critical decisions quickly. Some helpful resources include National RTAP's Emergency Response Checklists, which succinctly define the responsibilities of Emergency Response Coordinators in emergency situations.

Top Ten Time Management Tips for Transit Managers

Here are ten practical recommendations to put into place now:

1. If it is an option, take transit to work. This may seem obvious to transit managers, but an hour on a bus or a train can be spent reviewing a document without interruption.
2. If funding is in place, consider outsourcing some agency functions unless they are necessary to retain in-house. Examples include human resources, information technology, and maintenance. There are consultants with expertise in practically anything, from creating transit asset management plans to developing statewide coordination initiatives, which could take some of the hands-on burden off the transit manager's hands.
3. Set an email notification for a deadline for each project that is a few days or a week before the actual deadline.
4. Try keeping a time diary of daily average activities. At the end of a week, decide which time-consuming tasks can be delegated or handled differently.
5. Sometimes it is a good idea to just say "No" to requests if time and attention are needed elsewhere. There will probably be other opportunities to present at a webinar, but if hiring a new dispatcher is the focus right now, concentrate on that.
6. If something has been on your calendar or "to-do list" for more than a few days and hasn't been started yet, either start it immediately, schedule it for a specific time, delegate it if possible, or just delete it if it is no longer necessary.
7. Decide on the best strategy for managing the massive communications that arrive each day – email, phone calls and texts, and personal visitors. Establish specific times when these will be attended to. Use automation to feed informational emails (newsletters, announcements, etc.) and voicemails from multiple sources into targeted folders for later viewing or listening.
8. Don't schedule every minute of every day. Try to take breaks in between meetings and schedule quiet and uninterrupted periods for projects that require careful thought. National RTAP's Healthy Habits technical brief has information about how transit professionals can incorporate stress reduction and relaxation techniques into their work and lives.
9. Some people are self-motivated, but others may benefit from external rewards. There are apps that let users earn points for completing training, setting daily goals, and counting the consecutive number of days goals are reached. Agencies can even plan friendly competitions using apps or low-tech methods to reward team members who reach performance goals.
10. Everyone has a different work approach. If you admire people who seem to "get everything done," ask them for some tips. And finally, congratulate yourself and your team when projects both large and small are completed!

What's New in the ADA Toolkit?

Technical assistance center funded by FTA through the Section 5311 Program

Provides free training materials and technical assistance to rural and tribal transit providers and State RTAPs

Review Board – 14 State DOT and rural and tribal transit agency managers from across the country

Learn more at nationalrtap.org

National RTAP Resources and Services

- Training manuals, videos, slides, and eLearning for frontline staff and management
- Information and best practices via tech briefs, toolkits, topic guides, articles, and news
- Technology Tools for procurement, cost allocation, website building, and GTFS
- Peer Networking and training via webinars, conferences, roundtables, and online forum
- Assistance through reference services and tech support- bring us your questions!

What is TACL?
The Transportation Technical Assistance Coordination Library (TACL) provides a sustainable methodology and platform for access and findability of rural and tribal

transit coordination resources across a diverse range of transportation technical assistance centers and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The FTA-funded technical assistance centers participating in this ongoing work are:
- National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC)
- National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT)
- National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM)
- National Rural Transit Assistance Program (National RTAP)
- Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC)
- Transit Workforce Center (TWC)

ADA Toolkit Updates and Expansion in 2024
- Information, guidance, and resources for Tribal transit agencies
- All resources reviewed or replaced by more current resources
- All links checked and updated
- Q&A section deleted - topics merged into existing sections
- New examples and best practices to help transit agencies understand and comply with the ADA requirements
- New Section Sources added to all sections

About the ADA Toolkit
- Developed in 2014 for rural and Tribal transit managers
- Updated and expanded in 2020 and 2024
- Information for public bus systems and demand

response services in rural areas
- "Plain language" explanations of complex regulatory language
- Good practices, links to regulations, guidance, and more information
- Provides technical assistance information, not legal advice

Accessing the ADA Toolkit
nationalrtap.org/Toolkits/ADA-Toolkit/Welcome

Welcome Section
The purpose of the ADA Toolkit is to help rural and Tribal transit managers understand the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) requirements for public transit providers under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and to help them comply with the ADA requirements that apply to them.

Updated:
- Table of Contents
- Acknowledgments
- Full-Text PDF

Key Regulations, Standards and Guidance
This section introduces the various federal regulations, standards, and guidance on compliance with the ADA that are relevant to subrecipients of the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas program.

Updates include:
- FTA Comprehensive Review Contractors Manual (FY 2023)
- FTA Master Agreements, FTA Master Agreement (version 31, May 2, 2024)
- FTA Tribal Transit Technical Assistance Assessment Guide, Tribal Transit Program (TTP) recipients can use to identify and better understand ADA requirements and prepare for an assessment.
- U.S. Department of Justice Final Rule on the Accessibility of Web Content and Mobile Apps
- Revised 508 Standards and 255 Guidelines from the U.S. Access Board – 255 is a section of the Communications Act

General Requirements for All Service Types
There are some ADA requirements that apply to ALL transit agencies, regardless of the type of service they provide.
Updates include:
- Policies related to specific elements or equipment
- FTA ADA Circular 4710.1, Webinar 3: The ADA and Fixed Route Service Requirements (February 17, 2016) provides examples of when policy, practice, or procedure modifications may be necessary for people based on their individual disabilities.
- National RTAP eLearning ADA Driver Training

Fixed Route Bus Requirements
This section summarizes the U.S. DOT regulatory requirements that apply to fixed route bus service.
Updates include:
- Commuter Bus Service – Updated to better define the service and include information on stop announcement requirements
- Inoperative Lift or Ramp on a Fixed Route Vehicle – Detailed example of how to respond if the bus lift is not working
- Rider Assistance and Use of Accessibility Equipment - Expanded guidance on assisting people with disabilities with boarding the bus

Demand Response Requirements
The requirements for demand response services are summarized in this section of the ADA Toolkit.
Updates include:
- What is Demand Response Service? - This topic is expanded in to include U.S. DOT ADA regulations and their relationship to locally-determined policies
- Integration of On-demand service with Fixed Route and ADA Complementary Paratransit - New section with guidance from Appendix D of U.S. DOT ADA regulations
- Shared Mobility - Contracting Service from Taxi Providers and Transportation Network Companies – This topic is expanded and renamed. It includes additional resources: U.S.DOT guidance, FTA's frequently asked questions on shared mobility guidance and ADA, and TCRP Report 188: Shared Mobility and the Transformation of Public Transit.

Route Deviation Service Requirements
This section of the Toolkit discusses aspects of route deviation service that should be considered in light of ADA compliance.
Updates include:
Characteristics of Route Deviation Service – A reference and link to Flexible Route Service or Route Deviation in the Operations and Planning, Flexible Route section of the Transit Manager's Toolkit.

ADA Complementary Paratransit Requirements
Public entities that provide fixed route services must also provide ADA complementary paratransit services. This section of the Toolkit summarizes those requirements.
Updates include:
- Origin-to-Destination Service
- Guidance on "curb-to-curb" or "door-to-door" service
- Examples of when a paratransit driver can, and should, leave the bus to assist riders with disabilities
- Options to help with riders who need assistance above and beyond transportation
- Service Criteria
- Response time – Next-day service definition
- Fare – How to calculate fares for paratransit trips and information on "Premium Charges"
- Trip purpose – Additional guidance about trips for

"leisure" or recreational destinations

Eligibility –

- Eligibility Determination Process – Expanded guidance related to the establishment of an appeal process
- Eligibility Appeals – New resources for establishing processes for eligibility determinations and appeals
- Service Across Multiple Jurisdictions – New guidance for establishing processes for riders who are ADA complementary paratransit eligible who regularly travel from their home jurisdiction to a neighboring jurisdiction

- Other ADA Complementary Paratransit Operational Requirements and Considerations –
- Assistance with Items such as Grocery Bags – Guidance for establishing policies related to assistance with personal belongings
- Minimum Age for Independent Traveler - Guidance for policy on the minimum age at which a child can ride without being accompanied by an adult

Vehicle and Facility Accessibility

This section of the Toolkit focuses on the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) accessibility standards for transit vehicles and facilities. It also presents technical assistance information and sample practices.

Updates include:

Transportation Vehicles –

- Vehicle Step Height Considerations – Updated resources: 2022 APTA Bus Procurement Guidelines and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Small Light-Duty Bus Specifications
- Signage and Wayfinding for People with Vision and Hearing Disabilities TCRP Research Report 248: Tactile Wayfinding in Transportation Settings for Travelers Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Accommodating Riders Using Mobility Devices

This section of the Toolkit outlines the requirements to accommodate riders who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices on transit systems.

Updates include:

- Types of Mobility Devices – Expanded to include shared mobility devices (scooters and e-scooters) and online resources on the general topic of how ADA rules for mobility devices apply to public transit providers
- Operating Policies on Accommodating Riders Using Mobility Devices – note that there is a lift threshold of 600 pounds
- Pushing Manual Wheelchair onto Lift or Ramp - Examples
- Accommodating Riders Who Use Wheelchairs if the Lift and Vehicle Can Physically Accommodate Them – More Options
- Accommodating Bariatric Riders Who Use Mobility Devices – New Guidance
- Operating Policies on Accommodating Riders Using Mobility Devices – (continued)

- Use of Securement Devices – Examples
- Requesting that Riders Transfer to a Seat - Guidance
- Strollers as Mobility Devices - Guidance
- Other Considerations for Assisting Riders Who Use Mobility Devices – Expanded guidance

Service Animals

Transportation providers must allow service animals to accompany individuals with disabilities in vehicles and facilities. This section of the ADA Toolkit provides guidance, resources, and best practices.

Updates include:

- Other Considerations about Accommodating Service Animals – New guidance includes information about animals in training
- Additional Resources on Service Animals – Expanded content with new resources from the National Aging and Disability Resource Center (NADTC) and the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA)

Rider Assistance and Customer Service

This section of the Toolkit provides an overview of rider assistance and sensitivity requirements under the U.S. DOT ADA regulations, as well as good customer service practices and tips for serving riders with various disabilities.

Updates include:

- Personnel Training Requirements – Updated training resources include:
- National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) Access Matters Video Series
- Personnel Training Requirements – Updated training resources include: (continued)
- Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) Passenger Assistance Safety and Sensitivity (PASS) Training
- National RTAP ADA Driver Training and ADA Driver Training Hands-on Evaluation
- Easterseals Project Action Sensitivity Training for Bus Drivers
- Customer Service Guidelines
- Communication Tips – Expanded resources include:
- Addressing Transportation and Accessibility for All, Invisible Disabilities: Seeing the Unseen, TR News, Number 346. (July-August 2023)
- The United Spinal Association's Disability Etiquette Guide: Tips on Interacting Respectfully with People with Disabilities (2023)

To learn more about the updates visit the What's New in the ADA Toolkit? presentation:

rp.cdn-website.com/270961f6/files/uploaded/Whats_New_in_the_ADA_Toolkit.pdf

Outside the metro area, bus routes thriving

A 51-seat black-and-blue Bustang Outrider bus, snaking for 191 miles through Colorado's central mountains this week, carried an eclectic mix of travelers — a German Buddhist bound for six months of meditation above Crestone, a Tucson woman visiting her sister in Salida, an Asian tourist, a graphic artist coming home from a celebration of life.

The bus is often full, and driver Doug Allen laments the times he has had to turn would-be riders away, up to 15 recently at a stop in Buena Vista.

The demand along his Denver-to-Crested Butte route, with 17,277 passengers last year, up from 10,070 in 2021, has spurred the Colorado Department of Transportation to add a second daily run starting Feb. 1.

It's an expansion that reflects the robust public transit beyond Colorado's Front Range cities even as ridership on metro Denver's Regional Transportation District buses and trains has dropped. Federal Transit Administration records show that more people ride buses in rural Colorado than in rural parts of any other state.Colorado leaders plan to build on that this year by boosting more routes such as the one between Denver and Crested Butte to connect the state's thriving local networks. In December, CDOT officials launched a Bustang Outrider route linking Sterling, in northeastern Colorado, with Denver International Airport. A state transit connections study in progress will identify additional intercity bus routes, including possible new daily service between Gunnison and Montrose in southwestern Colorado, Limon and Denver, Weld County and Denver, and Salida and Colorado Springs.

"This is about growing transportation options as opposed to focusing on driving and how we can grow road networks," said Paul DesRocher, director of CDOT's transit and rail division. "Your ability to move is your ability to be free," DesRocher said.

Over the past six years, ridership on CDOT's nine rural Bustang Outrider routes increased by 63% from 27,240 to 44,438, state records show. The overall annual ridership on the state's broadening family of Bustangs — including

high-volume dozen-a-day service along I-70 between Denver and Grand Junction and I-25 between Fort Collins and Colorado Springs, along with "Pegasus" and "Snowstang" minbuses — exceeds 390,000, up from 238,000 in 2019. CDOT planners project Bustang ridership in 2025 at 325,000.

In contrast, urban RTD ridership decreased from 106 million in 2019 to about 65 million.

"Rural bus service is a lifeline," said Cara Marcus, knowledge and resource manager for the National Rural Transit Assistance Program. "If people don't have it, they cannot go anywhere. And rural bus drivers are often best friends for their riders. They know their names, their families, where they need to go."

In Colorado, bus ridership in rural areas hit 17 million in 2022, up from 16.7 million in 2017, Federal Transit Administration data shows. That's more than triple the ridership in the next-closest states (4.7 million in Michigan and North Carolina; 4 million in California). Local bus companies provide service in 53 of the state's 64 counties.

Local bus companies range from La Junta Transit in southeastern Colorado to large systems serving the growing communities around Durango, Eagle, Grand Junction, Steamboat Springs, Silverthorne, and Telluride. The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, which started in 1983, has expanded to provide more than 4.8 million rides a year to people around Aspen, Carbondale and Glenwood Springs.

The Gunnison Valley Rural Transportation Authority runs 41 bus trips a day along a 33-mile route between Gunnison and Crested Butte. Ridership reached 393,000 passengers last year, 20% more than the 2023 record, agency director Scott Truex said.

"The vast majority are residents of the valley. Each time we've been able to expand service, our ridership has increased. Ultimately, it would be fantastic to have a bus scheduled to arrive every 15 minutes." A no-fare Mountain Express system between Crested Butte and the Mount Crested Butte resort carries an additional 750,000 riders.

In Salida, a neighbors-helping-neighbors ride service that began 26 years ago has grown into the Mountain Valley Transit company, which runs 14-seater buses across a seven-county area. Ridership has been increasing at annual rates of 23% to 39%, and about a third of the passengers are seniors or people with disabilities, MVT board chief Kate Garwood said. The drivers loaded 1,392 wheelchairs in 2024, and the mobility helps stabilize communities, Garwood said. "If people can't get to their jobs or medical appointments, everything deteriorates."

Riders lining up this week at Denver Union Station noted Bustang comforts — big clean windows, Wi-Fi service, phone charging portals, a toilet — with a one-way price of $45 for the 5.5-hour trip to Crested Butte.

Bus ridership is growing "because people don't want to park. It costs too much to park," Allen said, after welcoming all aboard. "This is the most efficient way to go."

His riders typically sit silently, transfixed by mountains along a route that rises to elevations as high as 11,312 feet above sea level atop Monarch Pass. Sometimes they talk politics. Once they demanded that Allen stop the bus to warn a roadside dog walker about a bear they spotted nearby.

"I am going to sit and read a book on my Kindle and arrive relaxed," Salida-bound Karen Jettenberg said.

By Bruce Finley
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enewspaper.denverpost.com/infinity/article_popover_share.aspx?guid=d7df32fd-0a89-4a9a-8ffb-733063dd771c&share=true

Find Anything Toolkit

Fundamentals of Searching for Results

Sometimes it's difficult to identify sources of needed information. If you are looking for rural or tribal transit information, the Find Anything Toolkit will help you get started. The most successful searches share common elements and follow this process.

- Formulate a Question
- Narrow the Topic
- Search Tips
- Identify Information Clearinghouses
- Put It All Together

Narrow the Topic

The Internet is a helpful resource for doing background research about a topic, and can lead to answers (or articles and reports where research has already been conducted on the topic). Once a well-thought-out question is formulated, the key to finding useful information online is knowing how to refine an Internet search.

For example, you may be looking for FTA rules and regulations about buses. If you simply type "bus" into Google, you will retrieve over a billion results, many that that aren't useful. To find relevant answers, employ the following search tip:

To search for government information, use the following search:

bus site:gov will search all .gov (government) sites for the word "bus" - this search will retrieve bus rules and regulations from FTA and other sites, such as FMCSA, FHWA, etc.)

To search only the FTA website, use bus AND (rules OR regulations) site:transit.dot.gov to search FTA rules and regulations for buses.
Use any part of a website URL that may be helpful to your search: .com (commercial, business sites if you want information from vendors or commercial transit organizations), .org (associations or non-profits often contain very trustworthy information), .edu (educational institutions), or any specific URL, such as "nationalrtap.org" to search that specific site.

You can also search Google to retrieve results where your search terms appear in the title of a webpage:

allintitle: paratransit eligibility application will retrieve application information from various agencies for paratransit eligibility.

Search Tips

Two basic search tips that can always be applied are:

Simplify—the fewer and more direct words in a search, the better the results. For example: Instead of, "Which federal grants apply to bus operators?" better searches would be:
- transit rural 5311
- transit grant funding

Continue to refine and remove terms that will narrow the results if the first search is too broad.

For specific search tips based on popular search engines, visit:
- Google's Basic Search Tips
- Yahoo's Search Tips
- Bing's Search Tips

Don't feel that you need to limit yourself to the most popular search engines. Performing a search in multiple search engines will probably yield different results and possibly some hidden gems. Try these:

- [Ask](#)
- [DogPile](#)
- [DuckDuckGo](#)
- [Earth-Scout](#)
- [HathiTrust Digital Library](#)
- [Lens (searches scholarly works)](#)
- [OneSearch](#)
- [State DOT Google Search Engine](#)
- [Swisscows](#)
- [US Government Search Engine](#)

While Internet search engines are useful for performing broad searches, they only search a small part of the Internet. They also do not search databases within websites, such as National [RTAP's Resource Library](#)—which you have to visit the National RTAP website to search.

Artificial intelligence (AI) search tools have come into the mainstream in recent years, including, but not limited to Chat GPT, Google AI, and Perplexity. Searchers are advised to use these as an adjunct to authoritative sources and not depend only on AI search tools. AI search summaries are known to contain "hallucinations" - incorrect or even nonsensical search results.

You can also search individual [transportation journals](#), which are often peer-reviewed and may have open access (free) full-text articles. Kendra Levine of the Institute of Transportation Studies Berkeley published this spreadsheet so users have access to over 100 quality transportation journals, including information on their open access policies.

Identify Information Clearinghouses

An information clearinghouse is any agency or organization that collects and distributes information, and is a go-to place for information assistance. These clearinghouses are also known as Information and Referral (I&R) organizations. A library is a general information clearinghouse, and librarians (reference librarians in particular) can direct users to more specific resources. Here is a [map of transportation libraries](#) and some other places to get started:

- **Public Libraries:** can find local, state, federal laws; books on best practices; articles in newspapers/journals; area-specific demographic information; and factual information. Public libraries are a good starting point for some searches. Ask if you can talk to a reference librarian.
- **State Department of Transportation (DOT) Libraries:** contain training manuals and resources, technical specifications, journal articles, laws, best practices and rules, and may provide research assistance. Some State RTAPs also have libraries.
- **Transit Technical Assistance Organizations:** provide training and technical assistance, industry best practices, and help locating information. National RTAP is an example of this type of clearinghouse. A group of librarians and knowledge managers form the National Transportation Knowledge Network (NTKN),

offer LibGuides of carefully selected materials on various transportation topics.
- **Chambers of Commerce:** information about local programs, directories, resources, services to help connect businesses to residents, and sometimes local grant money.
- **Government Offices:** laws, assistance, and possibly grants. Local government offices can include town or city halls, planning and finance departments, and town commissions and councils.
- **Human Service Organizations:** (Red Cross, United Way, faith-based groups, etc.): can help with local needs, demographics, challenges, partnerships, and sometimes financial assistance.
- **Federal Agencies:** Many federal agencies deal with transit in a direct or indirect way. For example, FTA, U.S. DOT, USDA, and FHWA all provide information, regulations, training, and other resources related to transit. FTA's Technical Assistance (TA) Centers: NADTC, National RTAP, CCAM-TAC, N-CATT, SUMC, and TWC can also offer assistance.

Put it All Together

Suppose that a law that affects transportation has recently been updated and you need to know how it will impact your transit agency.
1. Ask a question—"What has changed in the new law?" or "How will the new law affect my transit agency?"
2. Narrow the topic by thinking about where the information might be found. For example, was it a federal, state or local law? Determining what level of government enacted the law will help narrow down where to look; such as on a federal or state website, the Federal Register, and in the appropriate U.S. or State law.
3. Do a broad Internet keyword search to find some preliminary information about new law. If you know the exact law number (such as 49 U.S. Code 5310), search for that directly.
4. Contact the appropriate government agency or organization that provides best practices and technical assistance in that subject area, or contact a local public library or State DOT library for help. When calling, ask for reference assistance.
5. Transportation Research Board's (TRB) [Literature Searches and Literature Reviews](#) for Transportation Research Projects is a useful resource that addresses the steps for producing a high-quality literature review for a transportation research project. The circular explores how to conduct literature searches; where to search for transportation information; how to put it all together as a quality literature review; and what the definitions are for related terms.

[nationalrtap.org/Toolkits/Find-Anything-Toolkit/Fundamentals-of-Searching-for-Results](#)

Wrangling Access and Mobility in Rural and Tribal Transit

December 7-10, 2025 in Austin Texas

Opportunities to Participate in the
2025 National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program (National RTAP) and the Transportation Research Board (TRB) invite you to participate in the 6th National RTAP Conference, Wrangling Access and Mobility in Rural and Tribal Transit, to be held December 7-10, 2025, in Austin, TX at the Hyatt Regency Austin. The event is co-sponsored by National RTAP and TRB.

Please consider submitting a presentation proposal to be included in one of 30 breakout conference sessions. Conference workshops and panels will occur in five routes (see below). We welcome presentations of interest to our audience of rural and tribal transit managers, rural and regional planners, intercity bus operators, State DOT, FTA, researchers, and others with an interest in rural or tribal transportation. Presentation proposals should address how transportation services impact lives and create measurable benefits in communities.

Session Summaries will be accepted until April 15, 2025. Summaries will be reviewed by the conference planning committee; you will be contacted once a decision is made about your proposed presentation or if more information is needed. We expect to send acceptance notifications by mid-May 2025.

What is a Session Summary?
A Session Summary is a brief paragraph describing what you propose to present. We suggest you

highlight the practical lessons you would share with our audience. Please be sufficiently specific. Please also avoid any product or professional services focused presentations. We'd love to hear how your services are implemented but will not accept commercials.

Call for Student Poster Submissions
Students are invited to submit a poster for the 6th National RTAP Conference to be shown on December 7, 2025 in Austin, TX. Posters for consideration must be sent by October 1, 2025 to info@nationalrtap.org and students must be able to present their posters in-person.

Conference Sponsorship Opportunities
Looking to showcase your brand at our upcoming conference? Secure your spot early!

Sign up now to receive exclusive Early Bird Sponsor and Exhibitor Information Packages. Be among the first to access our meeting kit as soon as it's released!

Presentation Proposal Form
app.keysurvey.com/f/41761652/75aa/

nationalrtap.org/News/Conference/2025-Austin

AVAILABLE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The following is a list of the training programs and course length of each that are currently available to rural transit providers through Missouri RTAP. Requests for training can be made by contacting Pat Diaku, MO-RTAP Program Specialist, at diakup@mst.edu or 573-341-6155.

1. ACTIVE SHOOTER PREVENTION AND RESPONSE — 2 HOURS.
2. AGGRESSIVE DRIVING —1 HOUR.
3. ASSAULT AWARENESS AND PREVENTION FOR TRANSIT OPERATORS — 1.5 HOURS
4. BACKING SAFETY — 1 HOUR.
5. BASIC FIRST AID — 1 HOUR.
6. BLOOD BORNE PATHOGENS — 1 HOUR.
7. CPR & BASIC FIRST AID — 4 HOURS.
8. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PASSENGERS — 2 HOURS.
9. DEFENSIVE DRIVING — 3 HOURS.
10. DISTRACTIVE DRIVING — 1 HOUR.
11. DIVERSITY & AWARENESS TRAINING - PROVIDING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR TRANSPORTATION PASSENGERS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES — 2 HOURS.
12. DRIVEN TO EXTREMES — 1 HOUR.
13. DRUG & ALCOHOL AWARENESS — 1 HOUR.
14. EMERGENCY & EVACUATION PROCEDURES — 1 1/2 TO 2 HOURS.
15. FATIGUE AWARENESS FOR DRIVERS — 2 HOURS.
16. HIPAA — 1 HOUR.
17. NIGHT DRIVING — 1 HOUR.
18. OPERATION LIFESAVER – HIGHWAY-RAIL CROSSING SAFETY — 1 HOUR.
19. PASSENGER ASSISTANCE/MOBILITY AID SECUREMENT — 2 HOURS.
20. REASONABLE SUSPICION TRAINING FOR SUPERVISORS — 2 HOURS.
21. SAFE & SECURE PROPER INFANT AND CHILD SEAT INSTALLATION — 2 HOURS.
22. SENSITIVITY AWARENESS — 1 HOUR.
23. SEXUAL HARRASSMENT — 1 HOUR.
24. SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS — 1 HOUR.
25. VIOLENCE IN THE TRANSIT WORKFORCE – PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY — 1.5 HOURS
26. WHEELCHAIR SECUREMENT — 2 TO 3 HOURS DEPENDING ON NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS.
27. WINTER DRIVING SAFETY — 1 HOUR.

For more information on classes and to register please visit: mltrc.mst.edu/mortaphome/mortaptraining/

RESOURCES

National RTAP – Rural Transit Assistance Program
www.nationalrtap.org/

Transportation Safety Institute – Transit Safety & Security Training Division
www.tsi.dot.gov/Transit.aspx

Federal Transit Administration – Rural Transit Assistance Program Page
www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/grants_financing_3554.html

Missouri Public Transit
www.mopublictransit.org/

National Transit Institute
www.ntionline.com/

Kansas RTAP – Kansas University Transportation Center
www.kutc.ku.edu/cgiwrap/kutc/rtap/index.php/index.html

Transportation Research Board's (TRB) Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)
www.tcrponline.org/