

ISSUE

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Transit Tidbits



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Why Should You Attend the DTA Fall Conference?

Terry Hoffman, Director Transportation Services
Watertown Area Transit, Inc. - Watertown, SD

A Note From Your Executive Director

See you all in approximately 3 1/2 weeks!!!

Jacque Senger

Networking with my peers, seeing first-hand the newest products available, rekindling of friendship's, forging new relationships and receiving a much-needed rejuvenation of the mind are among my reasons for attending Dakota Transit Association annual fall conference. What are yours?

Everyone's reasoning for making the trek to the annual event is unique. Quite often the decisive factors in attendance is dependent on the needs of your project. Smaller agencies don't always have the luxury of sending administrators or drivers because of small staffs and the demands thrust upon them. Larger agencies may send multiple team members and a host of drivers for the weekend rodeo competition and associated events.

In preparation for the week-long event, conversation amongst those on the board is always the same – what can we do to make this event unique; does our agenda have something for everyone; have we scheduled speakers who will captivate the audience with their message;

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Conference

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do we have outings planned to not only showcase the best of the host city, but events which will entertain those in attendance; will our training sessions provide pertinent information transit providers can use at their own projects?

During our quarterly meetings, we weigh the many options brought to the table. Sifting through the many ideas offered by board members, administrators from the host city, past board members, the respective DOT representatives and the DTA membership in general, we try to keep the event fresh and new and informative for all.

We all talk about the great networking when we return from conferences, meetings and training we attend and I truly believe this holds incredible value. I can't count the number of ideas put into action in Watertown as a result of simply talking with peers. Many strong relationships have been formed as a result of these sometimes-late-night sessions. I, for one, feel the networking is the most valuable aspect of any conference, meeting or training session attended.

I love being a part of the rodeo – from the setup on Friday to the securement training to the actual event through the awards banquet and the dance. Working with the drivers as a judge on the pre-trip inspection, I have met many interesting individuals. The drivers are the face of the transit and talking shop with them is always a treat as well as educational for me.

Recently, board members began inviting representatives from the Federal Transportation Administration to breakfast on the opening morning of the conference. This engagement has proven to be one of my favorite events of the week. What better way to kick off the conference than talking transit with the feds. Very enlightening and a great time for us to tell our story

The trade show is also a favorite for me - I like the free stuff! Although still a relative newbie to the transit world, I have forged a few relationships with vendors and always look forward to discussing transit and our needs with them.

For those who don't know me well, I am actually more of an introvert, so being socially active at this event comes as a surprise to some. I chalk it up to the people I spend time with – my transit family - and the fact they put me at ease and make where ever we may be home.

Finally, just being away from the stress and organized chaos of the home project for a few days should be a plus for all of us. My source of relaxation has always been a baseball or softball field. Transit related events like the DTA conference, have also come to hold a special place for me and hopefully for all of you as well. Dickinson, ND will be a long trip, but very worthwhile for those who attend. Colleen Rodakowski and her staff and the city are poised to welcome everyone and show off their city.

South Dakota Transit Agency Training Sessions



Palace Transit Head Start bus operators spent a morning training for the upcoming Head Start school year. Per Federal Regulations, Head Start Drivers & Monitors must attend a training session covering topics such as safe routes, loading and unloading passengers, emergency situations, child safety restraint systems, vehicle operations, rail road crossing, etc.

Mike Kutzke trained Brookings Area Transit employees on customer service and diversity with insight into our daily work responsibilities and the culture we are aware of. Mike's ability to bring understanding of other cultures and how we can best serve them. It's called "life".



River Cities Public Transit held a safety week for its employees. The drivers and dispatchers from all of their locations went through our training exercises including written test, driving course, wheelchair securement procedure and pre-trip test.



Training Update - Linda Freeman, PASS Coordinator

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Thanks a bunch to the folks at Dickinson for all they did to make the class at the end of July a success!

A special note regarding PASS Certification.

CTAA has changed the PASS Certification from 3 years to 2 years effective January 1, 2019. This means that you will need to attend recertification classes every 2 years if you attended PASS Class or PASS Recertification Class after January 1, 2019. For now, Defensive Driving and Maltreatment Awareness Classes are still good for 3 years.

As of now, there are no new classes scheduled. I look forward to seeing all of you at the DTA Conference in Dickinson!

Consolidation Story

Terry Hoffman, Director Transportation Services
Watertown Area Transit, Inc. - Watertown, SD

Faced with rising costs and little or no increase of incoming federal dollars, public transportation officials continue to search for solutions to continue providing service to citizens across South Dakota.

Efficiency and coordination are two terms frequently tossed about in public transit circles. Both are major factors which have propelled local transit providers to pool their efforts beginning in October.

Realizing the opportunities to stretch those federal funds while enhancing service overall and bridge existing gaps in transportation in rural areas, Watertown Area Transit, Inc. and Community Transit, Inc., will join forces this fall. The new corporation will also include the existing transit projects – Groton Community Transit and Spink County Transit. Newcomer Faulk County Transit will be the fifth member of the team which will now serve 15 counties in the state from the Minnesota border to the Missouri river.

"The SDDOT is proud of the consolidation efforts made by Watertown, Community, Spink and Groton Transit Agencies," said Jack Dokken, Program Manager of the South Dakota Dept. of Transportation's Office of Air, Rail and Transit. "By combining agencies, they are able to save public dollars by combining resources and administration efforts. These savings ultimately return to the rider in the form of expanding service."

The new organization will do business as Community Transit of Watertown-Sisseton, Inc. and will be co-managed by current Directors Terry Hoffman (Watertown) and Kathy Holman

(Sisseton). A few other new wrinkles will be introduced over time, but business, for the most part, will carry on as usual.

"Probably the biggest question as we worked through this consolidation was the fear of losing local identity and the assets currently held by each project," said Hoffman. "Once the various boards were assured this wouldn't happen, everything fell in place."

Helping to assure the local flavor would be maintained was the choice of the moniker for the new organization. Several names were tossed in the ring, but keeping the Community Transit label brought about the least change. The new company will serve 15 counties including Roberts, Grant, Day, Marshall, Edmunds, McPherson, Campbell, Faulk, Spink, Brown, Clark, Codington, Hamlin, Deuel and Lincoln. The new board of Directors will be comprised of a maximum of 15 members.

"This move will provide a tremendous boost for transportation in this part of the state," said Dave Gleason, board president for Community Transit, Inc. "Public transportation is crucial to many and this new organization will increase the opportunities for all. It's a positive move for all." All transit projects are required to raise a certain percentage of matching dollars to receive federal funds. The match money is raised in a variety of manners including donations from counties, cities, foundations, businesses, public and private parties, grants and fund raisers. Those funds plus and other monies earned locally will remain there.

Coordination between the merging entities is nothing new. WATI and CTI have often collaborated on trips along the I-29 corridor in order.

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Consolidation

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Medical trips to Fargo, ND, Sioux Falls or Aberdeen could become more common place with this change. Administrators are excited about the possibilities including the expansion of service to areas without transportation prior to this consolidation. Other positive aspects to this move include reduced overall costs, the reduction of duplication of administrative costs, and enhanced utilization of resources.

Locally, riders will be hard-pressed to note any changes in service. Fares, schedules and hours and days of operation will remain the same in each area. Trips will continue to be booked in the same manner as they are today. Any contracts will continue for service will remain the same including the free medical trips sponsored by Prairie Lakes Healthcare in Watertown. The new organization will continue to offer Medicaid supported transportation at all locations where it's currently offered.

One drastic change in all other locations will be the appearance of cameras, communications systems and routing software. These elements will appear in phases as the equipment becomes available and is installed. All vehicles in the Watertown fleet are already equipped.

"The new technology will make put our organization on a level playing field," said Holman. "Venturing forward, the communication aspect is vital to our success and cameras provide the security measures we require. Drivers will have routes at their fingertips, all of which will improve service."

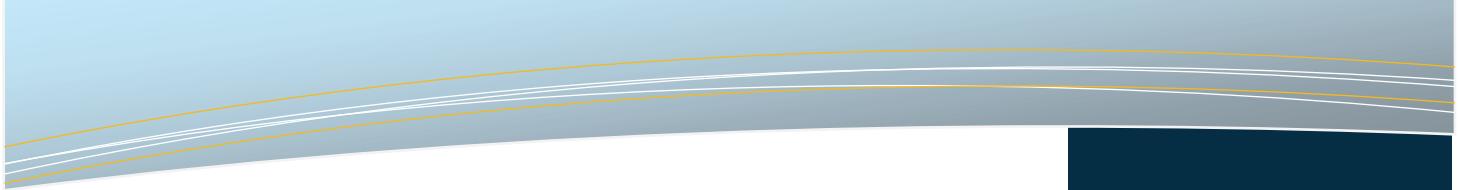
Long-term plans include the creation of a central dispatch center to be located in the Watertown office as well as a maintenance shop and staff. The maintenance staff will have the ability to be mobilized as needed.

Statistically the combined agencies are expected to provide in the neighborhood of 190,000 rides in Fiscal Year 2020. While the majority of the trips will be performed by the two major players in the mix, Groton Community Transit, Faulk County and Spink County vehicles will continue to provide their usual quality service, but the project leaders see bigger and better things in the future for the entire organization.

"Saving dollars, enhancing service and identifying and bridging gaps in transportation is what we are striving to accomplish," said Watertown Area Transit board president Randy Tupper. "This action is a win-win for everyone. Local and rural citizens, other transit providers and public transit as a whole will benefit."

Both Holman and Hoffman have visions of how they want the project to look in five, ten and 20 years. Proper management, education of the public and staff along with hard work and support from the DOT and FTA will make this a reality.

"We've been fortunate to have tremendous support locally, from Pierre and the FTA throughout this endeavor," said Hoffman. "We studied this move long and hard before committing and they've been with us every step of the way."



Thought for the Month of August...

“You never know how strong you are, until being strong is your only choice.”



**Jacque Senger
DTA Executive Director**

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Thanks to all!

- Jacque

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