

## RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes:

11/8/23 10-11:30 am CT

### Participation: 17 Attendees; 13 from agencies

1. Kayla Sullivan, Transit Alternatives
2. Liz Hensrud, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
3. Rob Silvers, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
4. Jeremy Gochnauer, Rolling Hills Transit
5. Bill Spitzer, Rolling Hills Transit
6. Shelly Rockman, SMART Transit
7. Joanne Brackey, SMART Transit
8. Stacy Struck, Prairie Lakes Transit
9. Jeremy Monahan, Prairie Lakes Transit
10. Nick Leske, UCAP
11. Allan Herrmann, Scott and Carver County, SmartLink Transit
12. Gary Ludwig, Trailblazer Transit
13. Ted Nelson, Prairie Five Rides
14. Cathleen, MnDOT OTAT
15. Torey Hunkus, MnDOT OTAT
16. Mariah Kathan, RTAP
17. Berta Hartig, RTAP

### Summary:

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic the group was given the opportunity to vote if they wanted the session recorded. It was a unanimous yes.

Many found it difficult to find transit-specific resources for this topic for training staff at their agency. They wanted to know what others were doing to address situations and ensure policies and services were equitable for staff and riders. One participant asked what others were doing for language interpreting services. Some wanted to know how they could make sure their employees and riders felt valued and to help their employees understand different perspectives of coworkers and how some of their actions could offend someone unintentionally. MnDOT participants wanted to know how they could better support transit agencies. The group shared scenarios related to increasing staff awareness and sensitivity to riders who speak different languages, are from a variety of cultures and have disabilities that may not be visible. One sample was about providing good customer service.

### Challenges

- Finding training for drivers and dispatchers that relates to them in the transit industry.
- How to recognize when there are problems regarding this topic and how to address the issues with staff and others.
- How to convince others that training on this topic isn't a negative thing.
- How to make sure our employees feel valued, help employees understand different perspectives of coworkers, how some of their actions could offend someone unintentionally,
- How to have tough conversations.

### **Meeting Roles**

- Process Observer: Berta and Mariah
- Timekeeper: Alan Herrmann
- Parking Lot Attendant: Berta and Mariah

### **Ground Rules**

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

### **What does Diversity and Sensitivity in Transit mean to you?**

- One participant shared their definition: Diversity is how to make sure there is representation of as many groups as we can get for ridership, staffing, or in government – to be sure they are involved in the process. It is diversity of gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. It helps us gain better perspectives and prosper. Sensitivity is more regarding those groups, and we need to be cognizant of their needs, their wants, the things that are important to them, but might not be important to everyone. We can't have the majority run everything. The minority needs their voices heard. They have things to say. Another way to look at it is if you are acting properly to address issues. If you have people working for you and they have problems, are you sensitive to that?
- Another participant shared their definition: Diversity is understanding your customer – what they need to access your service, training they need, understanding what they need to access such as fliers.

### **Challenges discussion continued**

- The group talked about people who seem to be less sensitive to people who have hidden disabilities. Employees seem to be challenged by customers whose behaviors are difficult and they don't follow policies. We must learn that diversity isn't always something we see. Sensitivity needs to extend to them. One example is how people treat or think of others who park in a designated handicap spot, and they think "they look fine to me."
- A participant shared an example of a passenger in transition from male to female. One day this passenger wanted to be called a female name and the driver called them a male name. Both the driver and passenger got upset. The discussion participant said this goes beyond ADA, people need to be sensitive to people's needs, and rather than get in an argument, just apologize.
- A participant shared that it is important to think about the words we use and how they might be taken.
- Another participant shared that their agency invited a panel of people with disabilities to share how they prefer to advocate for themselves and others to help employee gain insight and understanding.

- Mariah facilitated discussion and said that it is important to have policies and procedures in place when this happens and asked for examples.
  - SMART transit shared that they have annual diversity training and employees sign off on it for the agency and copied to MnDOT. Staff at SMART facilitate the discussion. Sometimes it's a 5-minute video. They try to take a different angle each year.
  - Another agency works with a local mental health center. They have passengers who attend weekly meetings there. Transit learned that those customers struggle with the 30-minute pickup window. Those customers shared how they feel about it and the anxiety they may feel.
  - When it comes to sensitivity training – mindset is important and words we use is important, shared a participant. He said to use people-first language, such as “riders with disabilities” rather than “disabled riders.”
  - An agency will be working with their county human services department to get materials interpreted into different languages.
  - One agency asked if RTAP could develop a one-page info graphic to help drivers and staff members use as a 5-minute training, to help with proper terminology. He commented that it seems like it is ever changing on what's acceptable or nonacceptable. This could also be about understanding cultures. Goal is to make sure it's part of every training. Provide a refresher every time you meet with the drivers.
  - **RTAP to check into developing 5–10-minute briefing videos that drivers could watch when there is a break on the bus. Maybe there is something on YouTube and drivers could access on their phones.**
  - Include this training with new hire training with Passenger Assistance, to initiate the conversation.
- An agency shared a scenario where they learned a lesson: Agency policy is to notify the customer when they have a negative balance. They learned that they may need to modify for customers with special needs. Because a customer with special needs was told about their balance before they went to work by their driver on their pickup and it negatively impacted their whole day at work. The agency found out that work pays for their ride home, not ride to work, so the customer will always have negative balance.

### Ask a Peer

- Kayla from Transit Alternatives shared that they had a driver who died of a suicide and utilized their Employee Assistance Program (EAP) mental health services which provided a speaker free of charge to support their staff.

### Other resources shared during the discussion:

- <https://mn.gov/commerce-stat/pdfs/language-line-info.pdf>
- Project FINE. They also do excellent diversity training <https://www.projectfine.org/> (Winona)
- National RTAP ADA and Sensitivity: <https://www.nationalrtap.org/Training/2-the-Point-Training>

**Process Observer:** This was a tough conversation, and it got a little heated. It is important to agree on ground rules and build trust to have hard conversations.

**Parking Lot Attendant:** Didn't go off topic.

**Next Peer Roundtable Dec. 13**

