

## RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes: Public Participation and Outreach

10/11/23 10-11:30 am CT

### Participation: 14 Attendees; 11 from agencies

1. Stacy Struck, Prairie Lakes Transit
2. Ron Decker, True Transit
3. Kirk Kuchera, SMART Transit
4. Paul Coyour, Prairie Five RIDES
5. Toni Wakeup, Bois Forte/Big Woods Transit
6. Jeremy Monahan, Prairie Lakes Transit
7. Jeremy Gochnauer, Rolling Hills Transit
8. Pat LaCourse, Brown County Heartland Express and Herman Express
9. Joanne Brackey, SMART Transit
10. Beth Heinrich, City of Morris
11. Melinda (Mindy) Fields, Rolling Hills Transit
12. Jim Wolter, Transit Project Manager (TPM) MnDOT OTAT
13. Mariah Kathan, RTAP
14. Berta Hartig, RTAP

**Summary:** Half the group needed to leave at 11 for a webinar so the group was polled for the next topic after introductions.

During introductions agencies shared one way their agency has engaged with the public and what they were hoping to get out of the meeting. Most agencies were looking for new ideas for how to engage with the public. Jeremy at Prairie Lakes Transit was specifically looking for input from others on how to get people to serve on their Transit Advisory Committee. Joanne from SMART Transit was looking for how to get City and County representatives on their Board.

### Examples of how agencies engage with the public:

- Host a booth at senior and wellness expos and bring the bus to community forums.
- Give presentations to seniors, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, basic education programs (to reach out to migrants and immigrants), Lions and other service clubs and organizations.
- Provide grocery rides for nursing homes.
- Provide rides to the County Fair. SMART Transit does a free lunch bus, where people can ride the bus to the County Fair for lunch and back. This year they provided over 800 rides. Many of these riders are people who do not usually ride the bus.
- Speak to groups, such as Lions Clubs.
- SMART Transit has a standard form template they use for anyone requesting a speaker.
- Bois Forte gave out wellness baskets at a community wellness event to recruit volunteer drivers. This activity brought in four completed applications that day.
- Host open houses.

- Agency belongs to the local Chamber of Commerce; this group helps get the word out. Engage with people on Facebook.

Because many were leaving at 11, there was a poll for the November Peer Roundtable topic. Diversity and sensitivity in the workplace received the most votes. Eleven people participated in the poll.

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## What should the next session be?



### Meeting Roles

- Process Observer: Jeremy Monahan
- Timekeeper: Mindy Fields
- Parking Lot Attendant: Joanne Brackey

### Ground Rules

- Solutions-Focused
- Peer-Led. This is your meeting!
- No bad ideas
- Mute when not speaking
- Cameras optional
- Anything else?

### What are the challenges?

- Getting support for the local match
- Funding to provide rides to more people.
- Changing public perception – Many think it is only for seniors, seniors think it is only for people with disabilities or low income.
- Sometimes the challenges come within the organization when transit is just one service provided by the organization.

### **Solutions and Resources Shared**

- Prairie Lakes Transit had a commercial on the local TV station pre-COVID to address the myth that transit is just for seniors. Jeremy shared the clip in the meeting.
- There was discussion on whether service should be provided to a geographic area if that area is not helping pay for the service.
- The group shared ideas on how to increase support for transit within an organization where transit is one of several services offered. Ideas included getting leadership on the bus and sharing the stories/testimonials of riders positively impacted by the service, as well facts such as ridership.
- Participants shared that they have agreements in place with the counties, cities, and entities they serve, and they bill them for service. Paul from Prairie Five RIDES shared that they bill 13 entities and when a new vehicle is purchased, the cost is split between all 13.
- An agency shared that they use travel training to show people how their service works. They will take a bus to an assisted living or apartment facility, drive them around town, and show them how it works. It is a training field trip. One time they took them to a local ice cream shop (the agency did not pay for ice cream. The people had the option to buy something if they wanted).
- Toni from Bois Forte shared that advertising, Facebook, and email has been used to increase awareness of their volunteer driver program. Talking one on one while staffing a booth at community events was helpful to recruit volunteer drivers.
- An agency mails letters to organizations and businesses they think might be interested in travel training.
- Liz at Tri-Valley said they look for events that are being advertised and ask to be involved. They have a marketing staff person at their parent company that looks for these opportunities.

### **Brainstorming how to improve Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) recruitment and participation.**

Jeremy Monahan shared that his agency has a tough time keeping people on their TAC. Currently, their bylaws state that Commissioners appoint TAC members. They have 10 spots and have never had all 10 filled. The turnover is high. They might be there one quarter and then they are gone. They tried to go out to community meetings in the villages, but that is not a substitute for TAC. They tried to use it as a recruitment method, but nothing has come to fruition from those efforts.

There was a discussion of time commitment and terms. An agency shared they do quarterly meetings, one hour each. The person is on the committee until they want to leave.

Mariah shared that when she lived in Bloomington the city involved youth – older high school and college students - on some of its committees. She suggested this might be a way to engage a demographic they are trying to reach. It was something they could put on their resumes.

### **Other challenges?**

How to increase public support so there is support for funding when it is needed, such as local share?

Ideas shared: Have numbers to make your case. Include community testimonials. Drivers and Riders can be advocates.

Ideas shared to collect testimonials: Record the person sharing their story. Collect the story on comment cards. Include a spot on your website for feedback and sharing stories. Designate someone at your agency to collect the stories if you do not have a marketing communications person.

Ideas for sharing the stories: Submit to media; write a letter to the editor; add to your organization's newsletter – and share newsletter with your partners; share stories on your website.

Idea for another transit story: SMART Transit all-agency meeting on Nov. 11 and it is followed by thank the driver week. They have someone talk to employees. This year is the effect of legalized cannabis on drivers and dispatchers and drivers can connect. The next week is Thank the Drivers week. They give them gifts. **Berta to follow up with Joanne for more information and a possible RTAP newsletter article. Mariah to add to November meeting.**

### **Ask a Peer**

Toni is looking for a mentor. She is new to her role, replacing Jenny Rowland. She was a dispatcher for Bois Forte and then left for a couple of years and is back in this role. Jeremy shared that this forum is a good way to get a feel for people and to meet them at the Fall Conference. Mariah noted that a Mentor and Mentee section could be brought up at the November Peer Roundtable during Ask a Peer when more people are there. At this point in the meeting, there were only a few people in the discussion because many left for another MnDOT meeting.

### **Next Peer Roundtable**

November 8 – Diversity and Sensitivity