

**PREMIERE
ISSUE**

The Transit Lane

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New Center to Address Rural and Small Urban Transit Issues

Demand for transportation continues to grow in large and small municipalities and in rural areas throughout the country. Mobility is a requirement for quality of life. It is essential for people to work, shop, socialize, participate in the political process, worship, or be involved with numerous life enriching activities. Further, there are significant problems in the mobility of the disadvantaged. To them, public transportation is literally their lifeline to society.



IACC Building, home of SURTC

Large metropolitan areas of the United States have captured much of the public transportation attention and funding while proportionately less attention has been paid to rural areas and small urban centers. The Small Urban & Rural Transit Center (SURTC) at North Dakota State University has been initiated, with federal funds from the Federal Transit Administration, United States Department of Transportation, to help address this inequity. SURTC is a research program within the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute.

SURTC was developed to conduct research, design educational programs, and coordinate training needs for transit systems in the small urban and rural areas. The new program is housed within the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute (UGPTI) at NDSU. The benefits of SURTC being at UGPTI are that research staff have a history of transit research

(for a list of these publications see www.surtc.org); SURTC will partner with other research programs in UGPTI including the Advanced Traffic Analysis Center, TEL8, and the Mountain-Plains Consortium.

Public transportation has the ability to make a significant contribution to the economy and the quality of life. SURTC will provide the knowledge and train human capital that is necessary for transit to realize that opportunity.

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SURTC's Programs

SURTC is a program of leadership and partnership helping people solve mobility and transportation issues in the Great Plains states including: Western Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

The vision of the SURTC is to develop a Center of Excellence that addresses the transportation needs of the public in small urban and rural locations.

The mission of the SURTC is to be a research support and outreach center to assist small urban and rural transit systems and other transit entities by conducting relevant research and offering outreach and training.

The research undertaken will look particularly at social equity, transit ridership, improved technology and air quality. The Center will provide information to transit agencies, businesses and communities aiding them in planning, coordinating, and decision making.

Education will consist of undergraduate and graduate courses in public transportation, preparing students to become leaders in the transit industry. In addition, SURTC will work with other faculty to incorporate public transit in student curriculum.

SURTC will also focus on training, outreach and service. Training will be conducted as needed, particularly in the DOT region 8 states. One of the first projects will be to offer the CTAA transit manager training. Other training programs will be developed to meet user needs.

The service function of the program will be carried out using both traditional and non-traditional methods of dissemination and assistance. The Advanced

Traffic Analysis Center (ATAC) training facility/laboratory will be used for training individual practitioners in the use of advanced technologies. Additionally, the TEL8 system will be used to disseminate results and conduct workshops and seminars.

The specific goals of SURTC are:

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's Vision

Develop a Center of Excellence that addresses the transportation needs of the public in small urban and rural locations.



What Can SURTC Do for You?

The SURTC team wants to assist the transit industry in research, education, and training & outreach. Please let us know if you would like to host a training session in your city or have suggestions for research projects.



Jill Hough Leads SURTC



Jill Hough, program director of the new Small Urban and Rural Transit Center at the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute, wants to see public transportation become a practical lifeline for rural and small urban areas.

Hough brings 12 years of experience in transportation research to the program. In addition to working in the area of public transportation, Hough has published numerous reports and articles in the areas of transit, roads, logistics and economic development. She has worked on several projects in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Transportation. For four months in 1998 she was interim director for the Federal Transit Administration's Transit Intelligent Vehicle Initiative in Washington, D.C.

SURTC is ideally suited to her research interests in public transportation. Her interests tie into the overall SURTC goals of making life better for people through affordable, accessible transportation. She wants people to be able to commute to work, obtain health care, access job opportunities, shop, socialize, vote, and to attend worship and community events.

Economics has factored into Hough's work since she was a graduate research assistant in the Department of Agricultural Economics at North Dakota State University in 1988-89. From 1990 on she has been an associate research fellow at the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute.

She earned her bachelor's degree in 1988 and her master's degree in 1991 from ND SU, both in agricultural economics. She is working on her Ph.D. in transportation technology and policy from the University of California - Davis.

Hegland Joins SURTC Team



When Gary Hegland joined the Small Urban & Rural Transportation Center as an associate research fellow, he returned to North Dakota State University where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1970 and his master's degree in 1972, both in economics. From 1997 until joining SURTC, Hegland worked with Job Service North Dakota.

The North Dakota native became well acquainted with rural transportation issues during his 20-plus years working on the family farm, complementing that with sales of agricultural products. His mixed-farm operation followed service in the United States Air Force as a B-52 pilot.

His focus with SURTC is on rural transit systems. Hegland's background gives him insight into many transportation issues facing small urban and rural communities. He looks at the current and future impact of transit systems and the potential impact of transit systems for elderly, low income and handicapped residents.

Miller, New Faculty Affiliate



Miller is the first affiliated faculty member in SURTC. He holds a joint appointment with the Department of Business Logistics and the Pennsylvania Transportation Institute at Pennsylvania State University. Throughout his 30-year career, he has taught, conducted research, and consulted in small urban and rural transit systems. He knows and likes the subject matter. His Ph.D. dissertation was about small urban transit planning. Miller has performed a number of transit planning studies for rural and small urban areas in Pennsylvania, as well as conducting policy studies for the state and federal government.

(Miller continued on page 4)



(Miller continued from page 3)

While his work has been primarily in Pennsylvania, a state claiming the second most rural residents in the nation, he is excited by the idea of trying to find mobility solutions for sparsely settled rural areas.

Miller earned his B.S. at the University of Cincinnati in economics, and his MBA and Ph.D. at the Pennsylvania State University.

SURTC on the Web



Patrick Nichols is the web communications manager for the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. Through that assignment, Nichols also works on the Web site for the Small Urban & Rural Transit Center.

He is working on his master's degree at the same time he focuses on improving the day-to-day operation of the UGPTI Web sites. Nichols is also developing new ways to communicate with Web users.

Nichols has two years of experience in Web communications and holds a bachelor's degree in graphic communications with a minor in computer information systems, which he earned in 2001 from Minnesota State University-Moorhead.

Student at SURTC



Crystal Bahe is a North Dakota State University senior majoring in sociology. She assists in data collection and report preparation for the Center.

SURTC Steering Committee

In addition to the professional staff, there is a steering committee that works with SURTC. These individuals represent the public transit sector, and national and state organizations that focus on improving public transportation. The steering committee will provide guidance to the Center. The committee members include:

- Keven Anderson, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Julia Bommelman, Metro Area Transit, Fargo
- Jeri Bottenfield, Wyoming Public Transit Association
- Lewis Clopton, Federal Transit Administration
- Rich Douglas, Wyoming Department of Transportation
- Bruce Fuchs and Bill Weimer, North Dakota Department of Transportation
- Lyn Hellegaard, Montana Transit Association
- Tony Kouneski, American Public Transportation Association
- Bruce Lindholm, South Dakota Department of Transportation
- Dale Marisco, Community Transportation Association of America
- Peggy Morris, Dakota Transit Association
- Rick Thoms, Souris Basin Transportation Board
- Lori VanBeek, City of Moorhead (Minn.), transit
- Janis Winston, Montana Department of Transportation



Partners

SURTC works with internal and external partners to further public transportation.

SURTC Internal Partners

Advanced Traffic Analysis Center (ATAC)

The purpose of the ATAC is to enhance transportation systems in small to medium size cities through the use of advanced traffic analysis and ITS solutions to safety and mobility problems. The ATAC will deepen the technological component of the SURTC by combining expertise in traffic and passenger movement and the use of ITS.

Mountain-Plains Consortium (MPC)

The Mountain-Plains Consortium (MPC) is one of the 10 competitively selected University Transportation Centers sponsored by the United States Department of Transportation. This program is a national resource and focal point for the support of research and training concerning transportation infrastructure and the movement of passengers and freight. The MPC and SURTC will complement one another in the efforts of focusing on the movement or mobility of people.

TEL8

The TEL8 system is an interactive telecommunications network linking several universities and Departments of Transportation (DOT) in the western United States including North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming. The telecommunications capacity also extends beyond these states. The TEL8 system will play an integral role with the SURTC as research, education, and training are disseminated throughout the rural states. Transit managers or other transit affiliates will have the opportunity to participate in the exchange of knowledge.

SURTC External Partners

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

The FTA works to improve the accessibility of America's communities by providing leadership, technical assistance and financial resources for safe, technologically advanced public transportation systems.

Community Transit Association (CTAA)

CTAA is a national, professional membership association of organizations and individuals committed to removing barriers to isolation and to improving mobility for all people. CTAA conducts research, provides technical assistance, offers educational programs and serves as an advocate to make coordinated community transportation available, affordable and accessible. SURTC and CTAA will partner with an emphasis on providing training to remote locations in the geographic scope of the Center.

American Public Transit Association (APTA)

APTA is one of the leading organizations advancing public transportation. They serve and lead a diverse membership through advocacy, innovation, and information sharing to strengthen and expand public transportation.



Steering Committee Meeting

The SURTC held its first steering committee meeting on October 2, 2002. Committee members were introduced to the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute (UGPTI) and SURTC. Mr. Gene Griffin, UGPTI director, provided an overview of the UGPTI organization, and the directors of each of the three research centers in UGPTI (Dr. Ayman Smadi, Advanced Traffic Analysis Center; Mr. Dennis Jacobson, the Department of Transportation Support Center; and Mr. Douglas Benson, TEL8) gave a short synopsis of their center's goals and objectives. Mr. Dave Sprynczynatyk, director of the North Dakota Department of Transportation provided a welcome from Bismarck over the TEL8 system.

A national perspective overview was given by Dr. Lewis Clopton, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), on five key issues: 1) USDOT Surface Transportation University Program, 2) FTA Core Program Goals, 3) Professional Capacity Building, 4) FTA University Activities, and 5) Small Urban and Rural Transportation Challenges and Opportunities.

Mr. Dale Marsico, director of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) discussed three key issues his organization is dealing with: 1) transportation re-authorization, 2) certification for industry professionals, and

3) improving communications with state insurance commissioners.

The results of the User Needs Assessment Survey conducted by SURTC was presented and discussed. The discussion, following the presentation, lead to identification of six key focus projects for SURTC:

- Training is a very important element of SURTC and this was validated by the survey
- Developing a "best practice" guidebook would be beneficial to transit managers
- The benefits of area transit systems' profiling were highlighted and noted that profiles are not currently available for several states
- A composite of a local area's system average operating costs and revenues for services provided
- Greater utilization of the World Wide Web in three key areas, education purposes, driver training, and collection and dissemination of privileged statistical data for managers
- SURTC could help with educational planning for the Dakota Transit Association (DTA)

Two of the attendees were later interviewed regarding the needs and benefits of the SURTC research organization. Their responses were very supportive toward SURTC.



Left to right: Peggy Morris, DTA; Bruce Lindholm, SDDOT; Lyn Hellegaard, MTDOT; Keven Anderson, MDOT; Lori VanBeek, City of Moorhead Transit; Julie Bommelman, MAT-Fargo; Rick Thomas, Souris Basin Transportation Board; and Crystal Bahe SURTC student.



Left to right: Dale Marsico, CTAA; Rich Douglas, Wyoming DOT; Lewis Clopton, FTA; and Bruce Fuchs, NDDOT.



Keven Anderson

Minnesota Department of Transportation District 4 headquarters focuses on west central Minnesota. Keven Anderson is the MN/DOT representative to the Small Urban & Rural Transit Center board. His service area includes 3,671 lane miles of roadway, 327 state bridges, 13 rest areas and 12 transit providers.

As a Minnesota state employee, Anderson calls his viewpoints more fiscal and technical. SURTC, he said, can contribute to improving the performance and funding of public transportation, which will in turn contribute to helping local residents.

His premise is to treat public transit as a business rather than a social service program that requires constant funding. "In my opinion, each system needs to have complete plans and goals as well as day-to-day reports in order to justify and tweak their performance. Performance parameters such as rides per hour, cost per hour, cost per ride and farebox recovery need to be analyzed and used to mold a rural system."

"I would propose that the rural systems could gain enormously by fashioning themselves after the urban system, as long as they realize that some of the logistics and concepts are different and would need a broader viewpoint in order to apply," Anderson said.

He also believes the opportunity for combined or cooperative transportation in most areas is enormous. Public transit, he said, needs to integrate itself into programs such as Day Activity Centers, special school transportation, Headstart, Medicare as well as elderly and disability transportation. These are also additional likely sources of revenue.

Coordination of services and dollars can also move public transit officials away from having to explain to citizens why a Headstart bus pulls up behind the public transit bus that pulls up behind the school bus.

Dale Marsico

Dale Marsico serves on the SURTC board, representing the interests of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and bringing his own rich background in transportation, health and human services. CTAA executive director since 1996, Marsico sees the Small Urban & Rural Transit Center as something unique, timely and needed.

"I've felt that we need a stronger link between colleges and universities that serve rural states and communities providing rural transportation services and support. Using the university and its potential links through various departments and training opportunities can strengthen local projects and local efforts to improve transportation access for rural residents," Marsico said. He welcomes being on the ground floor of SURTC's initial work.

"I've felt that we need a stronger link between colleges and universities that serve rural states and communities providing rural transportation services and support." – Dale Marsico, CTAA

The vision of SURTC parallels much of CTAA's vision of a mobile society with freedom, independence, dignity and choice seen as essentials for new and expanding community transportation alternatives.

Marsico believes transportation and people's needs are an intricate partnership. Both standard of living and quality of life are enhanced when the full technical expertise of SURTC comes into service planning and development. This ultimately benefits those who need greater transportation access. Rural communities seek to improve their economic base in these uncertain economic times and transportation and transit have great implications for economic development.

Marsico reflects the attitude of the SURTC board when he emphasizes the need to find ways to help people be mobile. His own move into the transportation field came through his work in primary and secondary health care for rural communities as well as developing regional activities in the employment and training field. He became the first chief administrator for the Brazos, Texas Transit District, where he developed a reputation

(Marsico continued on page 10)



RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDERWAY

Assessment Shows Transit, Training Needs

A significant goal of the Small Urban & Rural Transit Center (SURTC) is to determine the education, research and technical assistance priorities of transit providers. One of the first initiatives of SURTC was to survey public transportation providers in western Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming to learn more about their needs. Having information from people on the front lines of transportation helps SURTC create effective, efficient and useful programs.

Providers were given background information about SURTC and asked about training, education, technical assistance and research priorities. Of the 311 questionnaires sent out, 137 were returned. The responses provided excellent information for the SURTC team.

The survey revealed that 81 percent of responding agencies participate in transit-related training and 71 percent have funds available for training. The top survey conclusion is that driver training is a priority and training for others involved in transit systems is of high interest. Prioritization of driver training showed defensive driving was a high priority followed by safety and security, passenger assistance, customer service, Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, and drug and alcohol testing.

The previously mentioned training sessions fit into the educational priorities of SURTC. In addition to short-term and non-degree training programs, SURTC is planning one or more college courses. These courses will be offered on the North Dakota State University campus and possibly via the World Wide Web or teleconferencing. (TEL8, which regularly conducts teleconference classes, is located on the NDSU campus.)

Providers were also asked what technical assistance activities they considered valuable. The top ranked activities included: 1) a resource library; 2) Website with links to on-site technical assistance; and 3) Tel/Web “ask an expert.”

The survey asked providers to rank research priorities. Items with high priority included: 1) advanced technology; 2) new approaches to service design and delivery; 3) needs assessment and rider forecasting technology; and 4) case studies of best practices.

Based on survey responses, SURTC will conduct applied research to develop data and recommendations that have the promise of helping rural and small urban systems improve the effectiveness and efficiencies of their services.



North Dakota State University and Community Transit Research Project

North Dakota State University (NDSU) is considered a small urban university with growing transit needs. NDSU has an enrollment of over 11,000 students and just over 2,000 full-time faculty and staff. Most of the individuals live in the Fargo-Moorhead area. The university anticipates continued growth. To address present and future growth, NDSU President Joseph Chapman asked SURTC to conduct a campus transit research study.

The university transit study is designed to enhance campus mobility. The campus already has a Circulator serving a designated route. The study will examine the Circulator route to ascertain if it is meeting students' mobility needs. Modifications to the route may be recommended. The study will also

focus on the campus interface with the city's transit system, Metropolitan Area Transit (MAT) in order to efficiently move students, faculty and staff to and from campus. NDSU is expanding its campus to include downtown Fargo, by the acquisition of a building that will be open in 2004, to serve architecture, landscape architecture and visual arts programs. It will be important to have transportation services to this location. The study will also consider how to better serve the transit needs for the Tri-College system. The Tri-College



system allows students to take courses between three different campuses in the Fargo-Moorhead area including: Concordia College, Minnesota State University - Moorhead, and NDSU.

Most university campuses have parking problems and NDSU is no exception. Parking at NDSU is an obstacle for many students due to the high demand and limited supply of spaces.

The study is in progress. Results have been tabulated for two surveys that were sent out fall 2002. The surveys were administered to identify the students', and faculty and staff transit needs. Initial reports have been developed. If you would like to see a draft copy, please contact the SURTC office.

The goal of the study is to better understand campus transit needs. It is hoped that responding to these needs will increase transit ridership. The findings from this research project will be useful to NDSU and other universities investigating the implementation of transit services to serve their campuses. For additional information please contact Gary Hegland at (gary.hegland@ndsu.nodak.edu) or Jill Hough at (jill.hough@ndsu.nodak.edu).



Mobility Issue for Disadvantaged Citizens Addressed

Life for those individuals without the necessary transportation to join in everyday activities such as working, shopping, or socializing is severely degraded at best. This is not an issue for sectors of the population that may take their mobility for granted. Some may assume that everyone has the same capability to participate in our system as they do. This may not be true. There may be a segment of population in several rural states that do not enjoy the same social and economic opportunities that the general population does because of a lack of mobility. One such group may be the mentally or physically disadvantaged.

Individuals who are physically or mentally disadvantaged not only have a psychological need to participate in society and the economy, but also make valuable contributions. This element is amplified when considering that several rural states have limited



labor supply. These citizens can contribute to the economy as active consumers if given the ability to be gainfully employed. It is important to evaluate their opportunities to participate in the socioeconomic system.

There is no question that the physically and mentally disadvantaged are a recognizable group in North Dakota. What is not known is what their specific transportation needs are and to what degree their needs are being met. SURTC is working on a study to answer these two fundamental questions. Four Centers of Independent Living in North Dakota have worked with Jill Hough to administer

random surveys to their population of disadvantaged clients. Results for the study will be available this Spring. For more information, contact Jill Hough (jill.hough@ndsu.nodak.edu).

(Marsico continued from page 7)

for coordination and innovative service that included special emphasis on transportation planning and infrastructure development. The Texas DOT presented him with the Friend of Transportation award.

At the CTAA, Marsico seeks to broaden the traditional base by reaching out to those in related fields, works to see that the Association's legislative priorities are achieved and to expand awareness of community transportation as an important part of the nation's transportation future.



Coordination of North Dakota Transit Services

Census numbers show North Dakota with an aging population. This, coupled with migration of its young people to larger metropolitan areas and out of state, means North Dakota faces a double whammy of fewer people and more older, low-income and disadvantaged people among those who remain, especially in rural areas. The 2000 Census reveals North Dakota grew only .53 percent since 1990. Only six of 53 counties gained population.

Transportation for fewer people spread across sparsely populated areas on rural road systems, becomes increasingly difficult in such a scenario. Providing transportation services to people who, by anecdotal evidence, prefer to live in rural areas creates further issues.

Fewer taxpayer's dollars and providing services to more people – how can it happen? How can the state succeed in assuring its citizens have the transportation services needed, especially for the elderly, disadvantaged, and handicapped? The Small Urban & Rural Transit Center will address these issues in their research project “*Coordinating Transportation Services in North Dakota.*” The project seeks ways to improve coordination for rural passenger transportation. The objective

is to identify how Federally funded transit agencies can coordinate with other government agencies that provide transportation as a secondary service. This will help better utilize scarce resources.

SURTC is forming a coordination task force of state leaders in transportation, human services, and other government agencies to steer the project and assist with the formulation of a strategic plan. SURTC staff will gather information from state agencies to ascertain the degree of current coordination in North Dakota. This will identify the level of transportation coordination currently being provided and identify areas where increased coordination can further benefit the customer, while not distracting from the services of the agency.

When the task force has this information, a wide range of options along with an implementation plan, can be laid out to improve coordination services in North Dakota.

For more information on the project contact Gary Hegland (gary.hegland@ndsu.nodak.edu) or Jill Hough (jillhough@ndsu.nodak.edu).

PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Development of Modified Fixed-Route

Rural areas with public transportation are primarily reliant on demand response service where they contact a dispatcher to arrange a ride from one location to another for a certain day and time. Some small urban locations also rely on demand response service to meet their transit needs rather than adopting a fixed-route approach. The exodus from rural to small urban locations may result in increased population bases as well as increased miles and number of rides for demand response systems. These changes may

warrant fixed-route service or a modified fixed-route, which stops at frequent requested destinations, e.g., grocery store, Walmart, etc. The North Dakota Department of Transportation is in the process of contracting with SURTC to undertake a case study of Jamestown to determine if the city has enough riders to support a modified fixed-route in addition to their demand response system. The study is proposed to begin this Spring. For addition information, contact Jill Hough (jill.hough@ndsu.nodak.edu).



North Dakota Mobility Plan

SURTC has been asked by the North Dakota Department of Transportation to collect information and coordinate a statewide discussion of passenger mobility needs that will result in a statewide Mobility Plan for North Dakota. The DOT committed to this plan as one of the action items of its recently completed long range transportation plan, *TransAction*.

The purpose of the mobility plan is to provide North Dakota policy makers with a guide to future development of public transportation options, and to identify gaps that either now exist in mobility services or are likely to exist in the near future as the result of service curtailments. The planning process itself will serve as an opportunity for key stakeholders to discuss the desired level of personal mobility that should be the goal within the state and to review ways to provide the financial and operational resources needed to accomplish these goals. The scope of the mobility study includes all forms of local and intercity passenger transportation including AMTRAK intercity rail service, scheduled commercial and air taxi aviation, local and intercity bus, public and human service paratransit services, and local taxi services.

Once the plan is completed, it will be used by the North Dakota Legislature to identify programmatic and funding needs for passenger transportation. It can also be used by the North Dakota DOT to help determine funding priorities for the use of state funds and federal funds under state control. Further, the data collected can be used by local and regional agencies to plan for new or revised local services.

The 18-month study will begin in the spring of 2003 and will seek to determine the adequacy of local and intercity passenger transportation services in North Dakota, and to make recommendations concerning policies and specific programs and projects that can improve personal mobility for North Dakota residents. A key to this task is to agree upon the desired end state, i.e., how much local and intercity passenger transportation is desired or possible in North

Dakota. There are no national standards or technical guidelines that can help establish this desired level of service. Rather, key stakeholders, including individuals at all levels of government, public and private sectors, users and providers of service will need to discuss and debate this issue and agree upon an achievable goal for future services. This will be accomplished through focus group meetings. For example, is it reasonable to expect that some form of public transportation be available to every resident of the state? If so, how much service – daily, weekly, etc? In terms of intercity service, what is a reasonable expectation for access to rail, air, or intercity bus service? Further, at the request of the North Dakota Department of Transportation, we will address levels of service with regard to accessibility, scheduling, modal choice, affordability, comfort, intermodal connections, reliability, and congestion.

A website will be established to help the various committees and stakeholders communicate with the study team. In addition, all of the data on passenger services and demographic trends will be available through the website to help local providers, users, and decision makers better understand the current status of passenger mobility in the state.

For more information on this mobility plan contact Jill Hough (jillhough@ndsu.nodak.edu) or Dr. James Miller (jmiller45@mindspring.com).

Coming Soon!

SURTC is in the process of developing a LISTSERV and a discussion board to facilitate information exchange over the web. Please go to www.surtc.org to sign up.

