



TRANSIT TIDBITS

Issue 135 MAY 2023

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2023

**If you are positive, you'll see
opportunities instead of obstacles.**

DTA MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Jacque Senger, Executive Director

I have received 32 transit agencies 2023 Membership Forms. Thank you all who sent them in.

TRAINING UPDATE

Contact Information

Rod Grafing 701-840-1405

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"There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure. ---- Colin Powell

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PASS classes will be held June 16 & 17 in Bowman ND. If you have drivers or staff who need PASS training or recertification, please contact Rod using the above email. Include the names of drivers/staff who will be attending. REGISTRATION DEADLINE is Friday June 2nd 2023.

North Dakota is in need of PASS trainers. If you or someone from your agency is interested in becoming a certified PASS trainer, please contact Rod at 701-840-1405.

2023 BRINGS CHANGES TO OUR DTA CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORMS

Jacque Senger, Executive Director

The Dakota Transit Association Board of Directors have made some changes to our 2023 Registration Forms. We are sending this out ahead of time, so all the agencies are aware of the changes prior to completing the forms.

1st change

In the past we have held an Awards Breakfast on Sunday morning. That has been discontinued. All our awards will be presented on Saturday night at the “DTA Awards Banquet”.

2nd changes

Fees and Charges

Conference fees are now \$400.00 for Members and \$450.00 for Non-Members.

Roadeo Driver’s Registration fees are \$350.00.

Sunday Employee Professional Training fees are \$225.00.

Meal Costs for Guests

Saturday’s DTA Awards Banquet \$45.00

Guests’ meals Monday and Tuesday are each \$30.00.

DAKOTA TRANSIT ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Jacque Senger, Executive Director

The Sleep Inn & Suites in Minot, ND, will be hosting our DTA Conference September 15th through the 19th, 2023. Please remember to mark your calendars for this event. Their phone number is 701-837-3100 – when phoning in to make your reservations, let them know you are a part of DTA.



NEW DIRECTOR AT THE HELM

Travis Bortnem, Executive Director
Brookings Area Transit Authority

Following 15 months of “Interim Director” status, Brookings Area Transit Authority has promoted Travis Bortnem to the new Director position following Brenda Schweitzer’s departure on January 21, 2022. It was a long road for the Board of Directors to make a final decision, but they knew that the staff we had in place at BATA was well situated to bring BATA to the future.

We never changed our mission or drive to do what we do. We still want to be able to provide a service that fosters independence by providing mobility options. That sounds great, but what we really strive for is getting as many people on the bus as possible. We still like to see great ridership numbers. That surely hasn’t been too hard to do following the Pandemic.

During the last 15 months, we have seen a little more turnover than we have seen previously; but we are weathering the storm well. While we don't have as many CDL licensed drivers, our shift of focus on vehicles is accommodating that change. Where we once only had a few vans and a bus or two that didn't require a CDL; we now only have 10 of our 29 vehicles requiring a CDL. We have only brought in 1 CDL bus since 2017. Now with the Ford Transits coming in faster...Excuse me while I chuckle to myself...(I ordered those in February of last year and I'm still waiting). The economics of it all are probably going to push BATA to focus on those over larger buses. We will still have a few larger buses for peak times coming from youth transportation, but it isn't too often you will see more than 4-5 passengers on a bus at any given time other than those 2 hours a day.

BATA has also found a suitable building that we are in the works of being able to purchase. This has been a long time coming. I was looking back to a year ago when I was discussing this option with our Board of Directors. This is coming just about as fast as those new buses. However, I think we do see light at the end of this tunnel. We are finally going to be able to get all of our vehicles under one roof and no longer will we share grounds with the County Highway Department. As excited as we are, they want our building pretty bad too. Hopefully, it won't be long, and I can write another article showing off our new "home!" We are excited to see what we can do with 4 times the space we currently have! So let's cross our fingers and pray that the FTA can get through these

last hurdles to bring us home. We are also getting really close to sending our Dell Rapids facility out to bid as well. More fingers crossing please!!! Lots of growth, and keeping up with our mission going on here.

I am also looking forward to the DTA conference to see all my peers from SD and ND. Through the years I have been blessed to know and learn from all of you. Many have given me words of encouragement through the last 15 months. Thank you everyone for that, it takes a village to keep this all running. I promise not to break my glasses from having too much fun again in Minot, but we will still have a lot of fun...just not as much as the last time we were up there!!! See you all soon!!!

DAKOTA TRANSIT AWARDS

Jacque Senger, Executive Director

The 2023 DTA Award Nominations have been sent out to the general membership and are also on the website. Please remember to recognize those individuals who make transit a great place to work.

RAMBLING THOUGHTS FROM THE ROAD

Terry Hoffman, DTA President
Community Transit of Watertown-
Sisseton, Inc.

Driving home from our quarterly Dakota Transit Association board meeting on May 16, what topic to write about for the monthly Tidbit occupied my thoughts.

Budgets, triennial reviews, board meetings, the agenda for the Fall DTA conference, the future sites for the DTA, host cities good and bad for past conferences, construction projects, expansions, issues waiting for us on Wednesday morning and the smokey air that drifting down from Canada and would linger for days. All these items ran through my mind as we headed back to northeast South Dakota. Singly none of the topics have much bite so I decided to just ramble about all the above.

Community Transit Board Meeting

Due at the SDDOT on June 1, our 5311 Budget applications needs to be in the mail before we leave for Oklahoma and another CTAA conference. Needing approval from the local board, we sent the draft out last week asking board members to please look it over, critique and return in advance of the May 18th board meeting. Of course, we received zero comments until the day before the board meeting saying there were several questions from one board member. The fact he had questions was not the issue, we just wanted to have a chance to have everything in place and ready to be approved. Instead, we went into the meeting expecting to debate issues and do our best to convince this member the budget was sound.

After a sleepless night of concern over anticipated debates and justifying our numbers, the board accepted the budget as proposed without a hint of dissent. Time for the happy dance.

Dakota Transit Association Board Meeting

Earlier in the week, the DTA board convened at the Sleep Inn in Minot for our on-site visit. My first conference as a board member was in the Magic City in the fall of 2015. Minot proved to be a solid host then and I believe the 2023 version will be even better.

Perhaps the most appealing part of the conference will be the fact the Roadeo can be held on site which is always a plus. Meeting spaces, conference rooms and a theater are all strategically located in the same vicinity of the Roadeo events and meetings. We have some outside events in the planning and a spacious area has been set aside for the DTA. Stay tuned for details on this event.

As for the conference itself, planning is becoming more difficult each year – or maybe I am just too old to think outside the box. The makeup of the board has changed dramatically with an influx of younger members with a whole new set of ideas and skill sets. Trying to mesh the new vibe with old traditional laden thought process makes for interesting and occasional lengthy discussions. Bringing fresh ideas to the table, finding affordable presenters who deliver quality instruction and commentary and appeasing the wishes of the DOT's and the vendors is always a challenger. We will never make everyone happy, but this group always does their best to make each conference the best it can be.

Future of the DTA

I already mentioned out with the old and in with the new. This will continue in the near

future. The chairs of SD rep Kathy Holman and ND rep Erin Humphrey will open this year. Next year Brian Horinka and I will be leaving the board after nearly nine years of service. We both were appointed to the board to replace others plus were each elected for two terms. I won't speak for Brian, but I will miss the camaraderie of the members old and new. The DTA is important to all of us and it has been my honor to serve. I will miss it.

Every year we try to change some portion of the event just to keep things fresh. This year is no different. No, I am not revealing any secrets here, you will just have to show up and enjoy. Will there be topics some of you do not agree with? Are there sessions you will find beneficial? Will there be specialized training for the drivers? The answer to all three questions is, of course.

Following Minot, the conference will move back to the Black Hills of South Dakota and the city of Rapid City. Planning has already begun for the 2024 event. Where the 2025 will be held has not yet been determined, which is a concern to the board. The reason being, no city has stepped forward with an application. Minot, Bismarck, Grand Forks, Fargo and Dickinson have all been hosts for ND, but none have thrown their hat in the ring yet. Smaller communities such as Jamestown and Devils Lake have the facilities for the event, but sizes of hotels would mean splitting up the masses, a cause for concern at past events. After much discussion, the board may review the criteria which could give the smaller communities the chance to host.

We went through Jamestown on the way to Minot so we decided to re-route on the way

home and go through Devils Lake. Having never been there, I was pleasantly surprised with the natural beauty of the area. And yes, we did tour the Spirit Lake Casino while there and feel the potential is there to be our host. I also feel Jamestown has enough to offer as a host. Hopefully others will step up as well. In South Dakota, Pierre and Huron have submitted applications in recent years and may soon get their chance.

Triennial Reviews

Most people cringe when they see 'Triennial Reviews' in an email. We did too, a bit, but I welcomed the event. Preparing for a review gives our staff the opportunity to rediscover where all items are located, what we are doing wrong and more importantly, what we are doing correctly. Working with the SDDOT staff is always a treat for us. We had Andrew, Jennifer, Terri and Brenda invade our space for the two days and still managed to pull off a decent review.

Construction and Expansion

When CTWSI formed in 2019, the original Community Transit had several construction/expansion plans in the hopper. Those projects are slowly coming to fruition, but others have surfaced in the past year adding to the fun. Expansion of the Sisseton facility is now on the radar as is a possible land swap in Watertown.

Something in the Air Tonight

There is more than smoke in the air this week and has been for the past 18 months. We all deal with employee and rider issues periodically, but does anyone else feel the

frequency of these issues has increased over this time frame? We certainly feel that way in our little paradise. Drivers having disputes with other drivers, displays of anger from normally tranquil staff, disgruntled passengers irate about everything imaginable. The general public (non-transit riders) complain about transit service in general even though most have never stepped foot in a bus. Our HR consultant we hired in 2022 has become a very important cog in our operation.

People have changed since covid visited us or at least that is my theory. My family says I am crazy, that maybe it is me who has changed. No way I'm buying into that theory because I never, ever change.

Seriously, some of the issues we have encountered has made us question our skills as directors or leaders. What are we doing wrong, do we need to be re-trained along with the employees?

Finding good employees has always been a challenge, but never as difficult as now. We have always taken pride in ourselves in being good judges of character. Hiring has become a crap shoot and made us think twice before hiring new staff. I'm sure I am preaching to the choir here so I will stop there. I wouldn't trade any of our current staff for anyone, but moving forward we will be putting potential hires through more rigorous interviews and reference checks.

Tidbit Articles:

Please contact me with articles for your agency.

Recycle:

Please share your Transit Tidbit with your staff and any interested persons.

Address:

Directors, please check with your bookkeepers as well as the rest of your staff to assure they have the correct DTA Mailing Address.

Thanks to all!



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