



Future of Transit Funding

In the March 2011 issue of the Louisiana Transitions Newsletter, the cover article entitled *Operating Assistance Woes* discussed the economic downturns affect on local transit agencies and their quest to continue providing quality service to patrons with a true need for mobility. The article specifically talked about the 'Alliance for Transit Operating Assistance' and its efforts to promote flexibility in how we utilize federal funds. This article provides additional information on transit funding issues at the national level and uncertainty seems to be the watchword of the day.

In addition to our slowly recovering economic conditions, there are two main forces at work that are causing great uncertainty in the world of public transportation - the lack of a long term national transportation bill and the shortfalls facing the Highway Trust Fund.

National Transportation Bill

As most of you know, our current transportation bill, the 'Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users', commonly referred to as SAFETEA-LU, was signed into law on August 10, 2005 and officially expired on September 30, 2009. We have been operating under a series of short term extensions ever since. It makes for a very unstable operating atmosphere, especially when planning for future service, much less actual expansion of service.

There are a multitude of reasons that a new Transportation Bill has not yet been developed and passed, most of them political. The main reason that

Currently, the federal government devotes approximately 82 cents of every transportation dollar to highways and only 18 cents to public transportation.

Congress has done little toward establishing a new transportation bill was imminent elections. No one wanted to create a bill based on the ideals of one party or group of ideologies when another might soon be the ruling group. However, it takes time to create a new national transportation bill with new policies and initiatives and they are just getting started.

In addition to the normal rigors associated with a new transportation bill, our existing policies are out of date and out of touch with today's realities. We desperately need flexibility in the way we are able to spend our transportation dollars and especially our public transportation dollars. Currently, the federal government devotes approximately 82 cents of every transportation dollar to highways and only 18 cents to public transportation. To add insult to injury, most highway dollars require only a 10-20% local match, whereas, public transportation operating funds require a 50% match. It is a fact that federal policy and funding determine which modes will reach their full potential and public transportation is not being given its chance to thrive.

Highway Trust Fund

Adding to the uncertainty of operating without a long-term funding mechanism, are the current shortfalls in the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). The HTF was originally founded over half a century ago to fund various surface trans-

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Notes from the Top

by Donna Lavigne

Well, it's been another busy quarter here at the DOTD Public Transportation Section. We've been busy processing applications, conducting training, setting up this year's conference and getting ready for the new fiscal year.

Above all, we have some great news from one of our providers and we wish to congratulate them and let everyone know about their accomplishment.

The Avoyelles Public Transit in Marksville was awarded the STAR Special Merit Award by the Beverly Foundation. Avoyelles Public

Transit was one of 19 STAR Award winners selected nationwide for 2011. The award is a cash prize intended to enable winners to promote and provide transportation services to older adults. The Beverly Foundation is a non-profit foundation headquartered in Albuquerque, NM that undertakes research, technical materials development, assistance, and program recognition to encourage and facilitate mobility and transportation for older adults. This is the 12th year the Beverly Foundation has conducted its annual STAR Awards program. We here at Public Transportation are very proud of Avoyelles Public Transportation's accomplishment.

As mentioned earlier, we have been busy conducting various trainings across the State. We held a Vehicle Maintenance Training in Marksville in April and another PASS training in Baton Rouge in May. Both training opportunities were well attended.

As some of you may know, we held our first STTARS (Statewide Transit Tracking and Reporting System) training for all of the Section 5311 Rural providers this month in Baton Rouge. The classes were held at the LTRC computer training facilities on

the LSU campus, the classes were full, and we received great input on the program. The Section 5311 providers will begin using the system on July 1. We will be conducting additional training during the conference. See the Spotlight article later in this newsletter for more on the training class.

Finally, we have done a site visit and are planning to have this year's conference at L'Auberge in Lake Charles. The tentative dates are set for November 14-16, 2011. We are very excited about the conference location, it is a fantastic facility.

Again, thanks for all that you do to increase mobility for those in need here in our State. 



Announcements

FROM ALL OF US
HERE AT THE
DOTD PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION SECTION
WE WISH YOU ALL A
HAPPY AND SAFE
4TH OF JULY!



Events Calendar

APTA Conferences

Sustainability & Public Transportation
Workshop
July 31 - Aug 2, 2011 Los Angeles, CA

Multimodal Operations Planning
Workshop
Aug 15-17, 2011 Seattle, WA

Annual Meeting & EXPO
October 2-5, 2011 New Orleans, LA

Bus Technical Maintenance &
Procurement Workshop
October 2-5, 2011 New Orleans, LA

For more information: www.apta.com

Other Upcoming Conferences/Training:

SWTA Transit Law Seminar
July 10-14, 2011 Colorado Springs, CO

ADA, Paratransit and Community
Mobility Workshop
Aug 8-10, 2011 Tulsa, OK

Workshop on Transportation Law
July 10-13, 2011 Seattle, WA

National Rural Transportation Peer
Learning Conference
Aug 24-26, 2011 Washington, DC

For more information: www.trb.org



Human Services Transportation
Coordination Workshop
July 12-13, 2011 Marksville, LA

For information: www.dotd.la.gov
Or call (225) 274-4302
Or email PublicTransportation@LA.gov

NTI Courses:

For information: www.ntionline.com

Transportation Safety Institute Classes
Courses are offered around the country
on various topics throughout the year.
For more information, please visit:
www.tsi.dot.gov





FIRST STTARS TRAINING



Spotlight on...



First STTARS Training Held at LTRC in Baton Rouge

You've heard about it, talked about, and read about... but during the week of June 20th, Section 5311 Rural Transit Providers from across the state gathered to see it live in action. The Louisiana State-wide Transit Tracking and Reporting System (STTARS) was introduced during day-long training sessions for all of the Rural Transit providers from across the State. The training was held at the Louisiana Transportation Research Center's computer training facility on the LSU campus in Baton Rouge.

STTARS is a web based program that will ultimately reside on DOTD's servers. This means that you can access it from any web browser - at work or at home - with just a login and password. Most importantly, DOTD will back up the data regularly, which means, there is no danger of losing data due to local computer problems.

STTARS is designed to allow providers to do three main tasks: schedule trips, input vehicle maintenance events, and track ridership by purpose for invoicing. It will house information on the various grants and contracts that providers utilize. It will also store information on your clients and your agencies most frequent destinations so that when you schedule a ride, you

can call up a client, know which programs they are eligible for, select the right program to charge the trip to and, if appropriate, pick a common destination in your area.

The training workshops were one day each and well attended. The attendees were encouraged to provide input on changes that would make the program a success... they did so with great enthusiasm. Attendees provided great feedback on specific 'usage in the field' issues that will help make the program easier and more useful. Many of the suggestions will be implemented in the coming days prior to the programs kick-off on July 1, 2011. DOTD will continue to take input from users over the next several months to improve the system. This process is made easier through the use of a 'help-desk' built into the program.

Additional training and general introduction to the program will be provided to everyone at the upcoming 2011 Public Transportation Conference set to be held in Lake Charles in mid November. If you have specific questions about the program, please contact the DOTD Public Transportation Section at (225) 274-4302 or at PublicTransportation@LA.gov 



One of the DOTD PT Section's mandates is to provide information and technical assistance to transit providers in Louisiana to assist them in meeting their requirements for FTA funding. These activities come in many different formats and venues. DOTD PT provides numerous training courses, workshops, and training material as well as a website and an annual conference. To keep all of our constituents up to date on DOTD PT's activities, DOTD On The Go features just a few selected items each quarter.



from Richland Parish, Madison Parish, Franklin Parish, Tensas Parish, Union Parish, and Jackson Parish. They will conclude this outreach effort by the end of 2011.

Training and Workshops

DOTD held several workshops and training seminars during the second quarter of 2011. There was a Maintenance Workshop held in Marksville, LA that was attended by 160 individuals from around the State. Also, a PASS Train the Trainer certification class was held at the LTRC training center in Baton Rouge. There are now 25 new PASS instructors in the State. Finally, the new STTARS (Statewide Transit Tracking and Reporting System) was introduced to the Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation providers in the State. There were two one-day training classes also held at the LTRC training facility in Baton Rouge. For more information on STTARS, see the Spotlight Article in this issue.

DOTD Conducts Site Visits

As noted in our last newsletter, part of the outreach and assistance that DOTD provides to the Elderly and Disabled (Section 5310) providers, are site visits from the Program Manager. During the second quarter, Mike Watts made site visits to Union COA, Jackson COA, Lincoln COA, People Centered Support Services, LA Center for the Blind, City of Pineville, Rapides Senior Center, Ouachita ARC, Ouachita COA, Vernon Sheltered Workshop, Natchitoches ARC, Catahoula COA, Catahoula ARC, St. John ARC, and St. Tammany ARC.

DOTD Outreach to Underserved Parishes

Also as reported in our last newsletter, one of DOTD's primary goals is to provide some form of public transportation in all 64 parishes. It is a goal listed in the Louisiana Vision 2020 Plan. To further this goal, DOTD has been conducting educational visits to all of the parishes in Louisiana that do not currently have some form of public transportation services. During the second quarter of 2011, DOTD met with representatives

In The Spotlight

If your agency or someone within your agency deserves recognition for a job well done, or has already received recognition or an award, please let us know. Email or send a brief description, photos, and contact information to Donna.Lavigne@la.gov or to Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development/Public Transit Section, attn: Donna Lavigne, P.O. Box 94245, Baton Rouge, LA 70804. 

Contact Information Announcement

In our attempt to keep everyone informed of special events, workshops, conferences, and important information regarding public transportation in Louisiana, DOTD PT maintains a Contact Database. If information about your organization - new phone number, new director, new address or email - has changed, please help us keep our database current. Email your updated information to: publictransportation@la.gov

Thanks for your Help!





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portation programs. The Fund gets its revenue primarily through the excise tax that drivers' pay at the pump - 18.4 cents-a-gallon for gasoline and 24.4 cents-a-gallon for diesel fuel; this makes up about 88% of total contributions. In addition, there are truck-related taxes on truck and trailer sales, truck tires, and heavy-vehicle use. Unfortunately, the fuel tax is a flat tax based on number of gallons and does not go up or down with the price of fuel. The 18.4 cents-a-gallon has been in place since 1993 when gasoline was approximately \$1.10 per gallon.

In 2009, the HTF was in danger of experiencing serious shortfalls. The primary cause was over estimating expected receipts from fuel taxes. When SAFETEA-LU was passed in 2005, the estimated outlays far exceeded the estimated receipts by about \$10.4 billion. When the economic downturn hit coupled with rising gas prices, people made choices that involved less single occupant vehicle travel.

In a report published in 2009, *Stranded at the Station*, the introduction notes that, "Demand for public transportation is at a historic high for the United States. In 2008, Americans took 10.7 billion trips on public transportation, the highest since 1956 - the year the Interstate Highway System was approved. Since 1995, transit ridership has been growing at nearly triple the rate of the population and almost twice as fast as the number of miles driven. In 2008, transit ridership rose 4%, while the total number of miles driven fell by 3.6%." While these numbers are great for transit, they have translated into a lower than expected rate of income for the HTF.

In response to the HTF shortfall, Congress approved legislation in September 2008 to provide \$8 billion to replenish the HTF. However, the US DOT estimates that Congress will need to continue to infuse the account for it to remain viable.

In 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified before several Congressional committees regarding 'Options for Improving Sustainability and Mechanisms to Manage Solvency for the Highway Trust Fund.' They provided several recommendations that the US DOT and Congress are now considering. Many of the recommendations will make for tough political decisions such as raising the gas tax.

We all know that transit is a good investment. According to one study, every dollar invested in transit generates six dollars' worth of economic activity. Transit is, according to the National Safety Council, 25 times safer than being in a car. Transit is better for the environment and provides health benefits to riders and the general public. On a per-passenger-mile basis, transit has been found to produce 95% less carbon monoxide than private vehicles, 90% fewer volatile organic compounds, and about half as much carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide.

While state and local funding are essential to make transit a viable mode, federal dollars fuel the service. Congress needs to pass a new national transportation bill that reflects today's needs - it needs to provide the flexibility for funding use that we desperately need at the local level, consolidate funding categories instead of targeting special interest groups, and make transit a priority in the federal funding profile so that it can reach its full potential.

Finally, Congress needs to make the hard choices that will ensure that the Highway Trust Fund is sustainable so that future service and expansions can be planned and carried out to provide the mobility needs of our citizens. 



From Capitol Hill...

On Wednesday, May 27, several members of Congress issued a joint statement on their draft transportation reauthorization legislation, *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21)*. While stating that there is still work to be done, the release announced that MAP-21 "will fund programs at current levels in order to maintain and modernize our critical transportation infrastructure." 

