

RTAP Peer Roundtable Written Summary:

How does your agency do routes?

5/10/24, 10-11:30 am CT

Participation: 17 total, 15 from transit agencies

1. Annette Punt, UCAP
2. Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, ARDC
3. Chris Thompson, SMART
4. Elizabeth Hensrud, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council
5. Heather Vinson, Three Rivers Community Action/Hiawathaland Transit
6. Jason Ness, Hubbard County Heartland Express
7. Jeremy Monahan, Prairie Lakes Transit
8. Joanne Brackey, SMART
9. Kathy Grobe, Three Rivers Community Action/Hiawathaland Transit
10. Kirk Kuchera, SMART
11. Lezlie Grubich, Paul Bunyan Transit
12. Pat LaCourse, Brown County Heartland Express
13. Robert Silvers, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council
14. Ron Decker, TRUE Transit
15. Chris Belden, Duluth Transit Authority
16. Bill Spitzer, Rolling Hills Transit
17. Mariah Kathan, RTAP
18. Berta Hartig, RTAP

Meeting Roles

- Mariah Kathan — Facilitator
- Berta Hartig — Note Taker
- Ron Decker — Process Observer
- Chris Thompson — Timekeeper

Types of Routes/Transit Service Represented and Definition of Terms

- **Fixed Route:** fixed stops and times, typical for urban area transit
- **Deviated Route:** a route that will deviate a fixed distance off the route to pick people up, common in rural areas.
- **Demand Response** (formerly known as Dial-a-Ride): rides on request

- **Complementary Paratransit:** This type of transit service is typically offered alongside fixed route service in urban areas. It's a service for anyone who can't transport themselves to a fixed route stop for transit.

Challenges:

- Challenging to develop routes when a service area is interrupted by a natural landmark, like a river or other feature.
- When you have a large service area with demand response service, it can be hard to meet the demand for rides. There's room on the buses but passengers would need to be going to the same place at the same time, which is hard to coordinate.
- Renting garage space when you serve a large area; the goal would be to have regional facilities, so that the drivers have a breakroom and bathroom in the regional bus garages.
- Getting people to take surveys is hard
- Driver shortage can affect the ability to change routes or add new routes.
- Connecting routes to sidewalk networks (or lack of sidewalks)
- Having too many deviations and not being able to pick up people from the route stops.
- Dispatchers getting the deviated route timing right

Solutions:

- Route planning with stops in low-rent housing areas, medical centers, major shopping areas, and local colleges.
- Hiring a local agency to help understand what the community needs are for transit prior to developing a new route.
- Keeping bus garages and buses in the locations/cities/counties you service vs. Storing them at your central location.
- Fixed routes can be advantageous for younger generations or riders who don't want to have to call in to schedule a ride in advance.
- Historic ridership data and demographic data help with route planning. The consultant DTA used to do this used cell phone data to see travel patterns and what routes would be recommended based on that.
- Collecting feedback from drivers about rider needs and safety issues.
- Eliminating routes with a lot of turns helped reduce the safety risk of turning a bus, so transitioning to more straight routes helped with safety.
- [Jarrett Walker](#) is a national consultant who works on route planning that Chris at DTA has found very helpful, but his work might be more specific to urban areas.

- Onboard surveys are also helpful to understand the needs of current passengers. Especially asking where they're located and where they want to go to and asking what barriers there are to riding more often. Be careful with open-ended questions because that can be harder to understand.
- Connect with the RTCC in your area for help crafting surveys, understanding rider needs, and doing travel training with your riders. RTCCs can have a budget for marketing materials too that public transit agencies may not have, such as printing materials for things like a "How to Ride the Bus" guide.
- When changing a route, putting the new route on the buses, social media, and notifying local media.
- Having two deviated routes in the same area can be helpful for making up time when routes are running behind.
- Calling it a time guide rather than a fixed time on your maps if the route tends to run late.
- Setting a limit on how many deviations per hour.
- Bus tracking technology so riders can track where the bus is gives more confidence to the riders and relieves their anxiety about when the bus will come. This has reduced the call volume from riders as well.

Specific Questions & Answers

Can you plan a commuter route if you're a demand response service?

You need to have a conversation with your TPM at MnDOT to change or add a route.

How does timing work with a deviated route?

The times set on the maps shared with passengers are respected, so if a driver arrives early at a stop, they stay until the designated time, even with passengers on board. Passengers are instructed to be ready 5 minutes early. The agency builds in extra time into the route so that they can catch up if they are running behind.

Ask a Peer Part of the Meeting Questions & Answers

How to fill out an ICE form for a support vehicle. How to obtain a cost estimate?

Liz Hensrud volunteered to share her ICE form. She got information from the [State of Minnesota Cooperative Purchasing Venture \(CPV\)](#). You can contact your TPM for assistance getting a login for the CPV.

Googling can also lead to cost estimates, for example from old board resolutions from other agencies, cities and counties, blue book prices, local car lots online. Take a screen grab of that to get the information. The rule is not to call the seller, because the ICE is an independent estimate.

You typically need 2-3 different estimates, but MnDOT has the full guidance on what's required.

**Does anyone have both demand response and a deviated route in the same town?
And if so, is the deviated route utilized?**

SMART shared that they have both in all communities they service. People still call for deviated routes. They do encourage people to use deviated routes when they can.

Does anyone have a propane tank at their facility? FTA is asking for the height of the tank.

No one did, but RTAP can message this question in the RTAP newsletter if Liz sends the information to include.

Resources:

- Chris was willing to share a sample survey