

RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes

Winter Readiness

12/19/2024 | 1:00–2:30PM | Online

Attendees

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| 1. Leanne Greenslade | 9. Joanne Brackey |
| 2. Crystal Gauthier | 10. Kimberly Cook |
| 3. Amy Nieland | 11. Patrick LaCourse |
| 4. Bill Spitzer | 12. Terry Smith |
| 5. Cole Swingen | 13. Lezlie Grubich |
| 6. Elizabeth Hensrud | 14. Mariah Kathan |
| 7. Melinda Estey | 15. Jaycie Kratky |
| 8. Jeremy Monahan | |

Roles

- Timekeeper: Lezlie Grubich
- Process Observer & Parking Lot: Mariah and Jaycie
- Conversation Encourager: Bill Spitzer

What is challenging about winter readiness?

- Making sure that vehicles are fully maintained and ready for winter, including ensuring heaters are working and preventative maintenance is done.
- Planning for potential service cancellations
- Making the decision to stay open or run late
- Winter storms can be stressful for managers
- Dispatch needs to be reminded that you cannot schedule rides like you can in summer. It is different, and the road conditions will affect routes.
- Trying to help dispatch understand and prepare the drivers for the conditions on the roads.
- It can be hard to reach other agencies due to vacations and holiday time

How do agencies decide to close or cancel service?

- If schools are closed, the agency closes county/rural routes and just does city routes.

- Rely on drivers to let them know if they are closing roads.
- Work with the sheriff's office to get information to make a plan. Buses are not made to push snow, it's better to be proactive than reactive.
- If the roads are plowed, then they run as normal. Otherwise, they will go on emergency routes only.
- If they are going to close early, ensure that riders get home after they have been taken somewhere.
- Don't make the call to close too early. Weather predictions can change and you may regret closing if the weather turns out to be milder than expected. Now they make the call the day of service and not earlier.
- Have your lead drivers reach out to managers if they think the roads are bad. Then the managers can make the recommendations to the director.
- Try to overcome the stigma and toughness around not shutting down.
- Drivers will possibly call in more on winter weather days, affecting service.

Vehicle Readiness

- Most agencies start the process in October/November to prepare their fleet for winter.

General list for winter preparedness:

- Winter tires
- Windshield wipers
- Heaters
- Fluids
- AC off
- Covers over the AC are taken off
- Bug screen removed
- Putting on snow tires if you have them
- Front end covers put on
- Add a winter additive to diesel buses

Does anyone use spin chains?

No, but CCT will be getting them next year; this is their contact (bob.schaefer@onspot.com)

How to help dispatch understand how winter road conditions affect scheduling?

- One idea was to have dispatchers do ride-alongs

- This would have to be on heavy winter weather days, which could be hard to schedule.

How to help drivers prepare for winter driving?

- CCT has signed up 45 people for Safe Winter Driving courses through MnRTAP.
- The Driver refresher course drivers take every 3 years includes tips for winter driving.
- Remind your drivers of your winter driving policies: double your following distance on snowy and winter days, etc..
- Ask in driver interviews about winter driving confidence and skill level.
- Drivers must drive defensively with other drivers all year long; they are cautious no matter what time of the year it is.

Ask a Peer:

Do you put bus wrap cost on the bus order?

Agencies get quotes from local shops. New buses go right to the shop after they have arrived, and if there is a difference in cost it goes into the operating budget.

Does anyone participate in community events? If so, are they outside service hours?

- One agency used to do a parade around Thanksgiving. People were starting to crowd the buses and then throwing rocks at the bus, so they no longer participate.
- These events are usually volunteer based. One said they applied for a grant, and they got funding for parades for staffing and candy for summer parades.
- You have to let your insurance company know if you will be in a parade.
- One agency does a parade after Thanksgiving but no longer participates in summer parades because people would jeer at them for not throwing candy.
- You may be able to use marketing funding.

How do you use episodic hours? Is there a line item? Or just something you ask your TPM if you can

It can be in your service design, but episodic can be used only for providing rides, not for being a float in a parade without riders, that is considered a marketing or community involvement event.

When you get surveys, is it something you put at the top of your list, or do you think that people don't want your opinion?

Consensus that agencies should make sure to give input when it is asked for.