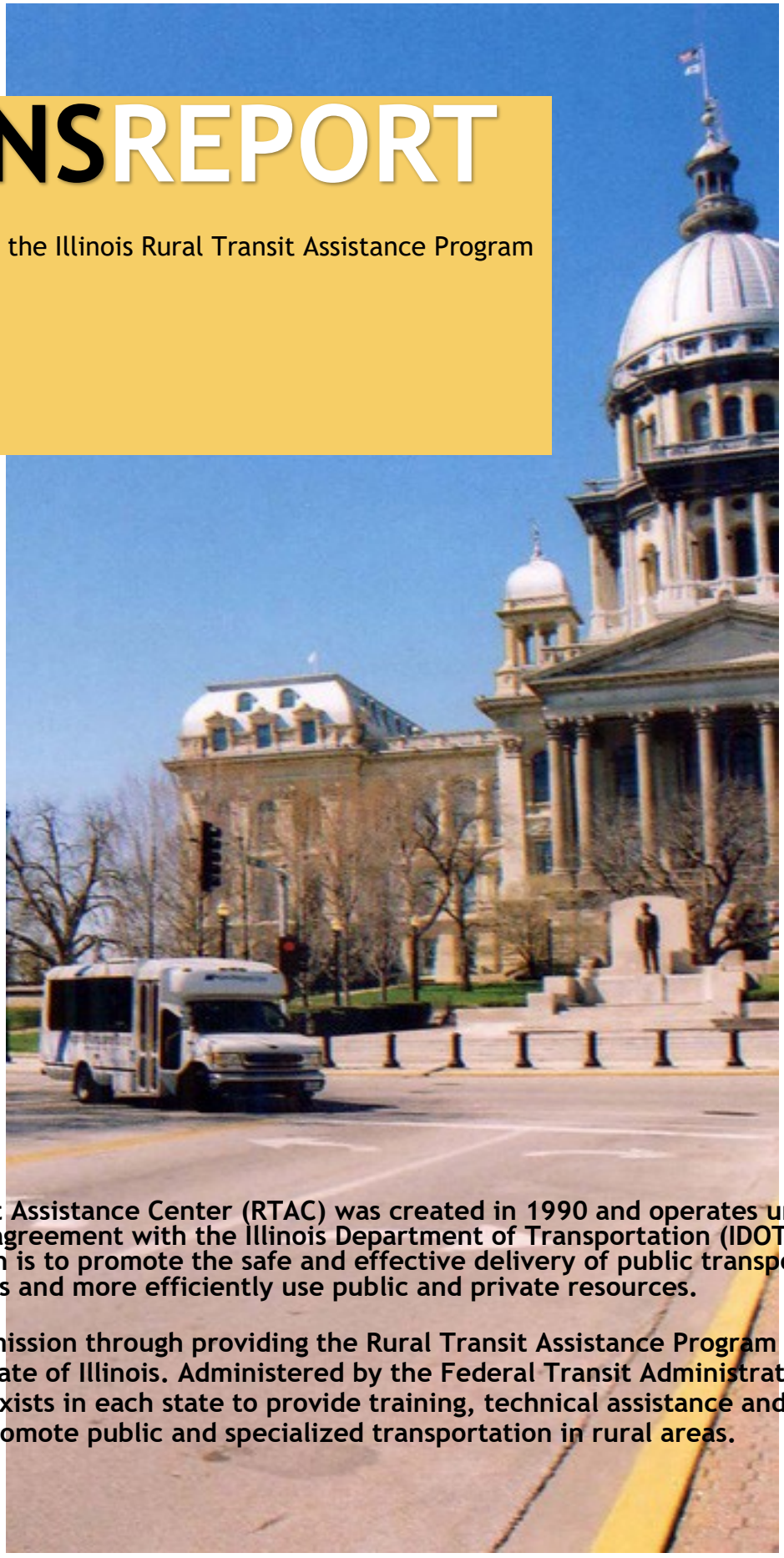
TRANSREPORT

The Newsletter of the Illinois Rural Transit Assistance Program

Summer, 2021



RTAC Staff:

Dave Patton

Mable Kreps

Ed Heflin

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

The big occurrence for the last quarter was a real, in-person conference! The Illinois Public Transportation Association hosted its Fall conference in Peoria, across September 14-16. The event was held at the venerable, yet much improved and renovated Pere Marquette Hotel. With at least 175 people in attendance, and lots of other activity at the hotel, the conference was not only a success with respect to presentations and training, but was a wonderful chance to see each other and basically a meaningful chance to get out of the office or the home office. The last in-person conference for us was the RTAC Spring conference in March, 2020 – the same month we all were subjected to the results of a pandemic shutdown. RTAC played a small role in the IPTA Fall conference by providing for a breakout session and speaker. The pre-conference golf outing at Coyote Creek, and the evening events at the Peoria Riverfront Museum (Tuesday evening) and the dinner cruise on the Spirit of Peoria paddlewheel riverboat were all well attended and highly enjoyable.

Carl Gnadt at the podium getting s going

Karl Gnadt, the Managing Director of the Champaign-Urbana MTD and President of IPTA did a fine job leading the conference – he has a unique sense of humor that played very well paired with his genuine regard for public transportation and the work of IPTA. Laura Calderon, IPTA's Executive Director, Mary Pat McDaniels, and her staff in conjunction with the great staff of Greater Peoria Mass Transit District, led by Doug Roelfs, did a fantastic job of putting together the whole event. GPMTD provided transportation to the evening events, including through the use of a brand new, all-electric bus, which showed the shiny future of such equipment. Although I could only attend two of the breakout sessions, I was very interested in Mark Szyperski's take and advice on managing the current difficulties many providers are experiencing with driver hiring and retention. Mostly Mark focused on retention as the best option to keep vehicles on the road. He noted that agencies and providers need to stay on top of social media and online product-review sites where there may be negative information

about a transit operation. Managers need to use social media and other sites to both present a good picture of their organizations and to answer/explain negative reviews in order to attract new drivers. With wages going up across the board, hiring drivers is competitive with many other driving opportunities so one must pay attention to what the outside world sees and hears about your organization.

The Pere Marquette's 2nd floor Grand Hallway

Other speakers covered topics such as air quality and new technology for disinfecting air on buses and in buildings and on surfaces; The keynote speaker, Linda Callecod talked about the importance of seeing and understanding perspectives through the eyes of others, and about how differently things seem amongst people of different cultures and races. Other talks addressed transit security, transportation financial planning, rebuilding ridership, and the ongoing recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a great industry and vendor expo in the Peoria Civic Center next door to the Pere Marquette.

The conference wrapped-up on Thursday morning with a state of the industry talk from Taylor Klocke, of CTAA, and Art Guzetti, of APTA. After an excellent series of updates and presentations from FTA's Kelley Brookins, and from nearly all of IDOT's large group of excellent personnel led by Shoun Reese, OIPI Deputy Director of Transit, the conference ended with a great lunch and prize giveaway (your scribe managed to win a bottle of meat prep that was appropriately titled for a part of a hog's anatomy that normally would not be mentioned much, if ever, but was featured prominently in nearly every presentation during the conference ☺

Here is Terri Finn, HSTP Coordinator for Regions 9, 10, and 11, trying out the cool, new Quantum securement device. This tool, by Q'Straint allows a passenger to be secured with little to no assistance from the driver. At destination, the driver is able to activate a system release from the driver's seat. The long "arm" moves up and down, and in, constantly adjusting pressure to keep the passenger secure.

Inside GPMTD's new electric city bus

Masked and ready for the museum

Shoun Reese, IDOT OIPI's Deputy Director for Transit leads off on Thursday for a series of excellent IDOT presenters.

Taylor Klocke, CTAA's Senior Communications, Events and Legislative Specialist, addresses the full room on Thursday morning.

Mark Szyperski leads his presentation about driver recruitment and retention in the Lasalle Ballroom — the coldest room in the building — maybe in all of Peoria. The temperature hovered in the upper 50s and helped even more to keep attendees riveted on the subject. Mark has over 30 years of transit and technical experience working within rural, urban, intercity, and regulatory environments. One of the main takeaways from this presentation was the critical need to defend your agency's image by not only doing the right thing, but by aggressively monitoring and using social media. And to recognize the good work that drivers are doing — especially when they don't realize that they are being watched.

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.

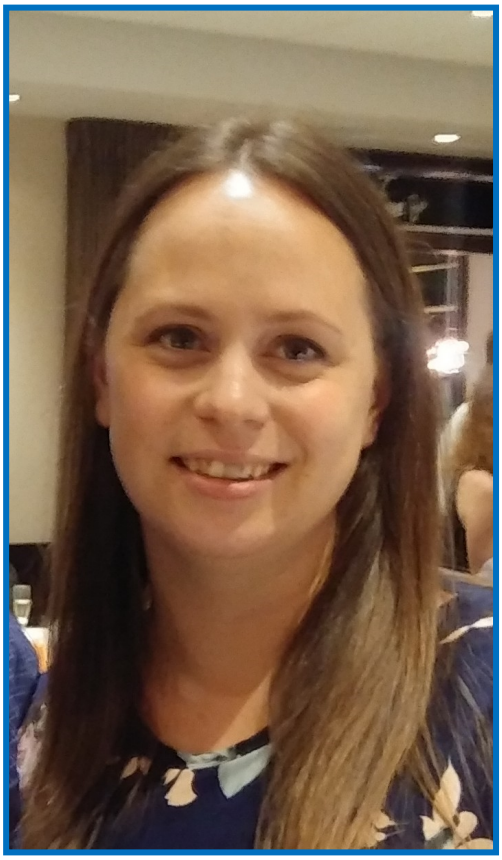
Emergency Procedures: Focuses on emergency preparedness (safety checks the driver should conduct before leaving on the trip and types of emergency equipment that should be on the vehicle) and on procedures to follow in case of an actual emergency (evacuation of passengers, first aid, etc.).

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

IDOT Welcomes Melissa Ohrwall



Melissa Ohrwall is currently working with IDOT as a Transit Operating Compliance Project Manager in the Northern section. She has 13.5 years' experience working in transportation. In her words:

I began as a bus operator for an urban fixed route and paratransit service. From there I worked my way up to Safety and Training manager, operations manager, then finally General Manager. During my time as Safety and Training Manager and Operations Manager I had the opportunity to travel across the US assisting other transit locations with their training of drivers and other managerial staff. I was also an acting 3rd party safety officer for my location, testing drivers for their CDLs with the state of Illinois. During my time as General Manager, I was able to oversee my system grow from being a private contractor with a local school, to working as a contractor with the City. I have my associate degree from Kishwaukee Community College and am close to completion on my Bachelor's Degree in Operations Management and Information Systems with a focus on Data Analytics from Northern Illinois University. My favorite part about being a member of the IDOT team is being able to help other transit professionals across Illinois. I know what It is like to work in the field while trying to balance many challenging tasks and deadlines, and therefore I find it very fulfilling to help other transit professionals. Once I got my feet wet in transit, I never looked back. The work being done by those in the industry is so important to the communities they serve, and I am glad to be a part of it.

Illinois Department of Transportation

Welcome to Mimi Hutchinson, Illinois Region 8 HSTP Coordinator

Mimi Hutchinson is excited to begin the role of HSTP Coordinator/ PCOM at the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) starting on 8/29/21. She is passionate about mobility justice, public transportation advocacy, and imaginative approaches to community development. Prior to this role, she worked part-time as a Planner II for CCRPC.

Mimi recently graduated with a Master of Urban and Regional Planning degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). She wrote her master's thesis on rural transportation and mobility in Appalachia. If you're interested in looking at it, email her for a digital copy! While a graduate student at UIUC, she held research assistantships at the Construction Research Engineering Laboratory (CERL) in Champaign, IL, and for an IDOT-funded project in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at UIUC. As a research assistant, Mimi composed literature reviews and academic papers and conducted interview campaigns with transportation planning professionals and lapsed transit riders from across Illinois. She has also held urban planning internships at UIUC's Research Park and the City of Urbana, Illinois.

In the past year, Mimi has served on two transportation advisory boards in Champaign-Urbana, as the Transportation Representative for Illinois Student Government, and was the 2021 recipient of the Helene M. Overly Graduate Scholarship from the Greater Chicago Chapter of WTS International.

For leisure, she enjoys making art and digital content, learning about ancient history, consuming news media, visiting Chicago, and spending time outside. Her favorite mode of transportation is the bus. □

RTAC FYI
Windows 11 to be Released October 5, 2021

Windows 11 has a release date of October 5, but that doesn't mean that everyone should rush to the Internet and work on an upgrade. Eligible Windows 10 machines will get a free upgrade to the next-generation operating system, but you'll need to make sure your laptop or desktop has the right CPU and features to support Windows 11.

You can check if your PC is eligible for the free Windows 11 upgrade by going to Windows.com and downloading the PC Health Check app. But as Microsoft is taking a "phased and measured process," some Windows 10 users aren't likely to get the upgrade until later on in the year or 2022. That's because, basically, Microsoft will prioritize the Windows 11 roll out over based on hardware eligibility, reliability metrics, age of device and other factors.

2022 RTAC Roadeo

The next RTAC Roadeo is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, April 30, 2022 in New Berlin, IL.

Below are some of the trophies won by drivers of South Central Mass Transit District!

RTAC Spring Conference

2022's conference will be held in Springfield March 1-2.

IL RTAP Advisory Council

Jean Jumper, West Central IL MTD, Chair

Adam Lach, Rides MTD, Vice-Chair

Rollin Barton, Dept. on Aging

Sarah Nollman-Hodge, South Central IL MTD

Sherry Hicks, FAYCO, Inc.

Kim Zimmerman, North Central Area Transit

Mike Neuenkirchen, Voluntary Action Center

Morgan Lewis, Warren County PCOM

Cheryl Shutt, Coles County Council on Aging

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RTAC Website: www.iira.org/rtac/

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