

FTA REGION II NEWSLETTER

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FTA Administrator Challenges Transit Industry

FTA Administrator Jennifer L. Dorn, speaking at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Transportation Association in September 2002, challenged the transit industry to increase its customers. Ms. Dorn noted that increasing transit users in every market is a key objective of FTA's strategic plan.

Ms. Dorn noted that although transit use had grown 22 percent from 1996 to 2001, reports by the Mineta Transportation Institute indicate that transit's overall market share has declined since the 1970s with less than 5 percent of America riding transit on any given weekday. Ms. Dorn also noted that the recent growth in customers may have plateaued, indicated by reports of a decline in ridership in the first quarter of 2002. Ms. Dorn forewarned that "if we can't convince a growing base of automobile riders to take advantage of the convenience of transit, congestion will strangle our metropolitan areas and hurt America's productivity."

Ms. Dorn noted that a key challenge is to "change America's mind about transit," and make sure that transit is a reliable and appealing choice in every community. She cited techniques used by successful transit agencies to increase their ridership base. These techniques included making business decisions, route decisions, and service decisions based upon customer feedbacks that transit has a stake in creating intermodal transporters, and building partnerships with both the private for-profit and non-profit sectors.

Ocean County Receives Administrator's Award

The Department of Transportation and Vehicles Services (DTVS) of Ocean County, New Jersey received the Federal Transit Administrator's Award at the 15th Annual Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation held in Huron, Ohio on October 27-30, 2002. The award was granted for the outstanding service provided by Ocean Ride, the Department's transit system, and the commitment and dedication of the Ocean Ride staff to the community.

Ocean County has been providing rural and elderly and handicapped transportation services to its residents for 25 years. Ocean Ride operates 15 modified fixed routes, an advanced reservation system called Reserve A Ride, a Disabled Employment Transportation Service, and service that provides veterans access to Veterans Administration facilities

In 1998, the county completed a comprehensive evaluation of their transportation system, laid out a five-year implementation program, and created the Department of Transportation and Vehicle Services. This afforded the County the opportunity to centralize operations and maintenance services under one management team, implement a commuter assisted routing, scheduling and automated call center, develop a five year capital and facility improvement program and recognize administration and human management. These changes have, with a great enthusiasm from the staff, increased productivity and improved Ocean Ride's response time in servicing its customers.

Ocean county transportation has grown from a four vehicle operation in 1977 to 67 vehicles today. They have replaced their aging fleet; 95 percent of the current fleet is three years old or less. A new Southern satellite facility was created to improve operations and reduce deadheading.

The expanded and improved services have led to an increase in ridership from 185,000 trips in 1977 to 320,000 trips in 2001. The DTVS staff continues to work diligently to improve their service and output.

Fiscal Year 2002 Grants

Federal Fiscal Year 2002 (FFY2002) was a very productive year for FTA Region II. FTA Region II obligated 70 grants in FFY2002, awarding \$1.7 billion in funds. The breakdown of grants awarded by program section and amount are as follows:

Sec 5307 (25 grants) - \$907 million
Sec 5308 (3) - \$10 million
Sec 5309 (27) - \$697 million
Sec 5310 (3) - \$8 million
Sec 5311 (3) - \$16 million
Ferry Boat Discretionary
(1) - \$9 million
Job Access & Reverse Commute
(4) - \$2 million
Over-the-Road Bus (9) - \$1 million
Security/Emergency Preparedness
(5) - \$309,000

Key projects provided funding in FFY2002 included the Hudson Bergen Light Rail Transit and Newark Elizabeth Rail Link lines, Long Island Rail Road East Side Access, West Midtown Manhattan Ferry Terminal, Utica Union Station, (continued on next page)

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Buffalo Intermodal Center, a new catenary system on the New Haven Line, emergency preparedness drills and new buses, including clean fuel ones, for many of our grantees.

FTA Region II awarded slightly more funds in FFY2002 than in FFY2001 with approximately the same number of grants. More consolidated grants were awarded during the fiscal year offsetting an increase in special program grants. FTA Region II encourages grantees to continue to consolidate their application requests in FFY2003.

FY2002 Triennial Review Findings

The Triennial Reviews conducted during FY2002 indicate that four areas of concerns remain prominent - maintenance, procurement and technical and the Americans with Disabilities Act. These areas continue to receive the most findings.

The FTA Triennial Reviews continue to find that many grantees and the contractors they are overseeing are not sufficiently following their maintenance plans for maintaining their FTA-funded vehicles and facilities. More diligence is needed in this area.

Procurement deficiencies were noted in five of the six reviews in which that area was covered. Many of them involved not having the correct Federally required clauses. FTA grantees are encouraged to include provisions in their procurement procedures that cover reviewing the most current FTA Master Agreement (available on the FTA Website) when developing new procurements. FTA Region 2 is reemphasizing that grantees are accountable for purchases that are procured off state contracts. There should be evidence in grantee files that the grantee has reviewed the state procurements to ensure that all the Federal requirements have been met and the Buy America preaward and post delivery audits have occurred.

There were two sets of finding related to the Technical area. One set involved improvements that still need to occur in the oversight of contractors. This is a recurring issue and is a concern to FTA. The other set of issues regards grantee reporting. The Triennial Reviews are finding that FTA grantees need to report their unliquidated obligations on the quarterly Financial Status Reports. Although grantees are doing a better job of entering quarterly milestone reports in TEAM-Web, concerns about the timeliness and quality of the reports remain. The Triennial Reviewers and the FTA program managers will be focusing on these areas in the upcoming year.

Some grantees continue to have misunderstandings regarding ADA paratransit service operations and the tracking of denials. The service days and hours of an ADA paratransit system must be for the same days and hours as for each fixed route to which it correlates. There must be a system for taking next day reservations if the office is closed on the day prior to service. In regard to tracking denials, an ADA paratransit service request denial must be recorded if service can not be provided within the hour for which it is originally requested, even if the customer can be convinced to take the service later in the day.

Another issue area pertains to periodic Title VI service equity evaluations for grantees having service areas with populations greater than 200,000. The Title VI rules require that these periodic evaluations occur for five service criteria groups. These evaluations are kept by the agency for their use in making service adjustments and, unlike the triennial Title VI Updates, are not submitted to FTA. The information should be available for the Triennial Reviewers during the site visits.

On a positive note, no findings were made during FY2002 related to the Drug and Alcohol Programs.

Grantees appear to have stronger management of their policies and procedures.

New Additions to Region 2

The FTA Region 2 family has grown with the recent addition of two new engineers, Peter Hankovszky and John Susino. Peter comes to the Region 2 office from Fluor Daniel where he provided project oversight to Region 2 for many MTA New York City Transit projects. Peter also was employed at STV working on major capital investment projects and improvements to existing rail systems. He has a B.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Connecticut and a Masters of Engineering from the City University of New York.

John Susino comes to the Region 2 Office from MTA Long Island Bus where he served as Manager of Engineering, Programs and Operations. He has extensive experience in the management of transportation projects. Prior to being at LI Bus, John worked for the American Maritime Officers Union and the Electrical Boat Division of General Dynamics. John has a Bachelors of Engineering, Marine Engineering, and Nuclear Science and Engineering.

FFY2003 Reviews

The following FTA reviews are currently planned for FFY2003:

Planning:

Triennial Reviews

NJ Transit

Broome County

Capital District TA

Town of Huntington

Niagara Frontier TA

Orange County

Rochester-Genesee RTA

Rockland County

Tompkins County

Procurement Reviews

MTA

MTA Long Island Rail Road

MTA Metro-North Railroad

