

CONNECTIONS

OFFICE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2001-2002



Additional FY2002 STA reductions

By Kay Thede

State Transit Assistance (STA) funds were reduced a second time this fiscal year. The 4.3 percent across-the-board reductions ordered by Governor Vilsack in Executive Order 24 to help ease the struggling state budget, resulted in a \$405,787 reduction. This is in addition to the \$659,820 reduction approved by the Legislature for FY 2002. These reductions are taken from the actual use-tax dollars collected by county treasurers between July 1, 2001, and June 30, 2002. Transit payments will reflect these reductions for the remainder of FY 2002, and for the first three months into FY 2003. (It takes approximately three months for the funds to actually flow to the transit system.)

The amount of STA is based on actual vehicle use tax receipts, and therefore, is susceptible to economic influences. Iowa transit agencies set budgets for the upcoming fiscal year based on STA projections developed by the Iowa Department of Transportation. As the economy has declined, the DOT has revised the STA projections.

The total decrease in STA estimates since the DOT's January projections for FY2002 has been about 20 percent. The DOT's Office of Public Transit has worked closely with the transit agencies to help them understand these combined impacts. Prior to the November special session, the DOT adjusted the STA projected collections for FY 2002 being used by the Department of Management from \$10,337,000 to \$9,436,902, to better reflect current projections.

The use-tax fund had been increasing each year since 1992. In times of a growing economy, transit benefits from the flexibility of this revenue source. Unfortunately, in times of a declining economy, the impact is reversed and compounded by other factors. Transit agencies receive funding from other state agencies and human service organizations for client services. These funds to support transportation have also decreased due to state budget reductions. The STA fund is susceptible to economic influences, and the DOT provides its best estimates, based on current information.

Improvement in the state budget outlook for FY 2003 is not promising. The legislature will have difficult decisions to make when it convenes in January. The STA funds may be susceptible to further reductions, as priorities are identified.



Iowa Department
of Transportation

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

- 2 DIRECTOR'S COLUMN
- 3 YOUR TICKET TO MOBILITY IN NORTHWEST IOWA
- 4 DRUG AND ALCOHOL REGULATORY UPDATE SEMINAR
- 5 ITS TRANSIT EXPO
- 6 PUBLIC HOSPITALS CHOOSE TRANSIT
- 6 IT'S ALL ABOUT IMAGE
- 7 FST&P HOSTS BIODIESEL CONFERENCE
- 8 WHO'S WHO IN IOWA TRANSIT
- 9 THE PRICE IS RIGHT FOR DUBUQUE KEYLINE'S PEERS
- 10 TRANSITS' SUPPORT AND COMMITMENT
- 11 2002 CALENDAR
- 12 TRANSIT TRAINING LIBRARY FEATURE VIDEO

Request for e-mail addresses

Due to recent budget cuts in state government, the Office of Public Transit will be moving from a paper version to an electronic-only version of our CONNECTIONS newsletter.

To continue receiving this newsletter, please send your e-mail address to Kay Williams, Secretary, Office of Public Transit, 800 Lincoln Way, Ames, IA 50010. Kay's e-mail address is kay.williams@dot.state.ia.us.

Director's Column

By Peggi Knight

ITS Project

I would like to give a brief update on the transit intelligent transportation system (ITS) project. The DOT currently has received seven proposals from consulting firms for development of the statewide transit ITS deployment plan. We sent out a request for proposals in mid-October and received proposals in late November. The consulting firm selected will be doing on-site assessments of each of the 16 regional and eight small urban transit agencies, and will be surveying the large urban transit agencies. The assessment

will include ITS and communications technologies currently used, staffing available to manage information technologies, financial capability to sustain a system, and ITS needs for the future. The consultant will also be developing a statewide transit ITS architecture. Anticipated completion of the deployment plan is September 2002. Actual deployment of ITS applications in Iowa's transit systems will begin shortly after that. I would like to encourage those of you who will be contacted by the consultant to help us take the

lead in making rural transit ITS successful. Please share your time and resources with the consultant to help them develop a high quality deployment plan.

Newsletter

As we all face challenging economic conditions, we need to make some adjustments to the way we accomplish our mission. It was my intent that at some point we would begin producing this newsletter in an exclusively electronic format. Due to the current state budget situation, the timeline for that change has been

compressed. This will be the final paper version of the Office of Public Transit's CONNECTIONS newsletter. From this point forward, we will be distributing the newsletter via e-mail and the Internet. I would encourage you to send us your E-mail address so we can continue to provide you with important information about the public transit industry. Past issues will continue to be available on OPT's Web site at www.iatransit.com.



From all of us in the Office of Public Transit, we would like to wish you a happy New Year and a pleasant holiday season.

Office of Public Transit staff (front, left to right) Peggi Knight and Peter Hallock; (middle, left to right) Pamela Lee, Kay Williams and Donna Johnson; and (back, left to right) Samil Sermet and J.P. Golinvaux.

Your ticket to mobility in northwest Iowa

By Donna Johnson

RIDES new City-to-City bus service is going places...lots of places, like Sheldon, Rock Rapids, Hartley, Everly and Sioux Falls. You can travel to one of many stops in northwest Iowa or take the bus to Sioux Falls, S.D., where you can get connections to Greyhound, Jefferson, and Jack Rabbit bus lines to take you anywhere in the country. "RIDES City-to-City bus service is your ticket to mobility in northwest Iowa," said Rose Lee, executive director of Regional Transit Authority/RIDES, based in Spencer. If you are catching a plane in Sioux Falls, there is no need to leave your car at the airport when you take advantage of RIDES new City-to-City bus service from northwest Iowa. Besides the Sioux Falls Regional Airport and Sioux Falls Bus Depot, RIDES also makes stops at Sioux Valley, McKennan, and Veterans Administration Hospitals, and the Sioux Empire Mall. Buses used for the City-to-City service have adequate room for luggage and parcels.

RIDES applied for and received federal funding through the Iowa DOT's Intercity Bus Assistance application process to help implement this service. The



northwest Iowa City-to-City bus service operated by RIDES began Jan. 2, 2001. "Ridership was slow to start as people hadn't had this type of service in northwest Iowa for over 20 years, but with the marketing and word-of-mouth publicity, the service is building," said Lee.

Fifteen percent of federal funding coming to Iowa for rural transit is required to go for support of intercity bus services. The goal is both to retain existing services and to

encourage establishment of intercity bus services in areas that have not had service in recent years. Iowa has one of the more aggressive state programs to follow through on these requirements, and northwest Iowa is seeing the fruits of that effort.

Rides City-to-City bus service operates six days a week with departures and returns the same day. For more information call RIDES at 800-358-5037 or 712-262-7920.

Paul Kerr, RTA/RIDES bus operator

Drug and alcohol regulatory update seminar

By Donna Johnson

Robbie Sarles, president of RLS & Associates, Inc., provided a drug and alcohol regulatory program update at the Iowa public transit annual meeting held in Clive Nov. 1, 2001. Sarles is one of the nation's foremost authorities on the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) drug and alcohol regulations.

An overview of the requirements of 49 CFR, Part 40 was provided to all transit managers, and drug and alcohol program managers in attendance. The U.S. Department of Transportation's rules covering the procedures for transportation workplace drug and alcohol testing programs were revised Dec. 19, 2000, with an effective date of Aug. 1, 2001. The revisions enhance fairness and the integrity of the testing process, and include such items as validity testing of specimens, test refusals, public interest exclusion (PIE) for serious noncompliance violations, employer responsibilities, and the need to obtain information for the past two years from previous DOT-regulated employers for new hires and other employees performing safety-sensitive work. New standards have been incorporated in Part 40 concerning the roles and responsibilities of professionals in the industry that work with the U.S. DOT's federal drug and alcohol program.

Collection site preparation and processes were expanded to protect the security and integrity of the collection process. Sarles reminded everyone to verify that their collection sites are using the revised Federal Drug Testing Custody and Control Form (CCF), required as of Oct. 30, 2001, and that use of these forms for a non-DOT test may result in a DOT enforcement action. Current specimen collection personnel must now receive qualification training and demonstrate proficiency, which must be evaluated by a qualified instructor prior to Jan. 31, 2003. New collectors must complete the training prior to performing collection functions. Refresher and error-correction training is also now required.

Medical review officers (MROs) are also required to take formal training and must pass an examination administered by a nationally recognized MRO professional certification board. The initial training must be completed by Jan. 31, 2003. Individuals that become MROs after Aug. 1, 2001, must meet the qualification training requirements before MRO functions can be performed.

Breath alcohol technicians (BATs)/screening test technicians (STTs) are required to undergo qualification training as well, and demonstrate proficiency of equipment operation and complete

refresher and error correction training when required.

By Dec. 31, 2003, substance abuse professionals (SAPs) must receive qualification training and complete an examination by a nationally recognized professional organization. They are also required to complete 12 hours of continuing education every three years.

Sarles discussed the changes from the original procedural rule which dates back to 1988, as well as the technical amendments the U.S. DOT posted to the new rules addressing various errors, omissions, and inconsistencies requiring correction or clarification. The changes apply to testing done by public transit systems under FTA rules, as well as any other agency receiving FTA funds either directly or indirectly. The rules also apply to testing by human service agencies subject to Federal Highway Administration rules for testing of drivers holding commercial driver's licenses.

Sarles also discussed the new 49 CFR Part 655, Prevention of Alcohol Misuse and Prohibited Drug Use in Transit Operations rule published Aug. 9, 2001. The new rule replaces FTA's previous drug and alcohol testing rules (49 CFR, Parts 653 and 654, respectively) that were simultaneously abolished. This new FTA rule conforms to U.S. DOT's newly revised drug and alcohol testing proce-

dures rule (49 CFR, Part 40). The basic components of the previous rule remain the same regarding policy statement, education, consequences, testing categories and type of drugs tested for; i.e. marijuana, cocaine, amphetamine, opiates, and phencyclidine. Some provisions have been omitted since they are now addressed in the new Part 40 rule. Sarles noted the FHWA/FMCSA rules were also updated in August, although she did not have the specifics on changes to those rules.

Major topics of discussion included the employers' responsibility to determine if dispatchers are safety-sensitive, and the regulations related to access to records for oversight agencies. Each employer must decide whether a particular employee performs any safety-sensitive function, regardless of job title. Since the definition of "dispatcher" varies from employer to employer, the decision to include dispatchers as safety-sensitive personnel should be made on the type of work performed. In addition, employers may now disclose drug and alcohol testing information, including individual employee test results, to the respective state oversight agency or grantee required to certify compliance to FTA, as noted under 655.73(i), Access to Facilities and Records. Oversight

Seminar, see next page

**Seminar,
from previous page**

agencies are held to the same standard of confidentiality as the employer. Part 655 prohibits employers from releasing information to law enforcement, except under the provision of Part 40, that allows the release of information to the court system, once criminal or civil charges have been made.

Another big change covered in this course was the exemption of maintenance contractors that perform maintenance functions for FTA recipients of Section 5309 and 5307 funding, that serve urbanized areas with populations of 200,000 or less, and Section 5311, rural funding recipients. This change was in response to concerns raised regarding the burden and cost associated with finding maintenance contractors willing to comply with the regulations. Maintenance staff of FTA grantees and contracted transit service providers continue to be safety-sensitive employees and remain in their employer's testing pool.

Under the new rules, pre-employment testing modifications allow employers to hire applicants and assign them nonsafety-sensitive duties pending receipt of a negative drug test. FTA also added a provision requiring pre-employment tests anytime a covered employee or applicant has not performed a safety-sensitive function within a 90-day period, if that person was also not in a random selection pool during the

timeframe. The rule also states an applicant or covered worker that has previously failed any drug test, which includes pre-employment drug tests, must present to the employer proof of having successfully completed a return-to-duty process, including the full regimen of follow-up testing prior to performing safety-sensitive job duties. Pre-employment alcohol tests are allowed, but not required under the regulation. If an employer chooses to conduct pre-employment alcohol tests, they must follow the testing procedures defined in 49 CFR, Part 40.

Post-accident testing requirements were also clarified. Employers were advised that the new regulation requires all covered employers to document the testing decision and the decision-making process for each accident. It was pointed out that documentation of the decision not to test is just as important as the documentation of the decision to test.

Policy requirements and applicability of the program, as well as common controversial issues, were also discussed. Several "sample forms" were distributed the following week by the Iowa DOT for managers to obtain previous employer record checks, release of information, individual test information, and master forms.

FTA's Office of Safety and Security provides drug and alcohol regulation updates

free of charge. If you are responsible for a drug and alcohol program under FTA rules, and not currently receiving the quarterly updates, you may contact RLS & Associates, Inc., 3131 South Dixie Hwy, Ste 545, Dayton, OH 45439, or phone 937-299-5007, fax 937-299-1055, or e-mail rlsasc@mindspring.com to be added to their mailing list.

This training session was co-sponsored by the Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA) and Iowa DOT, and funded through FTA's Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP).

ITS Transit Expo

By Kay Thede

A Transit ITS Expo was held Oct. 31 at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel in West Des Moines to launch Iowa's Transit Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) project.

Featured speakers at the expo included Ronald Boenau of the Federal Transit Administration, who provided background information on the use of ITS in transit systems. Representatives from Verizon Wireless and Motorola provided information about communication systems. Trapeze Software, Siemens Transportation Systems, Route Match Software, IDA Trak It, and Brown Traffic Products provided information concerning their products and how they are used in the transportation arena.

The expo provided attendees with an exposure to ITS terminology, acronyms, and a better sense of ITS products available. A recurrent theme from speakers encouraged potential users to do an assessment of what is really needed and find the product to help with a solution. Attendees included staff from transit agencies, Iowa Department of Transportation, Iowa State University's Center for Transportation Research (CTRE), and potential bidders for the development of the ITS Deployment Plan.

The event was hosted by CTRE, which is under contract with the Iowa DOT as project manager for the ITS project sponsored by the DOT.

Public hospitals choose transit

By J.P. Golinvaux

Both the Hancock County Memorial Hospital (HCMH) and the Ottumwa Medical Center recently turned vehicles over to their local transit systems after deciding their communities would benefit more if the transit systems operated the vehicles.

Toni Ebeling, the hospital administrator at HCMH, said, "The cost of providing rides using the Region 2 Transit System is much less than the cost of the previous HCMH van service, and enables HCMH to support expansion of the transportation capabilities for our entire county." Hospital patients were previously charged \$3-\$7 per ride, depending on their location, but now the hospital uses its transportation budget to pay the full cost of the rides provided by Region 2 Transit, so it costs the patient nothing. Free tickets for medical trips are available at the hospital and at HCMH clinics in Britt, Garner, Kanawha, Titonka and Wesley. Meanwhile, the transit system is able to use the donated bus to help relieve pressure on the other two public transit vehicles in the county, so there are fewer trip denials for everyone in the county. "It is truly a win-win situation for everyone," says Ebeling. North Iowa Area Council of Governments (NIACOG) administers the eight-county regional transit system based in Mason City, referred to as Region 2.

The Ottumwa Regional Health Center also decided the

community would receive more benefits from a vehicle that had been originally donated to them, if the Ottumwa Transit Authority (OTA) operated it instead. The three-year-old, raised-roof van had accumulated only about 4,500 miles at the time it was transferred to OTA. The hospital had operated it only at times that OTA did not have a lift-equipped vehicle readily available, and this was not getting the value out of the donor's gift. Today, OTA uses the vehicle in its paratransit service to transport consumers to the hospital and adjacent Ottumwa clinic, as well as other medical clinics in surrounding towns. OTA is able to make better use of this vehicle by serving a broader spectrum of customers and providing a greater number of rides.

In 1976, Iowa became the first state to establish a mandate for the coordination of public transportation services. Since then the Iowa DOT has been striving to fulfill this mandate and make transportation available to all Iowans. The benefits and successes that Iowa has achieved through this effort make the state a good example for other states to follow in effectively coordinating their public transportation systems. The mandate, found in Chapter 324A of the Iowa Code, allows for more efficient use of public funds, increased services to the public, and more efficient use of vehicles.

It's all about Image

By Donna Johnson



(Left to right) Peggi Knight, OPT Director; Alan Armstrong, Integer Group; and K. Stephen Spade, General Manager, Des Moines MTA.

A campaign to increase public awareness of transit is currently underway and continues through May, according to the Iowa Public Transit Association's (IPTA) Image Committee. This group is working with the DOT and private consultants to develop marketing tools, so all members of the general public can gain a better understanding about public transit, what it is, and what it can do for them.

The campaign appears to have kept support of IPTA members. The Integer Group, which is the private consulting company selected by the committee to come up with ideas and help coordinate the state-wide campaign, plans to start off with a media campaign. A brochure has been developed that all Iowa transit systems can utilize in their local areas to help get their message out that public transit is about people, not just buses. Photos and

stories of actual public transit users were selected from around the state to help promote the importance of public transit to our communities.

IPTA will host Public Transit Legislative Day at the state capitol, with representatives from all 35 Iowa public transit systems attending. A procession of the various types of public transit vehicles is being planned to parade to the state capitol, with a legislative reception to be held afterwards. "These activities are part of a proposed 'Public Transit Week,' and are being developed to create enthusiasm for transit and encourage people to give it a try," said K. Stephen Spade, Des Moines MTA general manager and member of the Image Committee. Governor Vilsack and other state and local officials will be invited to actively participate in promoting public transit with proclamations and other activities.

Five Seasons Transportation & Parking hosts biodiesel conference

By Dave Gosch, Marketing Manager, FST&P

Five Seasons Transportation & Parking (FST&P) hosted an Oct. 3 state biodiesel conference that participants labeled a success.

The conference, “From Field to Fuel Tank: The Biodiesel Solution,” was aimed at bringing fuel suppliers, fleet managers, agriculture supporters and government officials together to answer questions and to promote the use of diesel fuels made with soy oil and other materials. The group also learned about the environmental benefits associated with biodiesel.

FST&P was asked to help sponsor and organize the conference because the Cedar Rapids transit department uses soy diesel in its 45-bus fleet. Other sponsors included the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Agriculture, Iowa Department of Transportation, and Iowa Soybean Promotion Board.

Cedar Rapids Mayor Lee Clancey told the group that she was proud that Five Seasons Transportation & Parking has taken the lead in using soy diesel in its bus fleet.

“Under the direction of Five Seasons Transportation & Parking Director Bill Hoekstra,

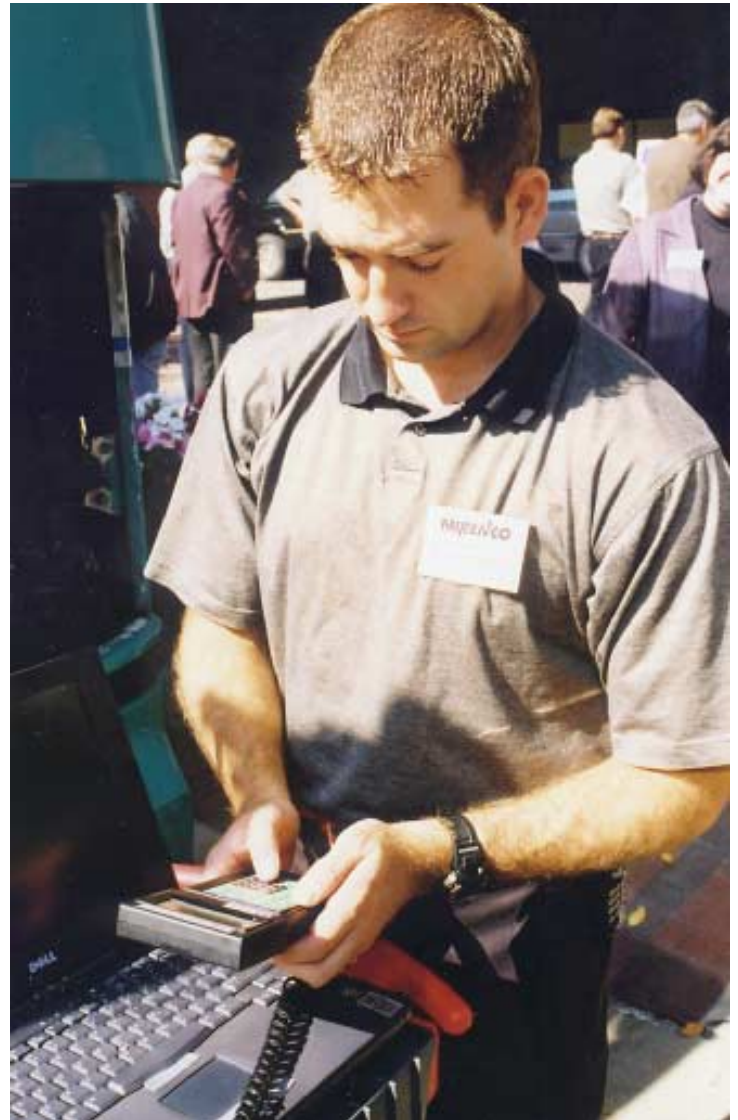
our city buses are a visible testament to a successful partnership between urban and rural interests,” said Clancey.

FST&P Director Bill Hoekstra told the group that using soy diesel is the right thing to do because it supports farmers. Using soy diesel is also a good way to reduce the nation’s dependence on foreign oil. Hoekstra also pointed out that soy diesel replaces lubricity lost when using the low-sulfur, clean diesel that is now mandated.

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Patty Judge told conference participants that the push to promote the fuel fits her goals of attaining profitability for farmers and preserving the environment.

“Biodiesel does both of these things,” Judge told the audience at the Crowne Plaza Five Seasons Hotel in Cedar Rapids. “You guys are right on target.”

The conference received high marks from the 100 participants, according to a survey conducted by event organizers.



Mirencó employee Richard Moffitt performs emissions testing on a FST&P bus during the expo portion of the state biodiesel conference held in Cedar Rapids.

Who's who in Iowa transit

Introducing Gary Wagner

By Donna Johnson



Gary Wagner, Delaware, Dubuque, and Jackson County Transit Manager

"Transit is a whole new experience," said Gary Wagner, Delaware, Dubuque and Jackson County transit manager. Gary is one of the newer faces you may see at transit meetings, but he is not new to eastern Iowa. Gary was born and raised in Waterloo, and then moved to Dubuque two years ago. He has been involved in the public service sector most of his career in one form or another in the electric utility industry. "Gary brings to transit a vast experience in operations, which is one of the primary reasons he was selected for this position," said Steve Jacobs, executive director, Project Concern

Phone-a-Friend. Project Concern provides management and operation of the public transit system based in Dubuque. "Gary has been very busy getting a handle on all there is to learn about public transit, while working with the city of Dubuque's Keyline Transit as it transitions the paratransit service over to the urban transit system," added Jacobs. Gary assumed the position of transit manager Aug. 28, 2001.

Gary has taken numerous classes over the years, since he enjoys learning new things. But, his life is not all work. He also enjoys anything he can do outdoors with his wife, Sally, three children, and four grandchildren, plus one on the way. His hobbies are golfing, fishing, boating, camping and sightseeing. He and his wife recently purchased a home that they are remodeling from top to bottom, both inside and out. "We are doing all the work ourselves, and at this stage of our lives it is almost more than we can handle," said Wagner.

Gary met a few Iowa transit managers at the procurement course held in Des Moines last September. If you haven't met Gary yet, introduce yourself and get acquainted. Congratulations Gary, on your new position, and welcome to public transit.

Ward still here after six-month challenge 26 years ago

By Donna Johnson



Pam Ward, OTA Transit Director

Not many Iowa transit managers can say they have actually managed more than one transit system, but Pam Ward can. Since July 1992, Ottumwa Transit Authority (OTA) has been providing management of the rural transportation for 10 counties in southeastern Iowa. Pam Ward, transit director for both OTA and 10-15 Regional Transit System, got her start in transit with the rural transit system. Back in 1973, Pam provided administrative assistance to both the director and transit coordinator of the Area XV Agency on Aging (AAA), located at Indian Hills Community College. Indian Hills was the parent agency for the transit program. Two years later, the AAA transferred sponsorship of the program to the Community Action Program (CAP), known

as Southern Iowa Economic Development Association (SIEDA), and Pam went with the program. When the transit coordinator left that same year, Pam asked for a chance at the position with the understanding that if she did okay she could continue; if not, they had six months to find a replacement. Although young and inexperienced, Pam was eager to do the job. Pam says, "Now, 26 years later, I must have done okay." Pam worked in the area of regional transit for another five years at SIEDA, predecessor to the newly formed 10-15 Transit, and then in 1980, accepted the position with OTA as the transit director. In 1992, OTA was awarded a contract to operate the regional transit system (10-15), hence Pam's management of both the regional and urban transit systems.

In April 2000 OTA moved to its new facility. Pam remembers OTA's first guests were the Iowa Transportation Commission members and DOT staff during a commission tour in southeast Iowa. Previously, OTA's staff of five was located in a 16-foot x 26-foot office at city hall. "It seemed fine when there was just two staff, but as we grew to five, it became unbearably crowded. I never thought Ottumwa would have a facility, but the board recognized this was not only a convenience, but also a major improvement for a system that continued to

Who's who, see next page

**Who's who,
from previous page**

grow. And so, after 15 years of saving, we broke ground in December 1999, and here we are in our new facility," said Ward. When their new facilities were being built, Pam's husband, Tim, advised her each step of the way. He helped make sure things were going according to plan. When it came to finishing the inside of the facility, the funds had nearly all been expended. Tim graciously offered his services again and handcrafted solid oak cabinets for the price of cheap, imitation wood cabinets that had been considered. Pam's family has been very supportive of her and her work. Pam and Tim have three children; T.J. is 23, Kelly is 21, and Dana is nearly 14.

Pam has held nearly every office within the Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA). When T.J. and Kelly were younger, Pam often loaded them up, along with her mother, and off they'd go to meetings. When Dana was born, Pam became very active at the national level. Pam has served as a member of Transportation Research Board's (TRB) Rural and Intercity Bus Committee, Paratransit Committee, and Planning Committee for Small Urban and Rural Areas. She also served as the chairman for the Rural Committee for nine years. She has attended several of TRB's national conferences, and served as a member of the national Rural Transportation Assistance Program's (RTAP) board a total of six years, and as

chairman four years. Dana made her first flight when she was just six months old to a RTAP national meeting held in Nashville, Tenn. Pam says to this day, all of her children love to travel.

Pam's family gives up holiday time to help OTA out when they transport folks to community dinners at Thanksgiving and Christmas. They also help out whenever RAGBRAI travels through their area. "Beyond a doubt, my family is the base that allows me to achieve much of what I have done over the years," said Ward. "Looking back, I realize how fortunate I have been to have mentors and supporters that have helped me along this road. Looking ahead, I hope that "we" (those in this business) will be fortunate enough to have others to mentor in the future. The future of transportation in Iowa depends on us successfully bringing in young people with new ideas and new energy. I feel that each system in Iowa has a wonderful service to pass along and I'm glad to be a part of it," Ward added. Pam has been a pioneer in intelligent transportation systems (ITS) as she has been working with vendors to implement this technology in the rural Iowa counties of Appanoose, Davis, Jefferson, Keokuk, Lucas, Mahaska, Monroe, Van Buren, Wapello and Wayne. She has been a mentor to many in the area of ITS and other transit issues and will, hopefully, continue to be so for many years to come.

The "Price Is Right" for Dubuque Keyline's peers

By J.P. Golinvaux

Iowa's public transit systems have a well-deserved national reputation for frugality. One of the tools for assisting transit managers with their efforts is a process devised by the Office of Public Transit (OPT). This process facilitates vehicle transfers between transit agencies. Mark Munson, Dubuque Keyline's manager, expects delivery early next spring of replacements for three well-used 1992 buses. Because of Dubuque's unique hilly terrain, these low-floor, ramp-accessible, Orion II model buses were especially difficult and costly to keep in service. So, Munson used the OPT's notification process this fall to initiate efforts to comply with guidance for disposition of federally-funded transit equipment and notify other transit managers statewide that these three buses were available for transfer to other transit agencies. To his surprise, managers of three other transit agencies responded. Interest was, in fact, expressed by these managers in securing as many as eight Orion IIs "if the price was right."

Given that only three buses with from 145,000 miles to 172,000 miles each were available, the OPT staff carefully evaluated the justification for each bus transfer requested. It was decided the best statewide benefit would be achieved by assigning one used Orion II bus each to Cedar Rapids, Clinton, and Met Transit, which serves Cedar Falls and Waterloo. To their credit, the mechanics of each new owner have begun the repairs and rehabilitation needed to make these new additions to their respective fleets as safe and reliable as possible.

The net effect of the measures these four transit systems took, and will be taking, to extract every last mile of use out of these three buses, will be to stretch the benefits of access derived from the federal and local investment in our statewide public transit fleet. A particularly unique feature of the Orion II bus is its accessibility. These three buses have low floors and are accessible by persons using mobility aids via a ramp and the vehicle's kneeling feature, rather than the lift required to make most conventional transit buses accessible. If all three transit systems are able to operate these transferred Orion II buses at least two more years beyond their customary federal minimum useful life, the savings, even after repair costs, could easily exceed \$50,000.

In any given year, 10 to 20 used buses or vans are adopted by transit agencies across Iowa. There is virtually no Iowa transit system that hasn't been a party to a vehicle transfer transaction that the OPT has facilitated. Cooperative participation in making this process work has stretched our shared use of the limited public funding for new revenue vehicles substantially. Much thanks is owed to each of you who has been involved in assuring that the majority of these vehicle transfers have been successful.

Transits' support and commitment to local communities

By Donna Johnson

Public transit systems in Iowa are committed to supporting their communities by providing transportation services in various ways throughout the state. Many people depend on the services these agencies provide, not just for daily transportation, but also as a way to take part in organized community activities. Here are a few short stories about transit systems in the Iowa City area that have provided ongoing support and commitment to their local communities.

Late last winter, at about 4:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, a police officer telephoned Roger Fisher, manager of Coralville Transit, on behalf of Coralville's new fire chief requesting aid at the scene of an apartment complex fire. Fisher said, "I quickly drank some milk, grabbed my bus garage keys, and headed for the first bus I could find." Several cold and anxious residents were huddled together in an ambulance for warmth, while police officers and firefighters worked both furiously and efficiently to extinguish the fire and get people to safety. Fisher was asked to board the displaced residents, drive around the circle drive of

apartments, and wait away from the fire. The bus' heater kept most people warm, while the interior lights provided some lighting for Red Cross workers that arrived shortly afterwards to board and find out which people would need their assistance. Meanwhile, snacks and coffee came, which by this time were greatly welcomed. Peering out the windows, they could see that a city worker had arrived with a load of salt and sand that would enable the emergency response crews to maneuver themselves and their equipment more efficiently, and eventually the fire was under control. Fisher drove the displaced residents to a local motel where they were temporarily accommodated, until they could go back to salvage any belongings and find more permanent housing. "After four or five hours of waiting, watching the drama unfold as a spectator, doing what I was told needed to be done, I was overcome with the satisfaction of being able to help. Once I knew no one was hurt, I felt I could sit back and rest," said Fisher.

As in many neighborhoods, Coralville residents have been putting candles in paper bags to line their walkways, and lighting up their trees, yards and houses

before Christmas. For years, on the Sunday night before Christmas, cars would jam the streets of Coralville to take in the view of brightly decorated neighborhoods. In response to a request to ease traffic, while improving the view, Coralville Transit provides a Sunday night tour that lasts for a couple of hours. "The drivers manage to get around the streets with amazing ease and no accidents yet, either," said Roger Fisher, manager of Coralville Transit. After the Christmas lights tour, many residents partake in another Coralville tradition of a pre-holiday dinner. "The dinner includes a celebration, with Santa himself passing out the gifts by each person's name," said Fisher. This is one of the Coralville highlights of the year, something many people look forward to. Coralville Transit has been bringing people to this event since the 1980s, and the bus drivers are always invited in for the feast. "It's not hard to find drivers for this event. Some drivers even stay to help with the dishwashing after the meal," said Fisher.

The University of Iowa (U of I) football team has sprung into action and so has Cambus, the transit agency that primarily serves the university. For each of the six

home games, Cambus (which is operated primarily by U of I students) puts 10 additional buses on the road. They provide a free shuttle to the stadium, available to everyone, from downtown Iowa City and the Hancher commuter lot. Up to 8,000 riders are squeezed into these buses for each game. The shuttles run about 1-1/2 hours before the game, and continue until about one hour after. The cost of the service is supported by the U of I Athletic Department. "Cambus has been providing this special event service for over 20 years. Thousands of fans have come to depend upon the service and have gotten proficient at squeezing," said Brian McClatchey, Cambus transit manager. With up to 70,000 spectators attending a game in the center of town, the service plays an important role in dispersing the congestion and reducing frustration for drivers. "People from around the country, even some from Ames, have commented how they appreciate the service and think it's great that it's free," McClatchey said. "It's an important service and also a nice 'welcome to the University of Iowa.' Go Hawks and we'll see you again for basketball!" added McClatchey.

Support and commitment, see next page

2002

Support and commitment, from previous page

“Both football and basketball seasons bring extra shifts and pay for drivers willing to negotiate heavy car and foot traffic brought in by Big Ten athletic contests,” said Roger Fisher, manager of Coralville Transit. For several years, Coralville Transit has transported ticket-holding, athletic club members to and from the front door at Kinnick Stadium and Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City for those big home games. “We do what we can to help relieve congestion and get people to and from the games safely, so that everyone can have a good time and enjoy the game,” said Fisher.

Iowa City Transit (ICT) transported 856 riders to the 10th Annual FLY IOWA event hosted at the Iowa City Municipal Airport last September. FLY IOWA is an annual statewide fly-in and aviation fair. Iowa City also hosted the very first FLY IOWA event in 1991. More than 10,000 people attend this annual event, with more than 200 fly-in aircraft and dozens of aviation exhibitors.

“Shop with a cop” is a unique program offered in Iowa City that is held annually in December. “Iowa City Transit (ICT) provides free

rides to local police officers that volunteer their time to take underprivileged kids shopping for Christmas gifts at Wal-Mart,” said Ron Logsdon, manager of Iowa City Transit. ICT also provides an average of 60 tours a year for local daycare centers and elementary school classes. Children are picked up at their daycare or school and given a bus ride through the downtown transfer point, where passengers can change from one bus route to another or even catch a University of Iowa Cambus or Coralville Transit bus. The children are then transported to the ICT administration and maintenance facility for a walking tour where the ICT tour guide explains to the children how it operates. “Afterwards, the children reboard the bus and are given a ride through the bus wash, which is always a big hit,” said Logsdon. “Each child is given a free coloring book related to Iowa City Transit, as well as a couple of free passes so they can ride the bus with their parents later,” Logsdon added.

February

Feb. 19-21: Trans/Tech, Orlando, Fla., American Public Transportation Association’s Trans/Tech Information Technology Conference (www.apta.com)

Feb. 27: Iowa Public Transit’s Legislative Day, Iowa Public Transit Association, Des Moines, Iowa (Bev Thomas, 515-440-6057)

March

March 10-13: Legislative Conference, American Public Transportation Association, Washington, D.C. (202-496-4800)

April

April 1-4: Managing and Planning for Rural and Small Urban Systems, Center for Transportation Education and Development-University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wis. (414-227-3190)

May

May 5-9: American Public Transportation Association’s 2002 Bus and Paratransit Conference, Minneapolis, Minn. (202-496-4800)

May 20-25: Community Transportation Association of America’s EXPO 2002, Austin, Texas (Charles Dickson, 202-661-0208)

June

June 19-22: Iowa Public Transit Association’s Annual Meeting and Bus Roadeo, Davenport, Iowa (Bev Thomas, 515-440-6057)

For more detailed conference listings, see the following Web sites:

<http://www.apta.com/meetings>

<http://www.ctaa.org/calendar>

<http://www.fta.dot.gov/library/into/calendar/cal.html>

Transit training library feature video “The Impact of Alzheimers”

Alzheimer’s Disease (AD) is an ongoing memory impairment that currently afflicts more than four million American adults. More than 50 percent of nursing home residents have AD. AD is said to be the fourth leading cause of death, with approximately 100,000 lives lost annually to this devastating disease. Health experts predict by the year 2040, 12 to 14 million Americans will have AD.

A short video that identifies early warning signals, stages of AD and its symptoms, is available for loan through the Iowa DOT’s training library. This video addresses potential situations transit operators may encounter, such as inappropriate transit fares,

failure to exit, boarding at non-designated stops, repetitive need of directional assistance, failure to be seated or frequent seat changing, inappropriate dress, or the appearance of intoxication.

Drivers may feel more comfortable in these situations if they have training in communication techniques, transit operator interventions, and the potential need for emergency assistance. Various transit operator interventions are discussed, such as the use of a non-threatening tone of voice, speaking slowly, repeating sentences if necessary, asking questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no, allowing for plenty of response time to questions,

identifying yourself as the transit bus operator, being patient and having a calm attitude, attempting to seat the passenger close to the driver’s area, being supportive, and reassuring the passenger you will be helpful to him/her. At times it may be necessary to contact dispatch for assistance. Drivers need to be prepared to provide a description of the passenger, as well as the street location where the passenger left the transit vehicle, and the possible direction the passenger was headed.

If you are looking for training materials for bus operators and other staff that might come in contact with passengers that may possibly

be showing signs of AD, then check this video out. It will help transit bus operators and others identify the signals and provide the appropriate assistance to help the passenger.

This 1993 video was sponsored under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. DOT, Federal Transit Administration, Project Action of the National Easter Seal Society, and the Transit Authority of River City, Louisville, KY.

The Office of Public Transit has a large selection of training resources available to loan at no charge to public transit systems and other passenger transportation providers. To borrow this video, or to obtain a complete listing of available training materials, call Kay Williams, Office of Public Transit, at 515-239-1875, or e-mail your request to

kay.williams@dot.state.ia.us.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Due to recent budget cuts in state government, the Office of Public Transit will no longer be printing the CONNECTIONS newsletter in a paper format. However, we will continue to produce the newsletter and send it out via e-mail. To continue receiving this newsletter, please send your e-mail address to Kay Williams, Secretary, Office of Public Transit. Kay’s e-mail address is kay.williams@dot.state.ia.us.

Kay can also be reached by telephone at 515-239-1875. Past and current issues of the CONNECTIONS newsletter can also be accessed via our updated Web site at iatransit.com.

CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS is a quarterly publication of the Iowa Department of Transportation. It is distributed free of charge to public transit systems, agencies providing human service transportation, intercity bus carriers, and other interested individuals and organizations.

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