



Tribal Transit Peer Roundtable Summary

April 30, 2019

Q: What is the purpose of the Tribal Transit Peer Roundtable?

A: Tribal Transit Peer Roundtables look at new ways to perform technical assistance for tribes, focusing on areas such as TAM plans, safety, and funding. The Roundtables are also a way for National RTAP to share updates about our Technical Assistance Program, Technical Assistance Conference, Tribal Scholarships, Tribal Champions Awards, and other services and resources to tribes.

Q: How many tribes run transit programs? How many tribal transit programs are directly under FTA?

A: There is a new FTA tribal liaison, Jasmine Clemons. National RTAP can hold a roundtable where we can ask her questions and to raise her awareness of issues. Each region also has a tribal liaison. Currently, there are 145 tribal transit programs. Fairly recently, there were only 45.

Q: What organizations can mentor tribes?

A: There are no strong national organizations that advocate for tribal transit, but National RTAP has resources that can facilitate outreach and advocacy.

Q: What are some best practices for tribes surrounding planning?

A: Some tribes perform integrated transit planning and tribal comprehensive planning as part of their tribal economic development strategy and tribal vision. For example, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation sought to identify and bring under tribal control as much of the existing historic tribal lands as possible. They have ongoing existing tribal rights for employment, hunting, and gathering within the area. When they developed a transportation system, they wanted to create one that allowed members to access jobs throughout their historic lands. It was one way to take tribal values and provide a presence in ceded lands and tribal lands. Look at planning in your

area, there may be more opportunities to make tribal organizations more visible and eligible for other funding.

Q: What are some best practices surrounding tribal TAM plans?

A: One tribe in the roundtable has a designated staff person for that function. It is going well.

Q: How does reauthorization look in 2020 for tribes?

A: FTA reauthorization is looking well, and there will be continued funding. The money available has tripled from 1997 to now. This is partly because as programs become stronger, they gain visibility and become more important to more people.

Q: With 2020 being a census year, one concern is with the citizen status question. The Supreme Court will decide inclusion of this in June. Is the census essential to Tier 3 of the tribal apportionments? Does FTA look at US Census to determine if the reported number is accurate by their standard?

A: People need to be counted to get the full funding they deserve, especially for rural and minority communities. Rural and tribal communities need to be active in the census so that they can be visible and counted and recognized. The National RTAP Marketing Toolkit is a good way to reach out.

Q: For now, the NTD information serves as the money generated to tribes through the formula. In reauthorization, what are some issues about whether the program will continue to be primarily formula-based, plus the additional amount discretionary?

A: The issue around 5310/5311 stability, is that more people have been receiving pieces of the pie, while the pie hasn't grown substantially. Don't be discouraged. It is important to keep applying, so that there is a clear demonstration of the demand that exists. Not being counted in the formula is particularly difficult for smaller tribes with a significant population living off the reservation, but receiving tribal support.

Q: We have a shuttle service for seniors and persons with disabilities in our county which includes rural and tribal lands. Which funding would we apply to be beneficial to continue this here, 5310 or 5311?

A: Both sources of funding are available if the transit program meets the needs of both riders who are elders and have disabilities. An agency doesn't have to do two separate programs, but they can combine their programs into one and provide more services.

Q: We have shuttle services for our elders and persons with disabilities. Which do we apply for - 5310 and 5311?

A: Both funding types are available if they're coordinated in trips.

Q: How do state DOTs calculate 5311 and 5310 grant awards for tribes? For a subgrantee of a State DOT, should the State DOT consider FTA tribal apportionments, FHWA funds that pay the local match, and third-party billing revenues when they are calculating the tribal subgrantee 5311/5310 grant awards?

A: Funding that is allocated through 5311 is by rural population. If a reservation is in a rural area, then the residents are part of the calculation that allocates funding to the state through 5311. A tribal transit system can be eligible for both 5310/5311 grants. If tribal lands have a significant elder population, 5310 creates value. Different states allocate funds differently, and they also have discretion in how they allocate funds. They don't want to penalize those who are doing a great job by giving them less money. State DOTs receive funding that includes tribal programs in formula, and can put money in discretionary funds, so that programs have to be competitive for 5310 and 5311 funding. An example of a funded program is the Umatilla tribe in eastern Oregon, that used funds for a network within traditional tribal lands serves everybody. The tribal program is getting close to 100,000 rides a year, so it is an example of a very competitive rural program. While the state has ultimate discretion in the allocation of funds, it is important that they understand how insecure-unsteady-transit program capacity can become as a result of decreased funding. Having a stable state allocation is valuable.

Q: How can tribes receive 5310 funding (which refers to funding set aside for transportation for seniors or individuals with disabilities)?

A: In order to qualify for 5310 grants, transit systems must have a plan for coordinated human services. Each state allocates funds differently: they can have a state plan and then allocate funding to projects that come out of the state plan, or they could be doing it through local planning areas. If a transit system is part of a metropolitan planning organization or regional planning area with multiple counties, the coordinated human services component can help with project eligibility for grants. Everyone needs to have a plan to have access to 5310 grants. 5310 is allocated by senior and population with disabilities in a state including tribal areas.

Q: If our State DOT is withdrawing funds from state tribal transit subgrantees after the award has been made and we've been told by the State DOT that they are aware we are receiving other transit funding, what can be done?

A: This is not allowed. There is language in the federal regulations that a state cannot limit/lower funding to a tribe that is receiving Tribal Transit Program funds from FTA. States receive allocated funds based on population; tribal populations are used in these calculations. Tribal residents are just as much residents of the states and part of the federal allocation as any other group in the state. Tribal members should have an equal chance at funding as anyone else in the state that is eligible for funding. It is important to develop relationships between State DOTs and tribes to avoid misunderstandings around funding sources. Sometimes it takes more information to do the right thing. The concept of states awarding money and then reducing grants because of the perception that there is other money there has been problematic. This was also a prevalent issue with many rural programs. States misunderstand tribal environment and funding structures, they may not have enough experience working with different programs, or they may have incorrect ideas about what programs can and cannot do, and it takes active commitment and communication to prevent these problems. State managers also need to understand more about the tribal programs. This is an area where National RTAP can help provide assistance to tribes.

Q: Do tribal transit systems provide rides reimbursed by NEMT Medicaid funds? If so, are those riders sharing rides with non-NEMT riders?

Standing Rock Public Transit gets reimbursed for Medicaid rides from North and South Dakota, and all the rides are shared.

Q: How can Transportation Research Board (TRB) help tribes?

A: TRB's Committee on Tribal Transportation Issues is a great place to share practice and identify research needs to be funded through the National Highway Cooperative Research or Transit Cooperative Research Programs. The committee leadership is active in developing the Big Sky conference program. National RTAP will share their tribal training opportunities with TRB, so TRB can help promote National RTAP tribal programs.

Q: What is National RTAP doing to help tribes?

A: National RTAP can support tribal programs engagement with the census, so tribal and rural communities are well represented. We can also help tribal programs become more visible. Tribal systems need access to mentors and experienced managers who can help them answer questions and resolve specific problems. Trainings are necessary, particularly ones that focus on the challenges faced on reservations. One tribal trainer said that he was having a tough time with trainings that were off the reservation. The trainer felt as though needing to go off-site for essential trainings that were not available locally limited the opportunities of tribal transit providers. National RTAP can partner with tribal transit organizations to fill the gap. Recently, National RTAP partnered with the Rocky Mountain Tribal Transportation Program in Montana and went to their conference and

quarterly meeting to deliver trainings. Albuquerque NM was one site under consideration for Onsite Tribal Technical Assistance Training. One of the current aims is to figure out what kind of training are needed and to coordinate with different tribes. National RTAP will perform more on-site trainings as it is a good use of our resources.

Q: How can tribal training be performed regionally?

A: There is a lot of interest in working with groups regionally. When National RTAP spoke to Region 8 in the fall of 2018, we identified a need for financial management training and other basic trainings. If there are groups that express interest, then National RTAP can provide onsite technical assistance that can function as mini-conferences. Onsite trainings could be set up as one or two-day events where National RTAP could bring in a number of trainers on topics like drug and alcohol, safety and security and/or ADA. We recently presented a grant writing training at the 2019 National Tribal Symposium to Advance Transportation Conference. Moving forward, National RTAP could scale the event by ensuring that there are one to two trainers to address the most relevant training needs of tribal transit agencies. The first group of National RTAP tribal trainings and the first test of the on-the-ground onsite trainings will most likely be in Region 8.

Q: If National RTAP were to come to your area, what do you think would be the most useful or helpful for your tribal program?

A: Training should be aligned with tribal needs for emergencies and safety. All training needs to be relevant to reservations. A tribal transit program recently sent drivers to safety training, which was about terrorism and anthrax. There are not much of those things on reservations. National RTAP can provide training on safety and emergency procedures, including: fog, hitting a deer, ice, etc., that are relevant to tribes.

Q: When can tribal training take place?

A: It would be impossible to train everyone at the same time. National RTAP is open to running workshops on weekends to make it possible for everyone in tribal transit programs, from bus drivers to transit managers, to attend.

Q: What opportunities are there for tribes at the National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference?

A: National RTAP worked with FTA so the 2019 National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference has opportunities for tribal transit programs. The conference provides attendees with the peer level discussion and opportunities to interact with FTA National Transit Database (NTD) staff and with the new FTA Tribal Transit Program Manager. The FTA coordinators for tribal and 5311 programs

will also be in attendance. Participants are encouraged to bring laptops and questions for the lab session so that they may receive one-on-one support with submitting NTD reports, policy review, Google Transit/GTFS Builder and other hands-on training.

Q: What are some benefits of having a rural and tribal conference in Portland, OR?

A: Portland, Oregon has a great transit system with interesting tribal relationships. The Oregon programs at the state level have recognized tribes at the same unit level as they do other transportation program. The money is allocated to tribes and states for the state funding, so while tribal programs are separate, they are also funded at an equal nation-to-nation level.

Q: What are Tribal Transit Awards and Champions?

A: A tribal champion is a tribal member who mentored you or inspired you and your tribal transit program. The Tribal Transit Champion Awards will be given at our 2019 Technical Assistance Conference. National RTAP wants to recognize the mothers and fathers of tribal transit on reservations. National RTAP, with the agreement of FTA, is recognizing tribal systems that inspire others and showcase best practices in serving the needs of people on tribal lands. Tribal Awards are an opportunity to recognize those people and show that value to the rest of the community. The benefit for all is to see the amazing work that people are doing to support transit on reservations. The program will accept nominations for both individual champions and transit systems. Criteria for transit systems includes systems that you would like to model your own system on, and practices that your system is doing now that you think the rest of the country could really benefit from doing.

Q: Will there be Tribal Champion from each region?

A: National RTAP is open to recognizing as many nominations that we receive! At the last rural conference (RIBTC), there were 6 nominations, and FTA said that all nominations were great and they wanted to recognize all of them. If people would like to recognize one awardee per region, National RTAP is open to that. In the first year there will be a number of individuals that have deserved recognition for a long time- we'll have a backlog of people who are very deserving and who have done some amazing things with their program.

Q: Can tribal members apply for scholarships for the National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference?

A: If you are part of a tribal transit program, National RTAP is willing to cover registration fees. The conference will be a great opportunity to get tribal training. There will be labs and time in small groups where subject matter experts will assist with NTD reporting, and 1:1 time with FTA program managers. State programs have separate sources of funding that exist to provide trainings and

attendance to conferences through state transit organizations. National RTAP aims to reach tribal audiences through the tribal scholarships that do not have the same opportunities or access.