

TRANSIT LANE

Small Urban & Rural Transit Center
North Dakota State University

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United We Ride Ambassador Program by Rex Knowlton

The Coordination Ambassador project, as it is currently configured, began in November 2005. Prior to the current project, Jo Ann Hutchinson, along with several folks from National Easter Seals Project Action, served as Ambassadors.

Ambassadors provide assistance to policy makers, state and local officials, human service agencies, consumers, advocates and transportation providers to understand the opportunities available through SAFETEA-LU legislation and to translate those opportunities into concrete action. The program flows through the Community Transportation Association of America and is funded by the Federal Transit Administration. Five transit professionals work half-time to cover the 10 FTA regions, each Ambassador working with two regions.

The Ambassadors convene frequent phone conferences in each region; coordinate technical assistance activities with FTA regional offices, CTAA staff and other appropriate stakeholders; assist states in implementing coordination tools such as Transit Passes and provide overall support to each state within the applicable region.

Secretary Mineta described United We Ride as “our nationwide initiative to help community leaders to find common sense solutions to transportation problems,” according to a recent article in *Passenger Transport*. The Ambassadors support the initiative in a hands on fashion.

Please visit Unitedweride.gov or CTAA.org for additional information.



Ambassadors pictured L to R: Jim McLary (Regions 2 and 7), Rex Knowlton (Regions 3 and 8), JoAnn Hutchinson (Regions 1 and 4), Roland Mross (Regions 5 and 6), and Dave Cyra (Regions 9 and 10).

Direct Mail Transit Campaign Successful



Lori Van Beek
Transit Manager
City of Moorhead

In 2005, Fargo-Moorhead Metro Area Transit (MAT) conducted a marketing campaign directed at single-family households located along bus routes. Past marketing efforts indicated that direct mail with

free rides were the most successful. Taken a step further, mailing route information and free rides to homes with the best transit service at their finger tips should be even more successful – and it was.

The mailings to each “neighborhood” were customized with the bus stop locations and times the bus arrived. Special 10-ride electronic coin cards were assigned to each household. A colorful brochure showcasing all of the recent transit improvements was also included in the mailing. To reinforce the campaign, billboards and shelter posters with the “X Marks the Stop” theme were placed strategically around town. Also, flags with the “X” were placed in each neighborhood at their specific stop locations. The reminders were everywhere. In fact, a survey conducted recently by the F-M Metropolitan Council of Governments indicated that 30 percent of metro residents were aware of the campaign.

Multiple media were used to reinforce the promotion. Try Transit Week, held in October, combined the “X Marks the Stop” theme with a treasure map. High gas prices were shown along the treasure map with 25-cent rides on MAT as the final “treasure” during the week-long event. Bench ads, magazine ads, and newspaper ads were also used, including a picture and quote from a regular rider.

The 10-ride cards distributed in the mailings were tracked through MAT’s electronic fareboxes to verify usage. The results verified that the promotion was a success, with an average return rate of 7.3 percent.

“Nothing About Us, Without Us”



Alan Abeson, Ed.D.
Director
Easter Seals Project ACTION

At the heart of the Americans with Disabilities Act is the publicly stated purpose of providing people with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy living, learning, working and playing in communities just like

all other Americans. Readers of this newsletter that serve people with and without disabilities through the provision of transportation recognize that without mobility, the goal of the ADA is unachievable for people with disabilities and for other groups of Americans such as seniors and those with low incomes.

With the passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) by the Congress last summer, an important step was taken in trying to advance the availability of transportation to these people. Three federal transportation programs, two previously existing and a new one, designed to serve these populations are now the focus of mandated local planning intended to break down previously siloed programs into a coordinated effort. The underlying logic is formidable - through coordination, more quality rides can be given to more people at improved costs with simplified access.

The programs to be coordinated are the ongoing Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and Elderly Individuals and Disabilities (Section 5310) programs and the New Freedom Program (Section 5317). The goal of the New Freedom Program is to reduce barriers to transportation and provide services for people with disabilities beyond the existing requirements of the ADA. Because of the difficulties of transportation in rural America, the also law includes a considerable increase in rural transit funding.

Despite the challenges implementing the coordination provisions of the statute, because the mandated planning specifically calls for the involvement of the people being served, as well as providers of human services and transportation, it presents a significant opportunity for entire communities to advance the purpose of the ADA for people with disabilities and others as well. A frequently heard theme of the disability community that also applies for others is “nothing about us, without us.” The message is clear, to improve mobility, to serve these populations, to receive these funds, communities must come together and must plan effectively.



RESEARCH

Study May Help Revive Vanpooling



Jon Mielke

Based on interest in vanpooling, high gas prices and an evolution in demographics and business in North Dakota, the UGPTI's Small Urban & Rural Transit Center has recommended the reestablishment of a commuter vanpool program in the state on a three-year trial basis.

The recommendation was the result of a study conducted by SURTC with the North Dakota Department of Commerce. The study recommends using federal funds for the trial period. That period would help state officials determine whether or not vanpools are needed and wanted in North Dakota, and whether or not the service should continue. SURTC recommends setting a goal of establishing 10 vanpools per year during each year of the trial period. Additional recommendations focus on incentives to attract and retain drivers and riders. Estimated cost over the three-year period is approximately \$500,000.

Vanpool programs previously existed in the state, but have largely disappeared. "We've looked at how this concept has changed since North Dakota last had an aggressive program in the late '70s and early '80s," says Jon Mielke, the SURTC researcher leading the project.

Today there are federal incentives for vanpooling programs, including funds from the Federal Highway Administration for no-interest loans for purchasing vans. Tax law has changed to allow employees to use pre-tax flexible spending accounts for transit expenses.

"The economic landscape of North Dakota has changed as well," Mielke notes. "We have major employers like Pro-Gold, Dakota Growers Pasta, Marvin Windows and others that have facilities located in relatively small communities that draw employees from a large surrounding area. We also have employees choosing to live in rural areas and commute to larger communities for employment. Those factors lend themselves to ride sharing."

To encourage riders to join the vanpool, the program will provide cost-effective, comfortable and safe rides, drivers trained in defensive driving and a guaranteed ride home program.

The study surveyed employers across the state to learn about employment trends and employer attitudes toward ride sharing. In addition, researchers surveyed employees to assess their openness to ride sharing. SURTC staff also met with representatives from agencies that could provide additional incentives for vanpooling.

Mielke managed the North Dakota DOT's vanpooling program in 1979 and 1980. "I went to the Department of Commerce and asked if there was interest in and incentives for vanpooling in the state. It turns out that, yes, there is interest and there are more incentives than there used to be."

The study also analyzed 15 vanpool programs that are operated by state and local entities around the country. Drawing from the most attractive features of those programs, the study presented a set of recommendations that may be considered if North Dakota decides to reinstitute a state commuter vanpool program. A copy of the final report is available at <http://www.surtc.org/research/vanpool.php>.

SURTC Helps NDDOT Evaluate Requirements



Dustin Ulmer

SURTC is helping NDDOT develop a matrix to be used to compare State Management Plans used by other states in the region. "Each state has its own set of regulations on top of the federal regulations," explains Dustin Ulmer, the SURTC research assistant working on the project.

The matrix will help NDDOT look at its requirements and compare them to those of surrounding states.

Ulmer says over the years changes and updates to requirements have resulted in a more complex set of regulations than necessary. This effort, expected to be complete by the end of the summer, should result in a new State Management Plan which will provide a clear set of instructions for the transit providers in the state of North Dakota.



Study Seeks to Build a Better Bus



Del Peterson

SURTC is working with the Federal Transit Administration to bring together bus manufacturers, bus equipment manufacturers, transit agencies, paratransit agencies and others to design a better small bus.

The effort grew out of a study of the bus manufacturing industry conducted by SURTC and supported by the FTA. The initial research looked at bus purchasing trends over the past 20 years and examined FTA and local procurement policies and their impact on the manufacturing industry.

The study is aimed at identifying incentives to adopt new technologies and the impact that standardization of bus specifications would have on production efficiency and cost. Data is being compiled through the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), state DOTs and the FTA. In addition, SURTC is working with individual transit agencies for the project.

In the past, all the attention has focused on larger, fixed-route buses, with little regard to the smaller buses with more irregular uses and routes, explains Del Peterson, the SURTC researcher leading the effort.

As the project progressed, the FTA asked SURTC to gather input on a prototype design for a bus designed specifically for small transit agencies. “The intent is to explore the possibility of developing a new transit vehicle or vehicle specifications to meet the needs of transit operators and riders,” Peterson says. “A transit vehicle designed to meet the specific needs of smaller systems will lead to gained efficiencies for transit providers while offering riders greater comfort with improved ride quality and greater vehicle maneuverability for operators.”

Peterson held a meeting in conjunction with the American Public Transit Association’s annual bus and paratransit meeting in Anaheim, CA, in May. About 15 people from bus manufacturers, component manufacturers and transit agencies attended. “Key topics included demand for hybrid buses to address fuel economy and low-floor vehicles to address accessibility,” he says.

Additional discussion focused on the need to improve ride and handling characteristics of small buses. “Many small buses are built on truck chassis, so they have more in common with trucks than passenger vehicles,” Peterson explains.

Another session will be held in June in Orlando in conjunction with the Community Transportation Association of America Expo. “Before that meeting we’ll be surveying CTAA members for their perspectives on buses and needs,” he says. Surveys will help determine what transit providers like about their buses and what they’d like to see changed in the hope that standards will be developed for differing locations.

“A bus operating in Arizona has different specific requirements than a bus operating in North Dakota (cold weather requirements, etc.) so we don’t want to develop one standard for buses,” Peterson said.

The project is being funded by both the FTA and SURTC, and the results of the study will be presented to manufacturing companies. The study may possibly result in the development of a prototype bus that would also be presented to the companies.

SURTC Assesses MAT Rider Satisfaction

The cities of Fargo and Moorhead wanted to know if riders were satisfied with the Metropolitan Area Transit System’s current bus service. So the Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments asked SURTC to ask them.

According to Del Peterson, the SURTC researcher who coordinated the project, a rider satisfaction study of this magnitude hadn’t been done recently. “Riders can fill out comment cards, but MAT wanted more updated and complete data to support their decision making,” he says.

SURTC conducted the survey in November with the help of 12 college-age survey-takers who rode buses on the 10 Fargo and six Moorhead routes and administered on-board surveys to 800 passengers during a three-day period. Survey questions covered the frequency of riding, ease of riding, cleanliness of buses, quality and other issues. A preliminary report has been submitted to MAT. A final report is expected to be complete in June.

“If there are areas of concern, we’ll investigate those in more detail and make all the corrections we can,” says Jim Gilmour, director of planning and development for the City of Fargo. In addition, the city will be developing a five-year transit plan. “The information from this survey will be useful in that process as well,” he says.



FTA and SURTC Examine Small Transit Vehicle Technology

Recent advancements in vehicle design have led to several new technologies becoming standard options for transit buses. Intelligent transportation systems (ITS), including automatic vehicle location (AVL), stop announcements and electronic fare collection are now readily available technologies. Increased accessibility through low-floor vehicles and alternative fuels are commonly found in buses across the country. While many of these technologies could greatly improve the service and operations of small urban and rural transit agencies, they have yet to be widely adopted by small transit vehicle manufacturers.

The majority of new vehicle purchases funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are buses and converted vans less than 30 feet in length. While use of small transit vehicles is widespread, orders tend to be customized and small, slowing development of the market as a whole. The FTA predicts a guided effort within the industry will lead to significant improvements in small transit vehicles. With rising fuel prices and a shift toward energy independence, small transit agencies could benefit from the availability of alternative fueled or powered vehicles. Adopting ITS could help small agencies improve demand-response scheduling with AVL systems.

The FTA has started to examine the potential for small vehicle improvement as part of its continued effort to improve public transportation. The initial work for this Advanced Small Transit Vehicle (ASTV) project is focused on determining where improvements can be made. Based on some background research, the Small Urban & Rural Transit Center (SURTC) has prepared a scoping paper defining the issue and outlining the FTA plan to address the industry's needs. This paper will be introduced at stakeholder meetings that will allow industry representatives a chance to provide input on the project. Two stakeholder meetings are planned for late spring. The first will be held May 3 in Anaheim, CA, in conjunction with the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Bus and Paratransit Conference. The second meeting is scheduled for June 8 in Orlando, FL, during the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) EXPO '06. Anyone involved with small transit vehicles is encouraged to attend and propose issues with vehicle technologies and availability. These meetings will provide a forum for open discussion and will guide the FTA's efforts. SURTC is also helping conduct a survey of stakeholders, specifically small transit agencies, to gain more information about the needs and concerns with small transit vehicles.

The goal of the ASTV project is to identify and resolve the major shortcomings of small transit vehicles. Based on input from the survey and stakeholder meetings, the FTA will determine how to help the vehicle manufacturing industry mitigate these shortcomings. One possibility is a guidance document outlining functional specifications of an ideal ASTV. The FTA hopes this effort will produce significant improvements in transit and advance vehicle technology.

Enderlin School District is Bus Routing Test



David Ripplinger

SURTC is fine-tuning its school bus routing software with help from the Enderlin, ND, school district where the software is being tested.

“With about 120 riders, Enderlin is an ideally sized district for this project,” says SURTC researcher Dave Ripplinger. “This type of program is already in use in many large school districts, typically those with more than a thousand students. SURTC thought it was important for smaller schools to have access to this type of routing software too.”

Ripplinger presented initial routes to the Enderlin School Board in April. The board then asked him to help develop routes for students who attend school in Sheldon, a school district that will be consolidating with Enderlin next year.

Ripplinger and graduate research assistant Yan Wang are developing easy-to-use, low-cost software specifically designed to help rural and small-urban school districts design bus routes that make the best use of buses and fuel while minimizing the amount of time students must spend on the bus.

In addition to developing the software, SURTC is identifying common needs of North Dakota school districts in regard to school bus routing. Ultimately, SURTC plans to establish a help center to guide schools in routing buses more efficiently and explore policy issues related to school transportation funding. In addition, SURTC will explore the possibility of using school buses to transport non-students in rural areas.

Ripplinger said the software is mostly complete but will be fine-tuned based on the experiences in Enderlin. The project is expected to be complete in June, and will include the software, the results of Enderlin's use of the program and a research paper outlining how this program will impact transportation in school districts in North Dakota.



Researchers Work to Improve Transit in Rolette County

Coordinated transit activities were given high priority in the new Transportation Bill (SAFETEA-LU) and consequently coordination is a high priority for North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and Rolette County.

SURTC research fellows Jon Mielke and Gary Hegland are working with officials there to develop a coordinated transit plan as required for local agencies to receive federal funding from the Federal Transit Administration. "Ultimately, our goal is to help them develop a plan that will expand and improve much needed services to the area," Hegland notes.

Rolette County is served by three transit providers: Nutrition and Support Services which provides the senior meals program and transit for Belcourt; Nutrition United Inc. which provides senior meals and transit for Rolette County; and Royal Coach Transportation, a commercial transit provider.

More than 15 additional agencies have indicated that improved transit is a high priority for successfully reaching clients. Examples include the Turtle Mountain Community College which indicates enrollment suffers because students lack transportation; local health care agencies say clients have difficulties reaching medical facilities; and the local Job Service office finds that many in employment training programs drop out because they do not have reliable transportation.

Hegland notes that Rolette County and the Turtle Mountain Reservation are more densely populated than much of rural North Dakota and the poverty, health issues and educational needs make improved transit a priority. "There is a lot of need there," he says.

Mielke and Hegland are meeting with the transit providers and other agencies to evaluate current services and to look for duplications and gaps. They will also discuss ways the agencies might better coordinate their services. "In some cases, the way services are paid for makes money ineligible for matching against federal funds," Hegland says. "At times, organizational and managerial practices may be changed or altered slightly to improve the potential for gaining access to additional funding for transit."

In addition, the researchers will visit with stakeholder groups such as senior citizens, tribal groups and others to determine how satisfied residents are with current services and determine priorities for improved service. The project is expected to be complete in about nine months.

Events Calendar

CTAA - EXPO 2006

June 3-9, 2006 • Orlando, FL

WYTRANS - 18th Annual Conference and Bus

Roadeo • June 21-24, 2006 • Riverton, WY

ITSA - 2006 National Rural ITS Conference

August 13-16, 2006 • Big Sky, MT

DTA - 2006 Annual Conference & Roadeo

September 23-27, 2006 • Spearfish, SD

APTA - Annual Meeting & EXPO 2006

October 8-11, 2006 • San Jose, CA

TRB - 86th Annual Meeting

January 21-25, 2007 • Washington, DC

Please check www.surtc.org for updates



EDUCATION

Students Look Ahead to Accessible Transit

The next generation of architects at North Dakota State University recently had a chance to design the next generation of accessible mass transit facilities.

NDSU's Small Urban & Rural Transit Center (SURTC) helped the university's Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture develop a proposal for a class project. Fourth-year students in architecture and landscape architecture were assigned to develop a proposal for either a downtown or suburban mobility center that incorporated multi-modal transit and transit-oriented development while incorporating the concepts of universal design. The assignment was part of the Advanced Urban Design Studio course.

"One of the focuses of the class was the concept of transit-oriented development. Everything we did during the semester revolved around transportation issues," says Cindy Urness, an instructor for the course.

"As future urban planners and architects, these students are a key audience for us," notes SURTC director Jill Hough. "We want to help make them knowledgeable about mobility and transportation issues and get them started early in

incorporating those issues into their concepts and thought processes." SURTC's research and outreach programs are designed to increase mobility in small urban and rural areas.



Cindy Urness

"I think the project opened the students' eyes to transit and mobility issues in people's lives," Urness says. "It also gave them a new awareness of accessibility and universal design. The students are all aware of ADA requirements, but this project helped them realize that in many cases designers and builders comply with the letter of the law and not the spirit."

At the end of the intensive two-week project in December, proposals developed by the 15 students were judged by a panel of transit professionals from NDSU, local transit agencies and the North Dakota DOT. "It was a gift to have people who are actually involved in transit ask questions and talk about practical issues. There's nothing like having a real client review your work." Urness says.

Student Matt Brehmer is a Fargo native and appreciated the opportunity to develop a transit-oriented vision for his hometown's future. "I'm always biking and rollerblading so I knew there were some real gaps in accessibility around the community. It was exciting to design a new part of the city and make it completely accessible and pedestrian oriented."



TRAINING and OUTREACH

SURTC to Offer Training to SMART in Detroit Metro Area



Gary Hegland

SURTC is helping a transit authority in suburban Detroit, MI, provide customized training for its drivers via DVD.

The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) includes about 60 community partners in three counties and provides transportation weekly for 200,000 riders. With the diversity of agencies involved in SMART it's difficult to get staff to traditional, classroom-based training.

With that limitation in mind, SURTC research fellow Gary Hegland has developed a series of video-based modules presented on two DVDs that cover the topics presented in the Passenger Service and Safety (PASS) Certification Program. "Drivers can work their way through the modules at their own pace and at their convenience," he says.

In addition, each module includes review questions to help assure that the participant has learned key points. The videos included on the DVD were gleaned from a variety of training videos and used with permission. "We didn't develop new material for this program, but repackaged it in a way that provides a comprehensive overview of the PASS training in a convenient package," Hegland says.

The training modules are being developed as a pilot program. "If things go well, it's likely we'll expand the program with SMART and we may customize or develop training programs for other transit agencies," says SURTC director Jill Hough. With that in mind, SURTC is making a significant contribution to the effort by covering administrative costs and some developmental costs.

Business Planning Taught and Practiced



Jim Miller

Transit experts attending the Community Transportation Association of America's Expo in June will be able to learn how to develop a business plan. The one-day session is being taught by SURTC affiliate faculty member Jim Miller who knows the process first hand.

The session is an expansion of one taught via the Transportation Learning Network (TLN) in October. The course was designed to teach transit managers what a business plan is and how to develop one for their agency.

"A business plan is no more than a systematic analysis of your existing system, your customers, your services, facilities, management, and governance structure combined with an assessment of your future service and management options," Miller says. "In addition, a business plan includes ridership, revenue, and expense estimates for the next 3-5 years along with a capital budget for vehicle, equipment, and facilities capital needs."

While the TLN session provided a low-cost, convenient option for rural transit managers, the one-on-one nature of the session at the CTAA Expo will offer some advantages. "We'll be able to work through some examples, allowing participants to actually develop portions of a business plan," Miller says.

Miller practices what he preaches. He is working with River Cities Transit in Pierre, SD, to help that agency develop a comprehensive transit plan. "We're evaluating their services and their management – all of their functional areas, maintenance, scheduling, financial, everything," he says.

"We've identified five possible options for service expansion. Now we're looking at projections. What will the ridership be? What will they cost? Can they afford it?" Miller says. "We're helping them set priorities and make projections for three to five years out."



SURTC Facilitates PASS Training

Transit agencies in North and South Dakota are improving the levels of service and safety provided by their drivers with help from SURTC.

SURTC associate research fellow Gary Hegland received trainer certification in the Passenger Service and Safety (PASS) Certification Program last fall at a training session sponsored by SURTC and the Dakota Transit Association in Oacoma, SD. He's now working with agencies across the region to provide the program to their drivers. "I encouraged the states to have all of their drivers certified and the department of transportation in North Dakota and South Dakota accepted that challenge and provided funding support. SURTC is working with them to accomplish the goal," Hegland says.

To date, Hegland has participated in PASS training in Pierre, SD, Valley City, ND, Dickinson, ND, and St. George, UT. Hegland is one of 14 certified PASS trainers in the Dakotas. "I've been going out with the trainers that were certified in our region to team-teach their first class," he says. That arrangement allows him to help the first-time teachers while gathering information on agency needs for additional SURTC and DTA programming.

The PASS Driver Certification Program ensures that community transportation drivers have expertise in passenger assistance techniques and sensitivity skills appropriate for serving persons with disabilities and the general public. The PASS program has a three-day train-the-trainer session to certify trainers. The trainers then offer a two-day program of instruction for drivers.

Some of the advantages of offering the PASS Certification Program are: the ability to reduce organizational liability; comprehensive, up-to-date training on the assistance drivers should be providing to passengers with special needs; intensive emergency situation training; certification oversight provided by national leaders in the community transportation field; and updates for all participants on relevant ADA changes.

The two-day driver certification class covers:

- Stress management & Americans with Disabilities Act
- Driver sensitivity, awareness and communication
- Mobility equipment (including walkers, canes, crutches, braces, etc.)
- Hands-on assistance (including body mechanics, transfers and guiding the vision impaired)
- Wheelchair types and features (including scooters)

- Lift operations
- Securement
- Principles of crisis management
- Evacuation techniques and emergency procedures
- Bloodborne pathogen protection
- Handling seizure disorders
- Responding to passenger abuse and neglect
- Driver/passenger sexual improprieties

SURTC Sponsors Workshop on Human Resource Management

A SURTC-sponsored workshop on human resource management was offered to transit managers and human resource directors in five states to help them be more effective.

The May 9 session was based in Fargo, but was broadcast via the Internet over the Transportation Learning Network (TLN) to 26 sites in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming and Utah. "We used the TLN to reach more individuals and to make the workshop more accessible to agencies that don't have the flexibility of sending staff to remote training," explained Gary Hegland, the SURTC associate research fellow who coordinated the training.



Lyn Hellegard

Topics included tips on interviewing, employee documentation and related laws. Instructors for the course were Lyn Hellegard and Carol Wright. Hellegard is coordinator of the Montana Transit Association and executive director of the Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association. She serves on several local, state, regional and national transit committees and has several years experience developing and implementing training programs. Wright is president of the Dakota Transit Association and project director of James River Transit in Jamestown, ND. Wright has a master's degree in human development/education/gerontology and is a member of SURTC's advisory committee.

"Lyn and Carol have extensive experience with human resource management as well as familiarity with transit," Hegland says. "They provided a very practical and detailed approach to this topic."



Carol Wright



School Bus Efficiency Training Offered

Superintendents and other school administrators are learning to make their bus systems more efficient during SURTC training sessions.

Sessions in October and April in Valley City and Minot, respectively, were attended by 13 administrators. “The small class sizes were a great way to start because we were able to have guided discussions rather than lectures,” notes David Ripplinger, the SURTC associate research fellow who is conducting the training. “Those discussions provided some feedback that will be valuable in future offerings.” The initial classes focused on bus fleet maintenance issues and innovative solutions such as pooled maintenance with other districts or outsourcing.

Ripplinger says many rural districts are facing declining tax bases and declining enrollments. Consequently, they are looking for ways to be more economical and efficient in transporting students.

“The state is trying to agree upon a school transportation funding formula that encourages efficiency and is equitable,” Ripplinger says. In the meantime, the legislature provided funds to the Department of Public Instruction for professional training in school transportation system management. The department contracted with SURTC to provide the training.

A training session is scheduled for September that will focus specifically on multi-district coordinated maintenance programs. Ripplinger notes that the ultimate goal of these training sessions is to further develop regional experts in transportation. “The training will expose superintendents to fundamentals, and help them do a better job with transporting students,” Ripplinger says.

In the future, training will be provided via the Transportation Learning Network, an interactive video network that can be accessed via the Internet. “We’re looking for ways to make the training accessible to more districts in a manner that is more convenient and more cost effective,” Ripplinger says.

STAFF

Hough Attends White House Conference on Aging



Jill Hough

SURTC director Jill Hough attended the once-a-decade White House Conference on Aging Dec. 11-14 in Washington to learn more about elderly concerns about transit and listen to national-level discussions about rural transit policy.

About 1,200 delegates participated in the conference, discussed issues and developed recommendations for additional research and action in the field of aging. Senator Kent Conrad authorized Hough to attend as an observer.

“The event allowed me to hear first hand the primary issues being discussed by the delegates and the presenters in the breakout sessions,” Hough says. “It was also an opportunity for me to have interaction with the delegates and to hear from them on their concerns and ideas for transit.”

Ensuring that older Americans have transportation options to retain their mobility and independence was among the 10 resolutions adopted by delegates at the conference. “That’s an indication of the importance of this issue to older Americans,” Hough notes.

A report from the National Institute on Aging indicates that the U.S. population age 65 and over is expected to double in size within the next 25 years. By 2030, almost 1-out-of-5 Americans — some 72 million people — will be 65 years or older. The age group 85 and older is now the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.

“Those numbers suggest some significant challenges for transit and mobility in the coming years,” Hough says. “Those challenges will be particularly acute in rural areas where the proportion of elderly is even higher and transit and mobility already face difficulties.”

SURTC’s student bus shelter design competition was also highlighted at the conference. The competition was featured in the Community Transportation Association of America’s exhibit. “CTAA wanted to have the bus shelter design at the conference to make two important points,” noted Jane Hardin, Senior Transportation Specialist with CTAA. “First, to attract older passengers, public transportation needs to provide senior-friendly transportation facilities. Second,



these senior-friendly facilities will also attract passengers of all ages.”

Hardin noted that the student design featured nearly all of the features that older transit riders ask for in bus shelters. “It’s a nearly ideal example of universal design,” she says.

Hough says the experience will be valuable as SURTC continues to look at transit for all riders. “We were able to gain some important feedback and information from attendees at the conference,” she says.

SURTC Researchers Present at TRF Meeting

Two SURTC researchers presented their research studies at the 47th Annual Transportation Research Forum March 23-25 at New York University.

The TRF is a professional transportation organization dedicated to providing an impartial forum for the exchange of ideas among practitioners, researchers and government officials regarding all aspects of logistics.

David Ripplinger, an associate research fellow with SURTC, discussed his findings on the use of intelligent transportation systems (ITS) in coordinating community transportation services. He examined the experiences of three organizations in planning, implementing and operating ITS to meet the mobility needs of their residents through improved coordination. His observations provide insights on the challenges of implementing the technology as well as the advantages offered by the innovations.

Del Peterson, an associate research fellow with SURTC, reviewed a study on the feasibility of commuter bus service between Wahpeton-Breckenridge and Fargo-Moorhead. Nearly 50 percent of commuters surveyed indicated they would use an “express” bus for their commute between Fargo-Moorhead and Wahpeton-Breckenridge. The biggest obstacle was concern over transportation back to Wahpeton-Breckenridge in the event of an emergency. The study determined the number of regular commuters between the Wahpeton-Breckenridge and Fargo-Moorhead metro areas, explored the willingness of commuters to utilize commuter bus service, determined what commuter bus service features were of utmost importance to travelers, and gauged the awareness of local commuters to commuter bus service and its features.

Ripplinger Presents at TRB Meeting

SURTC associate research fellow David Ripplinger presented his study of paratransit service in the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area at the Transportation Research Board annual meeting in Washington, DC, in December.

He outlined results of the study as part of a panel of experts assembled to discuss paratransit operations, planning and regulation. The goal of Ripplinger’s study was to provide information to the Metropolitan Area Transit to assist in determining the optimal form of paratransit service to outlying areas where economic realities and the desire for a high level of customer service must find balance. The service alternatives presented all met federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations regarding complementary paratransit service.

The meeting attracted more than 9,000 transportation professionals from around the world with more than 2,600 presentations covering all modes of transportation.

Beck Joins SURTC



Natalie Beck

Natalie Beck is an undergraduate research assistant for SURTC. She is from the big sky area of Billings, MT. Natalie is a senior pursuing her degree in business administration with a minor in child development and family science. Her hobbies include hanging out with friends and reading. She is researching the multiple definitions and numerical values associated with the term “rural”

to develop a functional description encompassing major population breaks.



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