CHAPTER VI
NYSDOT TRANSIT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter describes a range of technical assistance programs and services that NYSDOT provides to transit operators in New York State. The primary vehicle for providing training and technical assistance is the federally funded Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP). In addition to RTAP funded activities, NYSDOT provides technical assistance to transit operators in the areas of documenting transit security best practices, and developing and supporting technology applications in transit such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).

RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NYSDOT administers the Federal Transit Administration’s Rural Transit Assistance Program for New York State. RTAP is funded from the FTA Section 5311 Other Than Urbanized Formula Program and provides funds for training, technical assistance, and related support for these operators. During the past year NYSDOT provided technical assistance to small urban and rural transit operators across the state in the following areas:

Driver Training

During State Fiscal Year 2004-2005, 361 persons attended driver training classes at three regional training centers—Fulton, Kingston, and the Town of Brookhaven. Training was provided in defensive driving, pre-trip inspections, wheelchair securement, and emergency procedures. The number of drivers attending training doubled over the previous year (180) with the opening of a new training facility at Ulster County Area Transit.

The majority of driver training is conducted by staff trainers from small transit providers where the regional training centers are located. NYSDOT provides RTAP funds to train trainers at these and other sites to deliver driver training classes. A list of trainers, along with their areas of expertise and contact information, is available on the RTAP section of the NYSDOT website, www.nysdot.gov. A map showing the location of the trainers and the regional training sites is also provided.

NYSDOT distributes driver training schedules to all Section 5310 and 5311 systems, and also posts the schedules on our web site, under Upcoming Events.

Over the past three years NYSDOT has been examining the feasibility of incorporating bus driving simulator training to the RTAP driver training program. Efforts have included research into bus simulator training, vendor visits and transit property visits to view simulators, demonstrations of simulator equipment, and a survey of Section 5310 and 5311 operators to assess their interest in simulator training. Based on these efforts, NYSDOT will acquire a mobile bus driving simulator to provide training at regional sites throughout the state. The acquisition is planned for SFY 2007.

Vendor Sponsored Training

NYSDOT has begun partnering with the vendor community in providing training for small transit operators. To date, training has been provided for mechanics and drivers in the following topics: vehicle air conditioning maintenance, wheelchair lift maintenance, and wheelchair securement training. These training sessions are hosted and conducted by various transit industry vendors at no charge; rural transit operators can use RTAP scholarships to recover any travel expenses. This training has been very well received by the transit operators.

RTAP Scholarships

RTAP scholarships account for a significant portion of the overall program. These funds are available for use by operators, on a reimbursement basis, for individual training needs that they select. During SFY 2004-05, 66 rural operators from Section 5310 and 5311 agencies used scholarship funds for training activities. This is the highest level of participation since the scholarship program’s inception in 1997.

RTAP scholarship funds are used for a variety of training purposes. Some examples include: maintenance training classes, computer software
classes, National Transit Institute (NTI) courses, train-the-trainer classes, DMV 19-A instructor and re-certification courses, CPR classes, and management training courses. Several operators also used scholarship funds to attend FTA-sponsored training, specifically DBE and financial management courses. Operators also use scholarship funds to attend training conferences, including the annual New York Public Transit Association conferences and the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) Expo.

During the past year, many operators used scholarship funds for bus accident investigation training sponsored by NYSDOT’s Passenger Carrier Safety Bureau. The “Bus Accident Investigation Training For Investigating Safety Hazards” (BAITFISH) program was developed for New York’s public transit operators; all public transportation operators in New York State that receive STOA funding must have trained accident investigation personnel available, either under this or a comparable program.

RTAP scholarship application forms are available for downloading on the NYSDOT web site, under the RTAP Scholarship section.

Rural and Specialized Transit Conference

NYSDOT hosted the tenth annual Rural & Specialized Transit Conference in May 2005 in Syracuse. Nearly 170 persons attended, and NYSDOT Commissioner Madison provided the keynote address. Session topics included disabilities awareness training, regional maintenance facilities, substance abuse training for supervisors, and coordination under United We Ride. The Rural & Specialized Transit Conference continues to be one of the most effective products of New York State’s RTAP program.

Drug and Alcohol Compliance

NYSDOT is responsible for ensuring that all Section 5311 recipients are in compliance with FTA’s substance abuse program requirements. During the past year NYSDOT and our consultant assisted systems with annual drug and alcohol testing reports, policy compliance, and testing program administration.

Mid-Atlantic Regional RTAP Group

New York continues to serve as an active member of the Mid-Atlantic Regional RTAP Group (MARG). The group met during the 2004 National Rural Public & Intercity Bus conference sponsored by the Transportation Research Board to plan regional assistance efforts.

The Mid-Atlantic RTAP group maintains an updated training schedule and other information at its web site, hosted by Pennsylvania’s PennTRAIN program, at:

www.penntrain.net/NewFiles/MARTAP.html.

Other RTAP Activities

NYSDOT provides technical assistance to rural transit operators through a variety of methods. The RTAP lending library, which includes over 200 transit training materials, is available for small transit operators, and a complete library listing is available on the NYSDOT web site.

Assistance is also provided by phone/fax/e-mail requests. NYSDOT receives numerous such requests each year. RTAP funds are also being used to supplement transit marketing activities, which were first promoted at the 2002 Rural & Specialized Transit Conference. In addition, NYSDOT continues to use RTAP to fund transit studies for our rural counties.

NYSDOT’s Technical Assistance Section is available to provide technical and training assistance to small urban and rural transit systems by calling (518) 457-8335, faxing (518) 485-7563, or by e-mail via the Rural Transit Assistance Program page of the NYSDOT web site.

TRANSIT TECHNOLOGY AND SECURITY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

The Transit Beruea (TB) has been actively involved in assisting transit operators in the areas of transit security and technology deployment.

TB technical assistance activities in the application of GIS and ITS in transit date back to the mid-1990s. Through such forums as the Transit GIS Users Group and the Downstate Transit Committee that is managing the Trip Itinerary portion of the NY/NJ/CT ITS Model Deployment Initiative, TB has worked with transit operators to mainstream the use of GIS and ITS in improving the planning and operations of transit systems.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NYSDOT initiated a Task Force on Traveling
Public Security to define actions that NYSDOT and the transit industry could take to increase the level of security for transit system customers, employees and infrastructure. A number of the initiatives that have grown out of this effort focus on providing technical assistance and guidance to New York’s transit systems on transit security best practices, federal resources and emerging policies

A number of the activities the Division has initiated in the areas of Transit Security and Technology are described below:

Transit Security:

NYPTA/NYSDOT Transit Safety and Security Committee. In response to a recommendation of the Department’s Traveling Public Security Task Force NYSDOT and the New York Public Transit Association established a Joint Committee on Transit Safety and Security. The objective of this Committee is to provide a forum for NYSDOT and the transit industry to collaborate on developing and sustaining an understanding industry security best practices and promoting their implementation.

Transit Security Best Practices Document. The Joint Committee was charged with the task of developing, publishing and maintaining a resource document on security best practices. The document will be routinely updated as new information becomes available from national organizations/efforts or experiences/lessons learned by New York State Transit Operators. The Committee began work on researching and documenting these Best Practices in the Spring of 2002, and the document was published in 2003. The document was distributed to New York’s transit operators.

Transit Technology:

Providing GIS Software for Transit Systems via the NYSDOT Site License with ESRI: TB, with cooperation from the Department’s Mapping and GIS Bureau, was successful in amending the Department’s GIS Software License with Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) to include New York’s fixed-route transit systems. With this amendment, NYSDOT is now able to provide, at no cost to the transit operator, a copy of ArcView GIS software as well as extensions, upgrades (including the new ArcView 8), and access to Internet training modules. Systems are covered by the license amendment until January 2005.

GIS-Based Schedule Data Maintenance System (SDMS): PTD has been developing and testing, with selected transit operators, an integrated GIS/database application known as the Schedule Data Maintenance System (SDMS). The SDMS provides a user-friendly suite of tools to assist transit systems in managing schedule data in a GIS environment. The schedule database application has been developed by NEC, the contractor on the NY/NJ/CT ITS Model Deployment Initiative. The database is designed based upon the TCIP standard, to support the ongoing maintenance of schedule data required for the Internet-based Trip Itinerary application being implemented as an element of the MDI project. The GIS viewer/editor is being developed by NYSDOT with the intention of supporting a wide range of transit planning and operational tasks that rely on geo-referenced service and schedule data.

GIS Transit Route and Demographic Data: TB continues to warehouse route and stop data for all rural fixed-route transit systems and disseminates this data to transit systems, planning organizations and other agencies as requested. The bus route and stop data, combined with other existing demographic data, has been used by transit operators to evaluate and plan service routes, assess welfare to work transportation needs and implement service strategies to meet these needs.

InterCity Bus GIS Demographic Profile: TB assisted InterCity carriers with a GIS-based profile of potential ADA customers. The information was used to apply for competitive federal funding through the Over The Road Bus Accessibility Program. Seven applications submitted received funding and further detail about these grants is included in the intercity bus section.

Transit Agency Compliance with FTA Policy on Conformity with the National ITS Architecture and Standards. Transit technology applications, such as passenger information, fleet management, automated fare collection and transit signal priority systems all fall under the heading of ITS as defined by the FTA National ITS Architecture Policy on Transit Projects. This Policy requires that all federally funded ITS projects conform to the National ITS Architecture. The National ITS Architecture is a design framework intended to assist ITS project developers to implement their projects within an integrated regional system of multi-agency ITS. The Federal requirement became effective in April 2005. TB will provide operators technical assistance in understanding the details of the
requirements and in realizing the benefits of integrated, standard compliant, deployment of transit technology projects.

**Development and Use of the ITS Standards to Support Integrated Transit ITS:** TB staff have actively participated in the USDOT-led national effort to develop transit ITS data and communication standards (Transit Communications Interface Profiles - TCIP). As described in the Innovation and Mobility Chapter of this Report, TCIP and other emerging ITS standards provide an ability to exchange data among transit ITS and operational software and equipment. Implementing standards will provide cost savings by reducing the need for expensive custom system integration tasks in the deployment of ITS within transit agencies.

**TCIP Regional Integration Project:** NYSDOT is leading a regional multi-agency effort in the downstate area to apply TCIP and other ITS standards to the development of a common regional Schedule Data Profile (SDP). This common profile, and supporting software tools, will permit a “plug and play” capability between transit operator schedule databases and software packages and ITS applications. This project will include a training and education effort on the use of the SDP with legacy schedule database systems. The Integration project will also ensure that the Schedule Data Maintenance System (SDMS), referred to previously, can be used to manage schedule and service data to meet agency operational needs, as well as providing a stable source of data for any SDP compliant ITS applications that depend on schedule data, such as AVL.