

RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes: Driver Shortage

4/10/24 10-11:30 am CT

Participation: 19 total, 16 from transit agencies

1. Allison Karau, Watonwan, Take Me There Transit
2. Amy Listerud, Rainbow Rider
3. Deann Recker, Morris Transit
4. Donna Anderson, CCT
5. Jason Ness, Hubbard County Heartland Express
6. Jeremy Monahan, Prairie Lakes Transit
7. Kayla Sullivan, Transit Alternatives
8. Kenneth Bakken, White Earth Public Transit
9. Lisa Sabyan, St. Cloud Metro Bus
10. Mike Greenbaum, Newtrax
11. Pat LaCourse – Brown County Heartland and Hermann Express
12. Rhonda Torgersen – Tri-CAP
13. Scott Stark, St. Cloud Metro Bus
14. Stacy Struck, Prairie Lakes Transit
15. Ted Nelson, Prairie Five RIDES
16. Tracy Borgschatz, Hiawathaland Transit Three Rivers Community Action
17. Jim Wolter, MnDOT OTAT
18. Berta Hartig, RTAP
19. Mariah Kathan, RTAP

Biggest Challenges with Driver Shortage

- finding applicants
- issues with the starting wage for drivers
- being short-staffed and needing to cut routes
- losing drivers
- finding drivers that can work varied schedules
- aging workforce looking to retire
- getting drivers through ELDT requirements
- attracting a younger demographic
- how to communicate job openings
- how to get career and long-term drivers
- health insurance costs for full time drivers

Challenges & Solutions

1. Aging workforce:
 - a. Physical demands of the job
 - b. How to prepare for when they retire/leave of workforce for good

- c. It'd be nice to have advance notice from staff for when they are going to leave because it takes a month or longer to get a new driver on the road
Hiring Ideas: for online applications – is your agency always recruiting? Or do you delete job postings when full?
 - *Answer: After interviewing, they keep on file for 6 months. They call them back if they were good candidates but they didn't have an opening for them at the time.*
2. Benefits are important for recruiting younger people:
 - a. Discussion on costs for out of pocket for premium and deductible for Health Insurance
 - i. One person asked, "What do other agencies pay for the costs for benefits? Do you offer the same benefits for drivers as you do for administration?"
 - ii. Many people shared what the employees pay for health insurance but not many knew what the agency's portion of the cost was.
 1. Pat shared that in Brown County, \$384.14 is the individual cost for an HSA plan. He shared that most of the older employees are on Medicare, but that doesn't help the younger drivers. His premium was covered.
 2. Allison shared that the cost to her county was \$1362 for her family, and she pays \$370 for the premium for her family, and it is an HSA plan, and the county puts money in the HSA plan to help offset the cost.
 3. Jeremy said his agency pays \$1,900/person/month.
 4. Amy said her agency had the same medical plan for drivers, dispatch, and admin. Costs are high. This is always an issue with family plans.
 5. Donna said admin and staff have the same benefit. Family is high cost. CCT covers individual plans. She didn't know the dollar amount for family.
 6. Rhonda said they do an HSA plan. The cost is ~\$900 for the family plan.
3. Changing demographics in MN, including an aging population, will require more on demand trips and rides. This will create a need for more drivers. And this will be a larger issue in years to come.
4. Wages:
 - a. Drivers – starting with and without CDL. Participants shared:
 - i. \$21.70 with CDL, \$20.70 with Permit
 - ii. \$19 starting, regardless
 - iii. \$20.70 starting, regardless
 - b. Dispatch: \$19.15 starting

- c. Rhonda said Tri-CAP competes with Metro Bus in St. Cloud
 - d. It took a few years of above average wage increases to get to \$18 for CDL drivers in working with their governing board.
5. ELDT Discussion:
- a. Kenneth – The length of time of the program. They send them to Alexandria Technical College, it's a couple months long program.
 - b. Pat's Assistant Manager is trained to do it. They follow the RTAP slides, do the behind-the-wheel training; it's not a big difference from their regular training.
 - c. Rhonda asked if anyone has it laid out as a day-by-day plan? Pat said that they just follow the PowerPoint on the RTAP site. **Mariah will follow up with Rhonda by emailing the ELDT group to see what they have for their training plan and send the ELDT resources to Kenneth.**

How to show driving as a career in recruitment efforts:

- Lisa suggested that if you can't move into another position, try showing personal growth in the messaging and visually. Feature people who have been there a long time and what they find valuable about the job.

Benefits Conversation Continued:

- Does anyone have a comparison of benefits with other companies in the area? Maybe transit benefits aren't as bad as expected.
 - Jeremy is aware that Martin Country Transit benefits are better than others in different businesses and counties around them.
- Discussion about wages. Has anyone offered bonuses instead of wage increases?
 - Metro Bus has a bonus. There are specific terms to get it. They have both a sign-on bonus and a retention bonus.
 - Other places that need CDL (like delivery companies) offer bonuses.
 - One county has an issue with hiring and training employees to get their CDL then the employees leave to pursue a job that has CDL bonuses.
 - Rhonda suggested providing a potential stipulation about receiving bonuses – the employee must work for so long before they are eligible for it. Some places offer CDL training that is free as long as an employee stays at the business for x amount of time, or it will need to be paid back from the employee's earnings.

Ask a peer part of the meeting was spent on continued benefits conversation (above)

Process Observer Report – Mariah.

- Could shorten "Ask a Peer" part of the meeting for future sessions
- She will troubleshoot calendar event, so people aren't on GoToMeeting now that the meeting has moved to Teams.

Next Session: How does your agency do routes? May 15, 2024.