

Pathways to Transit Success: Fresh Ideas and Inspiration

The second section of this edition of DigitalCT Magazine provides brief, easily replicable features of community and public transportation leaders — both systems and individuals — who've transformed the changes outlined in our data and infograph section into action. Each of these profiles offers ideas and inspiration, as well as a roadmap you might be able use when confronted by the same type of challenge. To organize these brief features, we have arranged them under specific skillsets:

1. *Taking Risks and Embracing Change*
2. *Thinking Like a Business and Competing*
3. *Understanding and Meeting the Needs of Customers*
4. *Building Strategic Partnerships*
5. *Deploying Technology*

Across the nation everyday, community and public transportation leaders serve their communities and customers in untold innovative, creating and cost-effective ways. The ideas presented here are but a few of the many worthwhile public transportation innovations. Think you have something important to contribute to this dialogue? We do. Share your insight with us by emailing DigitalCT Editor-in-Chief Scott Bogren at bogren@ctaa.org.

Dealing With, and Embracing, Change

By Lenna Kottke

Change can be uncomfortable. Change can be unwelcome. But change can also be energizing, refreshing and inspiring.

That has been our experience in evolving and rebranding our nonprofit agency from Special Transit to Via Mobility Services. In our 35-year history, we have grown from a handful of employees and vehicles to a multi-county, multi-program agency. Our new identity as Via has given us a more expansive and inclusive name to more clearly express the sense of freedom, independence and vitality we bring to those who depend on our services.

We did not enter into this change lightly. Our evolution toward a new name began a decade ago, when we undertook a strategic planning process to envision the needs of future generations of older adults and people with disabilities and how we might evolve to meet those needs. We looked at demographic projections. We prepared financial forecasts. We identified an immediate need to expand our facilities and developed plans

***Change can be energizing,
refreshing and inspiring***

and strategies to more than double our capacity to serve the community.

Completing a successful capital campaign and construction project in 2010, we moved into our new building in January 2011. The new facility gave us the opportunity to reintroduce ourselves to the community, and we began a comprehensive effort to better understand what people knew about our organization, our services and our mission. We conducted focus groups. We surveyed our stakeholders, including riders, funders, donors and employees. Several themes emerged from this research, some expected and some surprising.

First we realized that the name Special Transit no longer captured the breadth of what we do. We are a full-spectrum mobility manager, a one-call resource for people living with mobility limitations. We provide mobility options, counseling and individual travel planning; we teach people how to use public transit; and, we work with a variety of other providers to find the most appropriate and cost-effective way to help people meet their transportation needs.

We also found that the word special could be perceived as a barrier. For some people living with disabilities, that word is a term that separates them from the community at-large, and the term

TOPIC 1: TAKING RISKS & EMBRACING CHANGE

is neither appealing nor acceptable. For others, the word may lead them to think that they are not eligible for our services, since they don't see themselves as having special needs.

For these reasons and more, we decided that we needed a new name, and with the help of outside consultants, we came up with a name that is short, fresh and memorable. Via literally means, by way of, and we want people with limited mobility to know that they can travel by way of our services!

Changing our name has given us new opportunities to tell our story and to share our values and mission with the community – a first step that sets the stage for a larger vision for shaping mobility in our region. An entrepreneurial spirit has characterized our organization since its humble beginnings, and we look forward to the opportunities presented by the changing world of health care, technology, urban development and more – all challenging us to evolve to keep our community transportation services relevant. **CT**

TOPIC 1:

TAKING RISKS & EMBRACING CHANGE

Dealing with Change and Taking Risks While Maintaining Your Principles

by Michael Noel

A few months ago, I was conducting a training workshop in New Jersey on the challenges associated with the safe boarding and securing of passengers who use power chairs, scooters and oversized wheelchairs. During one of the breaks, a veteran bus operator came up to me and stated how very different his job is now than when he first started as a city bus driver many years ago. How many of us could say the same thing.

Back then, a sign was posted up front indicating that passengers should not talk to the driver, and a big white line on the floor indicated where passengers were expected to stay behind. Now, the operator is being asked to provide hands-on service, have constant interaction with the passengers, all the while providing safe, on-time service.

As the session focused on assisting passengers with disabilities, I assured him that interacting with passengers – particularly those with difficult-to-

secure mobility devices – is vital and manageable, providing you always take the time to problem solve and do not compromise the securement principles.

This led me to think how often this plays out not just with front-line transit personnel, but in today's transit management decision-making process and the ever changing transit environment. Like my friend driving the bus, I think management can take calculated risks and embrace change if they just take the time to problem solve and not compromise their principles.

One trend I see across the country for transit management is the greater emphasis on productivity by local, state and federal funding agencies. This trend creates the need to monitor performance and make changes quickly with the expectation of continual improvement – a new reality for most community and public transit managers.

Today, the emphasis needs to be on understanding and really thinking through the challenges, not compromising principles

It starts with really understanding what constitutes success, gathering meaningful data and enrolling everyone to work towards a common outcome. So often I see managers struggling with internal issues such as a ridership declines, poor morale, or an increase in road calls or accidents. I'll ask them what data or trends they're using to try and understand these challenges and to solve them. More importantly, how are they engaging the front-line employees to improve the situation? Often, the data is buried deep in internal recordkeeping, and the front-line folks are neither aware nor involved in actively solving the problem. In my opinion, this is a formula for continued failure.

Today, the emphasis needs to be on understanding and really thinking through the challenges, not compromising principles and solving the problems by engaging the talents of the larger group. This really is a simple formula for risk taking that's not very risky.

The great philosopher Voltaire said it best in his quote, "No problem can withstand the assault of sustained thinking." **CT**

Strong Organizational Leadership Contributes to Organizational Success

By Ryan I. Daniel – WSO-CSS

Sometimes, staying the course, taking risks and embracing change are the only ways forward. When I came to St. Cloud (Minn.) Metro Bus as the new Executive Director a little more than a year ago, the ball was already rolling on two major projects and soon after we took on a third. The staff who started the projects were no longer with the agency. I credit the strong organizational leadership and teamwork within Metro Bus for keeping this fast moving bus on the road to success.

Converting to a CNG Bus Fleet

The CNG project represented the most complex advancement in the agency's 55-year history. The \$20 million investment - made possible through innovative use of municipal bonds - included construction of a fueling station and compressor compound; renovation of the maintenance and storage facility; and the replacement of nearly the entire fixed-route fleet of buses.

The majority of the construction occurred during the winter and the financial risk increased as the temperature dropped. Being the coldest winter in 30 years, there was substantial pressure to complete construction as quickly as possible. Any delays in the project would result in higher costs.

I relied on the maintenance manager to handle the day-to-day management of this project. His

job was to keep it moving. I focused on ensuring we were doing everything in our power to contain costs. We pulled in other staff as needed. The strength of a team being focused on the same goal is what made this project successful. In May 2014, Metro Bus became Minnesota's first public transit agency to use CNG to fuel its bus fleet.

Minnesota's first Mobility Training Center

While construction of the CNG project was underway at our Operations Center, Metro Bus was also investing significant resources on renovating a historic building in downtown St. Cloud to house its successful Community Outreach and Travel Training program.

This multi-million dollar project also was well underway before I joined Metro Bus. While it is challenging to complete a project without the benefit of being involved in the planning, it was possible - once again - because of the strong leadership of my staff, who were able to pick up the project and see it through. While a member of

While it is challenging to complete a project without being involved in the planning, it was possible because of staff leadership

my senior staff oversaw construction, I worked on completing the funding of these two major projects. All of this led to the third major undertaking of St. Cloud Metro Bus: Bonding.

First Bond: A+ Rating

For the first time in Metro Bus history, a bond was needed. Our team was strong enough to know our weakness. We quickly identified our need for help and expertise. We first worked with a consultant company and then hired the agency's first Finance Director. Having these experts on the team led to achieving an A+ bond rating for our first bond, which saved the agency from higher interest fees.

All that was accomplished over the past year - the CNG project, the Mobility Training Center, and our A+ bond rating - was only possible because of strong organizational leadership. This is what we have at Metro Bus and this is what transit agencies need to be successful. **CT**

TOPIC 1:

TAKING RISKS & EMBRACING CHANGE

TOPIC 2:

THINKING LIKE A BUSINESS & COMPETING

The Importance of Diversification

By Mark McGregor

For Virginia Regional Transit (VRT), diversification is not an abstract business concept – it’s a basic part of who we are. Diversification has permitted VRT to achieve our stated organizational mission: ...providing access to affordable transportation through passenger service, transit system management and other transit related services.

VRT works with 17 separate funding jurisdictions in rural Virginia. Working in multiple service areas across the northern and central sections of the state – diversifying our service – creates an economy of scale by allowing VRT and to allocate fleet (we operate 100 buses) and management resources across the Commonwealth, dedicating the needed services supports to the area or community in the most need.

In working with multiple governmental entities, the agency is forced to listen and identify what our customers are really looking for. In an environment that is competitive, transit properties need to be better than the for-profit companies

that seek our business. Being able to allocate costs and understand customers is vital.

We worked with the state and became a contract Department of Motor Vehicles office in our Loudoun location, and now we no longer have to travel to register our vehicles, while generating program revenue from those services. We sell advertising on our fleet (where permitted) and use those resources to help reduce costs to the communities. We even formed a charter company that has its own vehicles, management and offices to provide the type of transportation services federal money does not permit, but are essential to the communities we serve – an innovation necessary to serve a market we couldn’t serve any other way.

VRT leadership can cite numerous cases where private entities are funding public bus routes in exchange for a service that meets the corporate need. Our latest venture is to create a management services company where we complete procurement requirements that meet all of the regulatory issues

we face, and then permit other transit agencies to buy off that contract. In fact, one of our contracts resulted in lower per-unit prices on a body-on-chassis bus than the current state contract.

We’re facing real challenges and threats. The 2010 census dramatically changed our world when the largest single customer we had (Loudoun County, Va.) was switched from a rural to a large-urban designation, becoming part of the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Seemingly overnight, that largest customer had to switch from a local match system of funding to a 100 percent self-funded system. We found ourselves competing against large private transit service providers who submitted bids that were 75 percent of our costs and just happened to match the amount budgeted by local governments.

Our planned diversification resulted in a painful downsizing, however our multiple community systems and good reputation assisted us in reducing the impact on our people and our passengers. Had VRT as a company not been diversified, the loss of that contract would likely have resulted in the system shutting down. For us, we are hiring drivers, have developed a new business development position and are working on updating our strategic plan to meet the changing environment in which we operate. **CT**

...diversification is not an abstract business concept — it’s a basic part of who we are

RIMMS RESOURCE INNOVATION MEDICAL MOBILITY SYSTEMS

**A Comprehensive Set of Development and Support Resources
- Community Transportation Association of America -**

Medical transportation has become an integral part of people being able to access doctors and medical treatment in this country. RIMMS is a system and a service provided by CTAA to assist Non-emergency Medical Transportation providers to deliver the best transportation possible. It provides business planning, technical assistance, financing, and other services and is designed to provide organizations with the resources, information, products, services and skills necessary to efficiently start-up or expand a NEMT program of any size.

The Michigan Public Transit Association Opts to Compete in NEMT

By Clark Harder

The Michigan Public Transit Association (MPTA) began researching opportunities in Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) more than three years ago. As a result, we created a separate nonprofit 501(c)3 organization named Michigan Transportation Connection (MTC) that has now assumed oversight in the development of a statewide community and public transit-based nonprofit NEMT management company. We saw a rapidly-changing market and we decided – collectively – to do something in response.

Our efforts began by bringing together transit managers from throughout Michigan to dialogue on proposed changes under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and to assess existing opportunities and resources. Michigan already has some limited regional transit service, but we soon realized that the ACA had the potential to lead to broader opportunities. The MPTA committee structure reported back to our full board of directors, which led to the hiring of a project coordinator from June 2013 to March 2014 to lead the effort to broaden our base from transit to other organizations. These include the statewide 2-1-1 network, and the state's regional aging programs which already do some limited scheduling of NEMT.

After determining that the resources available were plentiful and that opportunities for expanded involvement of community and public transportation agencies in coordinating and scheduling NEMT, we moved

forward in the summer of 2014 with formalizing the new nonprofit MTC. We took the program out from under the MPTA's direct umbrella because most of our transit agencies want to be active providers of service to the network.

Even with the useful partners we have developed, the MTC is still heavily influenced by public transit involvement, but our board of directors includes representation from the Michigan Area Agencies on Aging Association, the Michigan Association of Health Plans, and the Michigan Association of United Ways. We hope other related health care partners will be added.

The MTC will function as a private-public partnership, engaging the transportation services of public transportation agencies but also will utilize private transportation businesses as well.

The State of Michigan has committed to two county-level demonstration projects in the current fiscal year through September 30, 2015. Those are in Muskegon County in west Michigan and Berrien County in southwest Michigan. Additional private

contracts are now being discussed by the MTC and local transit agencies with Managed Care (HMO) programs in several locations, as well as with veterans services organizations. All transportation services in our contract areas will funnel through the MTC, utilizing existing publicly-supported resources such as 2-1-1, transit dispatch centers and current mobility managers, working to our set of statewide standards. By coordinating through the MTC we reduce the duplication of staff while maximizing the return on existing investment and streamlining the billing and monitoring process.

To succeed, truly, we had to think like a business. Our advice to other state transit associations and public transportation agencies considering expanding their services in NEMT is to move judiciously. MPTA spent several months reviewing resources and unmet needs in our state, as well as current for-profit services and the MTC is continuing to move slowly and not take on more than we can reasonably handle as we launch and grow our service. Opportunities are plenty and we firmly believe there is a place and a greater role for public transportation to play in delivering NEMT; however, our goal is to make sure we are providing a reliable service that meets the expectations of our clients before we expand to the next level. **CT**

TOPIC 2: THINKING LIKE A BUSINESS & COMPETING

Community Transit Operators Use Service Design, Non-Grant Funding Sources to Overcome Loss of State Funding

What happens when a reliable funding source shrinks, considerably? In New Jersey, community transit operators looked to service design and non-grant funding – because cutting service to their customers and communities wasn't a good option. A loss of funding often requires changing service design.

Since the mid-1980s, New Jersey community transit operators have benefitted from the growth of revenues from Atlantic City casinos to meet the growing needs of senior citizens and people with disabilities. However, between 2008 and 2015, the state casino funds – that represented more than 40 percent of system operating subsidies – have dropped by more than half. The sea change in available funding has forced 20 county coordinated systems to reinvent their systems to increase efficiency and replace lost revenues.

The majority of services provided by New Jersey's community transit systems are traditional

...systems that can adapt will be better poised to meet the challenges of growing trip demand in the next decade

TOPIC 2: THINKING LIKE A BUSINESS & COMPETING

By Steve Fittante

advance reservation, curb-to-curb or door-to-door transportation focused on the needs of senior citizens who are unable to access traditional transit and people with disabilities who are not eligible for ADA paratransit services. During the past decade, more of these systems have embraced the use of route-deviation fixed-schedule services that previously had been used by rural transit operators.

One example of innovative service design is the impact of route deviation in Warren County, a rural county of 100,000 residents that implemented a two route, three bus shuttle in 2001. By 2008, the Warren County Shuttle had increased its annual system-wide ridership from less than 100,000 annual trips using 20 buses to over 250,000. In 2013, this rural county had the lowest cost per trip of the 20 county systems, largely due to the greater efficiency of the shuttle.

Several counties that have subsequently adopted this service design have actually increased their total system ridership and have been able to focus their use of more expensive advance reservation services in lower-density areas. Somerset County – growing suburban county – now operates seven fixed-route services which also serve as first- and last-mile access to NJ Transit traditional bus and rail services.

Since NJ Transit faces its own funding limitations in meeting demand for more local bus service in the suburbs, the county systems will play a larger role as local bus providers for the general public.

When Casino Revenue funding legislation was introduced to expand county systems in 1984, none of the systems had a mandatory fare system. Since 2008, more than half of the systems have embraced non-grant sources of revenue including becoming Medicaid NEMT providers, generating on-bus advertising revenues as well as implementing mandatory fare policies, sharing the cost of service. While making up for less than a third of the revenue loss over the past seven years, systems that have embraced these sources – coupled with smaller, more fuel efficient vehicles and other cost reduction methods – have been able to mitigate service reduction impacts on their customers.

While the future funding is uncertain, it is clear that the demand for community transit services, particularly in suburban and rural areas, will continue to place demands on New Jersey's county coordinated systems. The lessons of the past seven years indicate the systems that can adapt will be better poised to meet the challenges of growing trip demand in the next decade. **CT**

TOPIC 3:

UNDERSTANDING & MEETING THE NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

The Future Will Belong to Those Who Connect with the Customer

By Scott Bogren

Like a traveling band of community upheaval, transportation network companies – most notably Uber, and to a lesser extent Lyft – have spread their promise of customer- and technology-driven trips throughout the U.S., in the past couple of years, igniting passionate opinions, both pro and con, as soon after they arrive.

In city after city, the transportation network companies (TNC) – and please don't call it ridesharing, it isn't – arrive and immediately stir ardent policy debate on such issues as licensing, insurance, safety, affordability and quality. Some cities and communities embrace the TNCs, while others shut them out altogether. It's a case of the entrenched status quo versus digital age – and well-heeled – techies. The only certainty is ongoing sturm und drang.

The transportation network wars raging across the American landscape have most directly impacted the taxi industry, with community and public transportation reduced, seemingly, to bystander status. But these current battles are merely the first wave of a data- and

customer-driven transportation revolution that will eventually engage public transit. In fact, it already has.

Bridj ([click here for our CT Interview with Bridj Marketing Manager Ryan Kelly](#)) is aggregating neighborhood commuters in the Boston area and linking them directly with their workplaces on well appointed small buses with wi-fi service. Initial results have yielded significantly reduced travel times, for a price. And now the 128 Business Corridor – also in suburban Boston – is raising funds to launch a *smart bus* concept that aggregates traditional transit riders needing first-mile/last-mile solutions to the employment-rich Route 128 corridor. Twitter co-founder Evan Williams recently invested \$1.5 million in Loup – a self-styled public transportation meets private car service.

Let's face some facts here: the American population is urbanizing. Younger people want alternatives to the private automobile. Everyone has a smart phone connected to the Internet. Traditional forms of fixed-route urban transit – both rail and bus – cannot and do not

serve everyone, everywhere (with the possible exception of New York City).

The question that every community and public transportation leader needs to ask themselves is, simply: “Are we delivering our transportation services in ways that attract new riders, that are relevant to today's riders and are we really connecting with our customers – both current and prospective?”

Like it or not, the idea of making all forms of transportation more responsive to people is not going to go away. And, frankly, it shouldn't. It's about seeing customers – and potential customers – in the broadest sense possible. The TNCs are performing a vital function in driving the customer-centric approach into city after city. Community and public transportation can either learn to adapt and adopt these types of strategies and services, or risk being left on the side of the road by them. Uber, Lyft, Bridj and any other such services must be viewed as compliments to community and public transportation, rather than existential threats.

CT

Are we delivering our services in ways that attract new riders, that are relevant to today's riders and are we really connecting with our customers?

Sampling the Product

By Hugh Mose

As the general manager of small-urban transit systems for more than three decades, I always wanted to know first-hand what was going on in my agency, and I spent considerable time managing by walking around. One aspect of that was regularly riding the buses. The best way to know your customers is by joining them on the bus.

Over the course of my 19 years as manager of the Centre Area Transportation Authority (CATA) in State College, Pa., I had a goal of riding the bus to or from work at least once a week. In fact, knowing from past experience that I was going to be doing so, when my wife and I moved to the community we made certain to buy a house on a bus line.

Riding the bus allowed me not only to reduce my commuting costs, but it enabled me to do the following:

- Experience first-hand the real world of public transit. I was able to use the knowledge I gained as a semi-regular rider to

guide agency decisions, help set priorities for service enhancements and otherwise improve the bus riding experience for CATA's customers.

- Listen to the customers – and potential customers. In a small community, it didn't take long for the regulars to find out that I was the manager of CATA. My fellow riders were not at all reluctant to share their concerns with me, and occasionally these conversations led to service enhancements.
- Talk with front-line employees. I just loved to engage in conversations with CATA's bus operators, answering their questions about what was happening in the agency and how it might affect them. I found that nothing builds trust better than honest, face-to-face communication.
- Assess the condition of the rolling stock

and on-street facilities. There is no better way than riding the buses, and boarding and alighting at various bus stops, to see first-hand how well things are being maintained, and then use that information to take corrective action as necessary.

- Experience exemplary customer service. In transit, most of the employees are working on their own, which makes it hard for managers to observe their performance first-hand. As a rider, I was able to catch people doing things right, and thank them and occasionally formally reward them.
- Discover – and address – some of the little things that didn't work quite right. Whether it was a policy that impacted the customers, an operating procedure that negatively affected the drivers, or whatever, sometimes I was able to start the ball rolling to solving the problem.
- Keep in the good graces of the CATA Board Chairman. I have found that a recipe for success at work is figuring out what's important to the boss, and doing that. The CATA Board Chair rides the bus every day, so being a rider myself certainly didn't hurt my job security.

In summary, riding the bus helped make me a better manager, and using what I learned on the street to improve operations helped make CATA a better transit system. **CT**

TOPIC 3:

UNDERSTANDING & MEETING THE NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

Persistence is the Key Factor in Building New Relationships with the Health Care System

By Doug Sekerski

Working with our local hospital is a vital part of the Crawford Area Transportation Authority's (CATA) service in Meadville, Pa. The relationship with our local hospital helps our service grow and in turn gives a needed service to our community. Hospitals are in the business for health and wellbeing, and with the continuing changes in insurance and funding there are things we can do to help offset some of their costs and yet in doing so increase transit's bottom line while providing a needed and necessary service for them and their patients.

Many hospitals use volunteers to transport patients home after their stay, or use them for outpatient medical appointments at the facility. Our local ambulance service has also provided many of the other non-ambulatory trips for them. This had been the scenario at our hospital for many years – CATA would get a few of the local, or a couple out of town trips for them. They relied on the volunteers and the ambulance service to do the majority of the transportation.

CATA is a professional transit provider. We operate a safe, modern fleet, seven days a week. To be honest, we were frustrated that the hospital didn't choose to contract with us. That said, we continually worked with their director of transportation and staff, reminding them about our

services. We kept the dialog open – never pushing – but yet we let them know we could handle the work, usually at a much discounted rate. CATA staff participated in a number of community hospital boards with many other community leaders, business people and general public. We listened, watched and always provided input and insight when asked.

Times change – much like policies and procedures – and eventually we began to see a few more daily hospital-related trips. Next, we began to get a few more requests for trips, which we always answering with a yes. Slowly, steadily, our trip numbers started to go up. With the direct involvement with their board, directors and staff the relationship began to grow. Customer service for the patients went up, and we began to hear how good the professional bus drivers were with patients. And as our hospital trips increased, we also saw new requests for our service from outside of the hospital with many of the same individuals who in past had never used our service. Now,

we were transporting for the hospital, and the private needs of the same individual. It was only a matter of time before we saw the rapid growth of our transportation services based on our continued commitment and reliability of service to the hospital.

Developing a successful relationship with our hospital took time. We continued working with their management team, keeping the lines of communication open and reiterating CATA's professionalism, training and experience, even when we saw little to none of their transportation business. The reward in the end proved to be a reliable, consistent – and for us profitable – partnership. **CT**

It was only a matter of time before we saw the rapid growth of our transportation services based on our continued commitment and reliability of service to the hospital.

TOPIC 4: BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Time Banking: Exchanging Dialysis Rides for Garden Beds

By Nora Cashin

Dane County, Wisconsin's new timebank system has increased available volunteer driver services to dialysis appointments, and in exchange has opened up a plethora of free services to those volunteers to which they might not otherwise have access – redefining the notion of mobility management.

Time banking is similar to bartering in some ways (e.g., if a doctor fixes a person's leg, the patient gives the doctor a chicken). With time banking, an individual puts an hour into the time bank for, as an example, driving someone to dialysis, and then he/she receives an hour's worth of services in return. The difference is that the person receiving the volunteer's services may not be the same person who then provides a service for the volunteer. A local time banking organization maintains a database that helps coordinate all these opportunities.

Dane County tapped into an already established time bank, paying for a part-time staff person to recruit new time bank members to coordinate the

screening of drivers, and help arrange dialysis rides. First, we created a notice that was posted on the TimeBank website highlighting the opportunity for people to drive others to dialysis in exchange for time bank hours. Dane County paid drivers for their mileage at 19 cents a mile, which immediately saved about \$4,000 per month.

From the beginning, the program was enormously successful. It now averages 70 monthly rides, with a high month of 85. Local residents value the opportunity to receive services in exchange for driving. As one example, a woman who drove quite a few people to dialysis and banked significant number of hours was able to have three men build raised garden beds in her backyard. Another dialysis driver had their garage painted. We found that many of the dialysis riders, who are often on long-term disability, didn't really feel there was anything they could do to pay back for the rides they received. A mobility manager suggested that the dialysis patients could call other people who are confined to their homes to check on and chat

with them. The dialysis patients who participated in this way felt empowered by the fact that they indeed did have something that they could give back.

The time bank was further tweaked when dialysis social workers learned it was a tremendous strain for low-income families to drive six one-way trips a week. So they set up an option where an individual could drive their family member and another patient to dialysis and a time bank volunteer would drive the individual and their family member back, which helped some members of low-income families keep their jobs.

Time Bank International has started to look at time banking as a health care solution, expanding rides to other types of medical destinations, and creating neighborhood-based health supports. More information is available at timebank.org.

a woman who drove quite a few people to dialysis and banked a significant number of hours was able to get raised garden beds in her backyard

TOPIC 4:

BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

TOPIC 5: DEPLOYING TECHNOLOGY

Getting the Most of Technology

By Meredith Highsmith

In my role facilitating sessions for public transit leaders and coordinated transit systems, I will often work with attendees to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to better identify agency goals and objectives to work on as a part of the strategic planning process. In conducting the SWOT analysis, technology is called out as a key topic in all four categories some 90 percent of the time. Why is this? As technology rapidly develops and changes, it becomes a key component for transit providers looking to run services more efficiently and effectively. Technology can be both a strength and opportunity for agencies looking to capitalize on the benefits to maximize operating efficiency. It can be seen as a weakness or threat for those agencies who struggle to keep up with constantly changing technology, as well as those who are challenged in finding financial resources to afford implementation of new technologies.

Technology is a tool, something to improve your service in some measurable way. It is not an objective or goal. So what are some considerations

for transit leaders looking to implement and use technology in the public transportation realm?

- Consider the return on investment when looking at implementation costs. Many agencies are reluctant to implement new technologies (fare card systems, management information systems, mobile data computers, tablets, etc.) due to costs associated with implementation. The reality is that implementing new technology can save agencies significant amounts of time and money, as well as staff resources. Implementing a management information system, for example, may help an agency streamline data and reporting processes, whereas upgraded fare card technology may help eliminate fare evasion, streamline passenger counting, and provide opportunities for a single fare card system to be used amongst multiple transit providers.
- Remember the value of open data as technology develops. Transit providers can benefit from open data and data

sharing on several levels. Many agencies, urban and rural, are now using the Google Transit Feed Specification (GTFS, or Google Transit) to share information about routes and services online with both internal and external customers. The data sharing impacts agencies on a much larger scale; not only are customers able to keep up with route and schedule data in real time, but GTFS also allows for open data opportunities. There are unlimited opportunities for metropolitan planning organizations, city governments, app developers, researchers, and other transit agencies to tap into open data and learn more about performance measurement, short and long range planning opportunities, and develop useful apps that allow the general public to access route information.

- Lastly, the needs of a transit system are defined by the functions it needs to accomplish in day-to-day operations, such as bus routing, demand-response reservations, fare collection or billing, vehicle maintenance, and so forth. It is important for transit leaders to keep in mind that just because a technology is widely available, it may not be the best fit for the agency. Technology should be a benefit to the agency, not something that staff becomes overwhelmed managing.

At the end of the day, new technologies should serve the agency...not the other way around. **CT**

Big Data? You Might Already be Collecting It

There is much talk about big data and the coming revolution in community and public transportation that data collection will be bring forth. A rural Indiana transit operator is using data collected from its Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) to better capture operational and ridership data – and is then using that data to improve fiscal accountability, both internally and externally with those who fund its programs. It's a simple and replicable model for transit operations of all sizes in all types of service areas, one that elevates data collection from a bureaucratic requirement to a crucial tool for assessment and improvement.

Catch-A-Ride - administered by [LifeTime Resources, Inc.](#), in Dillsboro, Ind., – provides public demand-response transportation in six rural counties in southeastern Indiana and relies on the support of the community and local funding to uphold its mission, working together to provide services that help people maintain their independence. Evaluating the needs of the community, setting benchmarks, measuring performance and maintaining fiscal accountability internally and with local funders is vital to Catch-A-Ride's success. The utilization of data collected via the use of dispatching software and MDTs has greatly increased reporting capabilities and the ability to measure performance, develop plans and report results to our funders.

Software allows Catch-A-Ride to dispatch for six counties from one central location and offers a live

view of drivers' locations, automated scheduling, integrated maps, fares based on miles travelled and instant transmission of trip information from dispatch to drivers via MDTs. It's high-powered technology that the system has grown to rely upon. Trip information not only includes physical pick-up and drop-off locations, but also includes information such as age, trip purpose, special needs (walker, wheelchair, etc.), Medicaid eligibility, funding source, referral sources, etc., that is stored in a database and is used to develop reports and measure performance of a particular route, county, or the overall system for specific demographics. In addition, the option for monthly reports and billing is offered to clients and funders.

You might now be saying to yourself that many rural transit agencies have this type of technology as their disposal – and that's the point. Collecting various data points is really the easy part. The more important message here is in using the data in useful ways that help guide system planning and decision-making.

Catch-A-Ride has set benchmarks and monitors performance based on total cost per-mile, vehicle cost

By Erin Thomas

per-mile, revenue per-mile, average miles per-trip, on-time performance, delivered trips and denials and percentage of demand served – just to name a few. These performance measures allow Catch-A-Ride to evaluate the impact of amendments to route structures, dispatching procedures, vehicle maintenance, and even marketing efforts and have proven to be valuable in developing ways to increase efficiencies as well as maintaining accountability with funders.

Technology like that applied by Southeastern Indiana's Catch-A-Ride is a vital tool that the system's leadership highly values and helps determine the needs and trends of the marketplace it serves. It has improved system decision-making and helped the agency establish and maintain excellent working relationship with partners throughout its service area. **CT**

These performance measures allow Catch-A-Ride to evaluate the impact of amendments to route structures, dispatching procedures, vehicle maintenance, and even marketing efforts

TOPIC 5: DEPLOYING TECHNOLOGY

Technology is More than Just Computers: It's Your Vehicles, Too

By Kevin Coggin

Whenever transit professionals talk about technology, inevitably the conversation turns to software programs, computer hardware, apps and websites. But what about the vehicles we all operate every-day in our communities? Choosing the right rolling stock technology is just as important as all of those other technological concepts – maybe even more so.

You might remember 2005's Hurricane Katrina. But down here along the Mississippi Coast, we'll always remember the storm that forever changed so many of our lives and communities.

The Coast Transit Authority provides fixed-route and demand-response transit in the Gulfport-Biloxi, Mississippi region. We served our community right up until the storm arrived, moving many to safety – and assisted with local recovery efforts soon after it passed. In the aftermath of Katrina, we launched a new technology – vanpools – that continue today.

The CTA Coast Commuter vanpool service started as an element of CTA's program to assist the communities we serve with disaster recovery after Hurricane Katrina. Local businesses were struggling to put their workforces back together so they could restart their businesses. CTA designed the new

vanpool work commute service as a new market tool for employers to recruit and retain employees. What started as a single vanpool in 2007 at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula has grown into a successful program with a current fleet of 45 vans operating in four states bringing people to work in Mississippi each day. CTA vanpool customers are paying an average of \$100 a month. Employees now have a dependable, low-cost, low stress work commute option and it helps employers maintain a stable workforce.

We utilize a private contractor to manage the program so there are no capital costs incurred and the program can be expanded very quickly without capital outlay. The vanpool program is the safest, most effective and cost efficient transportation service that CTA offers. And all the vanpool ridership counts as CTA ridership.

So next time you begin to contemplate the role of technology at your transit agency, don't forget your vehicles and service modes. At CTA, vanpools have emerged as one of the most cost-effective, efficient and valuable technologies we have. **CT**

TOPIC 5: DEPLOYING TECHNOLOGY

Ideas Contributors

Taking Risks and Embracing Change

- Lenna Kottke is the Executive Director of Via Mobility Services headquartered in Boulder, Colo.
- Mike Noel is a Senior Associate with RLS and Associates, Inc. He works out of Johnstown, Pa.
- Ryan Daniels is the Executive Director at St. Cloud Metro Bus in St. Cloud, Minn.

Thinking Like a Business and Competing

- Mark McGregor is the Executive Director of Virginia Regional Transit, headquartered in Purcellville, Va.
- Clark Harder is the Executive Director of the Michigan Public Transit Association. He works out of Lansing, Mich.

Meeting the Needs of Customers

- Scott Bogren is the Editor-in-Chief of DigitalCT Magazine. He works out of Washington, D.C.
- Hugh Mose retired after more than three decades of managing small-urban transit systems. He resides in State College, Pa.
- Steve Fittante is the Director of Local Programs for the New Jersey Transit Corporation, working out of Newark, N.J.

Developing Strategic Partnerships

- Doug Sekerski is the Operations Manager at the Crawford Area Transportation Authority in Meadville, Pa.
- Norah Cashin is the Transportation Coordinator at the Dane County (Wisc.) Department of Human Services, in Madison, Wisc.

Deploying Technology

- Meredith Highsmith is an Associate Research Scientist with the Texas A&M Transportation Institute in Austin, Texas.
- Erin Thomas is Director of Catch-A-Ride at LifeTime Resources, Inc., in Dillsboro, Ind.



NATIONAL VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION CENTER

The Center was created in 2014 in response to the outpouring of interest in volunteerism related to the delivery of transportation services to many population groups including children, work force participants and older adults. Each of the founders have extensive experience in studying, supporting, and delivering volunteer transportation and are aware of the positive experience of those who volunteer to provide services as well as the many benefits accorded to those who receive the services. The founders are: Community Transportation Association of Washington, D.C.; the Beverly Foundation of Albuquerque, N.M.; Ride Connection of Portland, Ore.; CIMA Volunteers Insurance of Woodbridge, Va.; and AlterNetWays of San Francisco, Calif.

raising the standard of excellence



COMMUNITY
TRANSPORTATION



TRAINING



Passenger Service and Safety (PASS)

The PASS program has become the industry standard in ensuring community transit drivers have current expertise in passenger assistance techniques, sensitivity skills, and emergency preparedness. This program trains and certifies both drivers and their trainers. Drivers can now receive PASS certification in a new two-part process consisting of both online and hands-on training – visit: training.ctaa.org



Certified Community Transportation Supervisor (CCTS)

CCTS is a training and certification program for front-line transit supervisors. It addresses core supervisory skills in human resource management, operations and safety management, and performance monitoring.

Professional Dispatching and Scheduling (PDS)

This course is relevant for any demand-responsive environment, whether urban or rural, general public, paratransit or human services transportation. It expands proficiency in maximizing the efficient delivery of demand-responsive transportation, conveying riders' requests into affordable and appropriate trips, and in making effective use of the system's transportation resources.

Vehicle Maintenance Management and Inspection (VMMI)

The Vehicle Maintenance Management and Inspection training program promotes the community transportation industry's commitment to safe, reliable transportation through building up the professional skills of maintenance personnel and managers.



Certified Community Transit Manager (CCTM)

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. The program is built around a rigorous professional exam, for which we offer a two-day study class.

Certified Transit Programs Administrator (CTPA)

Developed in partnership with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), this professional certification program is designed exclusively for the state agency personnel who work in our industry. Through a rigorous testing and evaluation process, this certification affords states' highest-caliber public servants with recognition for their knowledge and accomplishment in working with public and community transportation grant programs.

Certified Safety and Security Officer (CSSO)

CTAA has developed the CSSO program as the first step in a two part process to provide accreditation to transit organizations in the critical areas of safety and security. In its essence, this protocol allows for assessments by Certified Safety and Security Officers (CSSO) of their respective transit systems prior to an on-site review by the CTAA accreditation panel. Following the review and assuming the transit organization meets all eight areas of the program's benchmarks, CTAA will then issue the organization a Community Transportation Safety and Security Certificate of Accreditation, valid for three years. An excellent way to comply with the elements of FTA's Transit Bus Safety Program!



We can be your partner in developing customized training courses in any area of critical need. We will help to meet your customized training needs with our own staff and resources, or will help you identify and obtain the particular training assistance you need for any conceivable situation.

Program topics can be selected from the existing courses or can be custom designed based on the interests and needs of the group. Several organizations with the same needs may collaborate to reduce costs. All courses are coordinated by our Training Coordinator, who will also assist in identifying potential partnerships and collaborations.

Many of our courses are offered on-site at different organizations, tailored to meet specific needs. This on-site training is convenient, cost effective and allows you to assist in the design and delivery of the program.

Join the organization that's working for you as it represents its members before Congress, working closely with Federal agencies advocating for equitable funding and reasonable transportation policies. Join now and save on training and certification programs. Call Caryn Souza, Membership Director at 202.294.6527 or e-mail souza@ctaa.org today!

Community
Transportation
ASSOCIATION

For information on course offerings, scheduling a session directly or developing customized training, email training@ctaa.org or visit www.ctaa.org/training