

**SMALL URBAN & RURAL TRANSIT CENTER
ANNUAL ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 10, 2008**

Attendees

Advisory Board Members:

Audrey Allums, Montana DOT
Keven Anderson, Minnesota DOT
Ron Baumgart, River Cities Public Transit
Julie Bommelman, Metropolitan Area Transit-Fargo
Bruce Fuchs, North Dakota DOT
B. Leone Gibson, Utah DOT
Gene Griffin, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute
Lyn Hellegaard, Montana Transit Association
Bruce Lindholm, South Dakota DOT
Ryan Marshall, Utah Urban & Rural Specialized Transportation Association
Jim Moench, North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium
Robert Padgett, American Public Transportation Association
Pam Ternes, Standing Rock Public Transportation
Vincent Valdes, Federal Transit Administration
Lori Van Beek, Metropolitan Area Transit-Moorhead

Guests:

Ryan Aasheim, U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan's Office
Charles Dickson, Community Transportation Association of America
Kathryn Harrington-Hughes, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute
David Leftwich, North Dakota DOT
Scott Stofferahn, U.S. Senator Kent Conrad's Office
Karen Wolf-Branigin, Easter Seals Project ACTION
Francis Ziegler, North Dakota DOT

SURTC Staff:

Jill Hough, Director
Alan Abeson, Affiliated Faculty
Gary Hegland, Training and Outreach Coordinator
Sue Hendrickson, Administrative Assistant
Jeremy Mattson, Associate Research Fellow
Jon Mielke, Associate Research Fellow
Jim Miller, Affiliated Faculty
Del Peterson, Associate Research Fellow
Dave Ripplinger, Associate Research Fellow
William Thoms, Associate Research Fellow
Carol Wright, Associate Director of Training and Outreach

SURTC Student:

Marc Scott, Ph.D. student

Welcome and Greetings from UGPTI

Gene Griffin, Director, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute

Gene Griffin welcomed everyone and thanked them for their time and efforts.

Public transportation and mobility are treated like breathing air, and we think it is free. We are at a crossroads in this country and transportation is one of them. We have increasing energy costs, public transportation needs are increasing (i.e., Chicago is pulling seats out for standing room on transit), and supply chains are shortening up.

What would we do with no transportation? Our system of commerce and economy, which includes health care, education, emergency services, etc., breaks down without transportation.

Mr. Griffin urged the Advisory Board to look ahead to where SURTC should be in the future, especially with reauthorization. Jill Hough and Mr. Griffin are meeting with staff of our Congressional delegation and will need support from the Advisory Board to address the challenges of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

Greetings from North Dakota Department of Transportation

Francis Ziegler, Director, North Dakota Department of Transportation

Francis Ziegler welcomed everyone to our state and to the NDSU campus.

We are in a transportation crisis. The Highway Trust Fund is going to be in the red by the end of September. A perfect storm is rolling in on transportation. There are decreasing revenues because more efficient vehicles are using less gas and are paying less in gas taxes. How will we keep the infrastructure going? Buses also need the same infrastructure to move people and goods. Increased fuel costs (NDDOT's diesel bill is \$6 million more than the previous winter) take away from transportation improvements. We also have declining infrastructure; there have not been many improvements in past years. We all need to be part of a big picture to come up with a new highway bill. There will be a shortfall in a few weeks and without reimbursement from Federal Highway, we will be in the red. Americans need to pull it together.

The NDDOT has been working on many projects with SURTC. Mr. Ziegler noted the Southwest study uses school buses to transport students and citizens. The NDDOT has partnered with SURTC on RFID technology; a chip can help us collect data from riders. The NDDOT appreciates UGPTI and Gene Griffin for his leadership. The NDDOT asks all of us to

be willing partners in working with Congressmen on the new highway bill. He predicts that transportation will look very different in 10 years.

SURTC - The Year in Review / A Look Forward

Jill Hough, Director, Small Urban & Rural Transit Center

Dr. Jill Hough thanked the NDDOT for their work and partnership with SURTC. She also thanked Gene Griffin for supporting SURTC. SURTC shares staff resources—communications, a graphic artist, web technicians and a computer technician—with other centers within UGPTI.

The presentation on SURTC's *The Year in Review / A Look Forward* began with a review of the center's vision, mission, and goals.

A "Center of Excellence" does not specifically define distinct qualifications, but rather a premiere institution, not just average or a little above average. SURTC want to achieve excellence.

SURTC has four distinct goals:

1. Enhance public transportation systems in small urban and rural communities.
2. Improve accessibility and mobility in small urban and rural communities.
3. Foster and facilitate information exchange among transit stakeholders and decision-makers in public transportation.
4. Contribute to the body of knowledge in transit.

SURTC has expanded its staff over the past year to include Jeremy Mattson, Associate Research Fellow, whose background is in economics. Also, two affiliated faculty were added. Al Abeson, formerly Director of Easter Seals Project ACTION, will be training and assisting with research on transit for the disadvantaged. Bill Thoms, former law professor at the University of North Dakota, has a long career in transportation. He will work on a project that looks specifically at the demands for the different modes of transportation / public transportation.

SURTC has expanded their training program to cover more topics and has increased the geographic area. The training this past year has reached from Alaska to Louisiana, and we've added Colorado, Texas, Iowa, Nebraska, and California as new areas. We will work to provide training anywhere it is needed and requested while taking into consideration our funding levels.

Recently completed research projects and their reports are available online at www.surtc.org. They include:

- Definition of Rural and Small Urban (David Ripplinger)
- Indian Reservation Transit Needs Assessment (Jon Mielke)
- Longitudinal Behavior of College Students and Transit Use: Phase I (David Ripplinger)
- Bio-Diesel Use in MAT Buses (Del Peterson)

- City of Brookings: Transportation Gap Analysis (David Ripplinger)
- Editor of Special Public Transit Issue of the *Journal of the Transportation Research Forum* to be published in September, 2008 (Jill Hough)

Ongoing research includes:

- Transit Planning in Sprawling Small Urban Communities
- Southwest Demonstration Study
- Assessing Impacts of Rising Fuel Prices on Native Americans
- The Impact of Gasoline Prices on Bus Ridership

Del Peterson, Associate Research Fellow

Del Peterson presented on his research of Transit Planning in Sprawling Small Urban Communities. The study includes small urban communities up to a population of 250,000. In 1998, Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo included 50 square miles. By 2008 it had increased to 80 square miles, an increase of 60%, while population increased 40%. Increased fuel prices make it difficult to provide transit services to sprawling communities.

The study will include a literature review, a survey, development of case studies on specific communities, and a final report. Small urban transit providers and planners will be able to utilize this research to better prepare for future transit service growth in their communities.

David Ripplinger, Associate Research Fellow

Jill Hough announced that David Ripplinger will be finishing his Ph.D. in Transportation Logistics very soon.

David Ripplinger presented on the Southwest Demonstration Project. Mr. Ripplinger noted every type of efficiency that can be done has probably already been accomplished in rural areas; it is time for something bold. The geographical area of this study can be compared to 40,000 people living in an area the size of Massachusetts. This is a lot of people who need access to goods and services. This study is looking at technology and the appropriate types needed. There is a strong level of interest on both local and state levels. The shareholders working together are tremendous. Citizens are truly enthusiastic about the coordination efforts. The concept of operations describes what the system will do and the responsibility of the organizations. The project is using the expertise of the Advanced Traffic Analysis Center (ATAC) at UGPTI. The study is scheduled for completion in early 2009.

Mr. Ripplinger also reported on the RFID project where technology will be used to produce efficiencies. Basically, this will be the use of a credit card to track data. This is an extremely innovative project and there is great interest and support from the NDDOT. The potential impact on riders and transit systems is very exciting.

Discussion followed:

Is transit service available in all eight counties? Some services are available only weekly. Those living in remote areas have none. Citizens believe using the school bus routes will be efficient.

It was noted that this project is “pushing the envelope.” Rising fuel costs and an aging population are driving forces for the project. It was added the population from farms and ranches are moving to cities. If you live outside of town, there is often no way of getting to a transit service bus. Yet people watch the school bus go by every day. That’s what prompted this project.

Are there state law barriers on riding school buses? In North Dakota, state law does not prevent people from riding school buses. Insurance in some states may be an issue. In North Dakota, insurance is provided by the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund for both school bus operators and public transit.

Are there issues or concerns with adults riding with children? There may be local school boards who will address this question.

Are school boards interested in defraying fuel costs with additional ridership? Yes.

Jon Mielke, Associate Research Fellow

The *Assessing Impacts of Rising Fuel Prices on Native Americans* research project is being conducted by Jon Mielke, David Ripplinger and Jeremy Mattson.

Mr. Mielke spoke on the June 9, 2008, New York Times article, “Rural U.S. Takes Worst Hit As Gas Tops \$4 Average.” The Oil Price Information Service, a fuel analysis firm, survey found the gasoline crisis is taking the highest toll, as a percentage of income, on people in rural areas of the South, New Mexico, Montana, Wyoming and North and South Dakota. There were no Native American populations on the list of top five rural areas. Mr. Mielke asks, “Where else are there more rural areas?”

Included in the assessment based on the Oil Price Information Service (OPIS - AAA) study were:

- Miles traveled per year
- Fuel prices
- Amount spent on fuel
- Percentage of income spent on fuel
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Mr. Mielke took a closer look at the oil information study and found some problems. Jeremy came up with a model to obtain data where OPIS didn’t factor in how many people in a household. The SURTC study focused on six Native American counties. The rationale is identified in the study.

Discussion followed. The report should be available in a couple of weeks. Rob Padgett would like it very quickly. This study will carry to a broader political base.

Jill Hough, Director

Dr. Hough highlighted SURTC’s education program.

The Public Transportation course was taught over UGPTI’s Transportation Learning Network to students from ND, SD and NY.

This year SURTC will work with the University Transportation Centers for class projects.

The transportation seminar series is now being offered as a credited course. A list of seminars can be found at <http://www.ugpti.org/training/seminar.php>.

SURTC will be developing a course for a new masters degree program in urban systems. David Ripplinger and Jill Hough will team teach the course. Dr. Hough will cover the policy side and Mr. Ripplinger will teach the modeling side.

Jill served as coordinator of the Rural and Intercity Bus Conference Student Paper Competition. Marc Scott received 2nd place in the competition.

Marc Scott, Ph.D. student

Marc discussed his internship experience. His interest in public transportation started in January with the Public Transportation course. During the summer of 2008, Marc's internship was with Transit Authority of River City (TARC) in Louisville, Kentucky. Barry Barker, Executive Director of TARC, introduced Marc to every aspect of the operation.

Marc noted that students involved in the industry facilitate workforce development. Thank you to SURTC for this invaluable experience.

Jill Hough, Director

Dr. Hough presented SURTC's outreach efforts:

- Newsletters
- Annual Report
- Mini CD's
- Presentations (TRB, TRF, and more...)
- Public Involvement Meetings
- AARP/SURTC Coordination Summit
- Serve on National/Regional/Local Committees
 - TOPS
 - TCRP Panels
 - NTI
 - FTA
 - ND Future Focus
 - COG

Jon Mielke, Associate Research Fellow

Jon Mielke discussed "Generating Public Involvement in Transportation" workshops sponsored by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute earlier this year. The workshop was designed to provide attendees with factual information concerning the condition of North Dakota's transportation system and funding realities. Mr. Mielke was one of the workshop presenters. The workshops were offered in six locations around North Dakota. Good input and favorable comments were received. The workshops generated a lot of interest with coverage in newspapers and trade publications around the state.

A summary of the workshop findings was presented to the North Dakota Legislative Interim Committee on Transportation. Francis Ziegler noted that the information was also presented to the Governor's staff.

Additional information and presentations from the workshops can be found at <http://www.ugpti.org/events/policy/>.

Jill Hough, Director

Dr. Hough announced that SURTC has expanded training efforts to Alaska, Colorado, Iowa, Texas, California, and Nebraska this past year.

Jim Miller, Affiliated Faculty

A business plan project started four years ago with a 4-hour session over the Transportation Learning Network. A business plan was conducted with River Cities Public Transit and was completed about a year ago.

Dr. Miller and Gary Hegland conducted business plan training to four South Dakota transit systems in August 2008. Each system received a binder and a memory stick with information specific to their transit agency.

This training is more of a private sector idea but does apply to transit. Transit systems often focus on the human aspect (compassion) and less on the business aspects. The training focuses on questions such as, "What are we doing? What should we be doing? Do we have the resources—people, money, buildings, etc.?" Jim gave an outline of the training materials and noted that two days was not enough time to complete the business plans. It was decided Jon Mielke will work with the agencies to write their business plans.

Gary Hegland, Outreach and Training Coordinator

Gary Hegland described risk management training he developed and has been presenting for SURTC over the past several years. The training concentrates on the following:

- Describing risk management
- Identifying key areas of vulnerabilities
- Providing management methods
- Discussing what-if scenarios

Most transit agencies think of risk management in terms of bus accidents or insurance. This course identifies areas of risk management transit managers need to consider in their operations.

Gary conducted one-day courses on risk management in Minnesota this past spring in Mankato, St. Cloud and Bemidji.

Carol Wright, Associate Director of Outreach & Training

An Introduction to Transit Management course was held in Fargo in July 2008. It was conducted by Carol Wright, Gary Hegland and Jim Miller.

It is a three day course designed for new transit managers--day one through the first 5 years. What do new transit managers need to know? The course has eight modules. Carol went through the table of contents. The binder is designed to be a reference manual. It has approximately a 250-page resource section, four reference CDs, and a transportation glossary.

Does the course simplify the FTA audit process? No, it does not cover federal audits.

[Download Presentation " SURTC - The Year in Review / A Look Forward"](#)

Effects of Rising Fuel Prices on Transit Ridership

Jeremy Mattson, Associate Research Fellow

Jeremy Mattson discussed his study, *Effects of Rising Gas Prices on Bus Ridership for Small Urban and Rural Transit Systems*. The full report can be found at <http://www.ugpti.org/pubs/pdf/DP201.pdf>.

[Download Mattson Presentation](#)

The meeting broke for lunch at 12 noon and resumed at 12:45 p.m.

Greetings from Senator Dorgan's Office and Senator Conrad's Office

Gene Griffin gave a background of the conception of SURTC and introduced Ryan Aasheim and Scott Stofferahn.

Ryan Aasheim, Outreach and Project Development, U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan's Office

Ryan Aasheim conveyed the regrets of Senator Dorgan for not being at the meeting today; the Senate went back into session this week. Mr. Aasheim appreciated the opportunity to commend and congratulate the work everyone does for SURTC. Growth and success are important to the transportation and transit issues we face in rural areas. The Senator always backs worthy projects he believes in. Congratulations and good job!

Scott Stofferahn, State Director, U.S. Senator Kent Conrad's Office

Scott Stofferahn, state director for eastern North Dakota for Senator Conrad, welcomed everyone. We are proud of UGPTI research and particularly SURTC for the great applications. Mr. Stofferahn addressed the SW Demonstration project; high gas prices spur a lot of creative thought. We are independent in rural communities and it is time to think a little bit broader. He closed by thanking Jill and everyone on the great job done by SURTC and the Advisory Board.

National Perspective

Vincent Valdes, Federal Transit Administration

Vincent Valdes thanked everyone at SURTC for the work done—how cutting edge and germane it is for transportation and transit across the country.

What will the next authorization look like? At FTA, it is not called reauthorization because it will be a different bill. Mr. Valdes agrees with Mr. Ziegler in that transportation will look very different in 10 years; transportation and transit will not look like they do today. As we look at transit and as we look at the structure of transportation in this country, we need to think about both the global and local perspectives. A lot of things seen at today's meeting are at the local perspective. Jon Mielke's study on tribal work and Jeremy Mattson's study need to be looked at and promoted from the federal perspective to really make a difference at the local level. From the international perspective, it is a foregone conclusion that global climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and potential carbon trading are going to be a theme over the next few years for countries all over the world. Transit has a role in this, perhaps not a major role, but if we get into carbon credit trading, transit will have an important role in how it impacts industry and how that sets us up for establishing our systems in the country.

Also, Mr. Valdes is very interested in the idea of mobility for all Americans, those with disabilities, for people who perhaps do not have the wherewithal to be able to own a car, or to even afford transit buses in the big cities. How do we leverage what resources we have and our diminishing resources?

Mr. Valdes wants to work with his office of research at FTA to really make it a lightning rod for innovative research. He doesn't believe in technology for technology's sake. The real pivotal point is application, from both an urban planning standpoint and from an economic standpoint. How do we apply these technologies logically? How we implement our policies, how we handle our legislation, and how we apply technologies is what will really make a difference in this country. We need to look at ways for the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Innovation (TRI) to play a central role in providing a national forum for groups such as SURTC so they can really start to explore local issues that can be used everywhere, not just locally but abroad as well. These are things we really need to keep in mind. Every bit of work that is done here has an international impact.

Robert Padgette, American Public Transportation Association

Robert Padgette extended congratulations to SURTC on all the work they are doing. It has been a whirlwind this past year with increasing fuel and ridership; bringing lots of media attention. The quarterly ridership report released this week showed ridership up 5.5%. What this doesn't show is systems fewer than 100,000 are growing by double digits everywhere across the country. It is interesting that where this is happening is where people are losing jobs and ridership is still increasing. APTA surveyed agencies to see how they are handling fuel increases. Some are considering reducing services. Mr. Padgette commended Barry Barker from the Transit Authority of River City in Louisville, Kentucky for encouraging the survey. The message to elected officials is that we need help here. APTA members are having a hard time keeping service on the streets.

Senator Clinton is currently introducing legislation for emergency transit funding. Mr. Padgett encourages all to talk to your legislators.

Mr. Padgett informed the advisory board that APTA will present their authorization plan to the APTA Executive Board in October.

The Highway Trust Fund will go to a zero balance this month. This is serious, and we really need a fix. It is expected to get wrapped up in reauthorization efforts.

APTA is sponsoring the special Transit Issue of the *Journal of the Transportation Research Forum*. Mr. Padgett thanked Jill for her work on this project as guest editor.

Charles Dickson, Community Transportation Association of America

Charles Dickson oversees CTAA's technical assistance program which works closely with transit systems and Councils of Government in rural areas.

CTAA is currently putting together their reauthorization proposals. They are looking at four basic areas: investment and finance (primary focus); energy and environment; social inclusion; and connectivity.

Investment & Finance

- Increase overall investment in all forms of community and public transportation
- Index the gas tax to match rising prices
- Allow transit agencies to access tax credit blocks
- Capture the value of transit's emission reductions as local match or other revenue
- Realize a full or greater share of true costs of providing human services transportation, especially for medical trips

Mr. Dickson further noted that funding transit in the future will not be just in the transit bill. Now is the time for us to realize that we as transit providers will have an impact across so many segments of society. There will have to be some recognition in the role transit plays to keep human service transportation systems going. No matter who is elected this fall, there will have to be some recognition of transit's role in America's healthcare system. As outpatient medical care increases, this will put more of a burden on transit.

Energy & Environment

- Tax carbon emissions, with credits recognizing the positive environmental impact of transit
- Convince the public and its leaders of the severity of the energy crisis and the vital role of transit in addressing it
- Conduct more research on alternative fuels that do not increase costs to transit systems
- Demand coordination of federal agencies and programs to fund transit solutions on emissions and fuel use

Social inclusion

- Improve flexibility in investment and regulations at all levels of government to encourage local innovation

- Raise awareness of services and programs among community leaders and how their missions correspond with larger community needs
- Enhance community involvement and participation, especially at the consumer level
- Be mindful of language and concepts used in communication efforts – use ideas and strategies to achieve change
- Focus on good legislation and good policy to serve all Americans

Mr. Dickson indicated this is an area where transit has always been good. He referred to Dr. Miller's comment from earlier in the day about the human services aspect of rural transportation and the fact that no matter what, you make sure those rides are there. I think this will become more and more important for all levels of transportation.

Connectivity

- Prioritize connecting people – regardless of location, mode, program or status
- Consider the value of and relationships between all modes: bus, rail, air, water, pedestrians and bicycles
- Seize the opportunity of transit's role in large, crucial issue, such as health care, energy, housing and the environment
- Promote a philosophy that encourages Americans to travel without cars
- Identify new and diverse sources of revenue
- Expand the boundaries of transit – we need a national system of connected regions, states and communities

Mr. Dixon noted that in the past, authorization negotiations have been focused on how to split the money—rail, air, transit, etc. This time, it will be focused on how to get the money. The gas tax is not going to provide the money needed.

CTAA is very interested in hearing from everyone on what they think the major issues are. In June, CTAA will be releasing their formal proposal, but there is plenty of time for other ideas to be included.

Medicaid funding for transportation is extremely crucial for many rural systems. They depend on Medicaid revenue to make up what they can't get from local or transit funds. There has been a lot of news recently from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in terms of changing the way states provide Medicaid transportation. CMS is encouraging states to adopt benchmarking plans to make Medicaid look more like private insurance and less like a social service program. Since most private insurance plans don't cover transportation, benchmark plans don't either. CMS is not authorized to approve the benchmarking plans. Even though they have written the rule, it has not been formally adopted and it is likely that it won't be adopted by the end of this administration. For whatever reason, states are already doing benchmark plans, and CMS is approving them. CTAA is in the process of getting legislation introduced and passed that will put a stop to that for the time being.

CTAA offers the following programs to assist transit systems with increased fuel costs:

- onsite fueling programs
- work with bulk purchases and low cost loan program for updating and installing fueling facilities
- gas cards with a discount of 3 to 4 cents per gallon
- assess facilities and utilities, assist in cost effective measures

- loan program working with rural transit systems to purchase and run gas stations within their communities so that they can fuel their buses but be a resource to the community

[Download Dickson Presentation](#)

Karen Wolf-Branigin, Easter Seals Project ACTION

Karen Wolf-Branigin spoke on the trends in small and rural communities related to customers with disabilities and older adults.

One trend that has been identified on the human service agency side is that organizations want to own their own agency, own their own vehicles, and service their own customers. Many of these organizations don't have a transit professional and really don't have any idea of what their transit costs are. They know how much money they receive, but they don't know their costs. Often, these agencies have 99.9% compassion for their own customers, but not necessarily anyone else's.

Project ACTION looks at what the implications are for rural communities. Because there are fewer service agencies traveling greater distances, their preference for doing it on their own will lessen as fuel prices increase and as there is a continued push for coordination from the federal, and in some cases, state levels. She suggested these agencies may be coming to SURTC for solutions. Easter Seals Project ACTION and the National Center on Senior Transportation is where information, training and technical assistance is available. The recommendations and implications for SURTC is that there will be many organizations coming to you and asking, "What should we do?" This is something she suggests that SURTC think about; get into the workplace psyche, understand the workplace culture of human service agencies, and when they think about transportation know what they need.

Ms. Wolf-Branigin pointed out that coordinated human service transportation networks are going to emerge if they are pushed. SURTC and rural and small urban communities are a lot more experienced innovators in working with each other. This is something you may be much better at than your urban brother and sisters. The implications for SURTC are that people may be coming to you and saying we want to work together but don't know how. This is where SURTC's best practices, coordination and other programs will be helpful. She observed that leadership is so important. Is this something that can be learned or trained? The whole issue of leadership and the work SURTC is doing in your current programs will benefit human service agencies.

She noted that the Baby Boomers are already here. The challenges these people face involves transportation. There are also many disabilities to consider: blindness, hearing loss, other physical disabilities, etc.

Ms. Wolf-Branigin addressed the issue of bringing customers to the mainstream.

- A comprehensive ADA paratransit eligibility determination process will serve you well
- Travel training can decrease ADA paratransit costs
- Older adults are interested in enhanced services and volunteer driver programs
- Who pays for and who provides enhanced services is a major point for discussion

There may be a few systems left where they let anyone on to a paratransit system. Due to rising fuel costs, paratransit costs are also rising and systems are really hurting. Systems may be coming to SURTC for help. Easter Seals Project ACTION is very interested in teaching people to use transit.

They are learning that people want to know how to use transit in different ways and training different types of clients. Enhanced services for older adults include the issue of “door through door” and determining who is going to pay for the service.

Ms. Wolf-Branigin indicated she is looking forward to the aging women articles coming from Dr. Hough's dissertation.

She announced that Easter Seals Project ACTION is launching a new online training course this year for new paratransit managers. It is an eight week course.

[Download Wolf-Branigin Presentation](#)

Regional/State & Local Issues

Jill Hough asked the regional and state members of the Advisory Board to address issues where SURTC can help and to give their ideas for the future direction of SURTC.

Keven Anderson, Minnesota Department of Transportation

Keven Anderson reported Minnesota's transit plan has coordination at the top of their list. The local Council of Governments is pushing for human services agencies with transit programs to coordinate their services.

SURTC could help with researching software packages for small rural systems that are still using pen and paper to schedule, dispatch, and track their rides. The products currently on the market are good for small urban systems with IT staff, but Minnesota has a couple of agencies using local home- built systems. There is a need for software that is cost effective and can efficiently dispatch buses. Currently, there are systems running two and three buses that are using pen and paper, not even using Excel or Access software systems. The transit operators don't have the time or expertise to explore software options. They need software that is plug-and-play and has a lot of serviceability. Many offices have good equipment but are running on dial-up systems, so connectability can be a problem. SURTC could help with updating technology options for transit systems.

Jim Moench, North Dakota Disabilities Advocacy Consortium

Jim Moench was intrigued by the perfect storm comment made by Francis Ziegler and sees it as a change in political climate; as a change in the growth of this country-- a badge of citizenship. Mr. Moench asked if there was some way to emphasize the investment and the return on investment that transportation brings to the American public. What will happen to us if we don't? How can we change the attitude and perception of the public who think we don't have to pay for wars or pay for transportation?

Discussion followed with Gene Griffin suggesting that possibly some kind of study could be done to look at the public's perception of transit and the relationship in paying for it in taxes. The study would center on public policy research and articulate better what people are paying for and what they expect.

Rob Padgette noted that a missing piece is why doesn't transit pay for it itself? It's a business, so it needs to run like a business. For example, letting a person age in place is much cheaper than living in a nursing home.

Lori Van Beek stated that people driving cars think they are paying for the true cost of driving their car. They don't realize they are not. She pointed out that there are hidden costs people aren't paying for.

Al Abeson explained that Easter Seals Project ACTION told success stories of people with disabilities who did have access to transportation. He noted, "What I'm hearing now is that we have a negative piece and say 'This is what will happen if we do not have any transportation.'" It will impact a larger segment of the population. This might be a way to position such a subject.

B. Leone Gibson, Utah Department of Transportation

Leone Gibson remarked, "I've heard a lot about small urban and rural. In Utah, rural is the frontier." She noted that it is difficult to implement programs in rural areas.

Carol Wright responded that SURTC concentrates on frontier rural areas in our training. We have many transit systems that have one bus traveling 150 miles to take one person to a medical appointment. SURTC works closely with transit providers to identify with these small agencies and what their needs are compared to a larger system where you don't have the long distances to travel with a sparse population.

Julie Bommelman, Metropolitan Area Transit-Fargo

Julie Bommelman stated that Fargo-Moorhead is continuing to work on technology implementation. She pointed out that Keven Anderson was right about software. Ms. Bommelman said her personnel sometimes struggle, and they have an IT person on staff. Metropolitan Area Transit has had tremendous increases in ridership. They are up 28%. Conversely, costs have gone up. Fare increases are being proposed. They have been running into Medicaid problems—discovering Medicaid will only pay for certain types of rides. Medicaid eligible people end up on public transportation. As always, dedicated sustainable funding for transit is needed.

Gene Griffin asked if there is a collection of data on small urban and rural areas that looks at operating costs over time.

Bruce Fuchs pointed out that the National Transit Database has always collected this data for small urban and urban transportation systems, and it is just starting to collect it for rural. It is the state Department of Transportation that enters the rural information into the system quarterly. Within another year or two, we will have some reliable data for everyone to use.

Bruce Fuchs commented that the NDDOT is taking a proactive approach to Medicaid transportation. They are working with the North Dakota Department of Human Services. The point of contention is that transportation providers have given Medicaid rides, and eight months later they have still not been paid for those rides. The NDDOT is proposing legislation that would allow the NDDOT to pay the Medicaid ride provider. The provider would get their money right away to operate, and the NDDOT could collect from Medicaid.

Julie Bommelman announced that the F-M Ambulance Ready Wheels is discontinuing service October 1. She is questioning how many of their previous clients will end up using the paratransit system and what impact that may have.

Bruce Lindholm, South Dakota Department of Transportation

Bruce Lindholm indicated that South Dakota purchased dispatching and routing software (Shah's) and as a result, is gaining efficiencies. He suggested that South Dakota would like SURTC to review data as to why software doesn't work for some agencies. He recommended that SURTC look to see if there are thresholds of what size transit operations can benefit from software.

South Dakota would also benefit from the development of a decision tree to assist in determining what type of vehicles particular agencies need. Right now the state DOT allows the agencies to request any type of vehicle they want. Another obstacle in vehicle procurement is the Buy America requirement, which doesn't work. Small states with small transit agencies are small operations, and it is still a big deal to save \$100. This is especially true with today's fuel prices. It would be helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of Buy America.

Lyn Hellegaard, Montana Transit Association

Lyn Hellegaard pointed out that we are in a silver tsunami. The senior population by 2020 will have grown 20-25%. According to national data, we will be experiencing integrating disabled veterans into communities. This will increase transit needs for the local provider. With seniors retiring to the rural states, Montana is anticipating growth in their Section 5307 programs. The funding pool did not grow in reauthorization. Montana currently has three systems but will go to six.

Transit systems spend a lot of time going through the Disadvantage Business Enterprise (DBE) requirements. Ms. Hellegaard recommended a pilot project with SURTC to make a DBE program more attractive in the rural states. The federal government needs to streamline the application process based on an estimated dollar amount to be a DBE so it is more attractive to the business community.

Ms. Hellegaard asked if SURTC could fund a pilot project with a rural agency to support SURTC research.

Bruce Fuchs stated that the state transit office has to be DBE certified. The transit office has to subscribe to the NDDOT DBE policy, but they also have to reinvent the wheel strictly for their own office within the department.

Rob Padgette encouraged SURTC to expand technology assistance via training. Human resource capacity also needs to be developed.

Pam Ternes, Standing Rock Public Transportation

Pam Ternes reported that from a Tribal perspective, population numbers are increasing; population is mostly 18 years and younger. School buses are completely full. There is a transportation issue for Indian health services, where there are 25-50 people who need to be transported to Bismarck every day for medical appointments. They are reaching full capacity for their vehicles. These over capacity issues are very big differences from what other rural areas are experiencing.

Ms. Ternes would like help from SURTC in deciding what size buses should be purchased and how to project these needs. She would also like to work with Jon Mielke on the reservation medical referral statistics. They continue to increase with the cut in Indian Health Services.

Audrey Allums, Montana Department of Transportation

Audrey Allums pointed out one big issue in Montana is Medicaid, Medicaid, Medicaid. All their transit providers are given open ended contracts. Human Services cannot give providers what they should make off Medicaid transportation. And, providers do not know where they are with match.

She reported that there is a need to increase local government participation in transit. The issue becomes how to more effectively sell the concept of financial participation to local government.

Montana transit providers, like other states, also have software issues. There are even some people who can't handle their e-mail.

Ms. Allums stated that another issue was recruitment of transit managers. Montana is looking at how to attract transit professionals to rural areas.

Montana is taking a stand on "No more crappy buses!" Ms. Allums stated that they are not going to accept any buses delivered to their transit agencies that aren't working or do not have warranties.

Bruce Lindholm commented that South Dakota has concluded that the low bid process is not working. South Dakota is looking at potentially going to an RFP process.

Gary Hegland noted that Minnesota has a great RFP program. He pointed out that Keven Anderson would be a great resource.

Ryan Marshall, Utah Urban & Rural Specialized Transportation Association

Ryan Marshall would be interested in the longitudinal study which addressed whether or not college transit users continue to use public transit after leaving college. It was noted

that SURTC is planning a follow-up study to their current longitudinal campus transit study that will look at that issue.

Another issue raised by Mr. Marshall was regarding alternative fuels on buses. He posed a potential research question regarding the benefit of using fuel additives.

He noted that in Utah, Human Services have more funding sources for transportation than a transportation agency does. He observed that it would make sense, therefore, that transit efforts be coordinated. It was pointed out that the United We Ride website has information on how to make these coordination efforts work. Mr. Marshall suggested that this type of coordination is something SURTC could help areas accomplish.

Mr. Valdes added that FTA is trying to consolidate its funding sources.

Ryan Marshall pointed out that Utah has exhausted all Section 5307 funding capabilities, as 5307 funds are based on the 2000 census. He wondered if there was a way this funding formula could be changed.

Rob Padgette is going to publish a paper on this very soon.

Jill Hough stated that SURTC will look at updating the performance measures study.

Ryan Marshall noted that the FTA audit requirement is that you spend 1% on security. This is difficult. He has heard that there is a waiver. Charles Dickson indicated that he can help Ryan with this issue.

Mr. Marshall also posed two additional questions for SURTC to consider: "Where can we get funding to train managers?" and "How can we move seniors from senior rides to public transit?"

Ron Baumgart, River Cities Public Transit

Ron Baumgart began by asking SURTC to help define what transit and transportation will look like in 10 years. Other questions for potential research include: Do we need green vehicles? How are we going to handle senior services in 10 years? What can be done about the Buy America requirements? He pointed out that purchasing vehicles which get 5 to 6 miles per gallon doesn't make sense. His priority is to give rides. These are areas which SURTC may be able to focus on which could benefit transit providers and the transportation industry as a whole.

Lori Van Beek, Metropolitan Area Transit-Moorhead

Lori Van Beek stated that the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) process is an issue. She believes that the threshold for compliance with federal regulations needs to be raised.

If Clay County was to buy an accessible van which could get 18 to 20 miles per gallon, MN DOT doesn't want to get a waiver for Buy America. This can cause a problem for the transit agency who wants to save operating funds.

The closing of Ready Wheels is an issue as Julie Bommelman mentioned earlier.

Ms. Van Beek said that with the quiet zone trains have become a problem. The buses often can't meet their timetables because of being held up by the trains. This makes buses no longer reliable and will affect ridership. She doesn't have an answer to this problem and would like some kind of study done.

They have experienced a 31% increase ridership in July.

Bruce Fuchs, North Dakota Department of Transportation

Bruce Fuchs pointed out that since this is a legislative year, it is critical that all ND constituents be politically active. With the authorization of new legislation to replace SAFETEA-LU, it is essential that all get involved nationally as well. He encouraged everyone present to please get involved.

3 p.m. tour of Alien.