CHAPTER VI
NYSDOT TRANSIT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter describes a range of technical assistance programs and services that the NYSDOT Passenger Transportation Division 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, the Passenger Transportation Division provides technical assistance to transit operators in the area of documenting transit security best practices, developing and supporting technology applications in transit such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).

RURAL TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NYSDOT’s Passenger Transportation Division administers the Federal Transit Administration’s RTAP for New York State. This program is funded from the FTA Section 5311 Program for Small Urban and Rural Transit Operators, and provides funds for training, technical assistance, and related support for these operators. During the past year PTD staff provided technical assistance to small urban and rural transit operators across the state in the following areas:

**Driver Training**

During State Fiscal Year 2001-2002, approximately 265 persons attended driver training classes at four regional training centers in Fulton, Jamestown, Rochester, and the Town of Brookhaven. Training was provided in the following subjects: defensive driving, emergency procedures, passenger assistance/sensitivity, blood borne pathogens, and FTA substance abuse program compliance.

The majority of driver training is conducted by staff trainers at small transit providers where the regional training centers are located. PTD provides RTAP funds to train trainers at these and other sites to deliver driver training classes. During the previous year PTD distributed a list of these trainers along with their areas of expertise and contact information to all small operators statewide. A map showing the location of the trainers and the regional training sites also was included. The intent of this effort is to stimulate peer-to-peer assistance, by enabling operators needing training to contact the closest trainer and arrange for training sessions. This list and map are available on the RTAP section of PTD’s web site, at:

[www.dot.state.ny.us/pubtrans/rtap.html] (http://www.dot.state.ny.us/pubtrans/rtap.html)

PTD distributes driver training schedules to all Section 5310 and 5311 systems, and also posts the schedules on the PTD web site, at:

[www.dot.state.ny.us/pubtrans/ptevents.html] (http://www.dot.state.ny.us/pubtrans/ptevents.html)

**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. Nearly 40 small urban and rural operators from Section 5310 and 5311 agencies used scholarship funds for training activities during the past year.

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 19A instructor and re-certification courses, CPR classes, and management training courses. Scholarship funds are also used by several operators to attend training conferences, including the New York Public Transit Association and the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) Expo.

RTAP scholarship application forms are available for downloading on PTD’s web site, under the “RTAP Scholarship” section.

**Rural and Specialized Transit Conference**

PTD hosted the annual Rural & Specialized Transit Conference in April 2002 in Syracuse. The conference was once again a success, attracting over 130 attendees. Session topics included insurance issues for small transit operators, challenging behaviors in passengers...
with disabilities, transit marketing, driver recruitment and retention, and NYSDOT’s safety and security efforts. One of the highlights of the conference was a transit system logo contest that was held in conjunction with the marketing session. More than 20 small transit operators entered the contest, and a team of judges selected the winning contestants, who will receive technical assistance in areas such as logo design, schedule layout and reproduction. This represents the first phase of a new PTD initiative to assist small operators in marketing their transit services. The Rural & Specialized Transit Conference continues to be one of the most effective products of New York State’s RTAP program.

Cooperative Activities with the New York Public Transit Association

PTD continues to work with the New York Public Transit Association in providing assistance to small transit operators around the state. RTAP-related news is now disseminated quarterly in the NYPTA publication In Transit. “Rural and Specialized Transportation News”, which first appeared in the spring 2002 edition, provides an update of RTAP activities and includes a list of upcoming training events. In addition, small transit systems are featured in the “Small System Spotlight”, which highlights a different operator in each issue. In Transit reaches a large audience which includes virtually the entire public transit industry in New York State as well as several national transit organizations.

During the past year PTD and NYPTA assessed the level of interest around the state for a professional transit manager certification program. Based on the response, we have determined to bring the Certified Community Transit Manager program, developed by CTAA, to New York in early 2003. Certification consists of an assessment of training and experience, as well as a passing grade on a written examination. CTAA offers a two-day training class to prepare for the examination, which we will offer along with the examination itself.

PTD will continue to coordinate with NYPTA on training and technical assistance for our small operators. Several members of the RTAP Advisory Committee also serve on the NYPTA Small Operators Committee, which will ensure continued open communication.

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 previous year PTD’s substance abuse program oversight consultant completed compliance reviews for all Section 5311 operators statewide. This included site visits (in some cases follow-up visits) to all Section 5311 operators, safety sensitive sub-contractors, collection sites and other service agents when available. Service agents include: Breath Alcohol Technicians (BAT’s), Medical Review Officers (MRO’s) Screen Testing Technicians (STT’s) and Third Party Administrators (TPA’s). The qualifications and procedures of all service agents were reviewed by phone survey when not available during the site visit. The consultant also reviewed all substance abuse program policies and assisted the operators and service agents in bringing their policies and programs into compliance. During the coming year, the consultant will complete work on the initial contract and continue to help the operators in making both their policies and testing programs fully compliant with the FTA regulations.

PTD also assisted our Section 5311 operators by procuring substance abuse program training materials (both the 60/60 supervisory training and driver alerts) and distributing these to operators.

Mid-Atlantic Regional RTAP Group

New York continues to serve as an active member of the Mid-Atlantic Regional RTAP Group. In March 2002, the group hosted the second annual Software Expo in Hershey, PA. The Expo attracted approximately 100 transit operators from throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, as well as representatives from 12 software vendors. Expo participants were able to meet one-on-one with the vendors for detailed demonstrations of the various products, with an emphasis on scheduling and dispatching software. A product of the first Software Expo held in 2001 was a written software guide designed to assist transit operators in determining their software needs. The software guide is available for downloading from the Mid-Atlantic RTAP web site.

During the past year MARG offered two sessions of the Management and Productivity Skills (MAPS) workshop. MAPS was held in Leesburg, Virginia in
January and in Binghamton in July. The Binghamton session attracted approximately 25 transit supervisors and managers from New York and Pennsylvania. MAPS continues to be in significant demand among New York’s small operators, particularly the Section 5310 human service providers. This well-received course will continue to be offered at least 1-2 times annually at different sites around the region.

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

PTD 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 PTD web site.

Assistance is also provided by phone/fax/e-mail requests. PTD receives numerous such requests each year. During the past year the national RTAP program released two training modules, which PTD publicized and distributed to operators requesting the materials. RTAP funds are also being used to supplement transit marketing activities, which were first promoted at the 2002 Rural & Specialized Transit conference.

In other technical assistance efforts, PTD is using RTAP to fund a transit alternatives study for one of our rural counties. The study is analyzing current operations, and will make recommendations for service improvements and administration of transit operation.

Rural Marketing Initiative: In 2001 the Rural Section initiated a marketing program for the rural transit systems. The goals of the program are to enhance the image of transit, improve visibility, and produce positive growth.

The first step was the distribution of surveys to gain an understanding of the issues the systems face and to begin the process of determining what the Department can do to help rural transit systems be more productive through effective marketing. A series of round tables were then held around the State to discuss current marketing efforts, share success stories, and consider

funding and technical assistance needs. The next steps are the development of a five year rural marketing program based on the findings of the surveys and roundtables. The program began with a logo contest, with the winners receiving funding for the purchase of technical or graphic design services.

PTD’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 PTD web site.

TRANSIT TECHNOLOGY AND SECURITY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

The Passenger Transportation Division has been actively involved in assisting transit operators in the areas of transit security and technology deployment.

PTD 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, PTD 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 of New York State Transit Operators. The Committee began work on researching and documenting these Best Practices in the Spring of 2002 with the intent to publish in early 2003.

**Transit Technology:**

**Providing GIS Software for Transit Systems via the Department Site License with ESRI:** PTD, 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:** PTD 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:** PTD 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 will go into effect in April of 2005. PTD 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:** PTD 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, in 2003, will be leading an 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 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.