DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

RTAP Peer Roundtable Notes

Policies

9/18/2025 | 1:00–2:30PM| Online

Attendees

1. Christina Lawrence, Michigan Transit
2. Kimberly Keller
3. John Sucha
4. Joanne Brackey
5. Randy Jahnke
6. Liz Hensrud
7. Cathleen Amick
8. Kayla Neptune
9. Lezlie Grubich
10. Kayla Sullivan
11. Allison Karau
12. Ted Nelson
13. Bill Spitzer
14. Mariah Kathan
15. Adam Kraft
16. Jaycie Kratky

Roles

- Timekeeper: Adam Kraft
- Parking Lot: Mariah & Jaycie
- Conversation Encourager: Mariah & Jaycie

Biggest Challenges:

- Outdated or Missing Policies:
  - Many agencies reported outdated driver and operational policies that need to be rewritten.
  - Some agencies are missing key policies (e.g., attendance, rider-specific policies) or have disorganized policy storage systems, making them difficult to find.
- Policy Overload & Complexity:
  - Agencies struggle with managing numerous policies from local, county, state, and federal levels.
  - Difficulty interpreting policies and procedures (like a golf rule book) and knowing which are mandatory.
- Policy Implementation:
  - Ensuring drivers and staff understand and follow policies is a challenge
  - Some drivers do not check emails or use online systems, making communication difficult.

- Compliance & Legal Concerns:
  - Confusion around MnDOT approval requirements and federal/state compliance.
  - Concerns about balancing safety with ADA compliance (e.g., scooters, seatbelt enforcement).
- Organization & Accessibility:
  - Poor internal systems make policy documents hard to find.
  - Difficulty keeping policies updated and in one accessible location for staff.

Solutions & Best Practices:

- Policy Development & Review:
  - Use MnDOT-provided templates and guidance (available in Compliance folder). Conduct annual policy reviews to ensure they match current practices.
  - Consult MnDOT legal/compliance teams for clarity on federal/state requirements.
- Policy Distribution & Training:
  - Provide printed booklets or binders in driver break rooms.
  - Send regular reminders such as "SOP Tuesday" emails covering one policy topic each week.
  - Require signed acknowledgment when employees receive the handbook or updates.
  - Hold quarterly meetings to discuss policy updates.
- Compliance & Safety:
  - Develop video request forms and clear data request procedures.
  - Strongly encourage seatbelt and wheelchair securement use, document refusals.
  - Work with consultants for comprehensive policy review and categorization, if possible.
- Collaboration:
  - Share policy manuals and rider guides between agencies.
  - Provide peer examples of policies and procedures for agencies developing new ones

Policies Mentioned:

- Employee / Driver Policies:
  - Attendance, drug & alcohol, ADA compliance, Title VI, reasonable modification.
  - Dispatching guidelines, SOPs, incident/accident response.
  - Seatbelt and wheelchair securement requirements.

- Rider Policies:
    - No-show, behavior, food/drink, bag/package limits, fare collection, animals/service animals, subscription rides.
    - Veteran ride free, pickup timelines, bus check, route riding, advertising policy.
- Emergency / Safety Policies:
    - Tornado warning procedures, severe weather response, violent intruder & hazmat procedures.
    - Data request and video sharing policies (developed or in progress).
- Compliance Policies:
    - Floodplain management & insurance checks for FTA-funded facilities.
    - Procedures for keeping policies up to date and aligned with state/federal requirements.

Ask a Peer:

Policy Approval Process

Question: Do policies have to be approved by MnDOT? What does that process look like?

Answers:

- MnDOT only requires approval for certain compliance-related policies such as ADA, Title VI, and procurement.
- Comprehensive reviews ensure operational policies reflect federal and state requirements.
- Other internal SOPs and procedures do not require formal MnDOT approval but can be reviewed for guidance.
- Agencies are encouraged to use MnDOT's templates and consult TPMs or legal staff when developing new policies.

Scooters and Mobility Devices

Question: Who allows scooters on the bus? What policies or criteria do you use to handle them safely?

Answers & Discussion:

- Some agencies require passengers to transfer out of scooters into regular seats (even though ADA allows remaining in the scooter).
- Others allow scooters but strongly recommend transfer and document refusals.

- Safety is the primary concern: agencies have seen injuries when scooters are not properly secured.
- MnDOT recommends having clear written procedures and training drivers to inform riders about risks and encourage transfer when possible.

Seatbelt Enforcement

Question:
How do you enforce seatbelt use for ambulatory riders?

Answers & Discussion:

- Some agencies require seatbelt use and will not transport riders who refuse (on demand-response service).
- Others encourage use but continue service even if the rider refuses.
- Minnesota law: if a seatbelt is available, the passenger must wear it; the passenger is fined for refusal (driver fined if passenger is under 15).
- Best practice is to document refusals, post signage on buses, and educate riders during onboarding or meetings.

Next Peer Roundtable: October 16, 2025, Topic – Public Engagement & Marketing