



State RTAP Manager's Panel Discussion Summary

COVID-19 Focus

April 23, 2020

Panel Session I: Jacklyn Montgomery, Executive Director, California Association for Coordinated Transportation (CALACT)

CALACT is working with Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and American Public Transportation Association (APTA) to advocate for funding from Congress. They were involved in advocacy for passing the CARES Act, worked on getting an extension for PTSAP compliance to December 31, 2020 (which was just granted on April 23, 2020), and extensions for CDL license renewals. They also created a template letter for Section 5310 agencies.

Their staff meet weekly with the state transportation agency about how funding will be used. CALACT has a procurement cooperative, which rural transit agencies can leverage for supplies for PPE and social distancing. Their RTAP program provides procurement guidance for rural transit agencies, such as how to incorporate Buy America regulations. As many small agencies were not able to purchase PPE, CALACT ordered 260,000 masks for their members. They also have a mentoring program where new transit staff can be mentored by more seasoned staff – this has been featured lately for grant-writing assistance and amending contracts.

They also set up a web page with links to COVID-19 information from FTA, CTAA, and others, and also a forum page where members can share questions and answers. They are producing weekly newsletters, webinars (including one with FTA about dissemination and invoicing of CARES Act funds), weekly transit talks for individual technical assistance, and messaging for operators (such as “Can we bring meals to you?”), and webinar recordings and slides.

Panel Session II: Marcele Edington, Program Manager, Office of Passenger Transportation, Michigan Department of Transportation

The stay-at-home order in Michigan is set to end on April 30, 2020 but may be extended. (Note: As of the publication of this summary, the stay-at-home has been extended to May 15, 2020.) The State DOT is planning to roll out CARES Act funding to be dispersed for both the last two quarters in

FY2020 and the entire FY2021, 18% net eligible funds to rural transit agencies and 15% to intercity agencies. They are looking at ways to use remaining CARES Act funds for lost revenue.

They also have a legacy grant that will be used to support 5310 agencies with projects related to COVID-19.

MDOT is currently working on statewide projects to assist transits with pandemic/disaster plans and implementing technology to support these plans. They are also working on a campaign showing transit support to the community during the crisis and transit being safe to ride post-COVID-19 restrictions.

Their RTAP Program has had to cancel all trainings except two which hopefully can be held later in the year.

They are strongly discouraging in-person meetings. The State has implemented an Executive Order relaxing the requirements for the Open Meeting Act to allow public bodies to conduct meetings remotely while facilitating public participation until May 12, 2020. Public bodies are required to provide detailed procedures by which the public may participate in the meeting remotely.

Since they have begun virtual meetings for information sharing, they have noticed a rise in attendance, which they will keep in mind for the future meetings and trainings.

They are building a new web portal to share information, group chats and updates and personal protective equipment (PPE). They are also sharing information, questions and answers with the State Emergency Operations center and hosting nightly calls with subrecipients in the “hotspot” to share ideas and concerns. They sent out an email about how to stay safe and social distance at drug and alcohol collection sites. They let agencies know that the commercial driver’s license (CDL) renewal deadline has been extended to June 30, 2020.

Their transit agencies are implementing rear door boarding and protective shields for drivers, including shower curtains. Huron Transit Corporation is using ¼ inch thick plexiglass shields for driver protection. They are using magnets to keep the plexiglass door closed. The Director of Huron Transit says, “Functionality is very good and no visual obstacles! Protects the drivers and passengers. The passengers even like them.”

Panel Session III: Lea Sheridan, Manager of Quality Assurance & Compliance, Local Programs and Minibus Support, New Jersey Transit

New Jersey began their COVID-19 planning efforts on March 9, 2020, when the governor declared a state of emergency. May 15, 2020 is the target date for New Jersey to lift restrictions, but that may be extended. Their RTAP Program holds weekly phone calls with all county agencies and sends out an eBlast with information weekly. They are categorizing emails with information about webinars, best practices, how to communicate with riders, cleaning information, procurement, grant information, etc. Their writer scours the Internet to find the best information. They also have a web page with links, including to the National RTAP Resource Library. They purchased seats for their subrecipients so staff can take fee-based online training at no cost, and are working with CTAA on a program with their PASS training.

They have not applied for CARES Act funding yet, but are in discussion about what the funding may be applied to, including cleaning materials, no touch systems, automated vehicle location systems, and capital equipment. A state-funded pilot program is being rolled out with one agency and Uber that allows agencies to contact Uber and enables additional mobility options. Transit agencies are installing plexiglass shields, and this is something that will be looked into for future funding.

Panel Session IV: Don Chartock, Grants & Community Partnerships Manager, Washington Department of Transportation

Don advised for everyone to be patient and kind and to think of a return to normal as more like a dial that can be slowly turned either way than an on-off switch. Washington State is still experiencing a stay-at-home order. The state may start construction and maintenance projects and are working out details for when other workers can return to work. Every morning their management team has a huddle, and a weekly update call with rural and small urban systems. They are also in regular contact with the Department of Health and the State Transit Association. Collaboration includes a shared Google Doc about revenue and movement, to learn what the impact is on ridership. Their RTAP Program offers advice on Civil Rights issues when cutting transit services.

Challenges include that it is sometimes difficult to maintain social distancing on buses and that some of the population does not believe that COVID-19 is a real problem and does not comply.

Intercity bus services are a priority for Washington to make sure they are able to keep it going. He acknowledged that more funding and flexibility is needed for Section 5310 programs. Washington DOT is working with national partners to obtain that flexibility. Nonprofit transit agencies that normally bring seniors to meals now want to bring meals to seniors. In order to provide additional help, traditional state and federal rural and special needs funding are being leveraged by some agencies who are not receiving Section 5311 CARES Act funding.

The state is still waiting to find out the impact to revenue. A good amount of the funding comes from state sales tax, and the impacts will not be known for a couple of months.

His program is performing a cost revenue analysis and looking at 2018 expenses to see how future funding can be allocated. By distributing a portion of the funds now, they can analyze revenue numbers to make appropriate decisions to distribute the rest.

Questions and Answers:

Q: Are the state funds being used for 5310 covering delivery of items (like shopping, more than just meals)?

A: It has to be an eligible expense. Shopping services, unfortunately, is not an eligible CARES Act expense, and the panelists considered this problematic. In MI they are allowing agencies to do this type of service through state funds, realizing that it may not be covered by the CARES Act. NJ has

leads of county systems who are able to do meal services. Their State DOT usually provides vehicles, not funding. Jackie advised that everyone should put into relief docket the ability for 5310 recipients to be able to do this - the more people who request this, the more likely it may be able to be granted.

Q: What are agencies doing to set up shower curtains and/or plexiglass shields?

A: Jackie said that it has been a challenge as drivers don't always have time to retrofit, but these have been installed in agencies. Jackie will share photos for the National RTAP Coronavirus Topic Guide. Ann Rajewski of CASTA said that agencies in Colorado are using both shower curtains and plexiglass shields that swing open. Marcele said that it is important for the shield to surround the driver. Lea added that most vehicles already have modesty panels behind the drivers, and transit agencies in NJ are trying to standardize how they implement the shields to cover the side of the driver facing the door. A number of participants of the panel discussion shared photos that will be posted in the National RTAP Coronavirus Topic Guide.

Q: What are states doing about the intercity operators that are requesting CARES funding? Are they treating routes/providers differently if they are already subsidized/under agreement with the State DOT or not?

A: Don answered, "That is the first question Washington started with." They reached out to subsidized routes and asked what they lost. However, the non-subsidized services are hurting more. They are planning to ask both subsidized and non-subsidized to award proportionately. They will follow 5311 parameters about what is an intercity bus provider. In NJ, timing coincided with solicitation for projects, and will determine distribution through that. CA did a survey of all 5311 (f) operators and some have high ridership, but have seen loss of revenue, still getting more information. MI is trying to determine how to use intercity funds, reviewing them and will determine at a later date. Kristin Haar shared that Iowa DOT only has 2 intercity bus providers who annually apply for and receive the state's intercity bus 5311 (f) funds, so they will split the CARES Act funds on a proportional basis based on number of revenue miles provided in the state by each in 2019.

Q: What data sources in addition to CDC and WHO are states using to decide how to go forward with COVID-19 planning?

A: Marcele receives news updates from the Michigan governor that include data and also regularly checks the State of Michigan website. Don is tracking data from ridership, traffic and Amtrak rides.