

An Association's Work in Rural Transportation

by Charles Dickson, Ginger Ammon, Len Cahill, Patrick Kellogg, Charles Rutkowski, Kelly Shawn and Monica Price

Several years ago, our Executive Director, Dale J. Marsico, CCTM, was helping us put together a package of assistance we could make available to transit agencies that were affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. There was a conference call with people from the affected areas that thanked us for trying to help. Dale's response was to remind them that we were here to "do our part." We learned that the motto "we do our part" was part of the historical wealth of information he likes to draw from. As you may have learned from our website, the phrase and the symbol of the blue eagle came from part of President Roosevelt's National Recovery Act. This legislation created the National Recovery Administration that was designed to create, among other things, voluntary partnerships between the public and private sectors and local communities to help alleviate the impact of the Great Depression.

When we think about how rural transit works in our country you see the same kind of vision at play. People work together to solve the mobility problems in their communities. This serves to remind us that solutions to situations great and small can only begin with cooperation and communication. Transportation in rural communities can be a very complicated effort. It involves not just good communication, but also issues like coordinated planning, business models, governmental grants and loans, financing, computer hardware and software, vehicles, and all the other elements required for success. People in local communities struggling with these issues often need help, and the Community Transportation Association plays an important role in this process, which reflects our continuing efforts to "do our part."

Today, for instance, we're doing our part for rural transit by providing the following services:

Information Station

Begun as a telephone hotline, the Association's Information Station has grown into an innovative on-line initiative with electronic documents and resources available in medical transportation, coordination, employment transportation, senior mobility, tribal transportation, passengers with disabilities, and, of course, rural transportation. By simply going to the Information Station website (www.ctaa.org/ntrc), users gain access to online resource bookshelves with a wealth of documents, training modules, newsletters, and other publications.

There are also a host of materials produced by the Association that are available exclusively through the Information Station. The monthly newsletter, *Tappy Grams*, details pertinent new resources that we've added to our on-line library. Divided into subject area, the newsletter gives short synopses of the new literature available on rural transportation and how to access it. It also gives the contact information for our staff Information Specialist, who is an expert at research questions to help get you what you need. You can subscribe to *Tappy Grams* by dropping a note to Eileen Boswell, Information Specialist, at boswell@ctaa.org.

In addition to *Tappy Grams*, the Association very recently began producing its *Fast Mail* email newsletter. A compendium of breaking legislative news, new resources, updates from the field and Association notes, the *Fast Mail* is designed to keep our members informed. To subscribe to our latest information effort, simply email fast-mail@ctaa.org.

CTAA produces toolkits ideal for rural operators, developed in the fields of medical transportation, senior transportation, and employment transportation. They offer how-to descriptions, best practices, and real-life examples to

help users start or further develop their systems. Each toolkit is accompanied by a full-time Association staff member who specializes in each field and is only a phone call away – through the Information Station hotline.

Answering your questions is always an important aspect of our work. While the website has introduced new ways of getting information on rural transportation topics, we still have the email and telephone hotline for times when users need to speak to a transportation specialist directly. There are specialists on staff with experience in employment, medical, rural, tribal, passengers with disabilities, urban, federal regulations, and coordination. Staff will help you find the answers you need related to your rural transportation questions, whether it be finding a specific report, locating funding sources, or more detailed questions. They may also steer you toward applying for short- or long-term technical assistance if you have a particularly large or complicated issue you need help working out.

For more information or to contact us with an information request, the Information Station hotline is reachable at 800.527.8279, resources@ctaa.org, and www.ctaa.org/ntrc.

Short-Term and Long-Term Technical Assistance

Sometimes requests for rural transit assistance aren't as easily fulfilled as emailing a document or having a telephone conversation. There are situations where tasks can seem daunting without more hands-on support, and the Community Transportation Association is there to help when you need it. After filling out a short application, a technical assistance specialist from the Association will contact you to discuss your specific needs and ways we might be able to offer our expertise. Through grants from the Department of Agriculture, Joblinks, the Department of

Health and Human Services, Federal Transit Administration, and Community Transportation Assistance Program, we are able to send specialists to sites across the country to deliver technical assistance.

One pages 17-21 of this issue of *Community Transportation* magazine, we take a closer look at some of the latest on-site technical assistance the Association has delivered to rural communities.

If you are interested in technical assistance for your organization, the application is available online at http://www.ctaa.org/direct_technical_assistance/, or please contact Bob Carlson, Technical Assistance Specialist, at carlson@ctaa.org or 800.527.8279 x732 for more information.

Training and Certifications

The Community Transportation Association offers training and certification programs for transit professionals in rural areas. Not only do we provide training courses in Passenger Service and Safety (PASS), Professional Dispatching and Scheduling (PDS), Vehicle Maintenance Management and Inspection (VMMI), among others, we also have a training coordinator who can tailor different courses to create a training program that works best for your organization. Delivered on-site, these training courses can help build confidence and skills among drivers and other staff, improve service to passengers, and create an atmosphere of well-trained professionalism in even the smallest transit systems.

The PASS Driver Certification program ensures that rural transportation drivers have current expertise in passenger assistance techniques and sensitivity skills appropriate for serving persons with disabilities. The PASS program is designed as a three-day Train-the-Trainer to certify trainers who can then train drivers or as a two-day driver program in which our instructors train your drivers.

The Certified Community Transit Manager (CCTM) program is built around a rigorous professional exam, for which the Association offers a two-day study class. CCTM status marks the greatest performance and highest efficiency in the community transportation industry; it is proof of the ability

to manage a comprehensive and dynamic community transportation system, especially in a rural setting.

The PDS two-day training program focuses on operational efficiency as well as customer service techniques. Effective dispatching can make or break a community transportation organization. This program is designed for demand-response organizations – common in rural areas – and focuses on operational efficiency as well as customer service techniques.

The Association offers its Training and Safety Review Program to help all sizes and types of public and community transportation operators to build their internal safety teams, identify safety and security weaknesses and reduce a system's exposure to liability. This training is a protocol for transit systems to certify they are addressing the critical components of a safety and security program.

These are just some examples; there are several other training programs available as well as individually tailored programs. Learn more on the Professional Development and Training website at http://www.ctaa.org/professional_development/ or please contact our training coordinator, Len Cahill at cahill@ctaa.org.

Webinars

Taking advantage of the latest online technology to meet the needs of people who may be in rural areas and cannot travel for trainings or meetings, the Association has begun a series of informational webinars. These hybrid telephone-online initiatives bring experts to the table to discuss best practices, and how the audience can use the information to better provide mobility services. Easily accessible, the webinars require only an internet connection and a telephone line for users to connect. Once the webinar begins, the audience can hear the speakers through the telephone and watch their presentations online in real time. There are even mechanisms for asking questions during the presentations, and all webinars are recorded and archived on CTAA's website for future reference or if you weren't able to make it on the call.

Some recent webinars sponsored by the Joblinks program include *Us-*

ing Transportation Voucher Programs to Support Low-Wage Earners and Workers with Disabilities, Using Google Transit as a Planning and Customer Information Tool, and Establishing a One-Call Center for Transportation Services. The presentations that accompanied these and other webinars, as well as presenters' contact information, transcripts and, in most cases, full webinar playback are available on our website at http://www.ctaa.org/joblinks_webinar_archive/. To get information about upcoming webinars, sign up for the email listserv by contacting Monica Price, Program Coordinator, at price@ctaa.org.

Peer-to-Peer Assistance Network

While we have experienced professional staff available for technical assistance requests, we also understand that sometimes another transit professional working in the field might make an excellent assistance resource. For this reason, we have developed an extensive peer-to-peer network. The way the network operates is simple: we take technical assistance requests, speaking requests, training requests, and match them with qualified people in the field from around the country. These peers then assist the requesting organization either through a site visit, phone call, or presentation using their expertise.

The pool from which we match peer-to-peer requests is vetted to include only the most qualified individuals, those at the top of their field. Eager to share their knowledge, they bring best practices and latest innovations to their presentations, along with the aspect of being right there in the field. Some of the latest presentations and trainings peers have given include those on the subjects of operations, technology, maintenance, federal regulations, medical transportation, employment transportation, senior transportation, and accessibility. For more than 20 years the Community Transportation Association of America has been dedicated to the cultivation of this peer network to ensure that no area of expertise in the field of rural transit is overlooked.

Depending upon your needs, peers can provide assistance over the telephone or via e-mail, on-site (your site or theirs), or can travel to share their experiences at your meetings or conferences. If you're interested in receiving peer assistance or for more informa-

tion, you can visit our website at http://www.ctaa.org/peer_to_peer_network/ or contact Ginger Ammon at ammon@ctaa.org and 800.891.0590 ext. 734.

Financing Assistance and Guidance

At the Association, we know the costs of starting, expanding, and even maintaining a transportation service, no matter how large or small, can be daunting. And though there are state, federal, and local funds available in many instances, there is often a need for private financing to fill out the remaining costs. However, qualifying for and affording the terms of private financing can often be difficult for rural systems. That is why we have developed an arm of our organization dedicated solely to helping fulfill those financing needs – the Community Transportation Development Lending Services Corporation (CTDLS), a lending institution certified by the Treasury Department.

Founded in 2000, CTDLS strives to simplify the process of transportation finance while using some of the more innovative financing mechanisms available to public and community transportation. Transportation Lending Services offers financing through two special product lines — the Capital Fund and the Business Operating Fund.

The Capital Fund includes financing for:

- Transportation and Railway Facilities Financing;
- Multi-modal Facilities Financing;
- Community Centers, Health and Human Services Centers and Co-Location Financing;
- Vehicle Financing;
- Local Share Financing for Federal Grants and Contracts.

The Business Operating Fund includes financing for:

- Transit Small Business Fund;
- Micro-loans for Transit Software and Hardware Financing;
- Working Capital Loans;
- Insurance and Self-Insurance Financing;
- Gap Financing.

And if you have unique, special financing needs that you don't see here, please contact us, as our Transportation Lending Services staff may be able to develop a financing program to meet your needs. Please see the website for more detailed

information at www.ctaa.org/transit_financing/ or contact the TLS Program Director, Patrick Kellogg at kellogg@ctaa.org and 800.891.0590, ext. 710. The preliminary loan application is also available on the website at: http://www.ctaa.org/preliminary_loan_application/

United We Ride Ambassador Program

The National Resource Center for Coordination (NRC), which is operated by the Association through an agreement with the Federal Transit Administration, provides technical assistance to improve transportation services and coordination. One of the most important components of the NRC is our United We Ride Ambassador program.

Ambassadors provide hands-on technical assistance in the development and implementation of coordinated human service transportation plans. The Ambassadors work to build awareness among decision-makers, service providers, and consumers on key issues related to human service transportation and coordination, including those requirements and opportunities created by SAFETEA-LU and other federal legislation. An Ambassador serves as a resource about human service transportation and coordination. To find your regional Ambassador, visit their website at <http://www.ctaa.org/UWR/>. There you will find the name and contact information of the Ambassador for your region. For more information, please contact Janice Lorenz at lorenz@ctaa.org.

If you would like to learn more about the work of the National Resource Center on Coordination, the website (<http://www.ctaa.org/NRC/>) offers a wealth of resources. Please contact Sheryl Gross-Glaser, Coordination Specialist at grossglaser@ctaa.org and 202.386.1669.

Special Rural Initiatives for Our Members

Energy Management Initiative

Today, the high cost of energy is the top challenge for many Community Transportation Association of America members, especially in rural areas. So we have created our new Community Transportation Energy Management Initiative — a comprehensive set of energy savings programs and solutions designed to benefit all types of Association members. And the entirety of this program — from saving on every gallon of fuel to utility audits to capital programs to help build fueling facilities — is available to all Community Transportation Association of America members.

The benefits of the Energy Management Initiative include low-price fuel options, reviewing your energy and utilities to ensure lowest costs and efficiencies, and help if you're interested in acquiring or building your own fueling facility. The program can work with fuel providers with whom you've established good working relationships in your communities.

For more information on our Energy Management Initiative, see the website at <http://www.ctaa.org/EMI/> or contact Caryn Souza at souza@ctaa.org and 800.891.0590 ext. 714.

The Community Transportation Insurance Program

This program, designed exclusively for Association members, is a member-owned insurance program that includes coverage through the private sector and this is ideal for rural transit operators. It puts you in control of the program in terms of managing and controlling insurance costs.

The program will provide not just good risk management, but in-depth training services to help ensure you are successful. You're eligible to join this insurance program if you're a member of our Association and committed to making an investment in controlling your own insurance needs and expenditures. To learn more about this program, please go to <http://www.pac-shores.com/financing.html> or please call Elizabeth Kelly at 800.828.5273, x177.

A Closer Look: Our Work in Action

Because the Community Transportation Association of America was founded to support rural transportation and rural communities, much of the Association's varied technical assistance work has taken place directly in rural America. We have helped plan and develop rural systems – and provided the necessary capital through our lending services for new facilities, equipment and to match federal funds. We've worked with rural tribes, inspired rural coordination teams through our Institute for Transportation Coordination and sponsored Joblinks employment demonstration projects. The considerable history of the Association in rural communities is one in which we take great pride and one we're committed to continuing well into the future. What follows are a series of profiles of but a few of these successful transit projects in rural America.

Middlebury, Vermont

In 2005 the Association worked with the local transit provider to help build a much-needed administrative and maintenance facility. Allison County Transportation Resources (ACTR) had grown from a two-vehicle operation to one needed to house and maintain 12 buses. Not surprisingly, something needed to be done to bring ACTR in from the cold. A site was selected, engineering and design assistance was provided and the Association even helped develop a financing plan.

North Carolina

Stretching across two-thirds of North Carolina, the state's Rural Vanpool Program is a story in flexibility, resiliency and, ultimately, vitality. The Association's Joblinks project helped with the important project that helped launch 16 vanpool routes serving more than 100,000 annual work trips. The program's success emanated from its ability to work closely with employers and employees, gaining their trust and confidence. Based on the needs



of rural employees and employers the program succeeded by targeting riders, usually in groups of five-to-eight going to the same destination, and then building the vanpool service to meet their needs, as well as the needs of their employer(s).

Astoria, Oregon

As the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's famed expedition approached, the Association helped launch an innovative partnership leading to successful marketing efforts to build public transportation options for tourists in the short-term, and for the communities served long-term. More than a million visitors came to Astoria – were

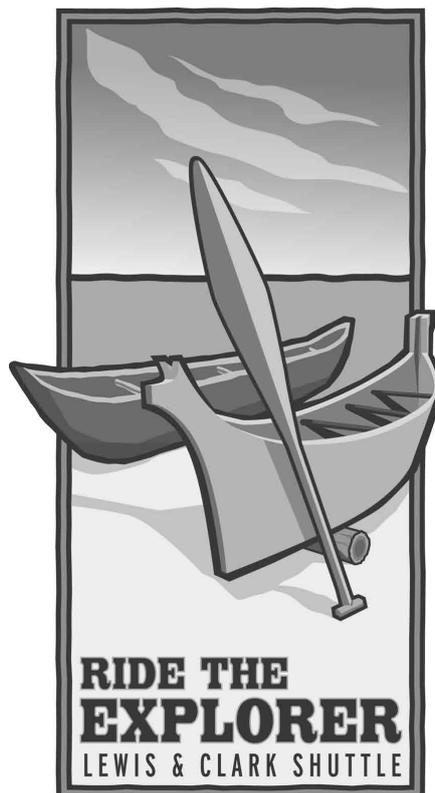
the Corps of Discovery's Fort Clatsop marked their western terminus – many using the various transit alternatives made available for the bicentennial. The Association helped develop an attractive marketing campaign to build awareness of transit alternatives in Astoria, as well as direct ridership on the services. Local chambers of commerce, hotels, tourism board and even the National Park Service took part in the project.

Riverton, Wyoming

The first time Sean Solan, transit manager for the Wind River Transportation Authority, took a group of riders through the new facility the Association helped finance, they all simply said: "Wow!" The 6,000-square foot facility was built in 1999 to house the agencies then-16 vehicles, a maintenance shop and an operations area. The most important aspect of the facility, according to Solan, was that it signaled his agency's permanent presence in Fremont County, as well as a lasting commitment to the system's riders. "The ability to get people where they need to go is just as important here as anywhere else — and this facility is proof that public and community transportation is vital to connected rural Wyoming residents," said Solan.

Stilligamish Tribe, Washington State

Located in northern Snohomish County some 50 miles north of Seattle, the Stilligamish is a small, dispersed tribe with which the Association helped develop an employment transportation connection. Eventually, that



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initial foray into public transportation helped the tribe launch a fixed-route loop operation, a dial-a-ride service and the original employment shuttle. “We knew we needed to do something,” said Stilligaumish Tribal Planner Casey Stephens. “Having the support of the Community Transportation Association gave us the extra push and put us in great position to go after funding within the Tribe and from outside sources.” The system launched in 2007, and since the Tribe has undertaken work to become a transportation provider to the local Medicaid broker, too.

Lake Placid, New York

Located in the heart of the Adirondack Mountains, the village of Lake Placid has hosted two Winter Olympic Games (1932 and 1980) and with the Association's assistance developed a transit system to help alleviate parking and congestion problems. The resulting system – the Placid Express – served more than 40,000 in its first 16 weeks of operation and though originally planned as a summer-only service is now operating year-round. The system operates trolley buses and operates fare-free for much of the year.

Northeastern North Carolina

The Association hosted a five-member team at the 2006 Institute for Transportation Coordination (ITC) whose goal was to develop a regional transportation coalition offering seamless service to the residents of the 10-county rural northeastern region of North Carolina. The team identified two counties — Washington and Tyrell — as priorities for the development of coordinated transportation services. As part of its work, the Northeastern North Carolina ITC Team has used innovative technologies like Google Earth to better illustrate its goals and



to help build local support for its initiatives.

Washburn and Sawyer Counties, Wisconsin

With a goal to build a regional, multi-modal, and multi-state transportation system for all residents in far northern and rural Wisconsin, this four member 2007 Institute for Transportation Coordination team includes both a tribal entity and a local veterans service officer. Since the ITC meeting last August, this team has helped implement expanded service in both Washburn and Sawyer Counties, facilitated through a one-call center. The team, with Association assistance, is also developing a collection of new marketing materials and is undertaking efforts to enhance the system's visibility and image.

Huron, South Dakota

The Association's loan fund helped People's Transit, a rural transit system in Huron, South Dakota, come up with the necessary local share to build an entirely new facility in 2001. The new facility, which included both maintenance and operational areas, was critical to the system's future and allowed for vehicles to be stored away from cold winter weather for the first time in the system's history. "Ridership grew by leaps and bounds immediately," recalls People's Transit Manager Sandy Mack. "The public realized we weren't just the senior bus."

Ashland, Wisconsin

Association demonstration grant investment was leveraged with a mix of federal, state and local support to publish a transportation resources directory in a 10-county region in north-

west Wisconsin. The guide included all available mobility options from state-supported rural programs to specialized transportation providers, vanpool and car-purchase programs. Moreover, the project marketed transportation services to the region's employers and business community, trained workforce development staff on transportation options, and created incentives for job placement and retention tied to transportation needs.

Clarksdale, Mississippi

The Association's technical assistance program worked with the Aaron Henry Community Services Center in Clarksdale, Miss. In 1990 to establish a regional transit system. Four counties in the northwest Mississippi region – Coahoma, Tunica, Quitman and Tallahatchie – had no access to mobility options. Association staff along with leaders from the Mississippi Department of Transportation undertook a needs analysis to support an application for federal investment. That investment was realized in 1990 and led to the creation of the Delta Area Rural Transit System (DARTS). Today, DARTS serves the four-county area with a staff of over 40 and the same number of vehicles, connecting riders with health care, employment, education, community services and recreation.

Sitka, Alaska

Beginning in 1999, Association staff worked with the Sitka Tribe and an informal local committee to investigate and prioritize local transportation needs. That effort expanded to include the work of LSC Transportation Consultants to conduct a transportation service analysis and coordinate existing resources. The continuing work for the





project led to the selection of operators to provide expanded service – the Sitka Tribe and Southeast Senior Services – and an administrative structure through the Center for Community.

In September 2002, Community RIDES was established, providing both fixed-route and demand-response in the area of around 9,500 residents. In addition to state and local investment, the project also was instrumental in securing investment through the federal Job Access and Reverse Commute program. As a result, fares are affordable for low-income passengers as well as seniors and riders with disabilities. The Association is currently working with the Sitka Tribe to develop a facility to house the transit operation.

Mason County, Washington

Through the Association's loan program, Mason County Transit has been able to purchase a new administration and maintenance facility in Shelton. The new facility allows Mason County Transit to consolidate its operations at a single facility, offer new training opportunities for its drivers, dispatchers and staff, and store a large amount of fuel to allow the system to purchase larger quantities to reduce fuel costs. Additionally, the location allows Mason County Transit to utilize a fuel blend of ultra-low sulfur and biodiesel to contribute cleaner emissions. The system provides public transportation access to all of Mason County.

Fremont, Ohio

Through a consortium of five rural transit systems in northwestern Ohio, an Association demonstration grant supported a project to better coordinate options and increase community awareness. Specifically, the project focused on responding to the needs of workers on late-night and weekend shifts at the region's many manufac-

turing plants. The enhanced awareness campaign included a new website and printed brochure that were widely publicized and distributed.

Meanwhile, the five systems involved in the project also improved coordination between their services and were able to identify gaps between

their operations. Additionally, the project involved local workforce development centers to inform jobseekers of available mobility options and involve employers and business associations in transportation improvement efforts.

Virginia, Minnesota

Across a seven-county area in north-eastern Minnesota, Association demonstration investment helped to identify transportation barriers to employment. As part of that effort, the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency improved information on transportation options available on its website for jobseekers, worked with area employers to improve transportation access for their employees, and coordinated information on transportation providers in all seven counties. The project included workforce centers, the city of Virginia, Arrowhead Transit and the Chippewa Tribe, in addition to the transportation services provided directly by the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency.

Dona Ana County, New Mexico

In an effort to improve information and communication to a bi-lingual and underserved population in Dona Ana County, Association demonstration grant support was utilized to establish Project Vamos. Through the lead efforts of the Alliance for Transportation Research Institute at the University of New Mexico, Project Vamos studied and implemented improved transportation options for jobseekers. That project included creating a transportation resources directory for employers and employees, encouraging the use of the Com-

muter Choice program for businesses, and developed promotional material in English and Spanish for employers and jobseekers.

Moreover, the project also helped secure federal Job Access and Reverse Commute investment to expand service on three routes in the county. Routes between Hatch and Rincon, Anthony and Las Cruces and Garfield and Las Cruces were either established or benefited from expanded service.

Raton, New Mexico

In 1998, the Raton, N.M. Lodging and Tourism Association requested help in restoring historic 1903 railroad depot. Association staff, along with input from LSC Consultants and the Colorado Architecture Partnership, worked with members of the community to determine the needs and potential uses for the depot. That process led to a determination that the station would continue to be used as a functioning station for Amtrak passenger trains as well as an intermodal center for intercity bus passengers and local taxi service. The project also worked with Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to transfer ownership of the depot to local governments in exchange for nearby city-owned property that hosted the railroad's tracks.

The project ultimately helped secure investment from several sources to revitalize the station. Support from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation and Community and Systems Preservation Pilot Program, the New Mexico Department of Transportation's National Scenic Byways program and local and national foundation investment delivered more than \$1.7 million to move the effort forward.

