

Tribal Transit Peer Roundtable Summary

November 27, 2019

Q: Tribal Transit Champions – Each of the winners had amazing partnerships and provided leadership in the area that they were working on. Are people interested in having the Tribal Transit Champions do a webinar on the projects that showcase their skills?

A: No one was interested.

Q: What are pre-authorization authority for vehicle awards and best disposition practices?

A: Transit agencies may need to pre-order vehicles a year in advance. They will need to obtain a letter from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) granting pre-award authority to purchase the vehicle prior to the award disbursement. If working with a state, the agency will need to ask the state for a pre-award authority agreement.

Best practices are to be upfront about agency needs and to request the pre-award authority. Just because it exists, it does not mean that it is there automatically; the agency will need to go through the process. It is important to document each part of the process.

Best disposition practices include finding out the fair market value of the vehicle. One way to figure out fair market value is to post it on websites like craigslist.com. If trying to move a vehicle to a community organization, this will need to take place after the useful life of the vehicle or the organization will need to pay the value of the vehicle.

Q: FTA is trying to figure out the best way to open up better communication pathways with Tribal Transit Programs. What is the best way to work with and share information with FTA? What are the best conferences for FTA Tribal Liaisons to attend so that they are able to meet with tribal programs face-to-face?

A: One approach is to invite Tribal Liaisons to a conference- whether it is every 2 years with National RTAP or other organizations like Southwest Transit Association (SWTA), or a state conference where tribes are concentrated.

Q: There have been several iterations of tribal transit associations. Which are the best tribal associations conferences for reaching the most people?

A: Currently, it seems that the National Tribal Transportation Intertribal Conference, and the National Transportation in Indian Country Conference (NTICC), which are the largest, are best. Many conferences are dominated by road and highway construction, but they do provide for a tribal track. Another organization to work with might be the Intertribal Transportation Association (ITA). Other than that, the traditional infrastructure of state transportation associations or national conferences (such as the Community Transportation Association of America – CTAA EXPO) or regional (such as SWTA) conferences.

It's a matter of conferences promoting issues that are relevant and important to tribes, including remoteness, great distances, lack of addresses, and lack of road access. Conferences must present issues that tribal transit operators are most interested in and provide practical solutions.

A participant chatted that FTA may be able to attend larger regional/national tribal meetings, such as National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), CTAA, Annual Alaska Tribal Transportation Symposium, Annual NTICC, and ITA.

Q: What training needs are most difficult to meet for your programs? What specific topics do you need outside trainers for (e.g. safety, employee retention, effective communications, customer service)? What is the best way to provide training to your program?

A: When putting together conference tracks for tribal transit programs, it would be helpful to begin a conversation with operators to find out what specific training needs they have. Some trainings must be in person. The problem is that training is regionally focused and dependant on where the programs are based. Many conferences are focus primarily on roads and highways.

Focusing on safety (transit and roads) may help leverage topics. National RTAP compiled a transit system design track. Not everyone who is eligible may be aware of programs that are available. Having two sub tracks would be helpful - one for beginners and one for advanced learners. Spotting issues that are important to tribes would be key features.

A participant chatted that there is a real interest in how tribes can do startup of their transit systems. There's a great need to learn about starting up with funding other than FTA, fundraising, and partnerships. Also, agencies need to know how to sustain their programs once they've gotten off the ground.

With funding being relatively new for tribes, they often don't have the concepts or needs assessments necessary for applications to succeed. For those tribal funding applications that are awarded funding and are in the implementation stage, there are complex needs regarding running a program. More nuanced operation focused topics can help programs get up and running. To address this training need, it may be a good idea to do a conference session at upcoming conferences on how to mix funds. Some states are not aware that agencies can mix funds, while others encourage the practice. Perhaps providing models on how to combine resources and grantors can be a good opportunity to highlight some successes.

CTAA is an advocate and a resource for tribal transit on various legislative issues, and they also have a technical assistance program through which they can help tribes start and run systems. CTAA is currently working with six tribes in various stages of program development and implementation. At the 2019 CTAA Expo, there was a 2-day tribal transit intensive track. At the upcoming 2020 CTAA

Expo in Louisville KY, there will also be a tribal training focused track. Previously, CTAA has provided sessions on “Creative Fundraising for Tribal Transit” and is willing to do workshops at upcoming conferences to address this training need.

A participant chatted that one of the conferences to consider attending is the annual Construction in Indian Country Conference (CIIC) in Arizona, which has breakout sessions on: "The Economic Benefits of Tribal Transit Program Development"; "First Mile and Last Mile Transit-Oriented Development"; and "Funding Infrastructure Development for Transit."

Tennessee DOT is having real success in working with transit-oriented development in rural areas. This makes sense in older communities where there are buildings that can be converted into senior housing and the focus should be on building transit around those communities.

One training need that the Seneca Nation has is to receive procurement training to enable funded capital projects to proceed. The Nation has had difficulty in identifying procurement documents and procedures, and in implementing capital projects that are consistent with the grantor guidelines. Procurement training sessions have been attended but, the focus of the training has been for large projects.

One of the tools that National RTAP has that can assist with both procurement for capital and other types of procurement is ProcurementPro 2.0. The tool is a valuable application to walk through the process.

One way to receive assistance from National RTAP is to submit a technical assistance request.

Q: What are the challenges of building transit facilities on tribal lands?

A: There is a need for training on Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and proposed transit stops, as well as tribal facility planning regarding construction of transit facilities on tribal lands.

Q: Regarding micro-mobility on Tribal lands, how do agencies find drivers?

A: Micro-mobility refers not to just scooters, but also to bike-sharing and getting people to become drivers for Uber or Lyft. Finding and hiring drivers can be challenging.

A participant shared through chat that TOD bike-sharing programs brings up the need to assess tribal pedestrian routes to existing/proposed transit stops.

The first mile starts with the first step. One of the major benefits that can be inexpensively conferred to communities is pedestrian routes that provide access to retail, employment and to transit. The ability to walk safely is key to the use of vehicles.

The ability of people to look at how housing, pedestrian routes, and transit all work can be broken down into steps. This speaks to the development question.

National RTAP let participants know that they are considering a future product on the construction of transit facilities on tribal lands.

One of the ways organizations can start coordinating and building networks is to look at Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and Agreements (MOA). One of the Tribal Champions that does an amazing job with mobility in highly rural and tribal lands is the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla. They have agreements and have built networks of services through memorandums of understanding with surrounding communities. Through a review of the geography of their historic tribal influence and tribal management, they built their transit system out to provide the tribal members within their tribal lands access to not just the reservation but also to jobs, to schools, and to healthcare. The program, has been built not through owning, but through agreement, and has been able to extend access and influence in their tribal lands.

Q: How can agencies access the tribal scholarship program or access to State RTAP funding?

A: Many programs that run through states are based on the total population of the state, not the total population of the state minus the tribal population. These programs are a part of the federal programs that support rural and tribal transportation because they are including the population in their analysis for allocating funds. It can be difficult when tribal programs don't have access to these funding opportunities.

Q: Is there interest in a training workshop that assists tribes in using the General Services Administration (GSA) purchasing agreement for vehicles? Is there interest in working with BusCon engineers to make sure that they get vehicle specs that are the best for rural programs?

A: Problems for rural and tribal programs are that the roads are not always in the best shape, the distances are long, and the vehicles are not built for that kind of mileage and terrain. There are a lot of issues with maintenance and maintaining vehicles over time. National RTAP has been working with the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida (USF) on reliability and longevity specifications for transit vehicles.

Q: How are agencies buying vehicles? Are they procured through state purchasing agreements or do agencies specify their own vehicles? Do agencies have to write up their specifications? Do agencies have specifications that they use?

A: National RTAP can help transit programs find out what is going on with vehicle specifications so that we can push the manufacturers to manufacture more reliable and long-life vehicles.

A participant chatted that the Seneca Nation has purchased buses from the New York State Office of General Services contract listing. The system works, but sometimes there are vehicle needs that are not on the contract, so they have to negotiate those provisions with the contractor.

That is true for many systems. Many of the state programs will provide an agency with the base price on the vehicle. With the Oregon purchasing agreement, an agency can choose a vehicle from the state list but if they want to have accessories or customize the engine, transmission, or electronics, those additional items have to go through a separate Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The base price sometimes is just the starting point. The California Association for Coordinated Transportation (CALACT) runs the state-wide California Purchasing Agreement for buses and they are able to provide a number of different vehicles options for their programs. This could be one

topic of focus during the GSA training workshop - to make sure that agencies specify the vehicle that is hard to find or is beneficial for rural programs, but isn't available now.

If agencies have vehicle questions, they can contact National RTAP. There may be a webinar or a training session at one of the upcoming conferences that highlights some of the work with GSA resource sharing.

Q: What is the biggest issue that agencies face regarding vehicles?

A: One of the issues that Jennie Rowland, the previous National RTAP Review Board Chair, said is that before they put vehicles into service, their agency has a blessing ceremony where they bless and name the vehicles. Their system has not had a safety problem. Several other transit programs have the launching of new vehicles into their program as part of their safety program. In a way, the community owns the safety infrastructure, and it is important to see that as something that is a means to keep both riders and drivers safe. This is a way to celebrate the mobility that each vehicle brings to the community.

Q: Question for Charlie Rutkowski, the Assistant Director of CTAA - Does CTAA's National Tribal Transit Conference offer scholarships for tribal members and tribal transit agencies to attend these training events?

A: CTAA does not offer scholarships for tribal members or tribal transit agencies to attend training events. There are existing scholarships available through other sources. A number of states offer scholarships through their State RTAP programs. The scholarships are offered by individual states.

Q: In the past, has National RTAP offered scholarships for tribal members and tribal transit agencies to attend training events?

A: National RTAP offers scholarships to the National RTAP Technical Assistance Conference as part our training and tribal transit training program. We help bring trainers to tribal conferences. We have trainers that provide trainings at conferences that we are not able to attend or on topics that National RTAP isn't able to train on.

A chat responder noted that Minnesota RTAP offers scholarships to tribal members through their State RTAP Program.

The Oregon and Washington State RTAP Programs are open to the tribal transit programs. If an individual applies for a scholarship through the state, scholarship resources are available to any tribal member to go to any conference according to what the state priorities are for that year. When Washington State DOT hosted the rural conference, all of that year's RTAP money went to provide scholarships, for 5311 and 5311c subrecipients throughout the state to attend.

There are quite a few resources available. Some states outsource their RTAP programs to Universities or to Transit Associations and each state manages their program differently.