

Rural Transit Day Twitter Chat July 16, 2020

Summary

The second [#RuralTransitDay](#) Twitter Chat on July 16, 2020 was moderated by Kari Banta of Texas DOT and Julia Castillo of HIRTA, with support from Angie Jones of Grant County Transportation District (People Mover). The chat focused on what agencies are doing to recognize passengers and staff on Rural Transit Day and through the year, and included a discussion about challenges, solutions, and best practices for rural transit.

Alaska Communications, Alaska DOT, Anchorage Police Department, Arizona Transit Association, Connected Wise, CTAA, CTE, Diamond Coach, Dunn County Transit, Flint Hills aTa Bus, Flint Hills Region, Florida RTAP, HIRTA Public Transit, Intelligent Transport, Missouri Public Transit Association, Muskogee Transit, MyRide Upper Cumberland, NCRTD, Nebraska DOT, Nebraska Public Transit, Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission, Oklahoma Transit Association, OMEGA, Palm Creek Talcum Powder Mines, People Mover, RTD Blue Bus, RTEC, Schetky Bus & Van Sales, Sullivan Strategies, Sunset Empire Transportation District, SWTA, Texas DOT, WMT'S Bus, and Young Professionals in Transportation were among the many organizations and individuals who participated in the chat. Rural Transit Day even reached the Columbia, South America; a [#RuralTransitDay](#)-tagged video about rural education was posted.

Visit the [chat transcript](#) for questions asked during the chat and attendees' replies. We also have a [Rural Transit Day page](#) with more information about the special day. Answers to chat questions are provided below.

Question 1: What do you think is the best thing about rural public transit?

Answers:

- According to Florida RTAP, it's being part of the community and knowing your neighbors.
- Arizona Transit Association tweeted, "Whether you're headed for an urban adventure or getting out in nature, public transportation helps you get where you want to be!"
- Jeff Hazen of Sunset Empire Transportation District thinks it's getting people where they need and want to go.

- Julia Castillo of HIRTA Public Transit likes the flexibility and ability we have to pivot quickly when we need to.
- Kari Banta of Texas DOT feels that it's the people involved. It's definitely a labor of love for their community!
- Megan Templeton of My Ride Upper Cumberland says that rural public transit helps people socialize and go on essential trips. They get to go where they need to go!
- Everyone at CTAA is incredibly proud and honored to be in the business of supporting rural transit providers. They think one of the best things about rural public transit is the connections and relationships it creates in communities.
- Dolly Catlin at Dunn County Transit (WI) thinks the best thing about rural transit is the support from National RTAP, Wisconsin DOT, CTAA, and FTA.
- Flint Hills ataBus is extremely thankful to work in a region with such incredible mobility agencies. We cannot express enough how grateful we are to those who work tirelessly to safely connect everyone to everywhere.
- “You all are the best and that is why I like rural transit,” declared National RTAP Executive Director Robin Phillips

Question 2: Share ideas for effective messages that let people know who rural transit systems are and who they serve.

Answers:

- Western Maine Transportation Services posted: Access to public transit in rural areas "allows people to live where they want to," while still being able to access the essential services they need.
- It's important that messaging shares the importance of rural transit to everyone. Sunset Empire Transportation Distract has people that use the bus to commute to their jobs, ride to school, ride to medical appointments, and some that just like to ride to get out of the house! Also develop a relationship with the newspaper reporter that covers your agency. They love it when you feed them positive articles!
- “Public Transit Gets You There!” exclaimed Julia. HIRTA also targets messages to specific rides. That way if someone see they go to the grocery store, they can be like "Oh that is for me." Julia also advises to let others help spread the word and piggyback on their messaging too – it is always good to incorporate transit into a message with the Heart Association or Cancer Society.
- Kari really likes the idea of reaching out to people about the kinds of trips they make. Lots of people seem to think that transit is only for certain people or just for medical trips. Having a good relationship with media definitely helps. Rural transit is a goldmine for positive human-interest stories.
- “Rural transit is for you,” shared Robin. In Hood River Oregon, mountain bikers use transit to get to the top of the hill and other people use it to get to work.
- Upper Cumberland Public Transit realizes that one size does not fit all when it comes to the ride that you need. Their diverse array of services, including bus routes, door-to-door, and customized trip services, help ensure that they get you where you need to go.
- Florida RTAP becomes an integral part of the community and often participates in local events, furthering their reputation as being a reliable support system.

- CTAA encourages providers to be in constant communication with their riders, local elected officials and the community. Local elected officials love to boast about their district, so by being in communication with them about the latest positive updates at your agency, you're helping yourself for potential future asks and helping them stay informed. Through social media or by participating in community events - being in front of your audience (and loud) is so important in demonstrating your value! Developing relationships with newspaper reporters makes their jobs easier and you (as an agency) receive free marketing!
- Here's a message from National RTAP, "Take rural transit, safe, clean, comfortable rural transit, just to get out of the house and go somewhere."

Question 3: How have you shown that your transit services are "vital and essential" during COVID-19?

Answers:

- CTAA advises agencies to document everything, spread the news of your new services (grocery/ medicine delivery, etc.) and promote stories of the populations you've been serving (essential workers, PWD, seniors, etc.) Just because the world stopped - doesn't mean rural providers have!
- HIRTA has done a lot with their local radio stations and newspaper outlets. They also worked with cities and counties to help them get the word out and, of course, have used a lot of social media asking people to share and forward messages. They also used their website and did rider alerts to keep them informed that they were open and providing safe service.
- Sunset Empire Transportation District kept all services going because we know that people rely on us. We have essential workers that still need to get to their jobs. If you cut routes, it takes a very long time to regain the trust of the public.
- Alaska DOT appreciates all those providers who keep Alaska moving! For Rural Transit Day, they created messages and graphics throughout all their social media platforms, wishing individual drivers a happy Rural Transit Day, and even created a Rural Transit Day banner for their DOT website. They also had a Rural Transit Day party, even with a cake.
- SWTA wants to thank all the transit providers in Rural America - across the SWTA Nation and the country - for providing essential service (before and during COVID) to work, health care, education, businesses and anywhere else. Transit matters everywhere!

Question 4: How do you recognize your drivers for the work they do? Have you done anything special for these Rural Transit Heroes during COVID-19?

Answers:

- CTAA has seen some of their members providing appreciation pay to their drivers. They've seen marketing campaigns that highlight a new driver every day on social media. They've also heard of agencies sending hero stories to their local papers.
- Caltrans tweeted thanks to all their rural transit operators for their hard work & dedication!
- This [tweet](#) by HIRTA shows how much the agency values their drivers, especially during these challenging times. They also gave Driver Hero bonuses and special HIRTA HERO shirts.
- RTEC of Kentucky [designed a cool new t-shirt](#) to honor its superhero drivers.

- Alaska DOT [shows appreciation](#) for rural transit drivers through individual recognition that makes these wonderful drivers who keep Alaska moving feel extra-special.
- Sunset Empire Transportation District always have an Employee of the Quarter. It is voted on by the Leadership Team and it was a unanimous vote that ALL drivers were recognized as Employee of the Quarter. Every single one of them deserved the award!
- MyRide Upper Cumberland recognizes their hard work on social media and their website. “We want our community to know how valuable these folks are!”
- This [Best Practices Spotlight](#) article shows some of the inspiring things HIRTA Public Transit and other agencies have done to help their community during this challenging time. Recognize your Rural Transit Heroes by entering them in the National RTAP [Rural Transit Heroes Photo Contest](#), with cash awards and lots of recognition. The deadline is August 20, 2020.

Question 5: How do you market your rural transit service – both to riders and non-riders?

Answers:

- CalTrans created a [Rural Transit Day poll](#) asking whether people rode rural transit. Results showed that 16.7% did and 83.3% did not. (To National RTAP, that sounds like an opportunity for more marketing!)
- National RTAP received some help #RuralTransitDay marketing help from [Time and Date](#), and from many agencies, including [Florida RTAP](#), [Arizona Transit Association](#), and [RTD Blue Bus](#). Transit agencies who need help with marketing can use the National RTAP [Marketing Toolkit](#). It’s full of ideas, templates, photos, and artwork to get started. Transit agencies and State RTAP Programs can also use our free [Website Builder](#) Web App to create a professional website. For example, see [Island Transit’s website](#). For additional ideas and inspiration, see our [Best Practices Spotlight Article on Social Media](#).
- Sunset Empire Transportation District explains that marketing to riders is fairly straightforward by messaging on the buses and in the shelters. Marketing to non-riders takes a lot more work. It’s all about relationships and you have to get out there and talk to people one-on-one or in groups.
- MyRide Upper Cumberland tries to raise awareness to through newspapers, brochures, and working with clubs, social groups, and other opportunities where people gather.
- HIRTA markets services to non-riders with specific messages so that they can see themselves riding their service.
- “Marketing and responding to change never stop,” Robin added.

Question 6: What is the funniest or most unusual thing you have had happen or seen happen while on rural transit?

Answers:

- Tiffany and Ethan were from a small rural town in Alabama. They met on the bus at age 9 and he knew she was the one. [Now they're married](#).
- Julia remembered when someone bought a sofa at the Goodwill and wanted the HIRTA driver to put it on the bus when they picked her up to go home.

- In early March 2020, CTAA's Taylor and Loreal visited their members in rural Kentucky. During a ride-along, a passenger watched them learn about the "hollers." The driver couldn't stop laughing at their expressions!
- Florida RTAP recalls birthday celebrations (by passengers) to honor the bus operator. Each passenger brought plates, cake, balloons, and utensils.

Question 7: Where's your favorite place to travel on rural transit?

Answers:

- National RTAP shared [photos](#) of beautiful destinations from last year's National RTAP Transit Through the Seasons Photo Contest from RFTA, Rockin 66 Express, and UCHRA.
- Sunset Empire Transportation District says that their favorite was all of their routes to get out of the office for a bit and talk with the drivers and riders! They are the most valuable sources of information!
- Jaime McKay of Young Professionals in Transportation [posted](#) some "adventures" on Rural Transit Day.
- Alaska DOT was excited that Rural Transit Day coincided with Throwback Thursday and [shared](#) a photo of a Northern Bus Company bus on Dock Street in Ketchikan, from November 1951.
- CTAA tweeted, "There's too many places - we can't choose one!" and [showed](#) a beautiful rural winter scene. "Everywhere! Who doesn't love a good ride around the beautiful countryside!" echoed MyRideUpper Cumberland.

Question 8: Bragging time! Has your rural transit system done anything awesome since last year's Rural Transit Day that you want to share?

Answers:

- CTE has been covering opportunities for zero emission transportation in rural areas.
- Connected Wise was proud to be a part of Rural Transit Day by supporting rural communities with technology designed to aid these areas challenged by the rapid growth of connected and automated vehicles.
- When the pandemic started, Sunset Empire Transportation District hired 14 temporary employees to work as sani-techs on their buses. Every bus all day long had a sani-tech disinfecting constantly. Riders, drivers, and the public loved it! And, they just hired back 2 of them to be drivers!
- Julia was honored to be selected as the CTAA Community Transit Manager of the Year and HIRTA was selected to receive funding for the FTA Mobility Pilot Program.
- UCHRA Transit drivers worked hard to assist with getting volunteers to and from the devastated areas of Putnam County after the tornadoes hit Tennessee this March. They also helped facilitate some donations for the disaster, including delivering water.
- National RTAP created a [Rural Transit Day Pledge](#) so transit agencies can provide passengers with helpful, courteous, and respectful customer service, invest in training and education, coordinate with community organizations and more.

Question 9: We're awarding Rural Transit Day t-shirts to the first person who answers this question on the chat, to the tweet with the most likes on the chat, and also the tweet and Instagram

posts that received the most likes by 9:00 AM the day of the chat – What does rural transit mean to you?

Answers:

- "Rural public transportation can be an important force in supporting local economies by connecting residents with local businesses and job opportunities." From the APTA report [Public Transit's Impact on Rural and Small Towns: A Vital Mobility Link](#)
- Helping community members get where they need to go! MyRide Upper Cumberland
- Rural transit makes a difference in people's lives! Sunset Empire Transportation District
- Rural transit is a life line. HIRTA Public Transit
- The contest winners were Sunset Empire Transportation District, MyRide Upper Cumberland, and Alaska DOT (who won on Instagram). Congratulations to all!