Transit Manager Peer Roundtable Summary

October 8, 2020

There were approximately 60 participants. Below are notes from the roundtable and links that may be useful to attendees and others.

1) What are you doing for outreach and marketing? Is anyone doing a “Safe to Ride” campaign or encouraging new riders?

- Julia Castillo of the Heart of Iowa Transit Authority (HIRTA) and the National RTAP Review Board:
  - We are doing a Safe to Ride campaign. We post to social media about “Ride Safe, Ride HIRTA” and about safety measures our agency is taking.
  - We created a video to show how we are keeping the buses safe and clean, and this has made a difference, actually showing people what they’re doing.
  - Ridership is going up, even though we are in a hot spot for COVID, but people are venturing out more. Hopefully that is in part because of what we’ve been doing to keep them safe and to reassure passengers.

- Other Participants:
  - We post frequent pictures/stories through their Facebook Page, which has been helpful and they’ve good feedback about it from customers.
  - We are staying connected with community partners, participating in parades, doing outreach on social media, and offering free ridership until the end of 2020.
  - Island Transit, a rural provider in Washington State, does a great job on their Facebook page of marrying the need to limit ridership, but also encourage folks to return to transit: www.facebook.com/IslandTransit/.
  - Island Transit also have a bus wrap with public health messaging – it shows Gail the Whale wearing a mask and says “Wear a mask, we’re in this together.” We are doing this in partnership with our county government. Gail the Whale is a mascot for our local tourism board. This is the first time we did bus wraps or advertising and has been well received.
  - Three participants – we haven’t wanted to market too much because seating capacity on the bus is limited due to social distancing.
  - Currently our service is officially for "essential trips only" and we limit capacity for social distancing purposes so we are also not actively encouraging new riders, as we are already passing up passengers from time to time when we are at capacity. Due to ridership growth from going fare free, we reinstated fare collection in July to reduce the number of pass-bys. We communicate regularly with our passengers about what we are doing to keep them safe.
2) **How are you training your drivers and other staff? Are you forgoing some training, using online training, or otherwise altering your new hire/refresher training program?**

- **Laura Corff of Cimarron Public Transit in Oklahoma and the National RTAP Review Board:**
  - We are continuing trainings in small groups when we can be in open spaces and at a safe distance and wearing masks. We are also doing more frequent “tailgate training”.
  - We are posting signs/flyers with reminders about COVID safety and other updates. They are also using questionnaire type notices for the drivers.
  - New hire shadowing is challenging due to social distancing and driver barriers, but they are doing it and using PPE protocols.
  - Office staff have participated in virtual webinars.
  - We continue to use online training (also before COVID), like defensive driving and first aid. We also use the National RTAP 2 the Point Training cards.
  - Bus Talks is also a tool, typically one-page weekly training on a variety of topics.

- **Other Participants:**
  - We haven’t hired any one new, but they are sending safety messages via tablet, about 3 times per week. The office staff is working from home, so we don't have the constant connection with them. We also have an employee portal online where we post all of our safety documents.
  - We usually do trainings with all 60 operators, typically twice a year, but will not do it this year. We are doing a virtual training using vendor training materials (e.g. wheelchair securement or technology products) as well as staff trainers recording information via their smart phones and getting it out via Google Drive. We are paying operators for 3 hours after they have gone through the training materials. And they are adding a quiz or other way to ensure they have absorbed the material.
    - Question regarding internet access: We have limited broadband in our area, so for employees without good internet at home, they can do it in the office before/after their shift. We’re not offering in-person training right now.
  - We do outdoor staff trainings as well as an Employee “Come and Go” Luncheon.
  - Multiple participants mentioned using National RTAP eLearning courses for self-paced, interactive online training for drivers and management staff.
  - Colorado, Georgia, and Florida are doing hybrid training – some courses online and some in-person trainings in small groups.

3) **What is your system looking to do, if anything, to help get people to the polls to vote?**

- **Julia Castillo of HIRTA in Iowa and the National RTAP Review Board:**
  - We recently launched a Ride to Vote campaign, offering free rides to polling locations and to USPS drop-boxes. We are promoting this on social media and let all drivers and schedulers know. They have stickers to distribute to all who rode the bus to vote.
  - They have done the free rides for voting for many years and it is built into their budget through state and county funding. This year they did the marketing campaign because of COVID and wanting people to not be afraid to vote.

- **Other Participants:**
  - We have added a “Trips to Vote” to our approved essential trips list and are communicating with our riders and community about it on Facebook. We are using existing funding for these trips.
  - Our transfer station is right across the street from an early voting polling place, which makes it easy for people to take transit to vote.
Two other agencies said they provide free rides to vote and have done so for years.

4) How are you doing as a leader during these challenging times? What are you doing to take care of yourself and your employees?

- Tim Geibel of the Crawford Area Transit Authority (CATA) in Pennsylvania and the National RTAP Review Board:
  - Share honest information with employees. In the beginning we sent messages almost daily. Important to support, listen and communicate openly and often with staff. Still need to have virtual trainings and meetings, to stay connected.
  - We used to have free hot lunches every month for the drivers, but that is on hold. We are redirecting those funds for holiday gift cards (e.g. for a turkey, etc.) to try to get them through the holidays and reward them.
  - For the leaders, it’s important to take of yourself, work remotely as needed, and try to find balance. Also, essential to communicate with your peers and know you’re not alone and get suggestions. National RTAP is a great way to connect with peers.

- Other Participants:
  - We created an employee survey so they can let us know how we as management are handling protocols and if they felt safe, informed, had the right equipment, and what we can do better. Was really helpful to hear their perspectives. Will provide survey summary to employees to let them know we are listening and responding.
  - We have frequent staff meetings to stay in touch and support each other. Staff go out to meet with drivers at least weekly. Also, an outreach coordinator has ridden the buses in part to talk to customers and see how they are feeling on the buses.
  - We give out small gift cards when the drivers have done something well. Rewarding them with something small goes a long way. They also made t-shirts that say HIRTA Heroes and did higher pay through July as hazard pay.
  - I get tested often so I know what the process is like in case other staff need to get tested.
  - We have started having staff meetings again monthly. We are an agency of 15 staff. We supply the food for the meeting. We clear out the bays and everyone sits in the bays very socially distant. I have had one-on-ones with every employee to reconnect after the past few months. That has been beneficial for the employee and myself.
  - We included the organization response to Covid-19 on our annual culture survey and had meetings with all employees to make sure they could discuss the results. We also had a BBQ on Rural Transit Day.
  - Hazard pay/bonuses:
    - We did during May and June. We paid $20 extra per day that they worked. Also provided $1 raise per hour.
    - Drivers received a 3% raise and some got a 5% raise. Also, bonuses to excellent drivers and management staff who are working on-site. Paying staff full-time pay even though they aren’t working their full hours. They have only done about half the rides than they normally do. It’s on the uptick, but it is slow.
    - We have provided Gap Pay and Hazard Pay to our drivers.
    - Our board awarded four of us what we call COVID PTO. We were the ones who kept transit going for basically two months while everyone else was furloughed. Three employees were given 80 hours and I was given 160 hours to be used by Sept. 30, 2021.
5) Are you starting any projects, expansions, or trying other new directions for your program?
   - Tim Geibel of CATA in Pennsylvania and the National RTAP Review Board:
     - With CARES Act funding – reached out to agency partners and said, if you need help with transportation, tell us what your needs are and we’ll help you formulate your “ask” to the county/municipality to help support the cost of the transit service. One of the counties said they weren’t going to be able to open the city pools, so they funded a route to county park/lake. Not a lot of usage, but a partnership to meet a need they have.
     - Revamped the route near the college to make it safer, because the college was worried about transmission among students.
     - Listen to what is needed in your community and see how your agency can help.
     - Beefed up online pass sales and fare collection. Last year they implemented Square.com on their website and use now TokenTransit, for smart phone bus pass/ticket sales. Making progress in transitioning to more online fare collection and eliminate cash fare collection. It’s worth the transaction fees and is very well received. $3 a day to do this. Easy to deploy. You do need an internet connection on your smart phone to show your pass. Even with a lot of poverty in our area, most people have a smart phone. People are migrating to the online passes.
   - Other Participants:
     - We also use TokenTransit for pre-paid passes and it has been a great experience and well received among customers. It is cheaper (discounted pass), contactless, and easy to use.
     - We are using some of our reduced service hours to provide limited stop express bus service between major transfer points on our cross-town route to reduce the frequency of leaving passengers at the curb.
     - We wrote an entirely new business plan when things were slow, so when ridership starts to increase, we will have a more sustainable service. Looking at different types of services and ways to diversify funding, so we aren’t reliant too much on one source of funding (i.e. when our Medicaid funding was cut). Plan is available on ridehirta.com.
     - We also have a prepaid fare/pass app, and it’s contactless, and we’ve seen an increase in that also in the pandemic.
     - Providing service to three physically challenged individuals from the three high schools in town, that need to go to hospital every day for work. They offer an extra service to get them there, and they ride the regular route home. They are proud they can help get them to work when they may not otherwise have been able to. Also, there is money in the state for opioid treatment, and the transit agency is being paid for trips to recovery treatment, with a slightly different payment system.

6) Are you still having staff work/meet remotely when possible? Do you see this as a cost savings benefit or are you looking to return to the old normal?
   - Laura Corff of Cimarron Public Transit in Oklahoma and the National RTAP Review Board:
     - The Community Action Program (the umbrella organization that the transit program is under) HR/accounting staff mostly worked remotely during the lockdown, but it was not really a cost savings. There were also some frustrations around delays in transmitting information, because the staff working remotely couldn’t access all information. Most of the transit program could not be remote. She now has access to her files wherever she works, which is a great option.
In watching a training on this topic, she thought about concerns about other residents having access to confidential information about passengers etc. while working at home, as well as workers comp with people working from home. The agency’s headquarters developed a policy for working from home and returning to work/office. She would be happy to share that with anyone.

- They are mostly doing virtual meetings, but where appropriate doing some in person if they can do it socially distant and with masks, which has been going well.

Other Participants:

- We had phone systems that were able to be taken home by staff, so most could connect to the server from home. Only the accountant is working in the office full time. Schedulers/dispatchers are working from home until at least the end of the year. Other staff go in periodically. They created a work from home policy for everyone to review and agree to. They haven’t had many challenges. They worked with their workers comp carrier to address that concern.

7) How are you handling farebox revenue right now?
- See above under #5.

8) Is your agency doing anything regarding the anti-racism movement and protests, etc.? Are you implementing any additional training, peer/support groups, or other changes?
- HIRTA has a Diversity and Inclusion web page if anyone is interested: [https://www.ridehirta.com/diversity](https://www.ridehirta.com/diversity).
- National RTAP is planning a diversity training for 2021. And this topic may be included in a future roundtable when there is more time to discuss.

Polls – 58% of attendees responded to the polls

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<th>1. Are you operating at full capacity and on normal routes?</th>
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<td>Approx. 3/4 Capacity</td>
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<td>We are shut down</td>
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1. Would you be interested in another roundtable within the next few months to cover the remaining discussion topics?

- Yes (28) 90%
- No (0) 0%
- Maybe (3) 10%