



TRANSIT TIDBITS

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2022

Just a note to say I am grateful to know each of you, thankful for your friendship and blessed to be a part of the Dakota Transit Association.

DTA Roadeo Overview
Adam Sharkey, Deputy Director
River Cities Public Transit
Pierre, SD

The DTA Roadeo occurred at the Ramkota Convention Center parking lot in Aberdeen, SD. It was a beautiful morning for a roadeo, and you couldn't have asked for a better start to the day. The

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day began with a continental breakfast for everyone, after everyone was full the judges meeting began. This year we had a record number of judges, which showed on the course. Adam went through the rules and gave everyone their stations mixing agency with agency and state with the state. While Adam was meeting the judges, Terry Hoffman gathered all the drivers for the roadeo overview and written drivers' test.

The roadeo was off with judges on the course and drivers having completed their written test. The three courses left for each participant were Driving, Wheelchair Securement, and Pre-Trip. This year's fourth and new course for the participants was Advanced Wheelchair Securement, put on by Lisa Nippolt from Q'Straint. Drivers were separated into four groups and placed at each station. Throughout the day, each station took roughly 45 minutes to complete. The Advance Wheelchair securement course was full of new and exciting ideas and tools presented by Q'Straint. Thank You, Lisa! Driver after driver walked out of Lisa's class with nothing but appreciation for the lesson and great ideas to take back to their agencies.

After roughly three hours, every driver had completed each course. The morning was a success, and I couldn't have asked for a better morning. But honestly, what I loved seeing the most were two things—drivers supporting one another and agency staff support drivers while judging. Walking from

group to group, you see drivers leading and assisting everyone in their group. It didn't matter if they were agency co works; they came together and cheered each other on. I also saw agency staff walking through the groups, supporting, and ensuring everyone kept their heads high. This speaks volumes about the DTA members. We come from different towns, cities, and states, and even though it's a state competition, we cheer everyone on. It's something special, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

Thank You to all our drivers and judges for making the DTA Rodeo the best rodeo in the nation!

Communication: The Language of Leadership

Megan Gould-Stabile, Division Manager
Rapid Transit System - Rapid City, SD

Leah Braun, from Rapid City, SD came to the Dakota Transit Association to discuss the barriers to clear communication, effects of poor communication at work, 4 leadership communication responsibilities, working with workplace conflict and difficult and disruptive employee behaviors.

Some of the most common barriers of communication are information overload, technical language, culture, lack of communication, inconsistent messages, gaps in skills and style differences. Along with barriers, poor communication effects our daily lives and the results of what can happen effect everyone. The effects of poor communication can cause more people tend to make mistakes, there can be a decrease in productivity, waste of resources and time, gossip and distrust in the workplace. To prevent these things from taking place leaders can take on the following responsibilities: uphold the vision, mission and values, create the framework for effective communication, set the example of interpersonal communication, and watch for toxic talk.

Leah gave some tips for powerful listening and speaking like posing the how and what questions above the why, who and when. Using a question like “How can I help?” allows for an employee or

customer feel like they are being heard and now part of the solution. Why, who and when questions tend to lead to blaming and shaming and conversation will go nowhere. Leah had us break out in small groups and work on empathetic listening; one person was the storyteller, one person listened to the facts and the final person listened for the feelings. This exercise allowed for us to understand empathetic listening versus just “listening”. A person can really hear how the person feels about a situation or how their day is going based on the feelings behind the story.

When leaders don't listen, they stop gaining wisdom, stop “hearing” what isn't being said, team members stop communicating, and their indifferences spreads to other areas.

Workplace conflict and difficult and disruptive employee behaviors can go hand-in-hand and trying to work through these items is key to communication. Anything from clashing personalities, irritating behaviors, poor communication and many more things can cause conflict within the workplace. If these things are left unchecked in the workplace it can cause many consequences like employee dissatisfaction, decline in morale, absenteeism, increased employee turnover. To prevent these things from taking place a leader can do the following: make dignity the foundation, hire for a culture fit, regular team building, communication, feedback, coaching and reviews, clear expectations, and written rules and policies.

When conflict happens...work with it! Ways to do this are to avoid the temptation to think that problems will “work themselves out”, understand that well-handled conflict is good for us, take responsibility for yourself in conflict, engage in structured problem-solving and practice “practical adaptivity”.

Communication begins and ends with you, take the initiative to be the best at communication and listening to set an example to those around you.

FTA Construction Project Planning

Terry Hoffman, Co-Executive Director
Community Transit of Watertown/Sisseton
Watertown, SD

Having just begun the “deep dive” into the world of procurement, I can honestly say “it’s intimidating on the surface, but really not that bad.”

After doing a project using the Invitation for Bid process versus the Request for Proposal type, I can say the IFB document is much easier to produce and much clearer on the results. Definite bids secured in black and white will get my vote every time over negotiating terms to the top player submitting an RFP. Negotiating prices is not for me.

The presentation delivered at the Monday morning session of the 2022 Dakota Transit Association annual conference by Richard Garrity of RLS and Associates focused on the uniqueness of construction projects. Preparing to build a facility or remodel or expand a current garage or shop requires familiarity with disciplines and requirements the typical transit agency rarely encounters.

“Property acquisition, architectural and engineering services, labor laws and buy America regulations are all items you will need to become friends with during the process,” said Garrity.

Historically smaller agencies tend to struggle with construction projects on a regular basis and thus do not have in-house expertise to provide the technical capacity to undertake these types of projects.

Enter the Architectural and Engineering services. A good A/E service will make the task much less daunting for smaller transit projects. Professional skills which may be needed include planners, surveyors, architect, a stable of engineers (Civil, structural, geotechnical, environmental, traffic), landscape architect, utilities coordinator, construction manager, right-of-way specialist, cost estimator, materials tester, and community relations specialist.

“Design, bid, build is the general process with the design phase completed prior to construction,” said Garrity.

The emphasis on developing a plan process which is thoughtful and co-operative cannot be understated. State DOT’s, local officials, key players in your own organization, regulatory officials and consultants along with the public should have input into a project. Defining the scope of the project, identifying consultants, developing a management strategy, scheduling and realistic budgets are crucial to the success of your project.

“Stages of the project will include feasibility, environmental, site equity analysis, design, property acquisition, obtaining permits and preparing construction bids, said Garrity. “All of this happens prior to the construction, commissioning and the beginning of operations.”

Definition of the project including the source of the all-important funding and requirements would be next plus the design of the building and the list of current and future needs. Scheduling of the above items will be critical and will likely require knowledge and expertise not found at the transit agency.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will become an area builders will become very familiar with during the process. Protection, maintenance and enhancement of the environment are taken into account under the NEPA guidelines and it’s the primary law governing the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) environmental protection process.

There are three classifications within the NEPA, including an Environmental Assessment (EA), Categorical Exclusion (CE) and Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Most projects undertaken by small transit projects are able to obtain a CE. It can still be a lengthy and tedious process. Obtaining a CE can include obtaining a physical street address, maps, GIS applications, legal descriptions, overlays, land use, street network, aerial photos and site photos. Air

quality will come under scrutiny during the CE process.

Zoning, traffic impacts, noise impact, historical background, current traffic counts, lighted intersections, parking requirements and proposed parking plans will be looked at closely. Ecology, wetlands, water quality, recreation and construction impact will be taken into consideration.

Environmental Justice studies and a Site Equity Analysis will be part of the process. In determining the site of a location, the applicant may not make selections effecting or denying anyone's rights due to race, color, or national origin. The location of the projects requiring land acquisition and the displacement of anyone from their homes or businesses cannot be determined by the same criteria. The Site Equity Analysis takes into account the demographics of the area while protecting anyone living or working in an impacted area.

Transit agencies should consider procuring A/E services prior to beginning any building project. Qualification-based procurement procedures apply to the hiring of the following services

- Architectural/Engineering
- Program/Construction Management
- Feasibility studies
- Surveying
- Mapping

Price is not and evaluating factor when working a Qualifications-based procurement. Selecting the most qualified proposer followed by negotiations with the proposer. After reviewing and ranking all proposers, the "most qualified" proposal is then chosen for negotiations. If those negotiations fail, then the discussions should open with the second ranked proposer.

"Getting the correct people working on your behalf will cut the time significantly," said Garrity. "Follow the discussions with each proposer in the order they were ranked until a price can be agreed upon."

Creating Customer Connections

Megan Gould-Stabile, Division Manager
Rapid Transit System - Rapid City, SD

The saying "Customer service is an attitude, not a department" is one that holds true no matter what industry you work in. Customer service is constantly around us, whether it is internal or external, it is a constant focus in the workplace. Once again, Leah Braun presented to DTA Conference attendees on Creating Customer Connection and lead discussions on how to accomplish this task.

Customer service is an everyday interaction between businesses and their customers. Some of the toughest customer service jobs out there are public transportation, starting with a driver and dispatch to management. Public transportation has so many red lines that can't be crossed, but we are still required to provide the best customer service we can. How do we do this? We build a connection with the customer, allowing us to gain their trust in the services we provide and not following the mentality of "the customer is always right".

When having a conversation with a customer there is a powerful, professional language that can be used like, "I see your point, however..." or "I understand what you're saying and our policy is...". These types of phrases help the customer know that we do understand what they are saying, but there are limits to what we can do. Another way to set yourself up for success with a customer is by posting the rules, portray confidence when speaking to them, learn to 'read' people, or even keeping calm. These strategies can help you build rapport with your customers, which is what Leah calls a 'secret weapon' when giving good customer service.

Leah continues her discussion about creating customer connections by giving information on how to work with difficult customers by giving techniques on how to handle different personalities, de-escalation tips, and reminders for all challenging passengers. Being able to remember that everyone has their own

personalities and having an idea on how to identify those and provide good customer service at the same time is a great way to build rapport with customers. Remember, customers are the purpose of your work; not an interruption of it!

FTA Procurements

Terry Hoffman
Co-Executive Director
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Procurement is probably the hottest topic on the table for public transit professionals today. It's also proving to be one of the most difficult tasks to navigate.

The presentation delivered at the Monday morning session of the 2022 Dakota Transit Association annual conference by Richard Garrity of RLS and Associates focused on Federal procurement requirements. Garrity is the senior Associate for RLS Associates of Dayton, Ohio.

His presentation included advice on the development of a compliant policy, micro, small and large purchase requirements, System of Award Management (SAM) record keeping, procurement record keeping and construction project considerations.

Mr. Garrity is a nationally recognized expert in the area of Federal Transit Administration regulatory compliance, having served as a Litigation Consultant to the U.S. Dept. of Justice, providing technical assistance on ADA compliance. He is a nationally recognized trainer on topics ranging from Financial Management and Cost Allocation to FTA Procurement Requirements, Title VI and Environmental Justice. He is also a lead triennial reviewer and has developed compliance monitoring tools for multiple states.

The development of a solid procurement policy and a detailed list of deficiencies often found in procurement activities dominated the session.

"Building a solid procurement policy utilizing the latest federal guidelines is a must," said Garrity. "Deficiencies often occur because the policy is lacking important pieces or the information is not correct."

Among the most common deficiencies identified were missing FTA clauses, lacking cost/price analysis, Independent Cost Estimates (ICE), pre-award and post-delivery certifications and incomplete policies. Garrity provided reference to documents helpful with developing policy and following Best Practices of procurement activities. He also cautioned attendees of conflicting information in these documents.

"When dealing with conflicting information, always follow the most stringent policy," said Garrity. "Be sure to establish a partnership with local procurement officials to ensure FTA requirements are met."

A prime example is threshold issues. If local thresholds are lower than federal guidelines, the local thresholds must be adhered to.

A vital part of any procurement activity lies in the documentation of the procurement activity. He often referred to "your procurement file."

"Be sure to have a written history of all procurement activities," said Garrity. "The minimum requirements include rationale for method of procurement, contract type, selection or rejection of contractor and basis for contract price."

Cost/Price Analysis and Independent Cost Estimates are tools Garrity feels procurement staff members need to become more familiar with and to take advantage of any training opportunities presented. He cautioned about not using enough information prior to producing and ICE (Independent Cost Estimate). The lack of understanding the difference between the three items causes and the lack of documentation in your procurement file are often seen as mistakes made when creating your procurement.

"Always utilize best practices which foster competition simply for the fact adequate competition usually coincides with better prices making," said

Garrity “Price Analysis is generally acceptable when competition is adequate.”

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Thanks to all!



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