

2023 Spring Workshop Notes

May 1–2, 2023

St. Cloud, MN

Please note that these notes are meant to capture conversation that might not be contained in the combined PowerPoint from the sessions. The notes will not duplicate content from the PowerPoints; they are meant to be reviewed together.

May 1, 2023 — Day 1 Notes

Welcome (Mark Nelson)

- Legislative update
 - Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) is down, affecting allocation of funds to rural transit.
 - He anticipates that rural transit will come out okay.
- Planning support contracts
 - OTAT (Office of Transit and Active Transportation) is moving forward with the first set of tasks (7 total).
- State Management Review recently completed.
 - Included an audit of financials and policies.
 - No check marks (zero deficiencies).
 - Thanks to the OTAT team for supporting a successful review.
- Workload requests from OTAT
 - The OTAT team is taking the feedback about workload seriously.
 - Improving communications and evaluating how communication is occurring is a priority.
 - Working on communicating the “why” with requests.
 - Improvements to the website are coming soon.
 - The request is for transit agencies to be engaged as the OTAT team enhances communications & processes.
- Low-No Emission Vehicles application submitted in April.
 - This is a competitive FTA (Federal Transit Administration) grant.
 - The 2023 grant supports propane buses.
 - Reminder that FTA is shifting to discretionary grant applications vs. allocation of money based on formula funds.
- OTAT office director position status
 - Interviews held.
 - Announcement coming soon.

Introductions (Melinda Estey)

Summary of answers to the question: “What are you looking forward to at this year’s Spring Workshop?”

Networking, to support new coworkers, to make great contacts, to learn new best practices, to hear feedback from transit systems on funding, to find commonalities, to learn “behind the scenes” info, to see happy agency faces, to learn how to do a triennial with no deficiencies, to help other transit systems, to answer questions about asset management, to enjoy the experience of growing, to see the plan come to life, to meet new people, to meet other 5307s, to see old friends, to get information, to learn how service is going, because we accomplish more together, to learn something new about transit, to be a sponge, to learn everyone’s names, to see where people are at, to get updates, for camaraderie, to learn why MN sports

teams don't win, to find out what's going on with the busses (pester Harinee), to hear updates about budgets & grants, to reconnect, to understand more, to win prizes, to gather more information on finance, funding, and the application,

OTAT 101 (Melinda Estey)

- Overview and introductions to all members of the MnDOT OTAT team.
- Status of each of the units by the unit supervisor.
- Noel noted that despite multiple units, everyone works as a team.

OTAT Process Improvement Updates (Abra Pollock & Kristina Krull)

- Presenters were from the Management Analysis & Development (MAD) unit within Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB)
- OTAT requested this support from MMB, and the process began two months ago.
- Validated top issues and opportunities with the Spring Workshop participants via an informal vote.
- Their goal is to support process improvement for OTAT.
- They will be process mapping up to 8 processes for improvement in a collaborative effort with OTAT and transit agencies.
- The goal is to improve the overall experience between agencies and the OTAT team, and the intent is to streamline processes.
- Noel noted that consistency in solicitation is a goal he has.
- A transit agency noted that the leadership transition has been challenging for processes.

Incident / Accident Local Response & State Reporting (Jean Meyer, Annette Marier, Harinee Iyengar, Gary Taft, Joanne Brackey, Kirk Kuchera, Nick Leske, and Michelle Miranowski)

- Question about the safety plan for 5311s. When will that be complete?
- NTD (National Transit Database) monthly reporting for 5311s is done through OTAT.
- BlackCat changes to comply with new NTD reporting requirements are forthcoming. There was concern about changing the data fields mid-year, so it will likely be updated at the start of the next year of data. A new change will be reporting security events.
- There will be a webinar to talk through the changes.
- Question asked: is if the agency is a curb-to-curb service but the driver provides door-to-door service, do you have to report it as door-to-door? Jean said you must report based on the service provided, not what the agency said it will provide. When the driver provided door-to-door service, they put the transit agency in the position of having to report it that way.
- Annette stressed that agencies need to complete a form for each incident. That first form determines if it needs to be reported. Agencies must document their decision-making process about how they made the decision to test/not test.
- The group walked through three incident/accident scenarios and what their response would be, using the provided resources.

Legislative Update (Margaret Donahoe)

- It is a good year for public transit.
- There is a budget surplus of \$17.5 billion.
- 2023 Session ends on May 22.
- The bonding bill has \$3 million for facilities, and they anticipate a bonding bill will be passed.

- Discussion regarding federal grant discretionary opportunities available for transit from FTA and other federal agencies.

Future of Funding (Noel Shughart)

- Discussion of state and federal fund distribution: How should the distribution go?
- Current needs exceed the revenues (per Noel).
- Asked the group if any agencies applied for discretionary grants: few did.
- Equity discussion: what does it mean? One example raised was transportation between homeless shelters in their city and how to meet that need.
- Discussion of the importance of thinking of equity in addition to demand when doing service design.
- Some examples shared from the group:
 - Advancing technology to support ridership (Trailblazer)
 - Micro-mobility/micro-transit (Rochester)
 - N-CATT (National Center for Applied Transit Technology) technology assessment (Mankato)
- Businesses would like training for staff to train their publics on transit use and more train-the-rider workshops and resources.

Regional Breakouts

Groups met for private regional meetings. No notes were collected from these sessions.

May 2, 2023 — Day 2 Notes

Regroup and Icebreaker Activity

The group reviewed any thoughts/questions from the day before and played “Bus Go” a bingo-like game to network.

Vehicle Ordering Updates (Harinee Iyengar)

- Vendor updates: Telin was acquired by Istate. Hogland is North Central International LLC of Monticello, DBA Hogland Bus Company.
- Harinee had to shift buses from Telin to North Central due to pricing. She is currently in negotiations with Hogland.
- She has simplified the MnDOT paperwork process. She now takes care of ICE (Independent Cost Estimate) and price analysis for buses on the state contract.
- The advice is to not wait until the last minute to order buses. Allow time for changes.
- Some agencies may see two sources of federal funds because they are adding 5339 funds. This will be in the revised award letter.
- Question: An agency would like to provide input on what to see on the state contract, types of buses and manufacturers.
- **Harinee will work with RTAP to get a webinar scheduled to share additional information.**

An Agile Approach to Fleet Transition (Glenn Gadbois and Noel Shughart)

- They explained agile process: the concept of piloting services, then testing, and then investing resources.

- Shifting away from OTAT thinking of new ways to provide service, instead encouraging advisory boards to think of new ideas and OTAT will ensure processes line up.

Intercity Bus 101 (Bonnie Buchanan)

- Provided history and background information about intercity bus and the transit services they provide.
- Shared stories of marketing campaigns and promotions over the years.

Small Group Table Discussions

These were conversational sessions, so there were no formal notes. Sessions included:

- State Patrol Update
- OTAT Continuous Improvement Project
- Vehicle Ordering
- Planning Consultant
- Low No Emissions (EVs, Propane, and Alternative Fuel Vehicles)
- Tour of Trailblazer's new van
- Intercity Bus meeting

Tell Us How You Move Around (Sarah Petersen)

Sarah led the group in an activity to diagram where each person travels in a week and how they get there, then think through alternate modes of transportation they might use.

State Patrol/Motor Carrier Update (Michael McKay and Jeffry Cummins)

- PowerPoint covers:
 - Who is Motor Carrier and who are the agencies that oversee the safety regulations?
 - How do transit operators fall under the safety regulations?
 - Driver Qualifications Waivers related to medical certification.
 - CDL (Commercial Driver's License) versus Non-CDL.
 - US DOT numbers — what are they and when must the information be updated?
 - What is charter/for-hire and when can it be done?
 - What about STS/NEMT?
- Questions from audience:
 - If someone lives in a neighboring state and has their CDL with passenger endorsement, can they drive the bus here? A: Yes – if they are not restricted to an interstate CDL. Note — If they move from out of state to MN, they will need to get a new license through MN.
 - Is the DOT number for each bus? A: For all buses in the fleet, not per bus.
 - Do you need a DOT number when the bus is owned by the city? A: There are exemptions for political subdivisions. You need to report every two years. No need to pay money or anything as a political subdivision to file. However, you will be given a number with a wheelchair inspection.

IDEA Unit Team Update (Fay Simer, Chuck Morris, Gary Taft)

- Topics covered in presentation:
 - Transit Asset Management Plan (TAM Plan): 5311s have chance to opt in group plan, 5307 can opt out.
 - Transit Technology: Chuck is meeting with transit systems to review 5-year project plans.
 - Shared Mobility: Elliot will be recruiting for ideas this summer. Mobility as a service Project (MaaS) app launch in March.
 - BlackCat technical assistance and troubleshooting: Asked if it would be helpful to host monthly BlackCat “office hours” – people seemed responsive to the idea.
 - Transit route GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping: Alex has been working on this to be able to see all transit systems on a map. They are working to put this on the web.

Closing Remarks (Mark Nelson)

Mark summarized the sessions and recognized the group for their contributions to the workshop.

Celebrating Transit Successes + Closing (Melinda Estey)

Transit systems shared examples of something they or another system did this year that they are proud of. Examples included:

- Brown County started a deviated fixed route service in New Ulm. Their numbers have been very good so far.
- Prairie Lakes Transit successfully procured and installed a surveillance system on the facility.
- City of Morris Transit ordered an electric bus.
- Metro Bus has continued to refine its all-around focus. They focus on the public and service but have a more balanced approach and equally focus on employee needs.
- Take Me There Transit procured a used bus and put it in service.
- Paul Bunyan Transit kept their aging fleet on the road at greatly reduced cost by their excellent in-house mechanic team.
- SMART had 2,000,000 rides as one agency in March and built and moved into a new facility in Owatonna.
- Tri-CAP Transportation had 3 new routes and e-tickets and has exceeded their post-COVID numbers.
- Tri-Valley Transportation’s ridership increased by 28.2% over 2022.
- An agency hired a mechanic and an operations manager.
- Fosston Transit installed AEDs in all buses.
- CCT started up suspended routes (pre-COVID).
- Prairieland Transit is working towards propane buses.
- Prairie Five RIDES coordinated with Veterans’ Services to purchase a van.
- Rainbow Rider, Trailblazer Transit, and the City of Morris willingly passed on a lot of information to another transit director/system.
- Mankato Transit worked with N-CATT to develop a technology assessment to guide future purchases of agency support.

“Commuter Lot” (Parking Lot) Questions

How does MnDOT download the term scale if not Windows95?