# TRANSREPORT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ILLINOIS RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

## Winter 2024

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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**

We really enjoyed the Spring conference this year. There were many great presentations and training sessions. Every year, and in fact throughout my working years in many jobs, I continue to discover/witness new and interesting approaches to presentations and trainings. Depending on the subject, sometimes it is simply best to stick to the tried and true method of carefully explaining the subject at hand – usually accompanied by pictures and graphs on the big screens. Other presentations utilize techniques which are designed to break the ice and drive audience attention and participation. Technology allows for both attempts, but sometimes good, old-fashioned "moving people around" can work as well. Melanie Green's style and dry humor really worked to bring people along through her presentation about managing transit, as well as her "giant circle of participants" to start off the financial management training. And Paul Lalonde's use of a real-time, online survey accessed by cell phones in the audience allows people to participate and provide data instantaneously to the speaker – providing a new element to public speaking which can bring people out of their shells. I do like a less-formal environment, but of course there is a fine-line somewhere between formal lectures and barroom antics, ha, and we definitely achieved a nice balance this year. The visuals, and files used during the conference are available on the RTAC website. We also noted the terrific participation and knowledge shared and gained during the two breakout sessions about local match, and operating issues, led by Sara Nollman-Hodge and Mike Pietrowski. When participants feel encouraged to ask and comment freely about anything needed during the sessions, we know that we achieved the right level of conduct. Dr. Merrett's presentation about the current state of Illinois and its population characteristics revealed by the latest census data drove many questions and comments about using the findings in future filings and applications.

# Conference Pictures

Brian Van Hine's experience with many forms of public transit helped transit managers understand how to manage their fleets and relate to drivers and their roles indirectly in safety through vehicle inspections. Eric Brown and Shelly Richardson conveyed real-life experience within the disability community and transportation, as well as coached us all on how to correctly interact with our consumers. And we are again thrilled with and appreciative of the IDOT staff participation and attendance at the conference. Karen Strell and Glenn Groesch and their experience really shined as they assisted various presenters and trainers throughout the event. Laura Calderon explained how important IPTA is to our avocation through a summary of IPTA's latest activities. It was interesting to learn of IPTA's history and how the organization (of which all of our agencies should be members) came to be.

We will look forward to seeing you all and many new faces next year – March 4-6, 2025 at the Northfield.

We had a total of 153 participants this year

# Conference Pictures

Dave Patton giving opening remarks of the 34th annual RTAC Conference

Paul Lalonde giving human resource updates

The IDOT team

IL Statewide Public Transportation Plan update

# Conference Pictures

Our new driver recruitment poster

Melanie Green getting everyone up and moving around

Melanie Green presenting the True Cost of Transit presentation

Chris Merrett giving his presentation on “Population Trends Affecting Rural Public Transit in Illinois

# SOUTH CENTRAL TRANSIT HIT BY TORNADO

South Central Transit recently had a sunroof installed at their Mt. Vernon location. Not by choice, but by the severe thunderstorms that passed through on March 14th. A tornado ripped through both their buildings in Mt. Vernon. The tornado basically destroyed both office buildings and the bus garage. Ripped the roof off and tore down some walls. They had to bring in some equipment to remove the damage from on top of some of the vehicles. The fleet took considerable damage, but they already have some services running. A structural engineer is scheduled to be onsite this week to determine if the buildings need to be repaired or demolished...we expect the latter. The greatest thing to come out of this was that the storms came at night, and we had nobody at the office at that time! No injuries! It was also great to see how well our team came together and got busy! Some property owners about 5 miles away have called to say some of the metal from our building was on their property.

# News & Happenings

## Mary Maszk becomes Carroll County PCOM

In March 2024, Mary was hired as the PCOM for Carroll County. She is excited to be the first person in this newly created position for the county.

After graduating from high school, Mary spent 21 years in the insurance field and then 14 ½ years at the local newspaper. She transitioned into the transportation field in September 2017, as the Grants Manager performing the duties of the PCOM as a senior center employee.

She has lived in Mount Carroll my entire life. Mary has been married to her husband, Brian, for 37 years. They have one son, Joseph and his wife, Alicia, and two step-grandsons.

Photo Credit of Carroll County Mirror-Democrat

# SAVE THE DATES

**2025 RTAC Spring Conference**

**March 4-6, 2025**

**Northfield Conference Center - Springfield, IL**

**2024 RTAC Roadeo**

**April 27, 2024**

**Sangamon County Fairgrounds -New Berlin, IL**

# 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
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