

Preparing for the CCTM and CTPA Certification Examinations: Study Guide

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to help you feel better prepared to take the Certified Community Transportation Manager (CCTM) or Certified Transit Program Administrator (CTPA) examination. Whether you're attending a CCTM/CTPA exam study course, or using this guide as a part of your personal self-study for the exam, this guide will help you in the following ways:

- You'll understand the general nature of what we address in each of the exam's six sections.
- You'll have a sense of the kinds of questions you'll encounter on the exam.
- You'll acquire some awareness about the biases and assumptions that may inform the exam's questions.
- You'll see how the areas we cover in the exam relate to your daily life as a transit program administrator, and will be reminded of key elements you may want to be sure are in your own transit organization.

One of the most important things to bear in mind is that the CCTM and CTPA exams test you on knowledge you already possess. While this study guide – and the class, if you're taking a CCTM/CTPA study class – is sure to present concepts in ways that are new, or perhaps even unfamiliar, to you, there really should not be any content in the following pages that is brand-new to you. To be sure, some people take the CCTM/CTPA study class without planning to take the certification exam, as they're seeking a general overview of transit management or transit program administration as part of their professional development, but we're not trying to teach or test you on new content or new ideas.

About the CCTM and CTPA Exams

First of all, the CCTM and CTPA exams are different than many tests you may have taken. They are not skills tests, which means you don't need to memorize a lot of stuff or demonstrate your hands-on abilities as a manager in order to pass the exam and earn your certificate. Instead, these exams are designed to test your knowledge, and especially to test your decision-making abilities.

The CCTM and CTPA exams are very general in their approach. Our aim is to help you demonstrate your knowledge around six (for CCTM) or seven (for CTPA) core areas, through a series of multiple-choice questions on a written exam.

While the general principles of the CCTM and CTPA are as applicable in Canada or other countries as they are in the U.S., the exam does have a U.S. bias, and quite a few test questions are couched in a U.S. context, such as by citing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as the frame of reference for how we assure accessibility for persons with disabilities, although the guiding framework in Canada is the Canadian Human Rights Act of 1977 and companion pieces of provincial legislation. You will not be tested on the details of the ADA or any other U.S. federal laws or regulations, but you will find the general concepts of federal rights, laws and regulations cropping up in almost every section of the CCTM and CTPA exam.

How the Exams are Structured

The CCTM examination consists of six sections, corresponding to the core knowledge areas of the CCTM program. The CTPA examination includes the same six sections as are in the CCTM, plus a seventh section, unique to CTPA, on transportation grants management. These are the sections of the exam:

- Service planning and system development (CCTM and CTPA)
- Budgeting and financial management (CCTM and CTPA)
- Transportation operations management (CCTM and CTPA)
- Human resource management (CCTM and CTPA)
- Procurement and contract management (CCTM and CTPA)
- Organizational leadership (CCTM and CTPA)
- Transportation grants management (CTPA only)

Each section of the exam consists of 20 multiple-choice questions, and every one of the test questions gives you four choices, of which only one is the correct response to the question.

How the CCTM and CTPA Exams are Scored

We score each section of the exam on a percentage basis, which means that each of the sections will be anywhere from 0% to 100% correctly answered. With 20 questions per section, you can see that each question is worth 5 points.

To “pass” each section of the exam, you have to answer 70 percent of the questions correctly; that means you need to give the correct response to at least 14 of the questions in that section.

To “pass” the overall CCTM or CTPA examination, you need to have a passing score on every one of its sections.

What about Retests?

The CCTM and CTPA exams are administered on line, and you learn immediately if you passed or failed a particular section. You are given the opportunity to retake a section at that time if you failed to pass it. If you choose not to retake a section you failed to pass, you may arrange a retest later with CTAA. CTAA has a fairly liberal policy on when (and even how frequently) you can re-take exam portions you initially didn’t pass.

Since the CCTM and CTPA exams essentially are “Pass/Fail” exams, you are not given the chance to re-take exam sections you’ve already passed. While some candidates set high personal standards for themselves, are highly competitive, or feel they need to demonstrate their professional skills through an exam score that’s as high as possible, these are not valid reasons for seeking to re-take any portion of the exam.

Knowledge Area 1: Service planning and system development

Overview

This knowledge area addresses how you manage such topics as transit system service design and configuration, the role your transit organization plays in the community it serves, how you respond to current and future change in both your community and your organization, and how you translate organizational purpose and mission into measurable, performance-driven management of your transit organization.

As part of this knowledge area, you need to possess some knowledge about transit planning and service design, but the exam does not expect you to be a professional, never mind certified, planner. You are expected to know how to address aspects of civil rights protections and social inclusion in the activities of your transit organization, but it is assumed you can find the specific legal, practical and regulatory information you need on these topics as they arise “in real life.” You need to have some awareness of how your transit organization is – or could be – funded. You definitely need to know what your organization does, why it operates as it does, and how it relates to the community you serve.

Key principles, assumptions and expectations

You know what your organization does. This knowledge is reflected in some sort of organizational statement of mission or purpose, which you and your staff and leadership understand and which is followed in the day-to-day activities of the organization.

You know your organization’s customer base. Whether it’s the general public of your community, or some specific subset of the community, you’re aware of this audience’s travel patterns and transportation needs. You’re also aware of how your customer base is likely to change over the next 5 to 10 years. Sometimes those changes over time are due strictly to community demographics, but sometimes those changes in your customer base may arise as part of your organization’s own evolving mission.

You know how your organization addresses – or should address – your customers’ transportation needs. It’s important to know how to match styles of transit delivery and your available assets (i.e., vehicles, personnel, revenue streams) with your customers, their origins, and their destinations.

You know your community. It’s not sufficient to know your passengers; you also need to know about the community’s demographics, the local economy, and even a thing or two about the

local tax base (especially if you're dependent on local government funding to help support your organization's finances). And as was mentioned above, you need to know how your community is likely to change over the next several years, so that you can maintain your organization's ongoing relevance and value in the community.

Even if it's not your current reality, the examination assumes you are committed to a performance-based approach for leading your organization. This means you'll have performance goals and objectives, performance targets and indicators, that these are measurable and relevant, and that your staff will be as engaged in these performance metrics as your leadership and governance bodies.

Since your organization is dedicated in some way to being of tangible benefit to your community and the people who live there, you're conversant in the "value proposition" of how the public, private and personal dollars that are spent toward your transit organization deliver some kind of "return on investment." You're also committed to making sure that your transportation organization is not disenfranchising or excluding anyone who's part of your customer base; on a fundamental level, that means that you understand and assure compliance with laws about civil rights protections, but it also means that you are working to make sure that the transportation service, and the design of this service, is planned and operated in ways that engage your community and promote social inclusion.

Core documents in your organization

You might have some sort of short-range service plan, business plan, or other documentation that guides the organization's transportation mission in ways that reflect current and projected demographics and transportation demand and that are cognizant of current and projected financial resources.

Periodic comprehensive operational assessments are found in many urban public transit systems in the US, but they tend not to be found in rural transit systems, nor are these assessments found in transportation services that focus strictly on specialized audiences or situations.

If you're in an urbanized area of at least 50,000 population in the US, your metropolitan planning organization (MPO) is required to develop a short-range "transportation improvement program" and a long-range "metropolitan transportation plan." These documents, and, sometimes, other federally required documents that you or your MPO must produce (e.g., a coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan, a public involvement plan, various "Title VI" civil rights plans and programs, public fixed route transit operators' ADA complementary paratransit plans) often contain important data and background information

about your community, your transportation organization, and the context within which you operate.

Ideas to consider in preparation for the exam

How does a community benefit from having a transportation organization, whether it's for the general public or targeted at specific populations (such as older adults, persons with disabilities, clientele of specific programs)?

When does it make sense to offer "demand-response" transportation, and when does it make sense to offer "fixed-route" transportation? What are some ways in which these modes are hybridized? What about interconnectedness, whether it's "first mile/last mile" challenges, or looking at things such as bicycle and pedestrian connectedness, vehicular park and ride connections, intermodal and intercity connections, etc.? When does it make sense to look at services such as vanpools, carpools and private ridesharing, commercial ridesharing/ride-hailing services (commonly known as "transportation network companies," or "TNCs"), or partnerships with taxis or other external entities?

How do you get public or customer input into your operation and its plans, why do you do this, and what do you do with the information you get? To what degree do you (or are required to) engage with low-income household members, racial/ethnic minority groups, or populations in your community whose spoken or written English language proficiency is limited, and how does that engagement play out in your organization and the community you serve?

What are some of the general benefits that transportation systems yield for the communities they serve, and what are the social and economic benefits produced by your own transportation organization?

Who uses your transportation service, and why? Are there members of your customer base you're not serving very well, and what can be done about that?

Here's a theoretical hierarchy of what's in a performance-based management system:

- Goals
- Objectives
- Targets
- Indicators

How much of this are you using in your organization right now? How much more can you do in this regard?

CCTM/CTPA Discussion Questions: Service Planning & System Development

Everywhere you go in your work life, people are talking about performance metrics, performance management, and performance-based approach to organizational planning, analysis and decision-making.

- Why would you institute a performance-based approach to your transit organization?
- How would you get your staff and leadership on board with this approach?
- What would you imagine seeing as your leading goals?
- How would you measure your progress toward these goals?
- If the performance-based approach works as you envision, how would things change in your organization and your community?
- Are you already doing any of this? If so, how's it working out for you and your organization?

Knowledge Area 2: Budgeting and financial management

Overview

This knowledge area addresses how you manage the budgeting and overall financial management of your transportation organization. It assumes that you have other people with daily responsibilities in this area, so you need to be literate in the details of transportation financial management, but can rely on others for the details.

In the day-to-day financial activities of your organization, there are likely to be many details you and your finance staff must understand and follow very closely. You're responsible for knowing the details that pertain to any particular funding stream or relationship you have with specific programs or regulatory bodies.

Key principles, assumptions and expectations

You have a budget. It's probably an annual budget. The budget is approved by your board of directors or similar governing body. It reflects your anticipated revenues and expenses, is realistic, and reflects the priorities of your organization's transportation mission.

The examination assumes your organization receives some funds from the US federal government, either directly from one or more federal agencies, via state- or local-managed programs that involve federal dollars, or through some other contracts or grants that involve federal funds. This reflects the reality of nearly all public transportation operations in the country.

You have an annual financial audit. In all likelihood, this audit is required by one or more of your funding sources. Even if not required, it's prudent financial management to have an annual audit.

You have a system for managing your organization's finances – including accounting, bookkeeping and cash management – that meets your needs and satisfies your funders' requirements and expectations.

You have documented financial management policies and procedures. You and your staff consistently follow these policies and procedures.

Your organization has, or at least aspires to have, a diversified financial base, so that it's not dependent on any one grant, contract or revenue stream to maintain its ongoing transportation mission.

Core documents in your organization

You have ready access to your budget, along with regular financial reports that show how your actual activity is measuring up against what was budgeted.

You and your staff have ready access to your documented financial management policies and procedures.

You have a copy of your most recent annual audit report, along with all the supporting and background information examined and documented by your auditors.

Ideas to consider in preparation for the exam

When and how is credit used in your organization's finances, whether through lines of credit and secured debt, or through unsecured lines such as employee credit cards?

How do longer-term financial issues, such as timely replacement of capital assets or carrying out major capital projects (such as construction), affect your annual budgeting and financial management?

How do you address matters of maintaining security in your finances, whether "high level" issues such as cybersecurity and fraud control, or "lower level" issues such as cash handling?

What are some of the diverse funding streams that support your transportation operation? What are some new funding strategies you've been considering, and what do you know about them?

How do the economies of your state and your community affect the finances of your transportation organization?

What are the major financial cost elements of your operation? How do you incorporate financial data and concerns in your performance-based management, and how do you know when your operations are meeting your financial expectations?

What does it mean to say that your annual audit is one of the most powerful management tools you have at your disposal?

When you do have to carry out cost control measures, whether because revenues are trending lower than they should be, or costs are trending higher than they should be, what are some strategies you can employ?

One of the downsides of receiving funds from a variety of funding agencies is that they may have very different sets of rules and expectations about how you manage their funds, what activities are eligible expenses, how you're paid by these funders, or what and how you report to your funders. How can you deal with that diversity?

CCTM/CTPA Discussion Questions: Budgeting & Financial Management

- What are some steps you can take to assure your board and your funders that you're keeping your organization in good financial health?
- Are you already doing any of these things? If so, how are they working out for you and your organization?

Knowledge Area 3: Transportation operations management

Overview

This knowledge area touches on a diverse array of how you manage the operations of your transportation organization. In general, this area encompasses issues of operating policies and procedures, safety and risk management, customer service, performance measures and management, and the ways in which we make sure our transportation services (and our community) are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Since most transit systems are fairly complex, it's impossible to test on every aspect of operations; nonetheless, you need to know a lot about many diverse operational issues.

Key principles, assumptions and expectations

Your organization has operating policies and procedures. They're written down, and followed – consistently – by your staff. Some of these policies and procedures may be dictated by law and regulation.

You gather data on your operations that you and your staff review and use in ways that make sure you're running a safe, effective and efficient operation. When your staff collect these data, they know how the data are used, and get feedback on how the data they've collected are affecting the direction of your organization's transportation mission. Some of these data are reported to state or federal agencies; you and your staff maintain awareness of how those data shape future funding determinations or policy decisions from state or federal government. Another reason for you to collect and analyze data is to provide the metrics behind your organization's performance management system.

You have some sort of safety management plan. It's written down. To the extent it needs to satisfy expectations from local, state or federal government agencies, it does so. All your staff are trained to proficiency on what their safety-related roles and responsibilities. In those unlikely events of injuries, accidents, emergencies or disasters, everyone on your staff knows what to do, and they do it. You collect data and maintain records to demonstrate the safe operating status of your vehicles, facilities and equipment, and of the safe and fit operating condition of your operating personnel, especially those safety-sensitive personnel who are covered under federal drug and alcohol testing regulations.

You and your staff understand the transportation operation's responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and all staff are trained to proficiency on ADA obligations

and the accessibility features of your vehicles and equipment. If your operation is one for which ADA complementary paratransit is a requirement, you understand and follow the federal laws, regulations and policies concerning this paratransit requirement.

In addition to honoring the ADA, your organization respects the civil rights of all your passengers and community members, and there is no discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, nor any other protected class under federal civil rights laws or any classes protected under state or local civil rights laws and ordinances. You have documented policies and procedure in place to receive and respond to any allegations of discrimination or other perceived violation of individuals' protected civil rights.

In general, you have meaningful mechanisms for receiving and responding to customer feedback about the transportation services you provide, whether it's the filing of complaints or the opportunity for customers to provide positive and constructive input on their experiences with your transportation operation.

Core documents in your organization

You have documented policies and procedures for your transportation operation.

You have documented safety and risk management plans, policies and procedures for your transportation operation.

If it's necessary for your operation, you have an ADA complementary paratransit plan.

You have documented policies and procedures for receiving and responding to complaints and allegations of violations against your customers' protected civil rights.

Ideas to consider in preparation for the exam

If you use subcontractors for any aspect of your operations, how do you hold them to appropriate standards of performance?

How does your organization address its maintenance management functions?

What is the range of obligations your transportation operation may have under the Americans with Disabilities Act?

What kinds of data are in your transit asset management plan, and how do you use these data in your operations?

Are you and your staff able to provide consistent and accurate information about your transportation operation's geographic service area, days and hours of operation, your fare structure (if any), and whether you have any limitations or priorities on particular populations or trip purposes in your operation?

What steps help assure your staff respond properly to safety-related incidents, accidents, emergencies or disasters?

How do you measure the success, effectiveness and efficiency of your transportation operation?

CCTM/CTPA Discussion Questions: Transportation Operations Management

In any transportation organization, no matter how large or small, we use data to inform the actions we take and the decisions we make.

- What data help you determine the effectiveness and efficiency of your operation?
- How do you gather these data?
- How do you use them?
- What's been your experience gathering and using performance data, and what have been your successes?

Knowledge Area 4: Human resource management

Overview

This knowledge area addresses how you manage the personnel in your transportation organization. It includes issues of compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and adherence with your organization's own personnel policies. In addition, this area touches on issues of staff training and professional development, the possible use of volunteers in your organization, when and how your employees' outside work and personnel lives are pertinent to their work in your organization, and how you respond to the inevitable (and hopefully minor) conflicts and misunderstandings that arise when overseeing the work of other people.

In general, you're likely to have other people on your staff or in your organization with day-to-day human resource management responsibilities. But as a senior manager in your organization, much of the ultimate authority in these issues rests on your shoulders.

Key principles, assumptions and expectations

Your organization has personnel policies. They're documented. You and your staff know and understand these policies. Your organization follows its personnel policies fairly and consistently. These policies span the entire human resource relationship, from recruitment and hiring to termination, retirement and other ways in which employees separate from your organization.

There are many ways in which your personnel policies are dictated by law and regulation. You understand your organization's legal responsibilities, and have systems in place to assure compliance with these requirements.

While you hope they're minimal, you nevertheless have fair, effective and consistent ways for responding to disputes, disagreements, misunderstandings and alleged misconduct among your staff.

You have a training plan that addresses the training and professional development of your staff.

Core documents in your organization

You have documented personnel policies and procedures for your transportation organization.

You have a documented training plan for your staff members' training and professional development.

You maintain necessary records pertaining to your employees' hiring and work status, performance, and all major personnel actions you've taken. These records are kept secure and confidential.

Ideas to consider in preparation for the exam

How do you assure compliance with equal employment opportunity in your organization's recruitment and hiring practices?

How does your drug- and alcohol-testing program relate to the hiring and management of CDL-holding or other safety-sensitive employees in your organization?

You're a manager, not a lawyer or legislator, so how do you pay attention to what you might need to know about the vast array of federal laws that affect your employment practices, including those listed below?

- Affordable Care Act
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Civil Rights Act
- Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Act
- Drug-Free Workplace Act
- Employee Retirement Income Security Act
- Fair Labor Standards Act
- Family and Medical Leave Act
- Internal Revenue Code
- Omnibus Transportation Employees Testing Act
- Social Security Act

What responsibilities do you have with respect to your employees' outside work or other activities?

What do you do when you observe or otherwise learn of employees whose performance is not in compliance with your organization's policies and procedures?

How do you succeed in providing training and professional development that's seen as positive by your employees, and not punitive?

Thanks to the prevalence of social media, you and your employees might see more than you've ever imagined possibly knowing about some of your employees' activities, attitudes or beliefs. Has this influenced how you address your organization's personnel practices and policies?

What have been some of your successes and strategies in hiring and retaining good employees?

What are some of the things you need to do and consider when it's necessary to terminate an employee?

CCTM/CTPA Discussion Questions: Human Resource Management

The one-word answer to the following questions, of course, is "training," but let's dive into some details to see what this really means in your organization.

- How do you make sure your employees understand your organization's mission and purpose?
- How do you help them see how they're addressing this mission in their day-to-day duties?
- How do you know your training is successful?
- What unexpected successes have you observed as a result of training your organization has conducted for its staff?

Knowledge Area 5: Procurement and contract management

Overview

This knowledge area focuses on what may be the central activity of your transportation organization: how you acquire goods and services, and how you manage the contracts through which you receive goods and services. It includes issues of compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and adherence with your organization's own procurement policies.

Furthermore, this CTPA area touches on issues surrounding the importance of monitoring your contracts and maintaining relationships with your contractors during the life of these contracts, the importance of carrying out fair and open procurements, and the need to respect the nearly universal steps organizations must take in almost any procurement:

- Determining the need
- Developing specifications
- Conducting an independent cost estimate, if needed
- Determining the procurement mechanism and – if appropriate – the pool of qualified prospective vendors or suppliers
- Issuing and carrying out the solicitation
- Selecting the vendor or supplier
- Executing a contract or comparable procurement document
- Abiding by the terms of the contract, and monitoring the contractor as appropriate
- Accepting the goods or services the contractor provides in accordance with your specifications
- Closing out the contract

In addition, aspects of simplified procurement mechanisms, subcontractor conduct, vendor selection, disputes and appeals, and the “legalese” terms and conditions that are included as so-called “boilerplate” in contracts are explored in this knowledge area.

In general, you're likely to have other people on your staff or in your organization with day-to-day responsibilities that pertain to procurements and contract management. But as a senior manager in your organization, much of the ultimate authority in these issues rests on your shoulders.

Key principles, assumptions and expectations

Your organization has procurement policies. They're documented. You and your staff know and understand these policies. Your organization follows its procurement policies fairly and

consistently. These policies span the entire contractual relationship, from solicitation and selection through performance and closing of the contract.

To the extent your procurement policies are dictated by law and regulation, you understand and abide by these requirements.

You keep all non-trivial aspects of your procurements and contracts documented and on file.

Core documents in your organization

You have documented procurement policies and procedures for your transportation organization.

You maintain necessary records pertaining to your solicitations and contracts.

Ideas to consider in preparation for the exam

What's your responsibility regarding contractors' use of subcontractors, and when do you need to be notified of such moves?

When real or perceived conflicts of interest arise in your procurement actions, what do you do?

In service contracts, how do you monitor performance, and how do you build in opportunities for bonus payments or other actions that reward contractors' work that is ahead of schedule or otherwise more than exceeding your baseline expectations?

What are some forms of streamlined or simplified procurement, and when do you use these methods in your organization's procurement practices?

What are some bases – other than cost – that you might use for selecting suppliers of goods or services? When would you use a basis other than cost for selecting vendors?

How do you communicate with prospective suppliers when you're launching a competitive solicitation?

Under what circumstances would sole-source (i.e., non-competitive) procurements be appropriate in your organization?

What are some of the terms and conditions you include in most of your solicitation and contract documents? Do you know what they mean and how they apply to your procurement actions and decisions?

CCTM/CTPA Discussion Questions: Procurement & Contract Management

- What are some examples of how you can be sure a procurement is carried out to your organization's benefit and satisfaction, without compromising anyone's rules or procedures?
- What's an example of how you'd launched and managed an unexpectedly successful procurement for your organization?

Knowledge Area 6: Organizational leadership

Overview

This knowledge area explores the larger issues of your work as a manager, including boards and board roles and responsibilities, organizational mission and purpose, advocacy and engagement with elected leaders, etc.

Key principles, assumptions and expectations

The primary assumption is that your organization has given you a leadership role, and your professional responsibility is to be an effective leader for your staff team, board members and members of the public in the communities you serve. Part of this leadership role includes knowing that you will respond suitably at times of crisis or emergency that's befallen your organization.

It's assumed that you have some sort of body that functions as your governing board.

There are documented roles and responsibilities that apply to your board, its actions, and its relationship with your staff.

Core documents in your organization

You have documented policies and procedures that govern your board's conduct.

Ideas to consider in preparation for the exam

How can you legally and appropriately carry out political advocacy aimed at getting elected officials to respond favorably to items that concern or impact your organization?

What are some examples of actions or activities your board should not be doing, even if they're a bit inclined to step in?

What do advisory committees do, and how are these tasks different from those that are performed by your transportation organization's governing board?

CCTM/CTPA Discussion Questions: Organizational Leadership

- What are some steps you can take to help assure your staff and your leadership share – or at least support – your vision of where the organization needs to grow and develop over the next 5 to 10 years?
- What do you do when someone on your staff or in your leadership “just doesn’t get it” with respect to your visions for the organization?
- Maybe it was just some little thing, or maybe it was something that revolutionized your whole organization. In any case, what’s an example of a success you’ve experienced in having staff and leadership rallying around to help accomplish some element of your vision for the organization?

Knowledge Area 7: Transportation Grants Management (CTPA Only)

This portion of the examination presumes the existence of a state management plan (SMP). Although required of state-managed Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant programs, non-FTA programs may derive benefit from management documents similar in scope and nature to the FTA-mandated SMPs. In other words, this is a beneficial management practice, even when not required.

There are many examples of states' public transit grant program state management plans. Without wanting to imply or suggest any endorsement of individual states' approaches, many plans are available on-line, including those of:

Connecticut (https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOT/documents/dptransportation/CTfastrak-ridership-graph-0719/CTfastrak-ridership-graph-0819/CTfastrak-ridership-graph-0919/Section-5311-State-Management-Plan_November-2019/Section-5311-State-Management-Plan_November-2019.pdf)

Iowa (<https://iowadot.gov/transit/publications/statemanagementplan.pdf>)

Oregon (<https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/RPTD/RPTD%20Document%20Library/State-Management-Plan.pdf>)

South Carolina (<https://www.scdot.org/inside/pdf/PublicTransit/SMPUpdate-20May2021revision-date02June2021.pdf>)

West Virginia (<https://transportation.wv.gov/publictransit/Documents/WV2019-Section-5311-SMP.pdf>)

FTA sets forth basic expectations for the contents of State Management Plans for its programs within the program circulars for each program (these circulars can be found on-line at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/fta-circulars/final-circulars>). However, the Transportation Grants Management portion of the examination is based on the idea that states do more than simply satisfy the baseline requirements set forth by FTA (or, comparably, the transportation program requirements set forth in state aging plans, state Medicaid plans, or the program guidance of any other state-managed program having a transportation component). The remainder of this study document discusses additional values and expectations that are reflected in the examination's questions.

The management plan is an accurate reflection of how the state carries out its business. If you ever find yourself saying "yes, that's what's in the management plan, but it's not really what we do," then there's something wrong with the plan, and a plan revision is probably in order. After all, if there are any disagreements between the state and one of its grantees, the management plan is one of the places where all parties will look to see what steps and expectations are appropriate to any circumstance.

The management plan reflects the purpose and priority of the program it addresses, and does so in the context of the particular state. So, for instance, if you're talking about the state's program of transportation assistance to meet the needs of elderly individuals and persons with disabilities, your management plan needs to explain this purpose and why it's of importance to your state and its constituents.

The management plan reflects the nature of the relationship between the state and its grantees. You should know that the CTPA exam has a bias, and assumes this relationship is more of a partnership, and is not a "command and control" relationship. We acknowledge that every state has its own ways of relating to grantees, but you should emphasize thinking in terms of partnerships when responding to questions on the exam.

The management plan should spell out all the state-specific issues that dictate how you administer the program. For example, FTA guidance allows for many types of entities to be subrecipients for its state-managed transit grant programs. On the other hand, your state may be one of those that is more restrictive, such as by restricting applicants to be units of local government. If that's the case, then your management plan needs to be very clear about this. As another example, also drawn from the realm of FTA programs, there's the question of how to handle revenues from federally supported "human services" programs as part of the "non-federal" share of project costs; FTA provides a lot of leeway about how states address this, which means the state management plan needs to be clear about the extent to which you accept these revenues as project costs, whether they're considered in the same category as farebox receipts and advertising revenue, or whether such contract revenue is considered as part of the net operating deficit, to be financed with a blend of federal funds and "non-federal" state and matching funds.

For that matter, there is the question of the rates at which your state matches federal grants. Whether with respect to FTA grants or any other federal source of transportation dollars, the federal government may state matching fund rates, but it often is the case that states can be more restrictive, or that states may provide a portion of non-federal costs through state revenues, or that states require local grantees to provide the entire non-federal share through their own revenues. Whatever is the case in your state, it should be reflected clearly in your management plan.

The management plan should be a useful resource for your own agency, your current grantees, and your prospective grantees alike. It should detail when and how funding decisions are made. If your state's approach is to sub-allocate funds on a formula basis, that should be stated in your management plan. If your state holds an annual competition for funds, state that in the management plan. If the state values continuity, and therefore seeks to continue existing grants or contracts where reasonable, indicate that in the plan. In any case, though, it is important

that the practices described in your management plan reflect the actual practices of your agency.

One of the central elements of a management plan is, of course, the process by which financial decisions are made. There are many different ways by which states may select grantees or local contractors for their programs. As mentioned above, some states use funding formulas, others competitive contracts, and other states use even different mechanisms. Who makes these decisions, especially if funds are awarded on a competitive basis? Are these decisions made by one person in one agency? Is there an application and review process? Is there a committee or panel, either standing or ad hoc, that advises on these sorts of decisions? Whatever you do, it should be indicated in the management plan. Especially essential is that there needs to be a process, also described in the management plan, by which funding or other decisions may be contested and appealed. Remember, if you don't specify an appeals process in your management plan, the "default" option is that your agency's decisions quickly may find themselves being adjudicated in state courts, which is an expensive and burdensome way of managing your program.

To some extent, you may wish to engage the views and perspectives of your grantees or other external stakeholders. Even if you don't remember, while taking the CTPA exam, that we have a bias that presumes some commitment to the concept of the state embracing a role of partnership with its providers and customers. Many states have committees or advisory groups to help inform or discuss the actions they must face in administering state transportation programs; often, states have relationships, some documented, some informal, with state associations or other stakeholder groups. In your management plan, consider what nature of relationship your state has with its customers, and see that your plan reflects this relationship in an open, accurate and transparent fashion.

For your grantees, there often are challenges in "coordination." This takes two forms, when viewed through the lens of a state program management plan. One aspect of the coordination to be addressed is how your particular agency intends to recognize and be involved with the activities of other state agencies, especially those dozen or so state agencies outside your own whose services and programs have a significant bearing on transportation. If you have particular accounting guidelines that your grantees should follow, indicate as much. If you have some formal interagency agreements or coordinating councils, they should be referenced and explained in your management plan. A second aspect of "coordination" may be even more challenging for your grantees, and that is how they are to carry out their duties if they receive funds through more than one program of your own agency. To use FTA programs as yet another example, it is not inconceivable that a single entity, such as a regional or county-wide public transportation provider that somehow is attached to a unit of government, could be receiving Section 5311 rural transit operating and capital funds through agency, could also be receiving Section 5307 funds for operating or capital if they happen also to serve an urbanized

area, and may be receiving funds for particular “Job Access” or “New Freedom” projects through grants or agreements from your agency. If that’s the case, how do you want them to carry out their duties under all of these programs without creating confusion or excessive administrative burdens for you or for them?

Somewhere in the management plan, it should be clear about your program’s commitment to such essential concepts as civil rights, private enterprise participation, and other matters of government-wide concern and priority. Another area driven by federal policy that somehow will find its way into your management plan is that family of transportation planning requirements set forth through various U.S. Department of Transportation programs; you may need to explain how projects and activities under your program relate to state and metropolitan transportation plans, transportation improvement programs, etc. If there are program- or service-specific planning requirements, such as the complementary paratransit plans required of public fixed-route transit operators under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or the locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans required as the basis for project selection under the FTA Section 5310, 5316 and 537 programs, these plans and processes should be referenced and explained in your management plan.

Throughout the management plan, it should be clear what roles of enforcement or oversight the state is exercising, and the way in which these roles are being exercised. For instance, if your approach toward assuring ongoing compliance with FTA requirements among your grantees is a process of periodic site visits, this process should be explained in your management plan. If you require that certain documents or reports be submitted to you, either for transmission on to federal agencies or to provide documentation in case your agency is reviewed or audited, something about this should be stated, clearly, in the management plan.

Whenever making statements in the plan about processes or documents that are “required,” be very, very, very clear about who’s making the requirement. If you allege items are “required” by a federal agency when in fact they’re not, this will lead to poor program management. There’s nothing wrong with saying that something is a requirement of your agency as part of its need to carry out the state’s business, even if it is not part of a specific federal requirement.

As stated above, the management plan needs to spell out the nature of the relationship you have with your grantees. If you plan to carry out site visits, inspections, reviews, audits, or the like, that should be indicated in the plan, especially since you may need to do these things as part of your federal dictates in receiving and managing program funds. On the other hand, it’s good to recognize that some things might not be part of your concern, except in unusual circumstances. For instance, the details of your grantees’ personnel practices should not be the state’s concern, as long as applicable laws, regulations or guidance are being followed. The details of how your grantees schedule and dispatch their vehicles are probably not the state’s

concern. In contrast, the state may – or may not – have a vested interest in your grantee’s procurements and procurement processes; this concern is something that should be addressed in the state management plan.

In terms of transportation, some activities rise to the top of needing to be expressed clearly in a state management plan. One of these is the acquisition, use, and disposition of vehicles. As with so many other topics, every state may handle this differently. Nevertheless, you may need to indicate whether it’s the state or your grantees who solicit and procure vehicles in this program, whether it’s the state or the grantee who purchases and holds title to vehicles in the program, any conditions under which the state may re-deploy vehicles from one grantee to another, the expectations about what’s to be done when a vehicle is at the end of its “useful life” or is being replaced, etc. Another concern that has some specific transportation implications is that of safety management and assurance: in a program with a transportation component, what is your agency’s role and what are your practices concerning transportation safety, whether they be related to regulation, training, technical assistance or grantee oversight? Yet another activity that has to be stated clearly in the management plan is what to do if a grantee is exiting your program, either by their choice or as a result of some adverse action by the state. Part of this is how you would answer the often-uncomfortable question, “When and how would you terminate a grantee?”

Moving away from the uncomfortable, your management plan should indicate the ways in which you make technical assistance available to your grantees. Again, keep in mind that the CTPA exam has a bias of assuming that you are working collegially with your grantees, and that the state recognizes the program succeeds at its purpose when grantees are able to perform their duties to the maximum possible effectiveness. Therefore, you indicate whether technical assistance is provided by the state directly, or through external contractors, or through some other means. However it’s to be done, we assume that the state takes its technical assistance role seriously, and communicates that fact to its grantees.

Another bias reflected in the CTPA exam is that the state views itself as an advocate for the types of activities carried out through its programs. That doesn’t mean you’re lobbying, or doing things like that (even if you wanted to carry out political advocacy, there are numerous restrictions and prohibitions from both federal and state governments, which, of course, are spelled out in the management plan), but it does mean that the agency tries to see that successful outcomes are a result of the program, and that the value of the program and its activities can be apparent to your agency’s political leadership or to interested state legislators. After all, there often are times when legislators start asking questions about activities related to your program, or are relaying concerns they’ve heard from their constituents, so even if you personally are not charged with responding to legislative inquiries, you should be managing and carrying out the program in such a way that your agency’s leadership can respond constructively and appropriately when asked.

Are you ready to take the CTPA exam?

If you are an astute and experienced transportation professional, familiar with the ways in which your state does business, chances are that you'll do just fine on this exam. If you want to keep thinking about the Transportation Grants Management portion of the exam, take a look at some states' management plans that are not your own, which could include those cited above, or those of just about any other state. Browse these plans, and see how they resemble the way in which your state communicates its way of doing business, but look, as well, for those ways in which another state's plan differs from your own. Why are there differences? What about these plans works well to the advantage of the state and its grantees? In what ways can you readily tell from another state's plan how it carries out its program? As soon as you feel comfortable addressing those types of questions, you'll find the questions on the CTPA exam to be a breeze.