



**NJ TRANSIT
Local Programs &
Minibus Support**

One Penn Plaza East
Newark, NJ 07105 - 2246
(973) 491-7372

Jon Corzine
Governor of New Jersey

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NEW JERSEY MAKING STRIDES WITH UNITED WE RIDE INITIATIVE

New Jersey has been moving aggressively since 2004 to implement the federal directives under the United We Ride initiative and with the advent of new technologies, strategies that have been talked about for years to increase mobility and create seamless access to the state's transit system may now become possible. Under current planning efforts, local stakeholders will examine the potential for one-stop rider information centers, mobility management and brokerages as new ways of developing consumer-oriented community transportation.

The stated mission in New Jersey for United We Ride is to create a more comprehensive and better coordinated community-based transportation service that meets the needs of older adults, people with disabilities and low-income residents. The goal is to increase collaboration across the public, private and non-profit sectors at the state and local levels to share knowledge and strengthen existing services. Another goal is to achieve cost efficiencies by coordinating duplicative transportation services, as well as identifying and addressing gaps in current services.

New Jersey's efforts to coordinate human service transportation began in February 2004 when members of an interagency committee representing the Department of Human Services, NJ TRANSIT and the Department of Labor attended the United We Ride Leadership Forum in Washington, DC. In the spirit of the federal initiative, the committee became recognized as the New Jersey Council on Access and Mobility (NJ CAM). The Council has expanded its membership over the past two years.

In December 2005, NJCAM sponsored two one-day workshops to introduce local stakeholders to the Framework for Action Community Self-Assessment process. In addition, the concept of a county-based community transportation coordination planning process was introduced in response to Federal Transit Administration planning requirements needed to secure formula grants as outlined under the SAFETEA-LU transportation reauthorization program. These grants include the Section 5310, JARC and New Freedom programs. Also, in December 2005, the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center of Rutgers University hosted a pair of workshops in Trenton where it presented recommendations from its study, "Meeting the Employment Transportation Needs of People with Disabilities in New Jersey."

In March, 2006 the FTA published interim guidance on several aspects of the SAFETEA-LU legislation, including a discussion as to what was required in a Human Services Coordination Plan in order to receive federal funding.

During the spring of 2006, state Transportation Commissioner Kris Kolluri and NJ TRANSIT Executive Director George Warrington wrote to elected officials in each county, requesting that they name a lead contact person to head up their county's coordination planning process. A one-day workshop was held November 16th in Eatontown and was attended by over 90 county representatives and others with the federal United We Ride "Ambassador to New Jersey," James McLary. At that meeting, proposed milestones were provided to the counties so that coordination plans can be developed using a uniform timeline which will allow the state to certify to the federal government that a statewide coordination planning process is underway. The first milestone comes in February, 2007 when each county must notify the state of the members of their local stakeholders group and a schedule of proposed meeting dates.

More information on United We Ride can be found at www.UnitedWeRide.gov.

NEW PROGRAMS LAUNCHED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO TRANSIT FOR DISABLED

The New Jersey Division of Disability Services (DDS), TransOptions of Morris County and the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at Rutgers University have teamed up on a pair of projects designed to help the state's disabled community more easily access transportation services, particularly for employment.

Through a grant from the Kessler Foundation, VTC is now working with TransOptions to pilot a regional concierge program to serve the greater Morris County area. If successful, the Morris County model could become a statewide model.

Meanwhile, DDS and VTC are building a new website that would provide the disabled community online access to information about transportation options available to them in their area.

The two projects were among the key recommendations contained in a 2005 study VTC conducted for DDS, entitled "Meeting the Employment Transportation Needs of People with Disabilities in New Jersey." The study identified transportation barriers to work for people with disabilities and recommended a series of solutions, many of them based on successful programs enacted in other states.

Travel concierge services are designed to serve as a broker between the disabled and transportation providers, providing coordinated, seamless trip planning and scheduling assistance. A number of states, including Massachusetts, have instituted concierge programs.

The web portal will serve as an Internet-based, one-stop transportation information resource center to help users determine possible transportation options and trip planning activities. Although less personalized than the services that would be offered by a concierge, the web resource could be an invaluable tool for New Jerseyans with disabilities seeking transportation information to facilitate their employment trips. Several other states, including Florida and California, have already developed or are in the process of developing similar one-stop transportation resource websites.

NJ's Disabled Community

VTC in its 2005 study found that approximately 17.4 percent of New Jersey's population, representing 1.5 million people, has a disability. The majority of these individuals would like to work, but only one-third are employed – a finding that negatively impacts not only individuals living with disabilities, but the overall strength and diversity of the American workforce as well," the study concluded.

Access to convenient and reliable transportation was found to be a barrier in New Jersey and nationally for people with disabilities who either were employed or were seeking a job in the competitive workplace. A 2004 Harris Survey for the National Organization on Disability found that Americans with disabilities were more than twice as likely to have inadequate transportation as those without disabilities (31 percent versus 13 percent).

Among the reasons access to transportation was cited as a barrier to employment was that information on travel options was difficult to obtain or outdated. In addition, in order to use most transportation services, people with disabilities are required to navigate a sometimes confusing process of eligibility qualification, trip planning and ride reservation. To make matters worse, travelers may have to choose between multiple transport options or use more than one system to get back and forth to work.

DDS, TransOptions and VTC have conducted a series of focus groups, engaged a web designer and taken other steps to launch the two projects. Project development is focusing on:

- Surveying disabled consumers and provider agencies to better understand their needs and expectations regarding work-related travel
- Supplementing existing databases to ensure their inventory of transportation services, providers and eligibility requirements are accurate and up-to-date

- Identifying which services should be provided by the regional travel concierge, such as travel training, trip planning, scheduling, referrals and/or eligibility determination
- Developing model policies and procedures to guide implementation of the regional concierge services and measuring success
- Learning from members of the disabled community what features and design elements they want on the web portal, and which features should be avoided.

Project Goals

Through the partnerships between DDS, VTC and TransOptions, the projects are expected to achieve a series of goals. These include:

Laying the groundwork for on-going collaboration between transportation providers, employers, employment counselors and public agencies. The problems associated with uncoordinated human services transportation are well documented both nationally and in New Jersey. The concierge pilot project will provide an opportunity to establish and nurture collaboration between all of the key stakeholders in one region.

Fostering greater understanding of the work-related transportation needs and expectations of people with disabilities. Focus group and survey research demonstrated to VTC that transportation providers do not fully understand the transportation needs of people with disabilities, especially with regard to work travel. The projects could help foster better interaction between consumers and transportation providers, resulting in a better understanding of consumer needs.

Helping disabled consumers better understand the ability of transportation providers to meet their needs and expectations. VTC's focus group and survey research similarly revealed a significant gap between consumer expectations regarding the quantity and quality of transportation service and the ability of providers to deliver service. The projects, through greater dialogue between consumers and service providers, could better match consumer expectations with the capability and resources of service providers.

Encouraging transportation providers to work with collaborative partners in brokering their services through a concierge. Transportation providers now function as part of a largely uncoordinated system of services due to "siloes" funding streams, uneven resources, service boundaries based on political jurisdictions and out-dated service delivery models and technology. The concierge pilot project will provide planning support and expertise to help overcome these challenges that have frustrated implementation of a successful brokerage model in New Jersey.

Positioning New Jersey to compete successfully for federal funds to support program implementation. Good ideas too often fall victim to oversubscribed programs at a time when public funding for human services and transportation is limited and competition for those funds is fierce. Careful planning of new services and programs is critically important to their success. The pilot project is designed to provide the upfront planning necessary to design a successful program and help position New Jersey to compete successfully for limited federal funds designated to address the travel needs of transportation disadvantaged populations.

NEW SLATE OF TRAINING CLASSES UNDERWAY FOR COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION EMPLOYEES

The New Jersey Community Transportation Training Program is now underway, providing specialized instruction to improve the skills of employees of rural and paratransit systems.

The Community Transportation Training Program is operated by NJ TRANSIT with funding provided through the Federal Transit Administration's Rural Transit Assistance Program and state Casino Revenue funds. Administered by the National Transit Institute at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, the training is provided free of charge to employees of New Jersey community transportation providers.



Professional dispatching and scheduling class meets in New Brunswick

Coaching the Van Driver II will be an eight-hour seminar held on February 26 in New Brunswick at NTI's offices and February 27 at the Wildwood Convention Center. The goal of the class is to upgrade and refresh the defensive driving skills of community transportation van operators. By providing up-to-date training in safe vehicle operation and defensive driving techniques, the program can help reduce onboard incidents and collisions.

Among the topics to be covered in the class will be: conditions that lead to accidents and collisions; preparing for weather, detours, etc.; vehicle characteristics and inspection; driving environments, and transporting passengers. The class will also focus on safe driving skills, such as situation analysis, scanning, stopping distances, and reaction times.

The current Community Transportation Training Program kicked off on October 5 with a two-day *Professional Dispatching and Scheduling* class attended by 19 students. Developed by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the course was designed to enhance the skills of community transportation schedulers and dispatchers.

The training is considered relevant for any demand-responsive environment, whether urban or rural, and is designed for both general public as well as paratransit or human services transportation. The course helps transit employees deliver transportation with maximum efficiency, convey riders' requests into affordable and appropriate trips, and use their system's transportation resources effectively.

Responding to a survey after the course was completed, over 80 percent of the students said they found the course content relevant to their jobs and that the training was a satisfactory learning experience. Over 90 percent said the class would help improve their job performance. "It was very good for furthering my job skills," said one participant.

On October 11-13, NTI conducted a three-day *Vehicle Maintenance Management and Inspection* class also developed by CTAA based on a maintenance training curriculum created by Halsey King, of Halsey King and Associates. The class is designed to enhance the professional skills of both maintenance personnel and managers, and improve the maintenance oversight of smaller transit vehicle fleets. It is targeted specifically for managers and technicians who maintain rural and complementary vans, cutaway paratransits, and buses under 30 feet in length.

The three-day course covered a host of issues including federal regulations and vehicle safety standards, hands-on training with vehicle inspection, the relationship between maintenance and operations, the role of technology, manufacturers' standards and the use of outsourcing.

The 15 students who attended the course said it would help improve their job performance and the course content was relevant to their jobs. "I just started my job and this course was a great learning tool for what I will need to do," said one student.

The third course, *Passenger Service and Safety (PASS)*, was held November 28-29 for 15 students and also was developed by CTAA. The goal of PASS is to ensure that community transportation drivers have current expertise in passenger assistance techniques and sensitivity skills. The program can also help reduce organizational liability by providing intensive training in dealing with emergency situations, and bringing drivers up-to-date in the assistance they should provide to passengers with special needs.

The course covers stress and crisis management, the Americans with Disabilities Act, driver sensitivity, evacuation techniques, handling seizure disorders and protecting against bloodborne pathogens. Students are familiarized with wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, canes, crutches, braces and other mobility equipment, as well as to how to provide hands-on assistance.

Students said they found the course relevant to their jobs and helpful in updating them on recent changes in federal laws and regulations.

A four-hour class on Infectious Disease Awareness and Prevention was held at NTI on December 15. The training provides transit employees with the knowledge and skills to identify diseases and infections, and learn how to protect themselves and safely dispose and decontaminate infectious materials and contaminated areas.

In March, two sessions will be conducted on Writing Policies and Procedures. For information, contact Susan Greenstone of the National Transit Institute at 732/932-1700, ext. 219 or email her at sgreenstone@nti.rutgers.edu

Later this winter, NTI will launch a new website that will list information on all of its training courses and offer the ability to register online.



COST founders Lawrence Cuomo (left) and James Holman were honored during the 25th Anniversary luncheon

NJ COST CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

The New Jersey Council on Special Transportation (COST) celebrated its 25th anniversary recently with a luncheon honoring original members and recognizing its accomplishments over the past quarter of a century. Attended by over 100 past and present members and invited guests, the luncheon was a forum for old and new friends to get together, reminisce and look to the future.

COST was founded in 1981 by Lawrence Cuomo and James Holman, both of whom were working in county paratransit systems at the time and recognized common issues and concerns throughout New Jersey in regards to senior and disabled transportation. Together they started COST to bring together various members of the transportation community to build a resource to discuss and solve problems in the industry. Today that organization is still going strong, addressing the needs of New Jersey's community transportation network.

During the anniversary luncheon, the founders and charter members of COST were recognized for their contributions. The guest speaker, James Redeker, NJ TRANSIT's assistant executive director for policy, technology & customer service, addressed how the members of COST had impacted the lives of so many people. Their work has improved the quality of life for senior citizens and people with disabilities as well as their families, Redeker said.

NEW JERSEY COST PRESENTS ANNUAL RECOGNITION AWARDS

The New Jersey Council on Special Transportation (COST) announced the winners of its Community Transportation Recognition Awards at its recent Vendor Expo annual conference held at the PNC Bank Arts Center in Holmdel.

Salvatore Fiorenza, a driver with Atlantic County Transportation, received the Driver of the Year award in recognition of his outstanding service.

The Dispatcher of the Year award was presented to **John Donnelly**, a dispatcher for Mercer County TRADE, for his continued high quality of customer service.

Middlesex County Area Transit was awarded Outstanding System of the Year. Middlesex County Freeholder H. James Polos accepted the award on behalf of the county and the entire transportation staff.

Every few years, COST presents its highest recognition award, the Reilly Award, for outstanding service to New Jersey community transportation. This year, the award was presented to **Kathy Belles** of Cape May County Fare Free Transportation and **Richard Pinho** of Ocean County's Ocean Ride for their dedicated work and support of the New Jersey State Paratransit Rodeo.

The COST annual conference attracts more than 150 paratransit and community transportation directors, planners, coordinators and support staff. In addition to the awards presentation, the expo offered two educational workshops, transportation vendor displays of new vehicles and product information.

Caryn Souza, membership director of the Community Transportation Association of America, was special guest speaker and presented one of the workshops, *What You Need To Know To Turn Underperformers Into Valued Employees*.

Transportation Consultant Michael Noel of Lazaro & Noel presented the second workshop, *Telephone Techniques and Etiquette Workshop*, for reservationists, dispatchers and office staff.

BERGEN COUNTY LAUNCHES NEW ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Bergen County residents who use wheelchairs can now call 911 for special assistance when they become involved in motoring mishaps. The system was put in place through a Roadside Assistance Program instituted by the Bergen County Division of Community Transportation.

Upon receiving a 911 call for help, local police will determine the extent of the difficulty and call the county police. The Bergen County Police will then alert the Division of Community Transportation to dispatch a wheelchair lift-equipped vehicle to assist the disabled motorist in reaching their destination. The police will take care of the disabled vehicle.

All persons with disabilities receiving this aid must be residents of Bergen County. For more information, call Barbara P. Rivlin, at (201) 461-1221.

WARREN COUNTY HOLDS 5TH ROADEO

The Warren County Department of Human Services in October hosted its 5th Warren County Roadeo at Abilities of Northwest Jersey, a local non-profit agency, crowning three winners. The event was cosponsored by the Warren County Transportation Advisory Council.

Drivers and judges from First Transit (Warren County's paratransit provider), and from surrounding counties were invited to participate in the event. A total of 14 drivers competed for the awards and the opportunity to compete in the New Jersey State Paratransit Roadeo held in the spring.

The local roadeo is a full-day training opportunity for drivers to demonstrate and hone their driving skills, passenger relations and communications. The event also serves as a forum for management and other staff to network, hear issues and concerns and address further training needs.



A driver is tested on securing a passenger using a wheelchair

CONGRATULATIONS!



The winners for the 5th Warren County Roadeo were (left to right): Mark Vukelich (3rd Place), Donna Dickerson (2nd Place) and Jason Slack (1st Place)



Drivers are tested on their skills by maneuvering through a course

STATE, PRIVATE CARRIERS JOIN IN PUBLICIZING YIELD-TO-BUSES LAW

NJ TRANSIT has joined with the NJ Department of Transportation and private bus carriers, such as Greyhound and Academy, to make the public aware of a recent state law that requires motorists to yield the right-of-way to buses that are re-entering traffic after having stopped to receive or discharge passengers.

The statute, which took effect in 2004, applies to drivers of cars, trucks or motorcycles when approaching the rear of an NJ TRANSIT or private carrier bus re-entering traffic after picking up or dropping off customers. Motorists who fail to yield can face fines or up to 15 days in jail.

The law exempts emergency vehicles. In addition, motorists are not required to yield the right-of-way to buses changing lanes in the normal flow of traffic.

The statute was enacted as a safety measure and to clarify the obligations of motorists as they approach buses merging back into traffic. In 2002, 1,633 buses were involved in accidents on New Jersey roads. The New Jersey statute was modeled after laws enacted on the West Coast and in Canada.



NJ TRANSIT RTAP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Christine Beach
Transportation Director
Township of West Milford
(973) 728-2863

Kathy Belles
Transportation Director
Cape May County
(609) 889-3700

Betty Chamberlain
Passaic County Paratransit
(973) 881-2846

Kathy Edmond
Director
Ocean County Transportation
Services Department
(732) 736-8989

Sharon Gerard
Office Manager
Somerset County Transportation
(908) 231-7115

James Green
Transportation Manager
St. John of God Community Services
(856) 848-4700

Greg Greer
Transportation Manager
Ladacin Network
(732) 493-5900

Mandy Hecht
Transportation Director
Cheshire Home, Inc.
(973) 966-1232

JanMarie McDyer
Human Services
Warren County
(908) 475-6332

Nancy Nicola
Transportation Director
Middlesex County Social
Services
(732) 745-3789

Diane Powell
Transportation Manager
Senior Citizens United
Community Services
(856) 456-1121



New Jersey Community Transportation Training Program

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The *New Jersey Community Transportation Training Program* offers a **Scholarship Program** to help employees of New Jersey rural and specialized transit agencies participate in out-of-state training workshops and seminars. Scholarships are intended to provide incentive and to help cover the primary expenses associated with attending a training opportunity. The scholarships will cover 80 percent of eligible expenses; the applicant must identify the funding source for the remaining 20 percent share. For more information on the Scholarship Program, contact Susan Greenstone of the National Transit Institute at 732/932-1700, ext. 219 or email her at sgreenstone@nti.rutgers.edu

RTAP RAP

New Jersey Community Transportation Training Program
National Transit Institute
120 Albany Street
Tower Two, Suite 250
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-2163



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Office of Local Programs & Minibus Support,
One Penn Plaza East, Newark, NJ 07105-2245*