

# Best Practice Suggestions for Transit Systems from Transit Managers

In the fall of 2003, we asked for “Best Practices” ideas from transit managers from across the region. You’ll find the resulting suggestions on this page. It’s a catalogue of good ideas that you may be able to put to work in your own transit agency.



## Protecting Sensitive Info on the Radio

We have initiated a homeland security measure that we’ve never used before in our area. We now use number codes to relay sensitive information through our two-way radio system. For example 10-20 stands for “your location” and 10-42 means “I’ve been involved in an accident”. We feel better using these codes over the radio, keeping sensitive information from getting into the wrong hands.

Midge Kuntz, Elder Care  
Dickinson, ND  
eldercar@pop.ctctel.com



## Creative and Aggressive in Wyoming

We as public transit providers should not be timid in providing service when there are plenty of avenues to form partnerships. We should look to contract for service with our local Head Start, Early Intervention, local colleges, veterans administration, air carriers etc...

Offering a special type of service requires putting the word on the street that it is available. We as providers need to act more like a private business. Be aggressive and creative. Here in Central Wyoming, we provide all the service that people equate with larger cities. We offer Airport Shuttles, group travel for Holiday parties as well as special shuttles for ambulatory patients. All this including Fixed Route and deviated route service Monday thru Friday.

We will be putting together ‘Shopping Shuttles’ for Saturday and perhaps the day after Thanksgiving for the families starting their holiday shopping. The message being; provide quality dependable service at a cost passengers can afford.

Sean Solan, Wind River Transportation Authority  
Riverton, WY  
sean@wrabuslines.com



## Who Do You Call?

Metro Area Transit has put together a comprehensive “Who do you call” list. The list is alphabetical by issue, and lists the name, department or organizations telephone number (work, home and cell) for contact people. The list is utilized by dispatchers and office personnel when drivers radio in problems that need resolution.

Issues listed include: accident, bus to be towed, car in the fire lane, graffiti in shelters, railroad stop arm down, safety concern on the bus, shelter cleaning, shelter repair, shelter ice melt, shelter snow removal, storm cancellations, street sanding, street snow removal, traffic lights out, tree limb removal, weeds in path to shelter, computer problems, bio-hazard cleanup, telephone system problems, etc.

Lori Van Beek, Metro Area Transit  
Fargo-Moorhead  
lori.vanbeek@ci.moorhead.mn.us



## Lists, Lists and More Lists!

Thank God for computers. I make lists. List of Meals on Wheels Clients, Bus Clients, Cleaning list, menus, inventory lists, time sheets, board summaries, payroll registers, etc and all this is saved in the computer so all I have to do is change months and print.

Hospitality House Senior Center  
Big Timber, MT  
hhsc@mtio.net

Small Urban & Rural Transit Center  
North Dakota State University  
PO Box 5074  
Fargo, North Dakota 58105  
701.231.7767  
www.surtc.org





### **Give Me a Brake**

I remind our drivers every time that it snows, when coming to an intersection which looks to be or is very slippery, to begin the stopping procedure farther back from the intersection, put the transmission into neutral. I remind them which buses have ABS braking systems and to hold the brake pedal down and not to pump the brakes. If they are operating one of our older buses that are not equipped with ABS brakes we go through procedure for stopping with that vehicle. Caution must be used with air brake systems as not to pump the brakes so many times that all the air is used and the pressure drops so low that the parking brakes come on automatically.

Darrell Michalenko, Minot City Transit  
Minot, ND  
michalen@web.ci.minot.nd.us



### **Service Overhaul Nets Savings**

Cities Area Transit formally known as Grand Forks City Bus has had a long standing contract for its Paratransit service with local taxi companies. For more than 20 years the City of Grand Forks has maintained a subsidy-sided service which allows the two taxi companies to provide taxi level service for all who qualify for complimentary service. The service had taken on a life of its own over time and to some degree was operating on “auto pilot.” Recently, a closer look was taken at this service and it was determined that it needed a major overhaul.

The need for an overhaul resulted in a full audit of both taxi companies and the manner in which they were accounting for rides was looked at very closely. The net result was an immediate savings of over \$25,000. This best practice story is quite long but our agency is very willing to share lessons learned.

Roger Foster, Cities Area Transit  
Grand Forks, ND  
rfoster@grandforksgov.com



### **Slow Down for Winter Safety**

Since winter is now in full swing, we have put into effect a new “Take Time & Slow Down policy. We have door to door service with our transit now, but with the recent snow and ice I have talked to my drivers about getting out of the bus and helping each client, whether young or old, even if they do not want help. Drivers should just be there beside them until they get loaded on the bus. We have put into the policy that when a client calls for their ride that we give them an extra 5 minutes loading and unloading time. (For instance) if they call for a 10:45 pick up, we tell them we will pick them up at 10:40 instead, to allow enough time to help each client so no one falls or gets hurt during the icy season. Also our drivers are to be very careful driving on the icy streets and slow way down while transporting our clients. They are to be to work earlier and start each route earlier. So far this has helped our clients and they feel much safer being helped. I have seen too many people fall and get hurt during the winter season. If we can prevent just one spill it will be worth the effort for slowing down.

Peggy Morris, Golden Days Senior Center and Public Transit – Redfield, SD  
plmorris@nvc.net



### **Free Rides Boost Ridership**

West River Transit provides transit in six counties with thirteen buses. Each December West River transports all individuals free of charge with our “Ride Free Week”, for any regular scheduled route trip. We started this a year ago to promote our system, by getting new individual to try the bus at no charge in hopes they will continue using the system all year long. We have added to our ridership with this promotion, and we will continue this “best practice” for our clientele, and the future of our systems ridership. The cost of doing this has been worth the additional riders.

Carol Anderson, West River Transportation  
Bismarck, ND  
westriver.bisman@midconetwork.com





## Bus Safety Inspections

The practice we are incorporating into our Dawson Heartland Express Bus System of Dawson, Minn., is for the midday (shift change) driver to take the time to perform their own bus safety inspection. (On some days the pick-up schedule for passengers becomes too busy and we are pressed for time.) The starting driver always does a pre-trip inspection of the bus, but the new change-of-shift driver is now also checking the 4-ways flashers, signal lights, headlamps and clearance lights, brake and back-up lights before they begin their shift and initial a form stating that the bus is in safe driving condition. We feel this is a valuable practice and the driver accepts responsibility for this, especially if there were to be an accident because of a faulty turn signal.

Bernie Struck, Dawson Heartland Express Bus System  
Dawson, MN  
bernie@dawsonmn.com



## Grocery Run

Paul Bunyan Transit has provided a bus for grocery shopping on Tuesday mornings for a number of years. This is provided for a number of the local apartment complexes in the community.

One of the community's local grocery stores pays the fare for the number of riders that utilize this service, provides donuts and juice to riders/shoppers, a staff person to assist them in carrying and delivering their groceries to the bus and their apartment complex. This provides a valuable service for the people who utilize this service and caters to those that need the extra help with packages, etc.

Paul Bunyan Transit receives revenue for providing this service from the grocery store along with an increase in ridership which puts us out in the community and personalizes our service.

Roger Allen, Paul Bunyan Transit  
Bemidji, MN  
pbtrans@paulbunyan.net



## Rides to Lunch

We were discussing nutritious meals for the elderly and handicapped individuals who live in their own homes in our community. We looked into meals-on-wheels. This is a great program, however, it does not provide for socialization for our elderly or handicapped population. After much discussion we came up with the following:

- This group of people has a hot meal but no socialization with others during their meal.
- We found that this group of individuals have the funds for a suggested meal cost (zero can be their contribution) HOWEVER,
- They DO NOT HAVE THE FUNDS for transportation to and from the meal site.

Therefore we started two programs. The first was the Meal Participation Program for the elderly. This is a free round trip ride from their home to the Senior Meals and Service Center for lunch. We ask the individuals to call a day ahead of time if they can, HOWEVER, if an individual calls at 10:30 a.m. and requests a ride for a meal that day, it will be provided. We provided 235 rides from July 1 through November 30, 2003 for noon meals.

The second program is the Drop-Inn Program for the handicapped. Their meals are also provided for a suggested donation. However, they too run into the problem of transportation. Therefore, their ride is provided free to and from the Drop-Inn Center. We provided 307 rides from July 1 through November 30, 2003 for the noon meal.

We feel all individuals should be allowed independent living and will be healthier and happier getting a well balanced meal and socialization with others.

We secure funds from our local United Way, County Commission, City Commission, local banks, fraternal organizations and also from campaigns to the local community to help one-another.

Jacque Senger, Lake Region Transportation  
Devils Lake, ND  
jacquencpc@stellarnet.com





## Unlimited Ride Coupons

One of the best practices we initiated this year is a \$20 “Monthly Unlimited Ride Coupon” for passengers age 65 or over - good for all rides needed within the community or county provided rides are pre-scheduled. Our standard fare rate is \$2 per one way trip in-town which is often difficult for some of our elderly passengers to pay, especially if they are on limited incomes and must decide if they can justify spending the \$2. This ride incentive was made possible by a grant obtained from the MN Dept. of Human Services – Long term Care Initiative - to help the elderly access services and remain independent. Even when our grant funds are no longer available to subsidize the cost of these ride coupons, this is one initiative we will continue because having affordable transportation is critical to sustaining independence and well being of so many transit dependent people. We also plan to expand this initiative to include all ages at various times throughout the year because busy families can’t always afford the cost or take time off work to get kids or loved ones where they need to go. We have seen a substantial increase in passenger trips because people will ride the bus if they can afford it. The “Unlimited Ride Coupons” are simple to administer and they make great gift ideas. It’s nice to pay only once for a card that will cover the cost of all rides for a full month!

Jeanette Aguirre, Western Community Action Inc.  
Marshall, MN  
jeanette.aguirre@wcainc.org



## Feeding the Hungry

Tioga Senior Citizens Public Transit has been trying a policy of delivering commodities to recipients who are unable to pick them up from Williston, a larger distribution center 50 miles from here. A local food bank reimburses the club for cost of vehicle and regular drivers can volunteer their time. Youth groups have volunteered their time loading at Williston and individuals volunteer to unload and deliver door to door. Many are unable to drive or find transportation for the delivery of these USDA food items so this service enables them to continue living independently and survive when utilities and health care cost are rising. I like to think of our mission as being: FEED THE HUNGRY AND IT IS NOT ONLY FOOD.

L. Lawrence, Tioga Senior Citizens Public Transit  
Tioga, ND  
lawrncet@nccray.com



## Dude, Where’s My Ride?

The Missoula Ravalli TMA developed a transportation guide for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The guide covered fixed route, demand response, for hire, medical service and independent service providers in Ravalli and Missoula counties. Information included service area, who the service was available for, cost, wheelchair accessibility, hours of service and any other additional information that might help user access transportation services. The guide was printed on 11x17 paper, so the print could be enlarged to accommodate diminishing vision issues of seniors. The guide was distributed at city health fairs (where individuals staffing the booth wore specially made T-shirts which had the same design as the guide cover), public library and clients of the local Transportation Advisory Committee. The guide was produced and printed in-house at the MRTMA offices using desktop publishing software to keep costs down.

Lyn Hellegaard, Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Assn. – Missoula, MT  
mrtma2@montana.com



## PR Partnership

Paul Bunyan Transit works with a Bemidji State University Public Relations class in the Fall and Winter. The instructor requires students to do intern projects with local non-profits in Bemidji. This provides non-profits with limited public relations dollars to get a number of projects done that they would not normally be able to do.

These students are working for a grade which forces them to put time and effort into the project or projects. They provide the leg work, some expertise and in return for an opportunity to apply their interest to a real-life situation.

Paul Bunyan Transit has gotten a video completed along with extra exposure to college students that would never have been possible without this cooperative effort. It is a win-win situation. It truly has enhanced what we are able to do as an agency and gives us greater exposure in the community.

Roger Allen, Paul Bunyan Transit  
Bemidji, MN  
pbtrans@paulbunyan.net

