

The Transit Lane

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Future Bright for Public Transit in Rural Areas

The future is bright for public transportation in rural areas and small communities, says Bill Millar, president of the American Public Transportation Association.

“The fastest areas of growth have been in rural, small city and suburban areas,” Millar notes. Bus ridership in towns with fewer than 50,000 people increased by 39 percent from 1995 to 2000. Ridership in towns with between 50,000 and 100,000 people increased by 12 percent and ridership in small cities with populations between 100,000 and 250,000 increased by 14 percent.

He made the remarks during a guest lecture for SURTC’s Introduction to Mass Transportation course. The course is offered on the NDSU campus and is linked to universities and departments of transportation in North Dakota, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming via the TEL8 system, a

telecommunications link serving that region and designed to enhance transportation research, education and technology transfer.

Millar was able to participate in the course through a video link to Washington, D.C.

Overall, the number of riders using public transportation is at its highest level in 40 years. Ridership is up 18 percent since 1995, he says. “That’s a million more riders a day.”

Millar says that ridership is a direct result of a steady increase in public investment that has improved the quality and availability of services.

Millar cited Gwinnett County, Ga., Midland and Odessa, Texas, Eagle County, Colo., and Glendale, Ariz., as rural, suburban and small city areas that have recently launched fixed-route bus systems. Bismarck, N.D., launched its fixed route service in May.

While public transit has been growing rapidly in rural areas, there are still challenges ahead. “Two-thirds of residents in rural areas have no access to transit services,” he says.

Millar noted that public transportation is a \$37 billion industry in the United States. More than \$11 billion is spent on capital expenditures by the industry each year with most of those funds coming from federal, state and local governments. More than \$25 billion is spent on operating costs and is provided by passenger fares, local and other earnings, and federal and state funding.

As a result of federal investment in public transportation, Millar says the transportation bill being debated in congress now will have a significant impact on transit



Bill Millar
APTA President

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Continued Federal Investment Vital for Public Transit

Federal funds for transit are an important investment in a public service that citizens have come to expect, according to an official of the U.S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA).



Barbara Sisson

“People consider mass transit a public service and there is an expectation that the Government assist with funding,” says Barbara Sisson, Associate Administrator in FTA’s Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation.

Public Transit doesn’t serve only our major urban centers, Sisson notes. In FY03 there were 1,281 transit agencies that received federal funds for public transportation in rural and small urban areas (population under 50,000). Elderly and disabled riders receive service from another 3,660 agencies in the United States.

She made the remarks during a guest lecture for SURTC’s Introduction to Mass Transportation course. The course is offered on the NDSU campus and is linked to universities and departments of transportation in North Dakota, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming via the TEL8 system, a telecommunications link serving that region and designed to enhance transportation research, education and technology transfer.

The video course was linked to Sisson’s office in Washington, D.C.

According to the American Public Transportation Association, the federal and state government provide about 18 percent of funding for public transportation. Local governments provide another 31 percent.

According to Sisson, Federal funds are used mostly for capital investment and are prohibited from being used for operating costs for transit agencies serving urban areas of more than 200,000 people. Nationally, federal funds pay for about 51 percent of all transit capital investment.

The FTA’s research program is designed to help transit agencies make the best use of those funds, Sisson says. “We look at innovations using off-the-shelf technology. We look at innovations using new technology or we look at ways of using both. We want to help the transit industry use resources in the most efficient and effective manner to move more people for less money.”

The mission of FTA’s research program is to “deliver solutions that improve public transportation”. Goals of the program are to partner with the transit industry to:

- Increase transit ridership
- Improve safety and emergency preparedness
- Improve capital and operating efficiencies
- Protect the environment and promote energy security

Although light and heavy rail systems are included in the FTA’s research program, buses are also a priority, Sisson says.

“Buses are the Rodney Dangerfield of Mass Transit; they don’t get much respect. People see them as a crowded, unclean, and slow-moving way of getting around,” Sisson says. “But in many areas, the majority of riders use buses as their means of transit.”

One goal of the research program is to change this perception of buses. The research program includes testing of new bus models for safety, energy efficiency, durability, efficiency, noise, emissions and braking. The FTA also studies innovations such as fuel cell technology, alternative fuels, batteries and other technology that will make buses safer and more efficient.

“At the FTA, we’re very concerned with ridership. If people are not riding mass transportation, then these resources are being wasted and their economic benefits are not fully realized in our communities.”

(Future – continued from page 1)

systems across the country. The Senate bill includes \$318 billion in expenditures on transportation over the next six years including \$56.5 billion for public transit. The House bill includes total expenditures of \$283 billion over the next six years with \$51.5 billion for public transit.

“The APTA remains committed to calling for a bill that funds transportation at nothing lower than \$318 billion,” Millar says. “Only with a bill of this amount can we begin to address our needs.

He noted that every \$2 billion invested in public transit generates 8 billion passenger miles. Similarly, each \$1 billion in federal investment generates 47,500 jobs.

Millar also cited a recent poll that shows broad public support and willingness to pay for public transportation. The poll indicated that 80 percent of Americans see increased quality of life with increased transit investments. About 76 percent of Americans support increasing public funding to expand and improve public transportation.

“Those survey findings hold true for urban, suburban, small town and rural residents,” he says.



United We Ride Initiative Seeks Coordinated Human Service Transportation System

Federal Transit Administration

For most of us, getting to work, getting to the doctor, or getting to church means getting in our car. But for many people, it's not that easy. There are often many challenges that individuals face when trying to "get a ride."

It's not that we – governments and community organizations – haven't tried to help. Nearly every human-service program recognizes that transportation is important. In fact, according to the General Accounting Office (GAO) Report (June 2003) there are 62 federal programs that fund transportation services. Americans – through our taxes and through our charitable contributions – spend a significant amount of money to help. Ironically, for most people who need transportation help, the creation of more programs hasn't made getting around much easier!

The GAO Report on Transportation Disadvantaged Populations (June 2003) points out that there often are multiple public and private agencies that provide human service transportation in any one community, and services vary greatly in terms of eligibility requirements, hours or scope of operation, specific destination of services, and quality of services

One important key to using these services more efficiently is coordination. The Department of Transportation (DOT), with its partners at the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (DOL) and Education (DoED), has launched United We Ride (UWR), a five-part initiative to enhance the coordination of human service transportation.

United We Ride intends to break down the barriers between Federal programs and set the stage for local partnerships that generate common-sense solutions and deliver A-plus performance for those individuals who depend on transportation services to fully participate in community life. The UWR five initiatives include:

- **A Framework for Action.** This publication was created by a panel of experts from around the country that was convened in August 2003. It is a self-assessment tool for states and communities to use to identify areas of success and highlight actions needed to improve the coordination of human service transportation. To download the complete Framework for Action and facilitator's guide, visit the Coordinating Council of Access and Mobility's (CCAM) website at www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/States.pdf.

- **State Leadership Awards.** On the evening of Monday, Feb. 23, Members of Congress, top administration officials and industry leaders presented the "United We Ride Awards." These awards recognized the states of North Carolina, Washington, Ohio, Florida and Maryland for leading the way in building and implementing infrastructures, policies and programs that facilitate human service transportation coordination.



(L. to R.) Jennifer Dorn, Administrator, FTA; Transportation Secretary, Norman Mineta; and Washington State Governor, Gary Locke.

- **National Leadership Forum on Human Service Transportation Coordination.** Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, Education Secretary Rod Paige, and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson formally invited all states to attend the National Leadership Forum held in Washington D.C. Feb. 24-25. The forum brought together 47 governor-appointed senior leadership teams, to work to raise the visibility of transportation coordination among state leaders and secure commitments to action. The forum provided technical assistance and recognized those states that have already taken significant steps to improve human service transportation.
- **Coordination Grants.** States will be eligible to submit an application for United We Ride State Coordination Grants to address gaps and needs related to human service transportation. The initiative will help states enhance coordination of human service transportation programs to more effectively address the needs of transportation disadvantaged population (i.e., people with disabilities), older adults and individuals with lower-incomes.

(United We Ride – continued on back page)



VIEWS

Small Urban Perspective

Public Transit's Role as a Vital Link Grows in Fargo-Moorhead



*Julie Bommelman
Transit Administrator
City of Fargo*

As the cities of Fargo and Moorhead continue to grow, public transportation takes on an ever-increasing role as a vital link for many residents. Meeting current

demands and planning for continued growth presents a challenge for public transportation staff in both cities.

Public transportation is essential to Fargo-Moorhead's overall well-being. With increases in certain demographic groups in the area, such as elderly, disabled, and socioeconomically challenged populations, public transportation is vital to the transit-dependent. Public transportation is equally important to the riders who use transit by choice, either for convenience, cost, or environmental concerns. The availability of public transportation contributes to Fargo-Moorhead's economic vitality by connecting people to goods, services, educational, and employment opportunities they require.

Public transportation is important to the recruitment and retention of employees. Employers in Fargo-Moorhead need to consider the transportation challenges their employees face and take proactive steps to assist in meeting those needs. Frequently, potential employees do not pursue employment in areas where public transportation is not available. As employers recognize, and proactively, work to reduce transportation barriers for employees, the opportunities for employment increase, benefiting both parties.

Public transportation reduces traffic congestion and alleviates parking demands. Last year, the combined Fargo-Moorhead Metro Area Transit System provided approximately 820,000 rides on the fixed-route system. In addition, close to 40,000 rides were provided on the complementary paratransit service. It is difficult to speculate on the number of vehicles removed from the roads through use of the Fargo-Moorhead public transportation system alone, but statistically, one full bus means 30-40 fewer single-occupancy cars on the

road. This means in the Fargo-Moorhead area, there were potentially at least 20,000-27,000 fewer vehicles on the road in 2003.

As population shifts and grows geographically and demographically within the metropolitan area, the public transportation system must grow to meet the challenge. The benefits of the system, such as affordability, convenience, reduction of traffic, pollution and driving-related stress, are obvious. However, as the dynamics of the urban area increase, public transportation needs to be considered as the only viable connection to employment, education, medical services, and recreation for many.

Rural Perspective

There's No "I" in Collaborate



*Lyn Hellegaard
Director of Community Affairs
Missoula Ravalli Transportation
Management Association*

Breaking the cycle of unemployment and isolation, while maintaining a traditional

lifestyle, is complicated by a lack of reliable transportation. This issue is not new to any of Montana's Indian reservations. However, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) of northwestern Montana are making amazing strides to reduce or eliminate this barrier for their communities.

Understand that these communities are made up of tribal and non-tribal members. For many years, segregation has been a mainstay of these communities. Tribal and non-tribal members each had a designated senior center resulting in many duplications of service. An effort is being made to merge the centers with the net result of better service to include access through a public transportation system.

The nearest major medical center is approximately 1 1/2 hours away. With limited capital, human, and fiscal resources available, these trips constitute an undue burden on all area providers. Many times a trip to the medical center takes the only lift-equipped vehicle out of service for an entire day.

One goal of coordination is to devise a system where one agency's vehicle will make the trip one day per week, with an agreement to transport other participating agencies' clients. As a result, a single vehicle could transport a group rather than a single rider and free up vehicles to serve the local community.



One community, Elmo, experiences a 98 percent unemployment rate with no available transportation. CSKT negotiated an agreement with the Hot Springs Senior Center to provide driver salaries. Elmo residents are now transported to Hot Springs, approximately a 1-hour drive, allowing CSKT to provide additional service to other recipients. CSKT transports passengers to the Pablo Tribal Complex where the public assistance offices and the college are located.

Low-income housing has typically been constructed on rural dirt roads far from the main highways, employment, or educational sites. Many recipients are unable to hold driver licenses because of traffic violations. If they do have friends and/or family to transport them, they may need assistance with fuel expenses. If the individual does hold a driver's license, many times their personal vehicle is in poor mechanical shape, if operating at all.

During the 2000 Montana Legislative session, a new program, Transportation Assistance for the Disabled and Elderly (TransADE), was funded through a 25-cent fee assessed to licensed vehicles. This program has facilitated partnerships and collaboration to begin developing a reservation transportation system.

The program began as a collaborative effort of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Lake County Transportation Advisory Committee, and the Missoula Ravalli TMA. A grant of approximately \$30,000 helped hire two full-time drivers and a full-time dispatcher.

The system divided the reservation into two segments, with one vehicle serving a segment with common checkpoints for pickup and drop off. Drivers would be hired who lived in the designated segment, and were allowed to drive the vehicle home at night in an effort to address wage and hour issues.

We greatly under-estimated demand initially. Funds were depleted within 4-5 months of the service being offered.

Note that this service was only advertised by word of mouth. The CSKT Tribal Council saw the benefits to their members and found the funding to continue the service until additional TransADE money was available. The tribal entities also contributed 100 percent of the matching funds required while continuing to serve non-tribal members.

Coordination was facilitated through agreements with other transportation providers in Lake County. The local transportation advisory committee instituted policies that will result in consequences for not meeting agreement obligations.

Looking Ahead to Other Activities

CSKT has received several grants for the 2004-2005 fiscal period. Goals set in these grant requests are to:

- Develop bus stops in housing developments.
- Assess the need for GPS and AVL technology.
- Evaluate feasibility of a checkpoint or fixed-route service.
- Begin a dedicated system to transport residents from Elmo to tribal complex in Pablo.
- Begin a dedicated system to transport residents from Hot Springs to tribal complex in Pablo.

If additional grants are received, CSKT will:

- Develop a partnership with Kicking Horse Job Corp to provide mechanical assistance to Title VIII and Voc-Rehab program participants.
- Purchase additional vehicles.

Prints Awarded for Best Practice Submissions

Insight on the art of running a transit agency recently netted three transit managers a Terry Redlin exclusive edition print. Roger Allen of Paul Bunyan Transit in Bemidji, Minn., Midge Kuntz of Elder Care in Dickinson, N.D., and Marilyn Raisland of Hospitality House in Big Timber, Mont., were each drawn from submissions to the SURTC Webpage discussion board. All the submissions are summarized and included as a separate insert with this issue of "The Transit Lane."



Bismarck Launches Fixed-Route Bus Service

CAT is roaming the streets of Bismarck-Mandan. After more than three years of planning, Capital Area Transit (CAT) fixed-route bus service launched with a grand opening and ribbon cutting May 6.

“Everything’s been going smoothly. We’ve had a lot of people out riding,” said Robin Werre, executive director of Bis-Man Transit, after the first week of operation. The only problems have been a few missed turns by drivers learning their routes and a run of interest that depleted the organization’s supply of 5,000 route maps. “Those maps were gone in a heartbeat,” Werre says, indicating the level of interest in the new service. A second printing of 5,000 maps was also distributed in less than a day.



Dave Sprynczynatyk, Director, North Dakota Department of Transportation

Werre says Bis-Man Transit has operated a demand-response transit service for 13 years. “As studies indicated a need for a fixed-route service, we’ve worked on planning and funding. The funding is a mix of federal and local dollars including a one mill increase in local property taxes.” The agency is hoping for additional funding when the federal transportation bill is approved.



Bismarck Mayor, Dr. John Warford cuts the ribbon. Seated from left to right are Jeannie Pederson, president of Bis-Man Transit board of directors; Robin Werre, director of Bis-Man Transit.

CAT has six buses operating on 11 routes: six main routes, four alternates and a circulator that runs between Bismarck’s two malls. For the rest of May and June, CAT is not charging fares to encourage ridership and help residents become familiar with the service.

CAT operates out of a central transit center in Bismarck that also serves as the headquarters for the demand-response system and the rural transit system. Bis-Man Transit contracts with Taxi 9000 to operate both the demand response system and CAT. Rural transit is provided by West River Transportation Council. The Bismarck depot for Greyhound is also located in the building.

The building, built in 1998, includes maintenance bays, wash bays and a bus storage area. The storage area was expanded to accommodate CAT’s new buses. “The facility works great for us. It puts all of our transit-related operations for the area in one spot,” Werre says.



SURTC RESEARCH

N.D. Transit Agency Explores Fixed-Route System

James River Transit in Jamestown, N.D., may blaze a new trail for transit systems in small cities across the region.

The agency is exploring development of a fixed-route transit system to complement its existing paratransit operation. The study is being conducted with funding from the North Dakota Department of Transportation and expertise from SURTC. Del Peterson, associate research fellow at SURTC is conducting much of the research.

“Over the course of the last three to four years we’ve found that many of our clients are unable to afford much extra transportation. We want to look at ways to make transit more affordable to them,” says Carol Wright, executive director of James River Community Center and Senior Services, the agency that operates James River Transit.



As in many small cities, younger families are migrating to larger urban areas, leaving behind a larger proportion of individuals with special needs. Those individuals often rely heavily on transit systems and have a limited ability to pay for them. At the same time, declining tax bases pose serious challenges to transit funding.

The cost of providing a paratransit ride for a James River Transit client is about \$5.96 per passenger. The cost of providing fixed-route service in Fargo, N.D., and Moorhead, Minn., is \$2.72 per passenger and \$2.36 in Minot, N.D. The proposed system in Jamestown would have stops at common paratransit destinations like clinics, grocery stores and service agencies.

“We’re hoping our system can be a model,” Wright says. “If adding some form of fixed-route system would work for us, other communities could modify our plan for their systems.” Only four of North Dakota’s 45 transit systems offer fixed-route service.

Currently, SURTC is evaluating how a fixed-route service might serve riders in the Jamestown area. Researchers conducted surveys and focus group meetings. “It was important for the researchers to see first hand the issues that we face,” Wright says. She notes that 97 percent of current riders are elderly, physically disabled, diagnosed with a chronic mental illness or developmentally disabled.

“We have large number of support services here, so we have a higher than average number of people with special needs,” Wright explains. “That’s all the more reason to explore development of a transit option like this. But we have to be sure that it meets the needs of the riders and not just the needs of the agency.”

Once survey and focus group results are analyzed, researchers will work with James River Transit to analyze a proposed fixed-route system. The researchers will also evaluate the system’s cost effectiveness and how it can be integrated with the existing demand-response paratransit system. The study is scheduled to be completed this fall.

NDSU and NDDOT Launch Statewide Mobility Study

With a mix of local and regional transportation options including everything from cars and taxis to school busses, personal-mobility in North Dakota is complicated. Add to that mix, links like airlines, Amtrak and Greyhound and the system gets even more complicated.

The North Dakota Department of Transportation and SURTC are studying ways to assure that more North Dakotans have more seamless and simple access to transportation and look for ways to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

Representatives from nearly two dozen public transportation-related organizations and agencies met in Bismarck April 22 to learn about the study and to discuss statewide personal mobility issues and unmet mobility needs. “We wanted to hear, first-hand, from transit providers what issues and concerns they are facing,” says Jill Hough, SURTC director.

Representatives identified several key issues:

- **Equipment accessibility.** Some agencies have busses that are not accessible to all clients with disabilities. Some equipment such as scooters are



getting larger and older busses don't have lifts capable of lifting them or doors are too small.

- **Insurance.** Insurance costs for transit agencies have increased by 300 percent or more.
- **Purchasing.** Agencies discussed purchasing equipment as a group to garner group discounts and other savings.
- **Volunteer programs.** How can volunteers be used effectively in transit programs? What works and what doesn't? What are the legal and insurance concerns?
- **Regulatory issues.** Staying current on federal regulations is a challenge for small transit agencies. How can they obtain required training for personnel?
- **Demographics trends.** Population is dropping in rural parts of the state and many of those that remain are elderly and require transportation assistance. Many school districts are closing or consolidating. Meanwhile, population is growing on the state's Indian reservations which are often remote and have significant mobility needs.
- **Basic service levels.** What basic service levels should be provided in all areas? How often?

The study is part of a statewide strategic transportation plan adopted in 2002 by the NDDOT to provide a shared vision for North Dakota's transportation system. The plan's goals call for a transportation system that allows optimum personal mobility. One of the initiatives is the development of a statewide personal mobility plan. That plan will be one of the results of the study, Hough says.

"Without reliable rural transit programs, small communities are at a greater risk. The lack of a comprehensive statewide transit network could mean more out-migration: people moving from small North Dakota communities to larger ones, or even leaving the state, says David Sprynczynatyk, director of NDDOT."

"We anticipate that the mobility plan will provide North Dakota policy makers with a guide to future public transit options," Hough says. "In the course of

developing the mobility plan, we'll identify current and future gaps in service, allow stakeholders to discuss the desired level of personal mobility in the state, and identify financial and organizational resources to provide the desired mobility."

"We hope to do a little thinking outside of the box about how we can use our resources better," says Jack Olson, senior planner with the NDDOT. "We'll look at what options and opportunities exist to provide more service to the public. Then we'll identify the impediments to those options and what can be done to alleviate those impediments."

The NDDOT asked SURTC to help with the study because of previous collaborative transportation work and the expertise of its researchers, Olson says.

"We wanted to look at personal mobility options across the state from personal automobiles to taxis, busses, airlines," Olson says. "We want to know what the

mobility needs are and how we can possibly meet those needs." The study will be comprehensive including intra- and intercity bus, Amtrak, school transportation, paratransit, taxi services and air service.

Currently, SURTC is developing a demographic

profile of North Dakota to help identify current and future transit needs. Center staff are also reviewing other state's plans and profiling existing service providers in North Dakota. That information will provide background for developing guidelines for basic levels of service to be provided.

Staff from the Center will also develop a webpage to share study information and preliminary data and to allow agencies to share ideas and information. They will also recommend ways that transit providers can use technology to improve services. This technology, called intelligent transportation systems, can help with management, vehicle location tracing, scheduling and dispatching, and for providing easy access to information for travelers.

The study is expected to be complete by the end of summer 2005, Hough says.

"The lack of a comprehensive statewide transit network could mean more out-migration."

*– David Sprynczynatyk
Director of NDDOT*



SURTC Proposes School Bus Routing Program

With energetic kids, unpredictable weather and sometimes questionable roads, getting kids to school in North Dakota has always been a challenge. That challenge is growing as the number of school-age children is shrinking while the distance between them is growing.



“Bus routes are getting increasingly complex,” says Jill Hough, SURTC director. “But there is continued pressure on schools to provide busing that is safe, timely and efficient.”

To answer that need, SURTC is proposing a school bus routing support program to help schools develop and refine their bus routes.

“In many schools there is a lack of expertise, technology and time to address routing issues. Software is available, but it is also complex,” Hough says. “We’re proposing that a more efficient approach would be to centralize some of that expertise here and provide school districts affordable assistance in addressing routing issues.”

The program would:

- Analyze North Dakota school district routing issues to identify widespread problems and opportunities.
- Establish a “help center” to assist school districts with problems throughout the school year.
- Develop school bus routes to maximize efficiency.
- Explore policy issues associated with school transportation funding.

In addition the program would look at ways to use the transportation capacity of school districts to serve broader communities. “As the population ages, transportation is becoming an important issue in rural areas. There may be ways that agencies can partner with school districts to use school vehicles to serve other needs,” Hough says.

“The proposal is still in development,” Hough says. SURTC officials plan to present the proposal to state officials this spring.

SURTC STAFF

Two Join SURTC Staff

SURTC recently added a research fellow and a communications coordinator to its staff.



Jon Mielke

Jon Mielke will be located at Bismarck State College where he will teach classes in a transportation program being developed jointly with the SURTC, the Bismarck State College and the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. In addition to developing the transportation education program in Bismarck, Mielke will serve as a research fellow with SURTC and the Advanced Traffic Analysis Center, both programs within NDSU’s Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. He will conduct research on transportation and traffic issues in the state.

Mielke retired earlier this year after 23 years with the North Dakota Public Service Commission. He served as executive secretary of that agency since 1994 and was also director of the licensing division overseeing licensing of elevators, grain buyers, hay buyers, auctioneers, and auction clerks. The licensing division also enforces state regulations relating to railroads.

Originally from Grafton, Mielke holds a bachelor’s degree in business and a master’s degree in public administration, both from the University of North Dakota. Early in his career, he worked with the North Dakota Highway Department and the City of Minot dealing with transportation and traffic issues.

Tom Jirik was recently hired as communication coordinator. He has been at NDSU for eight years as communications specialist with the agriculture communication department. He holds a bachelor’s degree in mass communication and agricultural economics from NDSU.



Tom Jirik

A native of Mahanomen, Minn., Jirik also worked at Iowa State University as a writer and editor for the College of Agriculture. Before that, he was a newspaper reporter.

He will work with administration and staff within SURTC and other programs of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute to enhance marketing and communication efforts.



Researchers Participate on Rural Transportation Panel

Two SURTC researchers were part of a panel discussion on rural transportation issues at the annual Transportation Research Forum at the Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., March 21-23.

Gary Hegland presented results of a research project on transportation needs of the disadvantaged in North Dakota. In the study, Hegland and Jill Hough gathered information on how disadvantaged individuals use public transportation and their evaluations of existing services. The information will help transportation planners in the state focus on areas where service needs to be improved or expanded. Results of the study were presented in the previous issue of The Transit Lane.



Jill Hough

Hough discussed a study of rural road users' needs in North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana. In that study Hough and Hegland compared rural road users' perceptions of roads with decision makers' perceptions. Information will be used to help county commissioners, engineers and others involved with maintenance

and improvements on rural roads better communicate with and meet the demands of rural road users.

Hough is director of the SURTC. Hegland is an associate research fellow. The annual Transportation Research Forum features presentations on transportation research and advances from university and industry professionals. The Transportation Research Forum is an independent organization of transportation professionals. Its purpose is to provide a forum for the discussion of ideas and research techniques applicable to economic, management and public policy problems involving transportation.

Hegland Offers Survey Tips at Montana Transit Association Meeting

Transit professionals attending the annual Montana Transit Association meeting in Great Falls, Mont., received a short course on using surveys from SURTC research associate Gary Hegland.



Gary Hegland

“Surveys can provide extremely valuable information about riders, customers, vendors and employees,” Hegland says. “But to get that information you need to spend the time and money to plan and conduct the survey correctly.”

Hegland has conducted research on rural roads and transit systems using surveys. He offered tips for proper survey design and use at the meeting, April 12-16. He plans to present the information as a technical workshop via the TEL8 System. Check the SURTC Website for upcoming training.

SURTC Publishes DTA Newsletter

With the spring issue, the Dakota Transit Association newsletter gained a new name and a new publisher, SURTC. The “Dakota Transporter” will continue to highlight opportunities, issues and ideas that will be useful to transit agencies across North and South Dakota. SURTC director Jill Hough and research fellow Gary Hegland are serving as editors. Within the next several months, newsletter will be available on the Web and distribution may eventually move to e-mail to improve timeliness and efficiency.



Technology Links Students and Instructors in Transit Class

A dozen students from five states were enrolled spring semester in the “Introduction to Public Transportation” course offered by North Dakota State University and coordinated by an instructor in yet another state. Interactive video technology was the key to the success of the course.

“The television technology worked very well every week,” noted Jim Miller, a retired faculty member from Pennsylvania State University who is now an affiliated faculty with SURTC. “It never let us down.”

The course is offered on the NDSU campus and is linked to universities and departments of transportation in North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Utah and Wyoming via the TEL8 system, a telecommunications link serving that region and designed to enhance transportation research, education and technology transfer.

The course was coordinated by SURTC. “The TEL8 system and interactive video technology give us access to national-level expertise,” says SURTC director Jill Hough. “Students and professionals across the region are able to share their common challenges and benefit from each others’ unique perspectives and experiences.

The course featured lectures by Barbara Sisson, associate administrator for research, demonstration and innovation in the Federal Transit Administration, and Bill Millar, chief executive officer of the American Public Transportation Institute. Their presentations to the class are covered in more detail elsewhere in this issue of “The Transit Lane.”

In addition, students in the class presented a major research project to the class. Topics included:

- Light rail projects in Salt Lake and Minneapolis
- Smart growth
- Applications of intelligent transportation systems
- Road pricing to manage demand
- Public transportation options for riders with disabilities
- Coordination among transportation service providers.



Jim Miller

Technical Workshop Focuses on Business Skills

Transit managers know they are in the “people business” and take great pride in their people skills. But successful transit operators must also have good business skills. A SURTC technical assistance workshop on April 23 was designed to help them hone those business skills.

“Topics such as performance evaluation and effectiveness depend on the application of sound business principles,” says Jim Miller, instructor for the course. “Their long-term survival depends as much on those business skills as their people skills.”

The workshop provided managers, policy board members and other personnel with practical ways to design and implement a performance tracking system for their operations. Such an evaluation system can be used to help manage the system and to report on performance to customers, policymakers and funding agencies. The workshop also explained how to determine and allocate costs to help systems with performance evaluation, billing and setting prices.

The half-day workshop was offered via the TEL8 system, a telecommunications link serving that region and designed to enhance transportation research, education and technology transfer. More than 40 people attended at sites in Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota and Wyoming. The workshop will be held again next year.

Miller is now an affiliated faculty with SURTC. He has more than 30 years of experience in public transportation research planning and management and is a leader in developing transportation systems for rural areas.

Handouts and a request form for a video of the course are available on the Web at <http://www.surtc.org/training/tel8/>.



(United We Ride – continued from page 3)

- **Help Along the Way.** This technical assistance program will build on the exiting work of the Community Transportation Assistance Program (CTAP), the Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP), Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA) and other stakeholder groups to provide hands-on assistance to states and communities in the development and delivery of coordinated human service transportation programs.

In February, President Bush issued Executive Order 13330 on Human Service Transportation Coordination. The Order calls for the Department of Transportation to lead in establishing an Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility. Membership will consist of the secretaries of Transportation, Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, and the Interior. The council will also include the Attorney General, the Commissioner of Social Security, and other federal officials the chairperson of the council may designate.

We encourage you to join us in our commitment to break down the barriers in human service transportation coordination. We hope that transportation agencies, human service providers, and advocates work together to build common sense solutions.

For more information on United We Ride, please visit our website at <http://www.fta.dot.gov/>.

Events Calendar:

CTAA Moving Mountains EXPO 2004 • June 13-18 • Seattle, WA

WYTRANS 16th Annual Conf. & Bus Roadeo • June 24-26 • Riverton, WY

APTA Transportation and University Communities Conference • June 26-29 • Austin, TX

2004 DTA Annual Conference • Sept. 20-23 • Sioux Falls, SD

2004 Minnesota Public Transit Conference • Oct. 4-6 • Minneapolis, MN

APTA 2004 Annual Meeting • Oct. 10-13 • Atlanta, GA

SURTC is scheduling training sessions. Please check www.surtc.org for updates.

