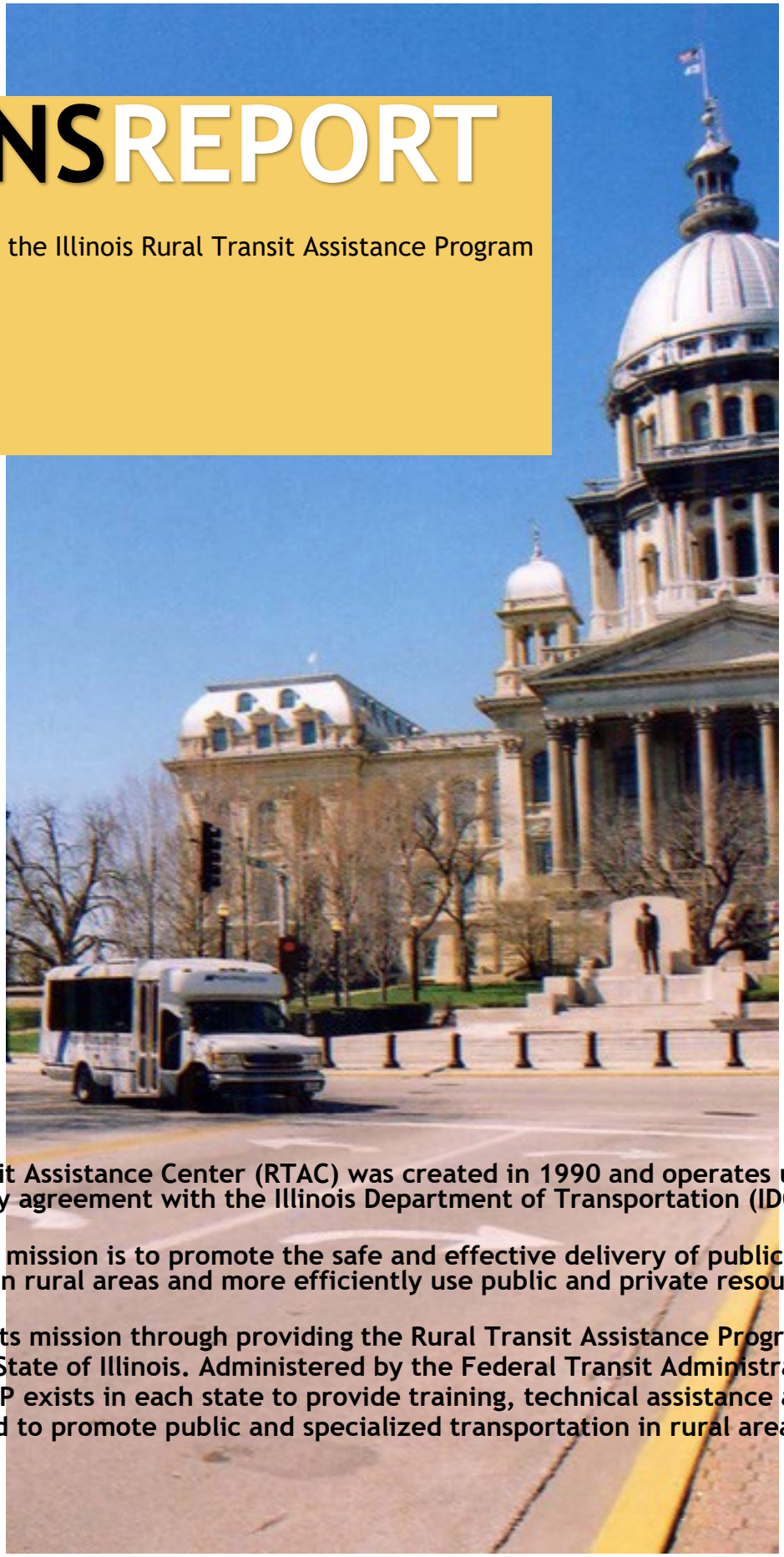
TRANSREPORT

The Newsletter of the Illinois Rural Transit Assistance Program

Fall 2022



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The Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) was created in 1990 and operates under an inter-agency agreement with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

The RTAC mission is to promote the safe and effective delivery of public transportation in rural areas and more efficiently use public and private resources.

RTAC fulfills its mission through providing the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) for the State of Illinois. Administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), an RTAP exists in each state to provide training, technical assistance and research, and to promote public and specialized transportation in rural areas.

RTAC Notes

Dave Patton, Director

Where to cut expenses in rural public transportation? This is a question oft-asked nowadays. The cost of fuel, scarcity of parts, theft of supplies and catalytic converters, overhead costs skyrocketing (heating, electricity, etc), and the difficulty with finding drivers and other staff members to fill open positions are some of the cost centers being hit.

More than one transit provider has recently considered the double-whammy concept of high-costs for obtaining medical certificates for drivers, and retaining and hiring drivers. It's no secret that the average age of rural public transit employees is inching upward and when it comes to drivers, the inching may be more like "footing." With advanced age and the accompanying medical concerns, the value of an expensive DOT physical is evident. In some cases agencies are finding that simply renewing the employment of experienced drivers is getting harder and harder because not only are people leaving the workforce, but they are being driven out because their health may not be good enough to keep driving. In one case I recently learned that a doctor refused to issue a medical certificate unless the driver under exam took a sleep-study and was then determined able to drive safely. The average cost of a sleep study in Illinois falls into a range between $1500 and $2000. This is a direct cost that the transit agency must pay. So, a completely valid question from the agency is "do we really have to do this/pay for this?" Most rural public transit agencies in Illinois do pay for pre-employment DOT physicals for drivers/prospective drivers. But are DOT physicals required? In short, the answer is yes in Illinois if the agency transports passengers in a vehicle with a gross vehicle weight of 10,000 pounds or more, or that may carry 11 or more (including the driver." And this requirement is not based upon a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) – CDL holders must pass a DOT physical. But, in Illinois, most other professional bus drivers also must. Here are the specifics:

The Illinois Secretary of State's rules of the road for non-CDLs https://www.ilsos.gov/publications/pdf_publications/dsd_x142.pdf has a little section for 2nd Division vehicles wherein there is a requirement for Medical Certificates for driving vehicles with a GVWR over 10,000 pounds, or which can carry more than ten persons. See pages 3 and 4 of this document.

The definition of a Second Division Vehicle in Illinois follows:

A second division vehicle is:

* designed to carry more than 10 persons;
* designed or used for living quarters;
* designed for pulling or carrying freight or cargo;
* a first division vehicle remodeled for use as a second division vehicle;
* a first division vehicle used and registered as a school bus. Operators of a second division vehicle with a gross motor vehicle weight of 10,001 pounds or more are required to carry a Medical Examiner's Certificate with them at all times while operating the vehicle. In addition, drivers are required to maintain a file containing a written test verification, road test verification and other records.

If a transit provider only uses minivans then a DOT physical is NOT required. I am not aware of such an operation, but certainly many providers do use minivans and a driver could be restricted to only driving those minivans. But, if the reason that driver is driving only minivans is because he/she can't pass a physical, I would argue that the provider is facing unnecessary legal jeopardy in the event of this driver having a serious accident resulting in bodily injury.

So, the point of this article is that, basically, rural public transportation providers should fully expect to pay for DOT physicals and probably should pay for follow-on testing which may come from those physicals – if a particular person who will be, or will continue to drive is worth hiring. Safety of the passengers must come first, followed by limiting liability of the transit provider, and then by budget management issues. Costs have to be trimmed elsewhere.

Winter Emergency Preparedness Tips

Heavy snow, freezing rain, sleet, and high winds. Here we go again. Rural transit drivers and passengers are often on the road when this type of weather occurs, and how the drivers react can truly be a matter of life or death. It is safe to say that rural transit systems address how to drive in hazardous weather, but hopefully they also discuss what to do if the vehicle gets stranded. Several years ago The Federal Transit Administration, through the National Transit Institute at Rutgers University, published an Emergency Preparedness Guide for Transit Employees, which listed the following tips for stranded transit vehicles:

- Stay with the vehicle.
- At night turn on the vehicle interior lights so crews or rescuers can locate you.
- If stranded in a remote, rural area spread a large cloth over the snow to attract attention of rescue personnel.
- If you need to pull off the roadway, set your hazard lights to flash and remain in vehicle.
- Run the engine and heater about ten minutes each hour to keep warm. While the engine is running, slightly open a window and keep the exhaust pipe free of snow to minimize carbon monoxide risk. Be careful not to run vehicle battery down.

The guide also offered also offered some tips appropriate for any emergency:

- Remain calm, stay patient and be prepared to make key decisions as quickly as possible.
- Provide a specific, yet concise, description of the situation to your transit control center. Inform them of the site conditions and health status of you and your passengers.
- Listen for dispatchers' response and instructions and, if possible, listen to your radio for developing news.
- Inform and give passengers clear directions during the early stages of the emergency. Continue to update them frequently throughout the event.

The RTAC lending library has a DVD which addresses winter driving, item number D-043, available for loan.

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Voluntary Action Center, Operators of Kendall Area Transit, Announces New Leadership Roles

Voluntary Action Center of Northern Illinois (VAC) Chief Executive Officer Ellen Rogers takes a new role as the Chief Development officer handing the agency's reigns to Chief Financial Officer Nate Kloster.

Nate Kloster

The non-profit agency incorporated in 1974 and governed by a volunteer board of directors comprised of local representatives now serves the nutrition and transportation needs of individuals in five counties.

Board President Michael Haines made the announcement this week, saying, "Ellen Rogers requested the opportunity to step away from her position as CEO, but she has agreed to continue in a management role as the Chief Development Officer."

"Nate Kloster, VAC's CFO has accepted the position of CEO, having served as Interim CEO during Ellen's leave of absence. Rounding out our Executive Management team is Tracy Smith now serving as Chief Operating Officer for Transit and Facilities," Haines added.

During her tenure at VAC, Ellen has met many challenges head on, including the construction of the community kitchen in Sycamore, the expansion of service areas, the growth of the Meals on Wheels program and the impact of declining funds and increasing need. "As Ellen begins her 34th year at VAC, we are grateful that she will continue to be the heart of our agency to so many we serve," Haines said.

Ellen Rogers

"I have been so honored to serve as CEO since 2015, and Executive Director, and Associate Director prior to that," Ellen said. "I am looking forward to this exciting opportunity to take this new direction in the agency. As the CDO my focus will be further developing the resources of the agency.

In addition, I will work closely with Nate, Tracy Smith, and our managers to ensure a smooth succession and continuity for our agency, our clients, and our communities."

According to Haines, Nate's service as interim CEO put him in an excellent position as the ideal person to accept the role permanently. "Nate accepted the position of CFO when the agency faced many financial challenges, including the impact of two years with significantly delayed state funding. Nate has been instrumental in stabilizing the agency's funding picture and addressing changes in it."

Tracy Smith

"We have nearly 100 dedicated employees and many more volunteers that are the hands and feet of this organization." Nate said. "It's a privilege and an honor to serve alongside this team."

As the TransVAC operations manager, Tracy was instrumental in the expansion of VAC's rural transportation program and addressing the impact of the loss of the urban transportation service in DeKalb County. He has overseen upgrading of the computer routing system and integration of all 3 transit programs operated by VAC. He has been instrumental in addressing the maintenance and facility needs of the agency.

These new leadership changes became effective October 1, 2022. "We are grateful to have such a strong leadership team and look forward to VAC being positioned to meet the growing needs of our communities," Haines said.

Congratulations to Amanda Olvera who is the new Director of the Grundy Transit System

HSTP Coordinator Spotlight

Reema Abi-Akar has been with the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission in Peoria for five and a half years. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a master's degree from the University of Michigan. She has worked on a wide range of regional projects, such as Peoria Lakes planning, hazard mitigation, regional water supply planning, and 2020 Census marketing. As the Region 5 HSTP Coordinator, her main focus is public transit planning for seniors and people with disabilities. She also serves as the communications guru and de-facto editor-in-chief of the office. In her spare time, she serves as the President of the Peoria Prowlers Roller Derby and evaluates ice cream shops in her area.

My name is Tim Hammers and I am the HSTP coordinator for Regions 1 & 3 working out of the office of North Central Illinois Council of Governments located in Ottawa IL. I attended college at North Central College in Naperville, IL and majored in business management with a minor in finance. I played football at NCC and was an All Conference & All American linebacker for the North Central Cardinals. I spent almost 20 years in the hearing aid industry and recently transitioned into the transportation field with this coordinator role in public transportation. I am married to my beautiful wife Christa and we have 2 wonderful children Hazel, 4 and Henry, 3. In my spare time I enjoy spending time with my family, watching sports, fishing and I love to golf.

FY 2022 RTAC Classroom Driver Training

RTAC is pleased to provide to your agency this year's classroom driver training program. The RTAC trainers have created new true/false and multiple choice question tests for Defensive Driving, Emergency Procedures, Passenger Assistance, and an optional Passenger Emergencies training. Each of the written tests relates to the corresponding on-site training. All of the driver training classroom material will soon be available at http://www.iira.org/rtac/resources/

Also, please visit our website to view the library items that correlate with the four trainings.

How to proceed:

1. Have each driver take the written tests—these tests are not just for new drivers, but for everyone.
2. Fill out the sign-in sheet, which signifies that your drivers have taken the written tests. At the end of August 2022, RTAC will submit to IDOT-OIPI a listing of each agency that has completed the written tests/on-site training, broken down by employee name and which tests and on-site trainings the employee completed.
3. Call/email RTAC to schedule the on-site trainings: Mable Kreps at 309.298.2141 or MR-Kreps@wiu.edu
4. Mail, email, or fax (309.298.2162) the sign-in sheet(s) for the tests and on-site trainings to RTAC. Please do not send us the completed tests.

Here is what to expect during the on-site trainings:

Defensive Driving: The course focuses on driving techniques that will enable transit drivers to drive in a more defensive manner. It addresses issues such as stopping distance, field of vision, vehicle controls, speed management, and vehicle inspections.

Emergency Procedures: Focuses on emergency preparedness (safety checks the driver should conduct before leaving on the trip and types of emergency equipment that should be on the vehicle) and on procedures to follow in case of an actual emergency (evacuation of passengers, first aid, etc.).

Passenger Assistance: In addition to explaining proper securement of wheelchairs, use of the wheelchair lift, and various ways to physically assist passengers, this course also addresses sensitivity issues and the best way to communicate with people with disabilities, manual operation of the lift in case of mechanical failure, as well as a customer service component.

Passenger Emergencies: Topics discussed will include the types of passenger emergencies, effective communication, how to be proactive, and how to respond to a variety of passenger emergencies.

If you have any questions, please email or contact Mable at 309.298.2141 or MR-Kreps@wiu.edu

RTAC Offers TAPTCO Online Training!

RTAC has partnered with TAPTCO to provide online driver training. For over 30 years, the experts at TAPTCO Transit & Paratransit Company have been designing award-winning bus driver training programs with specialties that include fleet operations and safety, industrial psychology, instructional design, and media production. This breakthrough series of safety video programs and study guides for bus driver training are designed by our team of performance improvement experts with specialties that include fleet operations and safety, industrial psychology, instructional design, and media production.

This training, the Paratransit Operator Development Course, is widely used across the nation, and in an online form, is highly appropriate for training new drivers and refreshing experienced paratransit personnel. All Illinois Section 5311 grantees and operators are eligible for this free training, with Section 5310 providers on a secondary basis. The best way to take advantage of this online resource is to have an agency's training manager (or whoever holds this duty) send RTAC each trainee's name, and email address, and RTAC will set-up an account for that trainee, and send a return email to the trainee with a username and password. At present, in order to use the online system, each trainee must have a unique email address. If a trainee does not/will not have an email address, we can work around that. Each trainee will be able to access his/her account and step through the 33 training courses and quizzes. Agency training managers will be able to see each student's progress and when the course is completed, print out a certificate. Certificates may be printed at the end of each course, if desired. Some agencies are placing these certificates into each trainee's personnel file.

RTAC is taking registrations — please write Dave Patton at dc-patton@wiu.edu.

Did You Know?

1 in 5

Americans live in rural communities.

Word Search

K N X S I F L E X I B L E F U N D I N G J I N
W E R Z M K M M Z Y T S S C K J A S C H K D U
H Q L Q Q W I P L Z H J W P F B Y M X S Z N B
N W O P E R A T I N G F U N D S Z K F V F A P
J U Q I Z K A E R A E C I V R E S D G Q V Y B
A M G Q F F Q S R G B K K N O J B Z Q X H G U
W U V S J K J A Q B E K G C Z M B R H G C J B
T A C C E S S I B L E V E H I C L E F E K S A
A S Z E J C N R E T L E H S S U B D G I N K C
H J Y B W C O M M U T E R R J I H U J C G S I
O G S I O N I L L I N R E T S A E H T R O N X
C J D X M M B S C U L P E A K P E R I O D Q A
E O G I J C I Z B Q Z E M I T N W O D R S T T
R B W K X R H S X Y O X P W H A I J C G Q S A
I A T I S N A R T O R C I M K U F W E P C D Q
L J R E H A B I L I T A T I O N T N H Y M L J

Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden ↑ ↓ → ← and ↘ .

ACCESSIBLE VEHICLE
BUS SHELTER
COMMUTER
DOWNTIME
FLEXIBLE FUNDING
MICROTRANSIT
NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS
OPERATING FUNDS
PEAK PERIOD
REHABILITATION
SERVICE AREA
TAXICAB

RTAC FYI

If you're new(er) to rural transit, make sure to surf over to the National RTAP website and check-out the newly updated Transit Manager's Toolkit. This is a fantastic and comprehensive manual which explains almost everything you could need to know, from working with Boards, to understanding federal regulations, to operations and planning.

The document is 179 pages.

SAVE THE DATE

2023 RTAC Spring Conference

March 7-8, 2023

The Northfield Center - Springfield, IL

IL RTAP Advisory Council

Jean Jumper, West Central IL MTD, Chair

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Kim Zimmerman, North Central Area Transit

Morgan Lewis, Warren County PCOM

Cheryl Shutt, Coles County Council on Aging

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