TRANSREPORT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

RTAC
Rural Transit Assistance Center

IIRA
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

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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

Recently I was trying to explain to a non-rural-public-transit friend about what we do – what it means to provide rural public transit and what paratransit means. It is not so easy to come up with simple explanations for subjects/topics for laymen or students when you live with the subject daily. It is very easy to describe something about which one is intimately knowledgeable if you have unlimited time. Mark Szyperski, On Your Mark Transportation, has stressed the importance of being able to deliver your elevator talk about what you and your agency do - in "too-short period" for waffling or long explanations. If you haven't created such brief speeches, it would be great to do so. My short explanation was along the lines of "we provide inexpensive transportation in rural areas primarily for those in the disability community and for those who cannot drive for whatever reason. We then make our services available to anyone." I found a fantastic article published in Online Mass Transit magazine, written by Christian Kent, Christian T. Kent Transit Management Consulting, LLC. Mr. Kent has 35 years of experience with public transit, ADA, and paratransit and with his permission we reprint his article below.

Have We Outgrown Paratransit

Christian Kent

Before the passage of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, access to public transit for people with disabilities was extremely limited, mainly because of indifferent and erroneous assumptions about the numbers, needs, capabilities and aspirations of people with disabilities. Today, access to transit is vastly improved, and industry statistics reflect this accordingly.

Since 2000, local bus fleets nationwide have moved from 81 percent to 100 percent accessible, and millions of customers with disabilities are making use of fixed-route transit who could not have done so before. The original intent of requiring complementary paratransit service was to bridge that gap, extending the equivalent of fixed-route transit to people with disabilities who could not make use of an otherwise inaccessible system, yet the demand for paratransit service has grown exponentially since its inception, despite North America achieving a mostly accessible fixed-route transit network.

The question is, do we need more paratransit or is it time for something else?

Have We Outgrown Paratransit Continued

Among the ADA's many strengths is it was developed with significant input from the disability community, and it requires ongoing engagement with the community for any changes being contemplated that could affect them (the "nothing about us without us" doctrine). However, now that ADA paratransit service has been fully implemented across the country -- count (and few you will find) the number of people with disabilities who are involved in decisions regarding the deployment of service or its evolution into other offerings that might better meet the needs of the target constituency.

In the past 33 years, we have often attempted to "perfect" paratransit without asking if there was something better or if the disability community's expectations had changed. There are many reasons for this:

1. The regulations themselves have not changed (except to clarify further we are expected to interpret existing requirements more in the customer's favor).
2. We have been motivated to apply sophisticated technology not previously available to resolve long-standing paratransit problems.
3. Our tendency to plan services for people with and without disabilities separately.

While the first two reasons are understandable, the third is harder to defend, except perhaps to attribute it to the law of inertia.

By operating paratransit service in its current form, we are preserving a 1990s artifact that offers only a half-portion of what is available today, such as only "next day service" instead of the "just-in-time" service being enjoyed by customers of transportation network companies (TNCs); shared rides that are typically not commingled with riders of other (mainstream) services, which often result in longer ride times due to scheduling being dependent on the placement of the trip with respect to other customers' trips, as well as trip time negotiation, which is the notion that eligibility for the service can be restricted on a trip-by-trip basis when the practical application of such vetting is difficult to implement – not to mention that restricting transit use should not be our objective. Efforts to perfect this version of service also fall short – now we have technology that more precisely informs the customer of how late the ride will be. That applies updated algorithms to the same population of trips to be scheduled, still with a "next day" orientation, and that only offers service where fixed-route transit exists, even as agencies begin to replace fixed-route service with on-demand.

Customers with disabilities overwhelmingly desire equity and inclusion. They want to go about their lives in a manner similar to those around them. To achieve this, we must ascribe to the philosophy of "one system" that serves everyone – one in which accessibility for all is in the genetic material that makes up whatever we create.

Have We Outgrown Paratransit Continued

The one “system” does not (and should not) be interpreted as one “entity.”

If there is one thing we have learned from the pandemic, it is the transit industry alone cannot meet the expansive demand for service that comes from our very diverse society. Partnerships are the name of the game, and transit agencies must work effectively with their human services counterparts, among others, to maximize the number of options available to customers while keeping costs sustainable. Many agencies have already begun this practice and the partnerships they have created are yielding positive results, but many others are creating microtransit pilot programs and other partnerships in which accessibility is a secondary consideration and this is a missed opportunity.

We have heard in recent years transit agencies are faced with the reality they are not merely transportation providers, but also mobility integrators – hubs of the communities they serve that consolidate mobility information in accessible formats that enable customers to choose from an array of options, many of which are provided by third parties. Partnerships with TNCs are one form of this, and as agencies move to replace low-performing fixed-route service with on-demand service, a new mobility option has emerged, and since paratransit service is, by definition, on-demand – then should we not be aiming microtransit services to accommodate demand that heretofore had to be served by paratransit? With microtransit being offered with same-day (perhaps same-hour) service, customers with disabilities can now be afforded service that is by design substantially better than traditional ADA paratransit and at a lower cost to the agency.

By incorporating accessibility into these new modes of transit, we are “building back better” with an accessible infrastructure that should reduce the dependency on paratransit for future generations. The vision of a single “system” accessible to all is one that has been discussed for many years but is often viewed as aspirational. The prevailing belief has been it would take such a costly investment in infrastructure that it could only be achieved in the very distant future, but the future is now. Between the federal funding that has been made available for infrastructure renewal and the rethinking of the deployment model of fixed-route transit, there has been no better time to revisit the concept of universal design in our nation’s transit systems.

To do this, we need a new approach. First, it is vital that representation from the disability community be included in the design of microtransit and other emerging modes of transit – not just for paratransit. Such representation is also sorely needed in leadership positions at transit agencies from which strategic decisions are made. Second, we need to commit to making accessibility an integral part of all our service offerings.

Have We Outgrown Paratransit Continued

This includes ensuring accessibility of the new kinds of vehicles that are being designed for transit, such as the autonomous vehicle and those with renewable energy. Third, we must think holistically about the transit ecosystems we create in our communities and how services can complement one another as they collectively respond to overall demand.

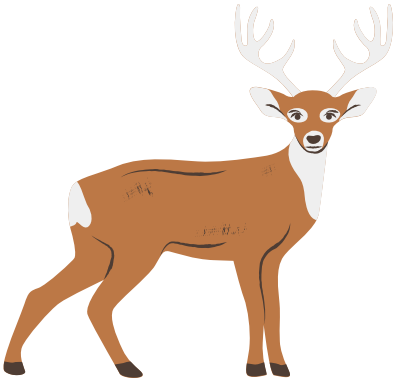
Transit agencies must be willing to partner much more often and embrace the mobility integrator role. This means partnering with social service organizations and small businesses that provide transportation and related services; identifying and sharing grant funding sources with these partners, and broadcasting numerous options to the public to create the most accessible, navigable environment for everyone. Finally, we must remember that ADA paratransit was never meant to be the mode of choice for people with disabilities, but rather a guarantor of mobility when other options fell short. Everything we do to empower our customers with disabilities is very much in the spirit of the ADA, and there is nothing in the regulations that prohibits going above and beyond minimum requirements. Many agencies, genuinely wanting to do right by their communities, exceeded the requirements in years past by offering more paratransit service than required and then encountered sustainability issues. But now the opportunity is before us to resolve paratransit sustainability by enabling even better choices for our customers, some of which we will operate and some of which we will support. It turns out that one size does not fit all, and it never did.

So, to the question at hand – have we outgrown paratransit? The answer is – mostly yes. As one who has spent most of the past 35 years designing, repairing, delivering, refining, talking and teaching about paratransit service, I continue to be grateful for the transformative effect it has had on our society and for the many opportunities it has given me to serve.

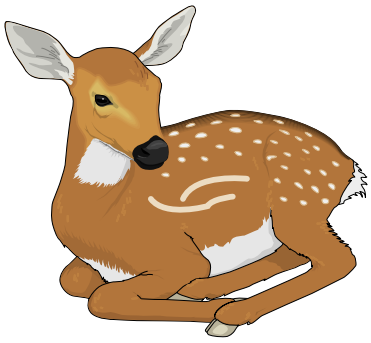
Because of paratransit, millions of people with disabilities have been able to “live their best lives,” engaging in all of life’s activities and being “seen.” Some form of paratransit service may always be needed because of: (1) the special assistance provided by our many professional paratransit operators; (2) the accessible fleets that are funded by transit agencies more than any other source and (3) because of the inaccessibility of the infrastructure around transit (i.e., sidewalks, curb cuts and other path of travel barriers) that will continue to take years to resolve, but there is a difference between maintaining paratransit as the primary option for customers and the brighter prospect that paratransit is a de minimus option among many others available to people with disabilities, many of which will offer more than what paratransit can deliver. This is the equitable future we should all be working to achieve.

Don’t Swerve for the Deer

Did you know the top 10 Illinois counties for crashes involving deer in 2022 were:



1.	Cook	542
2.	Madison	396
3.	McHenry	351
4.	Lake	350
5.	Will	344
6.	Peoria	323
7.	Fulton	313
8.	Kane	286
9.	Sangamon	282
10.	Macoupin	271



“While your natural instinct is to steer quickly out of the way when you see a deer, remember to not veer suddenly because you could lose control of your vehicle and swerve into another lane or off the road,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Omer Osman. “Always prepare for the unexpected. A deer might stop in the middle of the road or double back. They also frequently travel in groups so when you see one there likely are others nearby.” To read more click here:
Deer on the road? Avoid the urge to swerve.

Laws That Will Affect You Starting in 2024

On March 13, 2023, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed the Paid Leave for All Workers Act (PLAWA) into law, guaranteeing all workers in the state of Illinois 40 hours of paid time off each year for any reason. The law goes into effect on January 1, 2024. To read more about it click here:
Illinois' New Paid Leave Law: What Employers Need to Know

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER

By Ed Heflin

Jean Jumper, the executive director of the West Central Mass Transit District (WCMTD) since November 2006, will be retiring on February 1, 2024. Under Jumper's leadership, WCMTD has provided efficient and effective public transportation services to Morgan, Scott, Brown, Pike, Cass, and Schuyler Counties. She is known for her integrity and making customer-focused decisions and is admired throughout the Illinois Section 5311 environment.

WCMTD opened its doors on April 15, 2004, with a service area of Morgan and Scott Counties. The first few years were, for lack of a better word, challenging.

It is important to note that Jean didn't come into the job with transit experience. Just like the rest of us who work in this field, she needed to learn the players, the nuts and bolts of operations, the funding mechanisms, and proper handling of paperwork. Those things are important but learning them doesn't guarantee a transit system's success. West Central Mass Transit District has been successful because Jean came into the job with compassion for riders, a strong customer service focus, exemplary leadership skills, and the desire for continuous improvement of the district's services.

Interviewer: You inherited a challenging situation. Can you tell us what you faced?

Jumper: I started my career in transportation in the spring of 2006 with no experience in public transportation, appointed as the newest member of the Board of Trustees. My background (1985 - 2006) was in not-for-profit administration and re-organization. I had spent twenty-one years moving from one troubled agency to another, training boards and staff, revising programs to meet the needs of the members and constituents, increasing revenues, cutting overhead, and setting each back on solid ground before moving on to the next. During those years I filled the position of executive director for four different agencies in two communities and consulted with a half dozen others. In 2000 I had moved back to Jacksonville to take the position of executive director for the local United Way (a part time position) and juggled the schedules of three new teenage stepdaughters!

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

One of the not-for-profits I worked with was the WCMTD Board. The board was struggling with their role and had some concerns about their program and finances but did not know where to start. I had been working with the board in a consulting capacity and was invited to join them in 2005. Subsequent forensic auditing and review of records proved both fascinating and horrifying. Discussions with IDOT staff confirmed what we were finding. Issues included the fact that we were deeper in debt than the total amount of or our grant! Furthermore, the FY2006 Grant had not been submitted, and the reimbursements requests/reports for the current year (three quarters) had not been submitted. The audit for FY2005 was six months overdue and records were incomplete or missing completely. Then the managing director resigned.

Working with another member of the Board of Trustees and IDOT staff, we managed to complete and submit the FY2006 application. We pulled together all the information necessary for the FY2005 and FY2006 audits and submitted it to the auditor, and submitted the FY2006 reimbursement requests to IDOT. Finally, we put together a search committee tasked with finding a new managing director. Then we tackled the FY2007 grant application!

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to IDOT staff members Karen Strell, John Marrella, and Dave Spacek who took phone calls at all hours of the day and even arranged to do conference calls in the evenings. Remember, I was working for another agency at the time, so weekends and evenings were dedicated to working on the WCMTD issues! I learned a lot in those few months, but little did I know how much more I had to learn.

In October I was approached by one of the applicants, someone I had known for many years, for the position of managing director of WCMTD. He sat at my desk, looked me straight in the eye and informed me that he had just met with the WCMTD search committee and turned down the job. He stated he had told the search committee that they already had their new managing director, and suggested they hire me. I was flattered but very skeptical. By the end of the day, the chair of the search committee called me and repeated what this gentleman had said. She asked me to resign from the board and submit my application.

A week later, little knowing what I was getting myself into, I submitted two letters to the Board of Trustees of West Central Mass Transit District. The first was my resignation from the board and the second was my letter of interest and resume for the managing director position. On November 1, 2006 I started my new career as the Managing Director of West Central Mass Transit District.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

I remember being summoned to Brown County to a meeting. Again, without a clue, I walked into a public meeting called to elicit public comments on the proposed annexation of Brown County to the WCMTD! Nothing in the files had prepared me for this. 1 was asked: “What could WCMTD bring to the table and how will we serve the Brown County citizens?” For those of you who know me, this is hard to believe, but I was speechless. I was quickly informed that conversations had been ongoing with the former managing director, which the Board of Trustees seemed to know anything about, but here we were. Another call to IDOT for help! In 2008 we began providing transportation for the citizens and visitors of Brown County.

In 2009 I met Ed Heflin, the director of RTAC, at a meeting in Pike County to discuss public transportation options for them. RTAC, serving as the clearinghouse for the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation, developed and facilitated a transit capacity-building process for counties seeking a Section 5311 grant, the ICCT Coordination Primer Process. Going through the primer process was interesting and I learned a lot. I’ve had the opportunity to work with RTAC on a variety of projects including meetings with Adams County representatives working on county wide services and our annexation of Cass and Schuyler counties in 2014. I was eventually invited to serve on the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Advisory Board, which I have enjoyed greatly.

WCMTD ridership continued to grow between 2006 and 2014. When reimbursements became an issue in FY2016 we were forced to discontinue services for 60 days. All members of the staff were issued layoff notices, by far the most difficult decision I ever had to make.We called all 72 employees to a meeting to distribute the notices and make sure everyone got the same message.I was devastated, but the staff was supportive and their main concern was for their customers! I promised to do what I could to get us back to work as quickly as possible. They offered to volunteer their time, to use their own cars, to call whomever they needed to call. They were 100% ready to go to war! And, to a man/woman they stood behind the agency, and everyone came back when called.

During the 60 days we were closed I worked with one driver each day, utilizing funds from our Title III-B Grant to be able to continue providing lifesaving transportation services for medical reasons. Dialysis, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, bariatric therapy for seniors and individuals with disabilities was the extent of the services available at that time. Each day we used a different driver. I took calls, scheduled these rides and between phone calls worked with the press, IDOT, IPTA, RTAC and elected officials looking for any solutions for the problem.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

Throughout that time staff members would call me or stop in to see how I was doing and offer support and assistance. Customers called too. “How can we help?” “What can we do?” “Who can we call?” Those calls and visits kept me forging ahead.

Members of the Jacksonville Lions Club offered to help. They challenged other organizations to get involved and several stepped up to the plate. Donations came from individuals, churches, and not-for-profit organizations. It was humbling and gratifying to know that our services met so much to our citizens. I will forever owe a personal debt to the Lions Club who took the lead in this effort! In Mid-December I was able to call back the staff and we were back in business!

Then there was COVID. Who would have guessed that something like this would happen? The world all but came to a halt. I am pleased to say that we are on track in FY2024 to come back to pre-COVID ridership levels, despite the challenge of today’s workforce shortage and the inability to procure newer vehicles and the increased costs of keeping our aged fleet up and going as prescribed.

Were there other challenges and successes? Many. Too many to list here. Suffice it to say that the past 17 years have provided new learning experiences on a daily basis! But through it all assistance, resources and support have been available through RTAC, IPTA, and the IDOT staffs. I have come to know terrific people and will keep those memories close in my heart.

Interviewer: How did you build an efficient and effective rural transit system?

Jumper: I have to tell you that I am not someone who expects to fail. I have joked that I’ve been successful because no one told me I wasn’t supposed to succeed! Failure means that I did not do a good enough job and that is something that I cannot live with. Failure does happen and it should. It is the best way to learn. But failure is unacceptable if it is the product of sloppy planning, not considering all the facts, and discounting issues beyond your control. What IF can become IF/THEN when it comes to planning. Sometimes we have to go to plan B…then C…then D…but if you haven’t taken the time to think things through, you fail when plan A doesn’t go in the way you thought it would. Flexibility is important!

Secondly, it is about attitude! ‘I’ am only one part of a team of talented, committed, and intelligent individuals with one goal…to provide safe, affordable, timely and FRIENDLY public transportation!

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

Our partners in this business include our Board of Trustees, RTAC, IDOT, IPTA, elected officials (federal, state, county, city, township…), other public transit agencies, vendors and our customers. When we all work together, things go smoother. We must communicate the good and the not so great. Our questions need to be specific and our answers honest.

In my world, leaders lead by EXAMPLE. The drivers know that I will get in a bus early in the morning, the late-night shift, Safe Ride, or on snowy, evening routes when things are getting behind. The dispatchers know that I'll grab a ringing phone or help schedule a difficult trip. Management knows that once they have shown me that they have a good handle on their duties, that I trust them to do their jobs and don't interfere unless asked or if changes are needed. They all know that if they have an idea or a concern that they can bring it to me and we will look for opportunities or solutions together. Customers know that if there is a particularly difficult situation, they can talk to me and if it can be done we will find a way. My motto has always been that it is our job to say YES!

I use the words "Please;" "Thank You;" "Great Job;" and "I'm Sorry."

Staff knows that they can come to my office at any time with problems. Personal or work related. These are more than just co-workers. They are family.

IF and WHEN we have to say no, we attempt to find workarounds.

Customers are treated the same way. Having started with just a dispatcher and two drivers, I learned to do it all. Some of our customers have been with us for almost 20 years! We know them by name and situation. We listen as they share. This was especially important during COVID when no-one could get out and about.

I also use the tools available to us -- educational opportunities, new funding opportunities, historical data, and the expertise and ideas of others all become a part of an equation that culminates in good decision making.

So…you asked how "I" built an efficient and effective rural transit system? "I" didn't… WE did! By asking questions and then LISTENING, by trying new things (sometimes they worked, sometimes they had to be tweaked, and sometimes they failed miserably), by building relationships and by learning from our failures!

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

I will admit to one area in which I kept a tight rein for more than 16 years and that was the grant administration/financial area. Until 2022 I did all the financial work. Numbers are not my thing, so I have to work hard at making sure I have looked under all the rocks and all the numbers make sense. It was/is important for me to know where the money is coming from and where it was going.

It is my opinion that once we have our budget numbers from IDOT, it is my job to make the system work within those numbers! But for that to work, I must do my homework. How is the increased minimum wage going to affect us? Increase in Workers Comp Insurance? Increase in Unemployment rates? What are insurance rates are going to be from one year to another? What are fuel prices going to do next year? What is ridership now and how is it going to look 12 months from now? (Brother…COVID did a number on those projections!)
Are our customers happy? How is our local match business? Do I have enough local match to draw down our grant? Where can we find new match funds? How many buses are going to break down? How many deer are going to run into us? Do we need new equipment or software?

It is my experience that when the numbers are right going into the year I have time to commit to the program itself. Goal setting is important but putting the work into reaching those goals is vital.

Interviewer: You've had a fantastic rural transit career. I admire your accomplishments and I certainly value your friendship. You've always given good advice, so if someone wanted your advice on how to be a good rural transit manager, what would you tell them?

Jumper: Thank you for those kind words. I always start out by reminding folks who call me for advice two things. First…remember when you ask for free advice you sometimes get what you pay for. Second…there are a couple of lessons I had to learn the hard way.

Please know that the following suggestions are not necessarily in order of importance. In fact, many of them may and should be focused on concurrently. And remember that IDOT IS OUR PARTNER! We are in this together. This is not an adversarial relationship. We all want the same things: Safe, Reliable, Timely and Friendly public transportation for individuals of all ages, abilities and addresses in Illinois.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

Suggestion #1 is to know your IDOT grant manager and make sure he/she knows you and your agency. Your grant manager has more than just you to work with. I don't know about the numbers today, but when I started my grant manager was responsible for 10-12 grantees. Keep in mind your grant manager has more than just you to work with. Take the initiative to make a trip to HIS/HER office to meet him/her face to face. Make sure they know where you are...who are your current customers... what are your challenges...what successes have you had...what is your greatest need?

Suggestion #2 is to keep your reporting and grant submissions timely. I have been known to submit reports online at 1 or 2 in the morning to get them where they need to be on time. Timely reporting makes it easier for IDOT staff to do their jobs. Remember, just like you and me, they have deadlines and reporting responsibilities. If you are late then they are unable to do their jobs and make their deadlines. If grants are late, budgeting on their end is affected.

If you must be late, talk to him/her about the issues resulting in late reports. I have had at least 12 grant managers in the last 17 years, and I have found that none of them are unreasonable. Just be honest and if you make a promise (I'll get it to you by Wednesday) then do all in your power to keep that promise.

As part of this suggestion, KNOW what is in your reports. I am amazed at the number of people I have met who were lucky enough to have others on staff that provided them with the information that they needed to produce these reports, but they did not have any idea how the information was derived.

Early in my career I pushed back against some of what I considered duplicative and irrelevant reporting requirements. Some of the reports seemed to require a PHD in mathematics to generate. Others were the regurgitation of the same information in multiple formats all being submitted to the same person. I was convinced that there were reports we were submitting that were NEVER opened. Then the layoff happened, and I found that all those reports that I had put on the shelf were invaluable in pulling together the data that I needed to discuss with elected officials, IDOT, and local groups to gather the support I needed to save this agency. I am being honest when I tell you that it changed my attitude about the reporting procedures! It happened again with the COVID Pandemic. The information in those reports were vital to our public relations campaigns.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

Suggestion #3 is to READ YOUR CONTRACTS! Know what your responsibilities and requirements are. The contracts are legal documents. It is your responsibility to know what is in them. You might be surprised by what you find. Familiarize yourself with the federal and state documents that guide our industry. You don't have to memorize it, but at least be familiar with where to find the answers when you need them. No time? If you don't have time now, are you going to have time when you are in crisis?

Suggestion #4 is to get to know both RTAC and IPTA.They are terrific resources and have so much to offer us. They do the things other people think just happen! An additional benefit of being involved with both those organizations is that you meet amazingly helpful, friendly people in the field that have expertise in places you might be questioning! And they are glad to help! It is so much easier to pick up the phone and call someone you've had lunch with.

When I started, we were just a tiny little two-county agency with two old buses, one dispatcher, 1 ½ drivers and a director who didn't know a lot. And believe me I was intimidated by what was going on around me. But I listened and I learned, and I made some incredible, knowledgeable, and helpful friends. I owe a lot of what you call my success as a transit administrator to folks in the business that didn't even know how much they were helping me!

Suggestion #5 is to get to know your elected officials BEFORE you need them and make sure they know you! Electronic communication is not the end all and be all. Face to face conversation can provide a connection that emails and texts will never provide. Remember, the future of your agency and your continued ability to provide vital services to your customers (say nothing about your continued employment) is in their hands. They too are our partners. They control the purse strings and in an economy of limited available funds it is vital that they know you, your agency, your customers, and your services. Unless they know you, they can't advocate for you! If they know you, when you really do need them, their door is open!

Suggestion #6 is to know your customers and their needs. What agencies are out there that need transportation or maybe are doing their own but could be helped in some way by contracting with you? Who rides your bus? Do you know them? We generally have an idea of what age group they are in and maybe how they use the service and possibly where they live. But do you have any idea what other transportation services they might need? A ride to church? Saturday dialysis?

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN JUMPER CONTINUED

A visit to a family member? Do they ride because they can't drive or do not have a vehicle or just because it is easier and less expensive? Getting out in your communities and meeting your customers...having open conversations about their needs can help you determine your system's future, why a time or day is not generating rides, where resources could better be spent, AND when there is a problem, you already have a relationship started that is not born of controversy. Where should you look?County fairs, health fairs, back to school fairs, multi-family complexes (apartments/county housing facilities/assisted living facilities).

Suggestion #7 is to know your staff. They are not merely tools to get the work done, they are the people who are on the front lines either making your job easier or more difficult! They are the first and maybe the only person many of your customers will ever meet. They are your eyes and your ears. But most of all they are people with dreams, goals, and sometimes problems and challenges. Know and respect them for who they are and they will do the same for you.

Suggestion #8 is to keep your Vision and Mission Statement in the front of every decision that you make. Why are you here? What is it you want to accomplish? Focus...Focus.... Focus!

Final thoughts: It has been a fantastic ride but is now time for someone else with more energy and youth to take the wheel. I am going to miss the people. I am going to miss the excitement of seeing things grow and work.

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Patricia Nogueira Project Manager	Northern Illinois Patricia.Nogueira@illinois.gov		1 City of Ottawa 2 Henry Co. 3 City of Galesburg 4 Grundy Co. 5 Jo Davies Co. 6 Marshall Co.	7 River Valley Metro	
Marcel Mayes Project Manager	Northern Illinois Marcel.Mayes2@illinois.gov		1 Boone Co. 2 DeKalb Co. 3 Carroll Co. 4 Kendall Co. 5 Whiteside Co.	6 Rockford 7 City of DeKalb	
Melissa Ohrwall CVP Program Manager 312-793-3643	Northern Illinois Melissa.Ohrwall@Illinois.gov				1 Bi-State RPC 2 N Central IL COG 3 Tri County RPC 4 McLean County RPC
David Maziarz Program Manager 217.785.2751	Southern Illinois David.Maziarz@illinois.gov		1 Champaign Co. 2 CRIS (Vermilion Co.) 3 RIDES 4 West Central MTD	5 Champaign-Urbana MTD 6 Danville MTD	1 Champaign Co. RPC 2 Western IL RPC 3 S. Central Regional PDC
Jill Ohnesorge Project Manager 217.557.5448	Southern Illinois Jill.Ohnesorge@Illinois.gov		1 City of Quincy 2 Piatt 3 Jackson Co. 4 Sangamon/Menard Co. 5 Shawnee MTD 6 Coles Co. 7 Douglas Co.	8 Decatur, City of 9 Bloomington-Normal PTS 10 Madison Co.	
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Vacant Project Manager	Southern Section				
Vacant Project Manager	Southern Illinois				

Walters Chosen as New CEO of CRIS RMTD

Rural Mass Transit District
Serving Vermilion County

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release - November 17, 2023

Melissa Walters Chosen as New CEO of CRIS Rural Mass Transit District

CRIS Rural Mass Transit District (CRMTD), a leading organization dedicated to providing transportation solutions for the Vermilion County community, announced **Melissa Walters** will be the new CEO of the organization. Walters replaces Nicole Dowling who will be transitioning to a new position as the Executive Director of Family Service of Champaign County.

"I'm excited about becoming the next CEO of CRIS Rural Mass Transit District", said Melissa Walters, CEO. "It's an honor to serve our community in keeping older adults and people with health conditions or impairments independent. Our buses and vans are the difference between someone being a member of society or someone isolated and alone. I look forward to being part of a professional and life-changing organization like CRMTD."

The CRIS Rural Mass Transit District is committed to ensuring a seamless transition and continuity of excellent services during this period. The organization remains dedicated to its purpose of providing reliable transportation options that promote independence, accessibility, and community inclusion for the residents it serves. For more information about CRIS Rural Mass Transit District and its mission, please visit: ruraltransits.org

Melissa Walters

SAVE THE DATES

2024 RTAC Spring Conference

March 5-7, 2024

Northfield Conference Center - Springfield, IL

2024 RTAC Roadeo

April 27, 2024

Sangamon County Fairgrounds -New Berlin, IL

FY 2024 RTAC Classroom Driver Training

RTAC is pleased to provide 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 on our website.
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 each of the sign-in sheets, which signifies that your drivers have taken the written tests. At the end of August, 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 contact Mable at 309.298.2141 or MR-Kreps@wiu.edu

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 that 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.

Illinois Department of Transportation

RTAC OFFERS TAPTCO ONLINE TRAINING!

TAPTCO
TRANSIT AND PARATRANSIT COMPANY

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.

We have added two new, online courses from TAPTCO: A train-the-trainer course (five videos) and bus garage safety/OSHA compliance (two videos.)

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

IL RTAP Advisory Council

Adam Lach, Rides MTD, Chair
Morgan Lewis, Warren County PCOM, vice chair
Kate Downing, Sangamon/Menard Co. Area Regional Transit
Sandra Pastore, Dept. on Aging
Sarah Nollman-Hodge, South Central IL MTD
Sherry Hicks, FAYCO, Inc.
Kim Zimmerman, North Central Area Transit
Jean Jumper, West Central IL MTD
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Western Illinois University complies fully with all applicable federal and state nondiscrimination laws, orders, and regulations. The University is an Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity institution and affirms its dedication to nondiscrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, disability, or veteran status in employment, programs, and services.

Our mailing address is:
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Western Illinois University