Welcome to the beautiful city of Santa Fe! In my last year as MTAP Chair, it gives me great pleasure, along with New Mexico DOT’s Transit staff, to host this year’s Winter Meeting and show off the capital of “The Land of Enchantment.” I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, over 14 years ago from Brooklyn to work in transit for NMDOT and never looked back.

Glad that many of our colleagues from DOTs around the nation can join us for the Winter Meeting, especially the new chair of AASHTO’s Council on Public Transportation, Roger Millar, Secretary, Washington State DOT. The Winter Meeting, held each year in the month of November, is a culmination of the daily collaborative work of state transit offices. AASHTO is a vehicle that brings us together along with our partners from APTA, CTAA, TRB, etc. to continue the national discussion about policies and programs affecting state transit offices.

Over the past year, MTAP worked diligently to educate its members on the most critical issues affecting public transportation. We held technical initiatives forums on Transit Asset Management, PTASP, Cooperative Procurements, etc., and during our monthly conference calls hosted conversations about transit vehicle insurance, SMRs, TNC partnerships, and more. Our thanks to the Federal Transit Administration, especially those in the Office of Program Management, Program Oversight and Safety, and Budget and Policy, for their great participation and responsiveness.

The Winter Meeting agenda demonstrates our responsiveness to the membership of MTAP and the Council on Public Transportation. Each session is the result of input from members and as a result the Winter Meeting sessions will address a variety of priority topics, such as Mobility on Demand—Innovations in Transit, Multimodal Planning Transit Systems, Transitioning from Rural-to-Small Urban and Small Urban-to-Urban, and Solving Transit Employee Shortages. To close the meeting, we will continue the discussion about FAST Act Reauthorization, the next surface transportation authorization bill, and other emerging issues.

It is going to be a great Winter Meeting and a truly dynamic discussion. Going forward, we always want to be responsive to our members, so your involvement in our webinars, monthly calls, and in-person meetings is critical. State DOT Transit Offices are best at advancing transit programs, education, and public policy when we work and learn together.

Thanks again for your dedication to MTAP and the Council on Public Transportation.

– David Harris
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Visit FTA’s OTrak website for more information and updates on training opportunities over the coming months.

Important update! Federal Transit Administration’s Office of Safety and Oversight is undertaking efforts to update and modernize its Oversight Tracking System (OTrak). OTrak is FTA’s official system of record for all program oversight data. This update to OTrak will provide FTA recipients with access to the system for the first time.

The enhanced OTrak system will use Appian® for improved design and functionality. Appian® is the same platform as the Transit Award Management System and National Transit Database.

FTA first announced the OTrak modernization efforts during AASHTO Multi-State Transit Technical Assistance Program Steering Committee Conference Call in July 2019. During that call, FTA discussed the new system’s functionalities and benefits. And to continue to get the word out about OTrak modernization, FTA also participated the Community Transportation Association of America Expo in May.

Over the next several months, FTA will engage with as many recipients as possible to collect feedback on the system and provide training opportunities. To kick things off, FTA will host two virtual focus groups on November 19, 2019, from 2:00–4:00 p.m. EST and December 4, 2019, from 1:00–3:00 p.m. EST. The focus groups will provide FTA recipients with a first look at the new system and a demonstration of recipient oversight functions. Additionally, FTA will request recipient feedback on system design and functionality to help identify additional improvements.

Overall, OTrak’s enhancements will transition the system from a database to a dynamic work tool, using automated workflows, notifications, and data visualization and reporting tools to increase the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of FTA’s compliance review process.

FTA recipients will be able to complete key oversight tasks within the system. For example, recipients will be able to respond to information requests and submit corrective actions directly in OTrak. Additionally, recipients will be able to track the status of reviews, determine the status of findings and corrective actions, and access their oversight history.

- David Schilling
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With slightly under a year remaining to meet the deadline for agencies to submit their Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans (PTASP), the Federal Transit Administration is launching the PTASP Technical Assistance Center (TAC) to provide enhanced assistance to the public transit industry on the development and implementation of safety plans. The TAC offers this support through three engagement methods: an online community of practice to facilitate information-sharing and peer-to-peer support; remote support from FTA to address PTASP questions and provide feedback on draft Agency Safety Plan (ASP) content; and on-site assistance to provide training and ASP development support.

The TAC also will serve as the central repository for PTASP resources. For ease of access, FTA has organized the resources based on stakeholder categories, including small public transportation providers, large bus operators, rail transit providers, multi-modal operators, state departments of transportation, and State Safety Oversight agencies.

FTA will update online content and resources frequently. Participants are encouraged to visit the site often and subscribe to GovDelivery notifications and the Transit Safety and Oversight Spotlight newsletter to stay up to date on the latest PTASP TAC discussions and developments.

In July, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) issued a reminder to the public transit industry about the PTASP regulation compliance deadline of July 20, 2020. The PTASP regulation requires certain transit operators—and in some cases states—to develop ASPs based on Safety Management System principles.

To prepare for the upcoming deadline, state departments of transportation should identify small public transportation providers (small providers) within the state that must meet the PTASP requirements. A state is required to draft an ASP for small providers within the state unless a small provider opts out of a state-drafted plan. States can engage with small providers to determine whether they intend to opt out of a state-drafted ASP and document that decision.

Agencies are starting from different places—either transitioning current safety plans to address new requirements, drafting completely new plans, or performing analyses to identify next steps for developing plans. In all cases, the TAC will provide a variety of resources, tools, and examples to help agencies tackle obstacles and meet the compliance deadline.

Over the past year, FTA has provided robust outreach regarding PTASP, including 23 webinars attracting more than 4,500 participants and six, one-day workshops with nearly 500 industry stakeholders attending. This Fall, the agency will continue our PTASP webinar series with a webinar scheduled in November highlighting PTASP lessons learned and success stories at transit agencies. Past webinar recordings and slides are also available, including October’s overview of the TAC and PTASP applicability and requirements.

On September 20, 2019, FTA distributed a PTASP survey to transit agencies, state departments of transportation, and State Safety Oversight agencies. The survey will help FTA determine progress toward meeting the PTASP requirements along with topics and resources to support in the development of safety plans.

FTA is here to support state departments of transportation in meeting this important deadline. For questions regarding PTASP or the TAC, email the PTASP Technical Assistance Center or call 1-877-827-7243.
State departments of transportation help provide essential mobility services for all users, including elderly individuals, individuals with disabilities, and low-income individuals, as well as rural and tribal communities. From commuter and fixed route services to paratransit, on-demand, and other specialized services, state DOTs facilitate the most critical components of the nation’s multimodal transportation infrastructure and services.

Good partners and collaborators, however, are key to achieving these goals. And they come in various forms, such as internal agency staff, local/regional governments, transit agencies and providers, non-profits groups, and even other state DOTs. Here are two state DOT examples of partnerships that are critical to the delivery of public transportation services:

Oregon DOT’s Columbia River Gorge Strategy
For Oregon DOT (ODOT) the partnerships to provide public transportation access to the Columbia River Gorge are critical to making the Gorge a wonderful place for all visitors. The Historic Columbia River Highway, completed in the early 1900s, represents a destination and experience as the first National Scenic Highway and current National Scenic Area. However, this beautiful early 20th century scenic highway is experiencing the severe effects of early 21st century automobile congestion. So begins the story of the collaboration to make the Gorge a better place….through public transportation.

Oregon DOT sought a strategy to deal with the significant growth in Gorge visitations, currently at two million annually and increasing. As a result, a public transportation strategy based on the principles of transportation demand management was developed and implemented in partnership with Federal agencies, local governments, tourism groups, non-profits, and transit providers.

Public Transportation in the Gorge manages access and promotes safety to reach key destinations. In 2016, ODOT commissioned a Transit Study, the results of which led directly to implementation of the Columbia Gorge Express program. The Columbia Gorge Express is a state managed public transit service and includes intercity service and ride shuttle operations to manage congestion around Multnomah Falls, the most popular of all locations along the Columbia River Gorge. The intercity service line runs between Portland and Hood River to the east approximately 65 miles.

Tourism groups, like Travel Oregon, CRG Tourism Alliance, and Friends of the Columbia Gorge, are key partners, and they work with local transit providers to promote accessibility to key Gorge sites. FHWA’s Office of Federal Lands Highway is a key funding partner while TriMet, the mass transit district in Portland, allows Express buses access to eastern Portland Transit Centers as park and ride sites and connectors to the metro region transit system. The Port of Hood River, City of Hood River, and City of Cascade Locks provide bus stops in their jurisdictions while Rooster Rock State Park provides a park and ride for the free shuttle program to Multnomah Falls.
ODOT’s long-term vision is NOT in the operations of the Gorge Express. The agency is working with Hood River County’s local transit agency, Columbia Area Transit, to become the intercity service provider, and also is collaborating with CAT to transition this service to CAT by the end of the calendar year. The CAT’s program goal is to improve access and mobility to the entire Gorge.

Currently, five public transportation providers and dozens of private agencies operate in the Gorge. The Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, however, is perhaps the most important. It is host and convener of the bi-state Gorge Translink Alliance, providing mobility management support to the region and funded by Washington State DOT and ODOT.

Public transportation will continue to serve as a key instrument for access to the Columbia River Gorge, and partnerships will be at the core of public transportation’s current and future success in Oregon.

**Nebraska DOT Public–Private–Public Partnerships**

Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) discovered that internal organizational siloes were inhibiting efforts to implement public transportation throughout the state. To overcome this siloed effect, NDOT Transit Section developed a statewide strategy involving public–private–public partnerships. Through its Statewide Mobility Management, Statewide Rural Transit, and Vanpool programs, NDOT created projects that bridge silos and bring multiple organizations together under a shared vision.

In its vanpool program, NDOT provides a subsidy of up to $400 per vanpool per month. Through the FTA Section 5311, NDOT implements a rural vanpool service (Rural to Rural = 14 vanpools, Urban to Rural = 30 vanpools) and using FHWA Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding, a total of four vanpools are provided between Lincoln and Omaha. The service is a partnership with Commute by Enterprise and GoNEWhere.

Another successful NDOT partnership is with the University of Nebraska–Omaha. Together, they are working on Statewide Mobility Management, Statewide Driver Training Program, Compliance Assistance, Research, Marketing and Social Media, Technology Tools, and Safety Planning. Essentially, this partnership provides NDOT staff beyond its internal capabilities and access to services.

Finally, Nebraska Public Transit formed a partnership with a number of consultants, including Cambridge Systematics, KFH Group, and others, as well as the University of Nebraska, to implement a number of key public transportation projects throughout the state. This partnership resulted in the hiring of a Statewide Mobility Manager. The key transportation projects included the Technology RFQ, the Grand Island–Hastings–Kearney Intercity Study, the Lincoln/Omaha Intercity Feasibility Study, the Northeast Region Mobility Management, the Statewide Public Relations, Project Dashboard, and the Norfolk Flexroute Study.

Overall, the case of ODOT and the NDOT demonstrates how critical partnerships are to the success in delivering better, more effective public transportation projects and programs.
Can public transportation ever pay for its own capital and operating expenses? As history would tell us, the answer is probably no, at least not through the farebox. According to the 2016 National Transit Database, farebox revenues in the United States only cover 36 percent of operating costs and barely a fraction of the capital costs. Annual public transit subsidies in the United States exceed $48 billion. But that does not mean transit systems cannot demonstrate positive fiscal impact beyond farebox return—increased property values and tax revenues.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) recently completed the second look at property values around the SunRail stations in Central Florida. SunRail is Central Florida’s commuter rail service. The initial 2015 study showed variable increases in value across the system. However, the 2019 update showed a remarkable difference; SunRail has contributed to a $1.2 billion increase in property value above the control areas. The estimated tax revenues across all 12 stations have increased by almost 41 percent in the past seven years.

A station by station evaluation discovered that the property values and tax revenue growth appears to be driven by new multifamily and mixed use transit orientated developments (TODs) being constructed near stations. While the largest developments are in urbanized areas near Downtown Orlando, many of the developments are in suburban areas previously dominated by low-density, single-family housing, a good indication of SunRail’s transformative effect on local communities.

The downtown and hospital stations have experienced the highest levels of property value growth. The four downtown and hospital stations accounted for 78.1 percent of the cumulative property value increase. Much of the variation between stations appears to be attributable to an area’s predisposition to TOD. Not surprisingly, stations in areas less supportive of SunRail and TOD have yet to see notable impacts.

Other than direct operating revenues generated mostly from fares, this study demonstrates that transit can generate additional revenues through development impacts around transit stations and routes. Revenue can be captured in the form of increased property taxes, sales taxes, and impact fee revenues associated with new development attracted to station area.

This study is good news for local governments in Central Florida, especially as the FDOT gets ready to transition operation of SunRail to our local partners. The increase in tax revenues can be used to offset the operational costs for the local governments.

As the SunRail system matures, the property value increments, and tax revenues are only expected to increase. The FDOT is committed to continuing to monitor the property value impact over the coming years to better understand how rail systems can impact local Florida communities.

The full study is available at: Assessing the Impacts of SunRail Stations on Property Values.
For state DOT transit offices, the 10-year U.S. Census can influence the allocation of Federal funding and resources from the Federal Transit Administration to its public transportation providers. Now, for most urbanized areas (those with populations over 200,000), the U.S. Census causes no dramatic changes. However, the same cannot be said for many rural (populations with less than 50,000) and small urban areas (populations between 50,000 and 200,000). Rural areas are shifting to small urban (or even urban) while small urbans are being enveloped by urban areas. As these areas grow in population, the shift in designation—rural, small urban or urban—is causing havoc on transit systems that receive Federal funding, resulting in what some call, the “Urban Donut” in transit service.

In Tennessee, we pride ourselves on providing public transit service in all 95 counties statewide through a network of regionalized rural demand response providers and urban fixed-route service. Since the 2010 Census changed the Urbanized Area (UZA) boundaries, Tennessee has experienced several problems associated with the Urban Donut and now has public transit deserts in the UZAs between the fixed-service routes serving our urban cores and the boundaries of rural areas.

The Urban Donut around each UZA cannot be reached by the FTA Section 5307-funded, fixed-route, and paratransit services located within the urban core. Individuals within this area cannot be served by rural public transit agencies funded by FTA Section 5311 program funds, unless one leg of the trip goes into the rural area. As a result, local funds have been used to make up for the loss of Federally funded service or transit service has been cut to these areas altogether.

This is a significant problem across Tennessee. Thirty-eight percent of the 2010 Census UZAs population within the state’s 12 UZAs are served by the 5307-funded, fixed-route providers. In Johnson City, the small urban 5307 fixed-route transit provider serves 48 percent of the UZA’s 2010 Census population. To maintain public transportation service for the remaining 52 percent of residents, the provider depleted its local match reserves by more than $1 million.

How did Tennessee DOT (TDOT) discover this problem? During a Section 5311 compliance review, staff identified that 5311-funded trip origins and destinations were occurring within the UZA. As a corrective action, all 5311-funded agencies received trip software map overlays that determine if clients were eligible for 5311-funded service. In response, TDOT established a stop-gap $2 million annual program with state funds to help maintain transit access within these Urban Donut areas. This program, however, is not a permanent solution for the communities. Unfortunately, a host of other issues arose from offering state-funded service in the Urban Donut, including a requirement for rural agencies to become full reporters to the National Transit Database and implement Transportation Programmatic Cost Allocation Plans to properly document expenses and report data by location.

With the upcoming 2020 Census, TDOT strongly encourages finding a Federal solution to this growing problem. One solution could include allowing Section 5311-funded service in the Urban Donut with the establishment of a clear coordination plan between the agencies and the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Another solution could be funding for hybrid rural/urban providers. At a minimum, TDOT encourages FTA to extend the transition time (beyond two years, the current gap between data feeding into the formula and the Federal fiscal year apportionments), allowing a transit agency to understand and plan for the impacts of the 2020 Census.
In May 2019, the Illinois legislature passed the largest capital investment bill, the Rebuild Illinois Bill, in the state’s history, providing $45 billion in capital funds. The Illinois DOT’s (IDOT) Office of Intermodal Project Implementation (OIPI) is responsible for allocating the transit component of the Rebuild Illinois Bill, a total of $4.5 billion.

For some background, transit capital project oversight in Illinois is divided into two regions: the Chicago region and its service boards (Chicago Transit Authority, Metra and PACE); and the area outside of Chicago, known as downstate Illinois. The state provides funding for capital assets in the Chicago region and the Regional Transportation Authority, which oversees this area, works with IDOT on priority project funding. IDOT, however, provides funding, oversight and grants for downstate State capital investments.

The OIPI considers various criteria to evaluate and score the downstate transit capital project application as part of an annual Rebuild Illinois grants “call for projects.” With the Federally-required Transit Asset Management (TAM) data and the Capital Needs Assessment (CNA), IDOT already has Illinois downstate transit needs for the next 10 years identified by grantees who complete an annual TAM survey.

A Capital Needs Assessment (CNA) investment prioritization decision support tool, which also includes information from Tier I providers, is used to assign a score to submitted projects in each asset category: Vehicles, Facilities, Fixed Guideway Assets, Equipment and Systems. These weighted priority scores for each project are based on the following criteria: Asset Condition, Service Reliability, Safety and Security, and Operating and Maintenance Costs, as shown in the graph below.

IDOT will use these CNA project priority scores as a base evaluation for the Rebuild Illinois state capital grant applications, providing an incentive for downstate Illinois grantees to complete their annual TAM inventory/surveys. In addition, IDOT is currently considering other criteria to be used as a secondary evaluation for the submitted projects but will continue to define and refine the criteria in the next month. The first “call for projects” for Rebuild Illinois Transit projects is expected to go out in the next several months.

Overall, TAM and CNA data is proving to be a true asset for IDOT and this data works effectively as a decision support tool for Illinois grant awards. The original intent of TAM/CNA data collection, however, is to identify State of Good Repair needs and to inform Federal funding opportunities. IDOT is discovering that this data is very instrumental in identifying Illinois state transit investments. And this a great benefit to IDOT and the transit projects across the state.

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**Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) Based Approach**

![Graph showing criteria](Image)

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