

## Rural Transit Day Twitter Chat July 16, 2019

### Summary

The nation's first [#RuralTransitDay](#) Twitter Chat on July 16, 2019 was moderated by Kari Banta of Texas DOT, Julia Castillo of HIRTA, and Juanita Risch of Idaho Transportation Department. 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.

AARP Public Policy Institute, Policy, APTA, Brazos Transit District, Earl Public Transit, Florida RTAP, FTA, HIRTA Public Transit, Idaho IDT, Missouri Public Transit Association, NADTC, Nebraska DOT, Nebraska Public Transit, Nevada DOT, NORC Walsh Center, OATS Transit, Panhandle Trails, Routematch, RTEC, and TikiBus were among the many organizations and individuals who participated in the chat.

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

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**Question 1:** What do you think of when you hear rural transit or public transportation?

**Answers:**

- Lynn Mertz from the AARP Policy Institute shared, “When I think of rural transit I think of big vistas and the ability to connect people and places that seem far apart. On Rural Transit Day, let's focus on connections as we create a culture of health.”
- When Rachel Beyerle from NADTC hears rural transit and public transportation, she also hears the word opportunity - a path to employment, healthcare, day-to-day needs and socializing.
- Panhandle Trails answered, “It's all about assisting people in making the next connection, reaching desired destinations, building partnerships, it's about communities. We have a true ‘feel good’ job, where we GET to come to work every day and make a difference in people's lives.”

- Florida RTAP replied with a quote from Cathi Petagno, BOCC St. Lucie County Transit Division, “Small transit is a beautiful beginning of hope.” National RTAP answered them, “All transit no matter how small has a large heart.”
- “Rural transit means beautiful vistas, relaxing journeys, and some of the friendliest drivers in the world,” declared National RTAP.
- “Public Transit should be seen as an asset to all small rural communities. For all the reasons it is an asset in urban areas, it's an asset in rural areas too,” shared Julia Castillo from HIRTA Public Transit. On a lighter note, “In Iowa it means fields of sweet corn and lots of pigs!”

**Question 2:** What’s your favorite rural transit destination?

**Answers:**

- A number of beautiful (photos included in the transcript), fun and scenic rural destinations were tweeted, including Fernandina Beach in Florida’s Nassau County, Iowa near the IPTA Conference and also in the service area for Earl Public Transit, Texas Hill Country, Oregon (the site of National RTAP’s 2019 Technical Assistance Conference), and – broadly - anywhere you can go that allows you to be independent and enjoy life.

**Question 3:** If there was one thing rural public transit could that would make the biggest impact to people in your rural community, what would it be?

**Answers:**

- Kari Banta from Texas DOT stated that it's so important to emphasize that it's about people. Especially with all of the challenges that come with running a rural transit system. Getting the word out is also very important. Rural transit is not well known in some areas, or people may assume it's only for certain groups.
- National RTAP reemphasized that it's about people and training those people to provide the best transit service to their valuable customers and shared their [Best Practices Article on Driver Training](#).
- Extended hours of service would have a great impact on rural Idaho, added Julia Castillo of HIRTA. NADTC agreed - expanding days and hours of service would have a great impact. Many people would like weekend service if it’s not currently offered.
- NADTC felt that partnerships and collaboration across county or jurisdictional lines so that bus service could reach key destinations despite boundaries was important. National RTAP added that NADTC does an excellent job of connecting stakeholders throughout the country to help persons with disabilities and seniors with their transportation needs.
- More funds to allow better delivery of service, and better pay for drivers and additional staff to focus on how to minimize costs, increase services, market programs, etc., were recommended by HIRTA and Florida RTAP. There also needs to be more funding allocated to rural systems to be able to meet the growing needs in smaller communities.

**Question 4:** How do smaller transit agencies get buy-in from businesses and others in the community on the importance of rural transit?

**Answers:**

- Florida RTAP talked about involvement and sponsorships in statewide transit events such as the Florida Triple Crown Bus Roadeo.
- Texas DOT stated that coordination across different agencies is critical for everyone's success
- NADTC discussed that partnerships can improve local funding opportunities thru MOUs, financial agreements, and in-kind services. The proof is in customer dollars spent! Transit riders shop, dine and enjoy entertainment just like all patrons.
- Iowa has public transit in all 99 counties and we cross into other counties and cities all the time ... all 35 systems work together to make transit great in Iowa. Julia Castillo of HIRTA Public Transit advised agencies to get in front of people as often as possible. Tell your transit story to County Supervisors, City Council, local businesses, anyone and everyone and make it people focused, not vehicle focused. She also recommended creating transit advisory groups and inviting the right people to the table, especially workforce and economic development staff.
- National RTAP is very grateful to have such an amazing Review Board to help us help all rural transit stakeholders. They also have a resource with ideas to show how transit makes an impact, a [Transit Benefits Statistics](#) page.
- Working together, that's what makes rural transit work!

**Question 5:** How often do you take public transportation? If you don't ride, what's one thing that would make you try rural transit?

**Answers:**

- National RTAP staff rides public transportation whenever we can. Especially when they travel and want to see the sights.
- For reaching out to non-riders, HIRTA Public Transit does promotions to target people to try them out. For example: during Men's Health Month, all new male riders get their first round-trip free. It allows them to try it and us to have a new rider in a database.

**Question 6:** With urban growth, so areas are now growing into areas that were once rural. What are some ways rural and urban transit systems can partner?

**Answers:**

- Idaho ITD has their rural agencies partner with and coordinate stops with the small urban and urban services.
- Florida RTAP suggested creating super stops between rural and urban areas to facilitate the transfer of passengers.
- HIRTA Public Transit contracts with an urban system for their vanpool program, to offer those services in their 7 counties, instead of having to develop their own. HIRTA also recommended to share mobility rural and urban travel training. Bring people into the metro and have their Mobility Coordinator teach them how to ride the metro transit system. It is one more way to give people more freedom and independence.
- National RTAP answered that good resources can help and shared Neponset Valley Transit Agency's [Transportation Partnership Toolkit](#).

**Question 7:** What's your favorite story about rural transit?

**Answers:**

- Florida RTAP pronounced that it is the appreciation and gratitude received when small and rural agencies can participate in training provided at no cost to the agency. They also shared a touching photo of a driver providing excellent customer service when boarding a rider in a wheelchair.
- HIRTA Public Transit relayed about being able to take an 80-plus year-old man to the nursing home every day to see his 102-year-old mama. He had a disability and without public transit he would have not been able to visit her.
- National RTAP shared some stories from the [Rural Transit Heroes Twitter Chat](#) from [Greenway RTA](#) and a grateful rider.
- Transit can put the biggest smile on everyone's faces.
- Providing top-notch customer service to people who need to use transit - that's what it's all about!

**Question 8:** What is the funniest or most unusual thing you have had happen or seen happen while on rural transit?

**Answers:**

- HIRTA Public Transit had a woman who had them take her to the local thrift store and when they went back to get her, she had purchased a sofa and wanted to bring it on the bus.
- To create new banner photos, National RTAP hired a photographer and a rural bus to be a “model.” The bus “posed” all day amidst corn fields, apple orchards and forests.

**Question 9:** What is one of the greatest “Celebrations” for your rural transit system?

**Answers:**

- HIRTA Public Transit makes every day Driver Appreciation Day. “Without our superhero drivers we would not be able to provide the amazing services we do today. So, if we can make our drivers and other staff feel like rock stars, they will make the customers feel the same,” stated Julia Castillo. Rural Transit Day is the day to give your small transit service a high five and big thank you for the service they provide in the smaller rural communities in America.
- Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA), Florida Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD), Florida Developmental Disability Council, and The ARC of Florida, Inc. united to hold the Annual Legislative Day.
- Roadeos are so cool. Rural transit staff have impressive skills.
- Bringing many stakeholders to the table to make transit better for those who really need it.
- National RTAP is planning another celebration for all rural transit systems. Agencies can share photos depicting the majesty of rural transit to the Transit Through the Seasons Photo Contest.
- Florida offers a bus to the beach, which Rural Transit Day Twitter Chat participants thought was a great service.

- Panhandle Trails provides free rides on Rural Transit Day. Their wheels are rolling in the Nebraska Panhandle celebrating the nation's first ever Rural Transit Day in the Good Life!