



TRANSIT TIDBITS

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THOUGHT FOR OCTOBER 2025
WORK HARD IN SILENCE,
Let your success be your noise

2025 DTA Conference

Jacque Senger, Executive Director

For all the issues encountered putting this conference together, the Board of Directors want to thank Pam Fosse, Director of the Jamestown Civic Center and her staff for their exceptional support during the entire Conference. Our Conference/Rodeo went off with a bang! We had great speakers, our awards banquet and Hoedown was a huge success, and many tried out the mechanical bull. Guess who????



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Dakota Transit Association

Next Board Meeting

The next board meeting for DTA is scheduled in Jamestown, ND, on November 3rd and 4th, 2025. We will be staying at the Marriott Fairfield.

2025 DTA ROADEO

Adam Sharkey, Co-Director

River Cities Public Transit

Saturday, September 13th, started as a beautiful day for a rodeo. Forty drivers showed up to represent their agencies and showed off their skills. They began their day with Terry Hoffman, who answered any questions the drivers may have had. Once no more questions were asked, tests were distributed, and the testing started.

With all tests completed, the drivers were escorted to the course for their walkthrough. Each driver got the

opportunity to walk the course and ask any questions pertaining to the competition. Once completed, Rick sang the National Anthem while our amazing Veterans held the American Flag. Then, the rodeo began, and the drivers proceeded to their starting stations. But that wasn't all that started. Rain joined us this year for the rodeo, and what began as a few drops turned into good rain for 3 hours. Each driver had to complete a driving course, a pre-trip inspection, passenger assistance, and a TSA pre-trip inspection. The TSA pre-trip was not judged as part of the rodeo but was a fantastic addition. Drivers were given 7 minutes to find any suspicious packages or items left on the bus and describe them in detail.

At 12:30 pm, all contestants were done; the course was being taken down, and buses were being returned. The day couldn't have been better. Thirty-nine volunteer judges showed up to help judge and support their drivers. The rodeo couldn't go as smoothly as it does without each one of them. A BIG thank you to everyone who took the time to come out, judge, and support their drivers!

I would like to personally thank everyone who attended to help judge and to all the drivers who competed. It was a great day, despite the rain, but it took all of us to make it happen.

Transit Agencies Briefed on Evolving Drug and Alcohol Testing Requirements at DTA Conference

Terry Hoffman, Co-Director
Community Transit of Watertown-
Sisseton, Inc.

Public transit leaders from across North and South Dakota gathered at the 41st Annual Dakota Transit Association Conference in Jamestown for a critical session on drug and alcohol (D&A) testing requirements. The presentation, delivered by Sean Oswald of RLS & Associates, provided a deep dive into the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations,

along with the latest changes to testing requirements and methods.

Oswald, a national expert in transit compliance, reviewed the six categories of federally required testing: pre-employment, random, post-accident, reasonable suspicion, return-to-duty, and follow-up. Each, he emphasized, plays a vital role in protecting both the public and transit employees.

"FTA's drug and alcohol testing program isn't optional—it's foundational to transit safety," Oswald said. "When a rider steps onto a bus, they deserve the assurance that their driver and every safety-sensitive employee is fit for duty."

Updates in Testing Requirements

Oswald highlighted several recent and upcoming changes that agencies must be aware of to remain in compliance:

- *Expanded drug panel testing: FTA now requires testing for a broader range of opioids and other substances, aligning with USDOT's panel updates.

- *Oral fluid testing: New rules allow the use of oral fluid (saliva) testing in addition to urine testing, providing a faster, less invasive method and reducing opportunities for tampering.

- *Post-accident thresholds: Clarifications were made regarding when testing is required after accidents, ensuring more consistent application across agencies.

- *Collection and recordkeeping standards: Updates to chain-of-custody, laboratory procedures, and electronic documentation strengthen accuracy and confidentiality.

Today's Compliance Challenges

Even with clear regulations, Oswald noted that transit agencies face a complex landscape: The legalization of marijuana in many states conflicts with federal prohibitions, requiring agencies to clearly communicate expectations to employees. Synthetic and designer drugs continue to evolve, complicating detection efforts. Supervisors

remain on the front lines, needing strong training to identify and document reasonable suspicion cases.

Balancing Enforcement and Support

Oswald also addressed the return-to-duty and follow-up process, reminding agencies that testing is both a compliance tool and a safety net. Employees who test positive must complete federally mandated steps before resuming safety-sensitive duties, often with the guidance of substance abuse professionals.

“Testing should never be viewed as punishment,” Oswald emphasized. “It is about accountability, safety, and support.”

A Key Takeaway

The session made it clear that drug and alcohol testing requirements are not static. Regulations evolve, testing methods expand, and the challenges of substance use shift with time. For transit agencies, staying informed and adapting quickly is essential.

“The regulations will continue to change, but the mission will not: protecting passengers, employees, and the integrity of public transit.”

What’s New in Drug & Alcohol Testing

- *Expanded testing panels now include more opioids and controlled substances.
- *Oral fluid (saliva) testing approved as an alternative to urine testing.
- *Post-accident testing thresholds clarified for consistency.
- *Updated chain-of-custody, lab, and electronic recordkeeping procedures.

Additional articles from the 2025 Conference will be in the November Tidbit

Calibrating Your Compass

Andrea Irwin, Director
Rural Office of Community Services

Another great conference has been wrapped up for DTA members. Stephanie Schafer presented a session on Calibrating your Compass.

Stephanie is a nationally certified counselor with nearly a decade of experience supporting individuals and organizations in high stress roles and has provided training and consultation on workplace mental health through EAP. She talked with us about developing our compass so that we can achieve a healthy balance in our daily lives. We learned how to identify our core values and how to strengthen our relational connections to create a personalized action plan.

We were able to look at ourselves and find our primary stressors like employee availability or providing service with limitations in funding. We gained understanding of how chronic stress affects us, both mentally and physically. It can cause health issues, anxiety, loss of sleep or illness, and leads to lack of focus and burnout or quitting.

Thinking about all these things, we left with a better understanding on how to overcome burnout with positive change. Rest is key to mental health, along with finding balance and setting boundaries. Make goals that are easily visible and work on connecting with others that could be allies in achieving those goals. As we work to put these things into action to better ourselves, don't forget to find a way to incorporate gratitude into your day.

“See Something, Say Something” Comes Alive for Dakota Transit Workers

Terry Hoffman, Co-Director
Community Transit of Watertown-
Sisseton, Inc.

The day starts early for most public transit workers, with buses rumbling through quiet streets and dispatchers fielding calls as passengers begin their commute. For these frontline professionals, routine runs often conceal a hidden responsibility: ensuring the safety and security of everyone on board.

On September 14, 2025, that responsibility took center stage at the Jamestown Civic Center, where Transportation Security Administration (TSA) inspectors Keith Turner and Carlos Feigelmuller presented the First Observer Program to transit staff from across North and South Dakota.

Turner and Feigelmuller, veteran Inspectors for the TSA/DHS have become a fixture at recent DTA conferences. Turner has a total of 17 years of experience with the two agencies, the last eight with Surface Operations. Feigelmuller began his tenure with the TSA in 2016 as part of the screening workforce. He has also worked as a security contractor for the military as an attachment to the Navy and Marines.

For a driver like Eric Martinson, who has spent 15 years navigating the roads of his community, the session was a wake-up call.

“I always thought of my job as just getting people from point A to B safely,” he said. “Today, I realized that being alert to the little things—strange behavior, unattended bags, anything unusual—could actually prevent a serious problem.”



First Observer is a national initiative designed to train transportation professionals to act as the "eyes and ears" of the nation's security network. The training equips drivers, dispatchers, and administrators to recognize suspicious activity, document it properly, and report it through the right channels. During the interactive session, participants reviewed real-life scenarios, such as a commuter leaving a suspicious package on a bus or confrontations between passengers escalating into safety risks.

Attendees practiced how to de-escalate tense situations and communicate concerns to law enforcement without putting themselves—or others—in danger.

Turner and Feigelmuller stressed that transit workers are uniquely positioned to notice early warning signs because of their daily interactions with passengers. Feigelmuller recounted a story of a bus driver who noticed an unfamiliar bag left near a terminal.

“The driver didn’t panic,” he said. “They followed the steps we teach in First Observer, reported it immediately, and the authorities safely resolved the situation. That’s exactly what this program is about—

being prepared, observant, and proactive.”

For dispatchers, the program underscored the importance of coordination and vigilance.

“Sometimes, we’re the ones receiving the first tip from a driver or a passenger,” said Tara Maifield, a dispatcher attending the session. “This training taught us how to respond quickly and accurately, making sure everyone stays safe without overreacting.”

The session also included role-playing exercises, giving staff a chance to experience the challenges of real-life transit security issues in a controlled environment.

“It’s one thing to hear about these situations,” Martinson said, “but trainings like these make it clear how important it is to stay calm and follow the right steps.”

Turner reminded the audience that security is a shared responsibility. “We don’t expect you to solve the problem on your own,” he said. “We just want you to recognize when something doesn’t seem right and report it. Your awareness could prevent a crisis before it starts.”

By the end of the day, it was clear that the training had a lasting impact. For drivers, dispatchers, and other transit personnel, the session reinforced their critical role in protecting the community. Every bus route, every call answered, every observant eye contributes to a safer travel environment.

“Safety isn’t just a law enforcement job,” Feigelmuller concluded. “It’s a partnership. Every person in transit has a role to play. When you see something, say something—because it matters.”

The session included group discussion and practical tools that participants could immediately apply in their daily work. Topics included:

- Recognizing behavioral warning signs of security threats
- Effective communication strategies during confrontations.

- Techniques to defuse tense situations without escalating them further.
- Balancing personal safety with passenger service.

For Martinson, that message hit home. “Tomorrow, when I start my route,” he said, “I’ll pay closer attention—not just to traffic, but to the people on my bus. It feels good to know I can make a difference.”



TRAINING UPDATE

Contact Information

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UPCOMING PASS TRAINING: Classes will be held in Northwestern, ND in December 2025. Exact location and dates are yet to be determined. If you have drivers in need of training or recertification in this area of the state, please feel free to contact me so I can begin the registration process.

I am still working on compiling a mass email list for all DTA member agencies, as a better way to communicate upcoming training information and updates from CTAA.

Are you or someone from your agency
Interested in becoming a PASS
trainer? CTAA now offers PASS - Train
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If you have drivers/staff in need of
training or re-certification and would
like to inquire about or schedule a
class, please contact Rod using the
information listed above



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Tidbit Articles

Please contact me with articles you would
like to place in the Transit Tidbit.

Distribute

Please share your Transit Tidbit with your
staff and other individuals interested in the
Dakota Transit Association.