

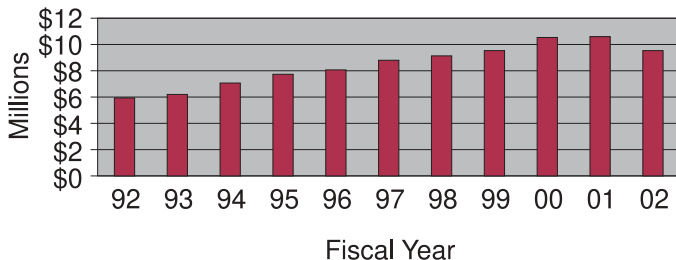
CONNECTIONS

OFFICE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT NEWSLETTER • SUMMER 2001



State Transit Assistance reduced for FY2002

State Transit Assistance



By Kay Thede

State Transit Assistance (STA) for Iowa's 35 public transit systems is estimated to be approximately \$1.5 million less than projected in early January. The fund took a hit from two sides: the Iowa Legislature reduced the amount by \$659,820 to help meet state budget shortfalls, and use tax projections have dropped due to fewer vehicles being sold.

State transit assistance funds are generated from one-twentieth of the first four cents of the state's vehicle use tax, in the form of a standing appropriation. Because the transit funds flow through the general fund before the Iowa Department of Transportation distributes them to the transit systems, the fund became part of the 6 percent reduction realized by most General Fund programs. The transit fund reduction, part of House File 755 adopted in the 2001 Legislature, is a reduction for FY2002 only.

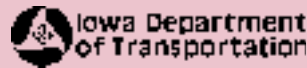
STA projections for FY2002 declined from \$10.9 in January to \$10.1 in May. The use tax had been steadily increasing since 1992, but began the downward trend during FY2001. The projections for FY2002 reduce the STA to less than the 1999 levels. Monthly receipts show no sign of the trend reversing soon.

Transit's role in I-235 reconstruction

By J.P. Golinvaux

In 2002 the Iowa Department of Transportation will commence reconstructing Interstate 235 (I-235), the freeway that serves the Des Moines metropolitan area. "The reconstruction work is scheduled to last for five years, starting in 2002 and ending in 2006," said Martin Sankey, I-235 project manager for the Iowa DOT. Significant traffic congestion is expected throughout this period. We felt it may be of interest to our readers that several transit initiatives are under consideration as ways of minimizing congestion and addressing traffic issues associated with this major project.

I-235 construction, see page 5



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Director's Column

By Peggi Knight



- Developed the Student Transportation Administrative Rules in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Public Transit Association and the Iowa Pupil Transportation Association. Efforts are in place to encour-

The Office of Public Transit (OPT) was reestablished during the Iowa DOT reorganization in March 2000. This has enhanced communications among the DOT employees who have been dedicated to transit for many years, and has allowed them to again provide more unified support to the public transit industry. I joined the Office in late July 2000 and will soon have been with the Office of Public Transit for a full year. This would, therefore, be an appropriate time to review the events of the previous year, and share with you some of our goals for the coming year.

Previous Year

Coordination

- Reestablished Statewide Transportation Coordination Advisory Council (See article in Spring 2001 Connections, page 4).

age the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to adopt these rules in place of the current Head Start rules. (See Page 10)

- Worked with transit regions to develop new vehicle signage in response to FTA guidance. (See page 4)

Communication

- Held regional meetings with transit agencies.
- Published Connections newsletters (electronic version available on our Web site, iatransit.com).
- Reestablished more consistent transit updates via E-mail.
- Entered into a contract to establish a new interactive Web site (iatransit.com).

The new designs will not be posted until this fall; however, this link will currently take you to our existing site. Please save this location and give us your feedback when the new design appears this fall.

Customer Service

- Reorganized the Office of Public Transit based on input from transit agencies and FTA. (Spring 2001 Connections, page 1)
- Monthly State Transit Assistance (STA) payments and Electronic Funds Transfers (EFT) – STA payments are now being made monthly instead of quarterly, and we are offering EFT. Currently there are 22 transit systems participating.
- Streamlined agreement process;

- Signing agreements prior to sending them from OPT to the transit agencies designated signatory to reduce the amount of handling required on both ends of the process; and
- Drafting agreements immediately after grant approval to minimize delays in the process.

Advocacy

- Applied for, and received approval of, a \$1.9 million ITS grant from FHWA. (Spring 2001 Connections, page 1)
- Participated in APTA Legislative visit to Washington, D.C., and Iowa Transit Legislative Day.

Compliance

- Participated in and responded to the state management review regarding Iowa's compliance with Federal Transit Administration rules.

Unfortunately, not everything that has happened over the last year has had a positive impact on transit. The significant losses in STA are outlined in Kay Thede's article on page 1. At the state level, budget cuts have led to the elimination of the vacant position in our office, and out-of-state travel has been cut. Despite these setbacks, the Office of Public Transit will continue forward with the following agenda.

Future

Coordination

- Develop vehicle signage guidance in response to FTA guidelines.
- Establish greater cooperation/coordination with IPTA committees.

Communication

- Continue to work with the Web page consultant on development of the new design.

Customer Service

- Update Transit Manager's Handbook.
- Continue to analyze processes used by the Office of Public Transit to make improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness.
- Develop training programs in cooperation with IPTA training committee.

Director's Column, see next page

**Director's Column,
from previous page**

Advocacy

- Develop Transit Marketing/ Advocacy Plan — The Iowa Public Transit Association is working on an image campaign, and we have committed to work together to make our total effort as effective as possible.
- Move forward with ITS Plan development.
- Make presentations to transit policy boards, chambers of commerce, etc.
- Coordinate with IPTA, CTA and APTA to ensure a commitment to transit in TEA-21 reauthorization — The Public Transit Management System (PTMS) provides a process for analyzing the capital needs for bus replacement. In FY2001, PTMS included a list of 256 vehicles that were programmed for replacement, totaling \$21 million dollars. We were only able to replace 64 vehicles, even after transferring a portion of the federal transit operating assistance funding to supplement the Congressional earmark for statewide capital. We need to emphasize in the federal reauthorization process that it is imperative to more effectively meet this need. If this trend continues, we will continue to add buses to the list without replacing an equal number of buses, and the backlog will continue to grow. (See Spring 2000 Connections, page 3)

Compliance

- Perform compliance reviews of transit agencies to assist them in understanding federal rules.

Obviously, this is not an all-inclusive list of the efforts of the office, or of our plans for the future; however, I wanted to bring you up to date on where we have been and where we are headed. Thanks to all of you who have worked with us over the last year, and especially to members of the Office of Public Transit for their dedication and commitment to making these things happen.

I would also like to take this opportunity to offer my congratulations to Karlyne von Krog on her retirement, the Governor's Shining Star award, and winning the Urban Transit System of the Year Award (see articles on pages 6 and 7). Well done. What a way to make an exit!

IPTA hears update on ADA issues

By Peter Hallock

Cheryl Hershey, from the Federal Transit Administration's Washington, D.C., Office of Civil Rights, spoke at the Iowa Public Transit Training Conference held June 6-9 in Sioux City. Hershey reviewed the general requirements for transportation providers under the Americans with Disabilities Act. She also discussed the growing number of legal actions taken by both the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) against local agencies that have failed to comply with the ADA rules.

While she stated that the rules require full compliance with the various standards set forth in the rules, Hershey also indicated the courts have taken into consideration local officials' demonstrated efforts to reach full compliance. She pointed out it has been agencies which have consciously decided to aim for less than full compliance that have, to date, been the primary targets of legal action.

Hershey noted that most investigations begin as a result of a public complaint to either FTA or DOJ. FTA will investigate the complaint and, if they find violations but no flagrantly willful noncompliance, will try to work with the local provider to reach compliance before resorting to legal action. She indicated it is also possible for a transportation provider to voluntarily request an assessment of their efforts, and her office can provide advice and assistance on questions that may come up in trying to meet the requirements.

The Iowa Department of Transportation's Office of Public Transit and Iowa Public Transit Association jointly sponsored this training conference. Funding for this conference was provided under FTA's Rural Transit Assistance Program.

New look, same great service

By Donna Johnson

After more than a quarter century, two regional transit systems have taken on new names and appearances.

Peoplerides (formerly Region 6 Transit Services) is in

the process of changing the signs on its buses and other vehicles to reflect its new name. "Our goal is to encourage even more people to take advantage of our low-cost

transportation services," said Marty Wymore, Peoplerides executive director.

Peoplerides serves the counties of Hardin, Marshall, Poweshiek and Tama. Residents in the four-county area can ride or obtain service information by calling 1-888-616-4298. All Peoplerides services are wheelchair accessible.

Wymore encourages anyone in need of transportation in their service area to give Peoplerides a call. "Peoplerides is committed to meeting the needs of the entire population in their service area," says Wymore.

Heart of Iowa Regional Transit Agency (HIRTA) is also sporting a new name, color and striping on its vehicle fleet. HIRTA's board of directors unanimously voted to adopt a new look to market their services to all members of the general public. HIRTA contracts for service with individual service providers in the counties of Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Madison, Marion, Story and Warren. Blue, reflective striping with large, six-inch, white lettering prominently identifying HIRTA Public Transit is displayed on both sides of each vehicle. "Contractors are continuing to get more calls for transportation services each week. The new signage has brought greater awareness to all members of the public that this service is there for them and not client specific," said Jeanette



New look, see page 11

I-235 construction, from page 1

Traffic congestion has been addressed with an assortment of tools that have come to be known collectively as “transportation demand management” (TDM). In particular, TDM refers to strategies that aim to alleviate congestion by: 1) reducing demand for personal vehicle travel; 2) shifting personal vehicle trips away from congested corridors; and 3) shifting trips to high occupancy vehicles. More specifically, the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has adopted a congestion strategy that aims to reduce single occupancy vehicle trips to work by 10 percent. Known as TDM-10, this voluntary program’s goal is to reduce trips, and hence congestion. One means of accomplishing this goal is to increase the percent of trips taken in high occupancy vehicles.

Sverdrup Civil, who is serving the Iowa DOT as consultants, has subcontracted to Parsons Brinckerhoff, Quade & Douglas (PB) to, in part, assess transit initiatives that should be implemented to reduce congestion during reconstruction of I-235. One of the encouraging findings that Bryan Porter of PB has shared is that “...the structure is in place.” Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) has already established 10 service elements that constitute a foundation for building “...an effective TDM program.” Elements of MTA’s service that PB has identified as transit initiatives that are critical to the success of congestion management efforts include:

- local routes that provide thorough coverage of the core area;
- express and commuter services (including park and ride and a reverse commute route);
- a downtown transit mall that focuses attention on transit;
- an extensive system of downtown shuttles that provides midday mobility for bus and vanpool riders;
- a system of transit passes with extensive third-party sales locations;
- a well-developed program of employer incentives for transit and vanpool use, referred to by MTA as its Employer Support Program;
- a “guaranteed ride home” program for vanpool and commuter bus riders;
- a well established vanpooling program, known as Central Iowa Rideshare, that serves area commuters;
- automated vehicle location (AVL) Intelligent Transportation technology is partially in place; and
- fare payment “swipe card” technology, that is a payment option on Link services, could be expanded system wide to reduce boarding times.

These elements of MTA’s service will have a key role in reducing I-235 reconstruction traffic congestion because:

- transit service is in place and, relative to roads, has more underused capacity; and

- shifting work trips to transit actually removes vehicles from roads, while other measures under consideration may simply relocate congestion.

Accordingly, MTA’s management has undertaken a system redesign project aimed at determining how to best reconfigure its services. This project sought answers about how to improve transit service generally and, more specifically, what activities would best improve upon the elements identified by PB as being critical to the success of congestion mitigation strategies. Three of the 19 area-wide transit service improvements identified have been determined to be both feasible and to hold real potential for easing traffic congestion related to I-235 reconstruction. They are:

- improve on express services in suburbs currently receiving service, and expand to additional suburbs;
- introduce high frequency cross-town service on at least the University Avenue corridor to reduce travel time and improve connectivity; and
- introduce shuttle services to park-and-ride centers.

In addition to these fixed-route service improvements, other transit measures that are viewed as essential to the success of TDM-10 strategies are:

- expanding and improving employer support for, and expanding the fleet of, Central Iowa Rideshare;

- fostering expanded and intensified employer participation in MTA’s Employer Support Program, in which employers cover all or part of employee transit pass or vanpool fares; and
- investigating implementation of “bus priority corridor” measures to improve the overall people-carrying capacity of certain streets (e.g., automated vehicle location hardware compatible with traffic signal controllers, bus priority at traffic signals through extended green, bus turnouts, and relocation of bus stops to the far side of selected intersections).

“Recent investments by the MTA to upgrade its fixed-route and vanpool fleets have been made mindful of these TDM-10 strategies, and the DOT’s commitment to develop multimodal alternatives has been a key to getting the community focused on this issue,” said K. Stephen Spade, general manager, Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Authority. “However, additional federal, state and local funding is critical to the successful implementation of the TDM-10 Plan if stakeholders are to reach their goal of reducing vehicle trips by at least 2,200 trips per hour. Along with the need for additional funding, our success will almost certainly hinge on the partnering between local employers, service providers and other governmental agencies with MTA to implement appropriate transit initiatives,” Spade added.

System of the Year Awards

By Donna Johnson

The Iowa Department of Transportation honored Marshalltown Municipal Transit and East Central Iowa Transit for their accomplishments during the 2000 fiscal year, which ended June 30, 2000.

Marshalltown Municipal Transit (MMT), which provides public transit service in the city of Marshalltown, was recognized as the most improved urban transit system of the year. There are 19 urban transit systems in Iowa. East Central Iowa Transit (ECIT), which is a service of the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) based in Cedar Rapids, was acknowledged as being the most improved regional transit system of the year. ECIT contracts with individual transit providers in the counties of Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Washington, and is one of 16 regional transit systems in Iowa. The awards are based on a combination of ridership gains, and a decrease in the operational cost per ride.

MMT, headed by Karlyne von Krog, posted a 22.6 percent gain in ridership. This helped to reduce the cost per ride by 12.4 percent. MMT attributes their gain in ridership to increased service to the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as to students and plant workers. These improvements earned MMT the FY2000 "Urban Transit System of the Year" award. Remarkably, MMT has received the award three times previously, for the years of 1986, 1987 and 1992, making their fourth win a record.

Ridership in the rural areas served by ECIT increased 16.4 percent, while the cost per ride dropped 2.4 percent. Robyn Jacobson, Transit Coordinator for ECIT, attributed the gains to better coordination efforts that resulted in significantly increased ridership statistics from their county service providers, coupled with reduced maintenance and administrative costs. This is the first time ECIT has been



Robyn Jacobson of East Central Iowa Transit, (right), receives the Regional Transit System of the Year Award from Iowa DOT Transit Program Administrator J.P. Golinvaux.

honored as the "Regional Transit System of the Year" by the Iowa Department of Transportation.

The awards were announced June 7, 2001, at the Iowa Public Transit Training Conference held in Sioux City. The Iowa Public Transit Association and Iowa DOT jointly sponsored this conference.

At the conference DOT officials recognized other transit agencies that had also made noteworthy improvements. These included three urban transit systems: Des Moines Metropolitan Transit Authority with an 11.4 percent increase in ridership and 2.9 percent decrease in cost per ride; Ottumwa Transit Authority with a 3.9 percent increase in ridership and 7.6 percent decrease in cost per ride; and Keyline Transit in

Dubuque with a 4.5 percent increase in ridership and 2.8 percent decrease in cost per ride. Two regional transit systems had significant increases in ridership for FY2000. North Iowa Regional Transit System (NIRTS), based in Mason City, increased its ridership by 12.9 percent. NIRTS contracts with individual transit providers in the counties of Cerro Gordo, Floyd, Franklin, Hancock, Kossuth, Mitchell, Winnebago and Worth. Mid-Iowa Development Association (MIDAS), headquartered in Fort Dodge, showed the greatest increase in ridership for all regional transit systems with a 20.9 percent increase. MIDAS provides service in Calhoun, Hamilton, Humboldt, Pocahontas, Webster and Wright counties.



Karlyne von Krog of Marshalltown Municipal Transit (right), receives the Urban Transit System of the Year Award from Iowa DOT Transit Program Administrator J.P. Golinvaux.



Karlyne von Krog's last day at the helm of Marshalltown Municipal Transit was spent inspecting this new, ramp-accessible, raised-roof minivan.

Marshalltown Municipal Transit Administrator receives Shining Star Award

By Donna Johnson

Karlyne von Krog, transit administrator of Marshalltown Municipal Transit, was recently awarded the Shining Star Award presented by the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs, Governor's Conference on Aging.

Governor Vilsack recognized von Krog for her dedication to making municipal transit services as user-friendly, dependable, and cost effective as possible for elderly residents and visitors. Shining Star Awards were presented at the 22nd Annual Governor's Conference on Aging, held in West Des Moines, May 21, 2001. Von Krog was selected for an award under the category of "Existing Services." Awards were also presented for New Services, Public and Private Resources Working Together, Ongoing Commitment, and Youth.

In her tenure as administrator for the transit services offered by the city of Marshalltown, von Krog has had an ongoing commitment to public transit; particularly notable are efforts she has made to assist veterans at the Vetran's Home to more easily access venues throughout Marshalltown.

The city of Marshalltown has a number of residential facilities that serve a large number of retirees dependent on the public transit system. Over the years, von Krog has found ways to offer more hours of service, and has encouraged intensified use of flexible or deviated fixed-route service, rather than the city's more costly paratransit (taxi type) service. Most recently, she has been attempting to increase service effectiveness by initiating a subscription

Von Krog retires

By Donna Johnson

Friday, June 15, 2001, marked the final day for Karlyne von Krog transit administrator for Marshalltown Municipal Transit. After 12 years von Krog decided to take on some new projects and try some new things. Since von Krog will have more time at home now, she plans to build a patio and remodel her basement. It won't be all work for von Krog though. Along with her annual treks to Las Vegas, new travel destinations are in her future, starting with a trip to Florida to visit a former classmate. Rumor has it she may even take up golf.

Von Krog had several noteworthy accomplishments during her tenure as transit administrator. Marshalltown Municipal Transit has had the honor of being the recipient of the Iowa Department of Transportation's "Urban System of the Year Award" twice during her administration. She was also recently selected as a recipient of the Shining Star Award by the Governor's Conference on Aging. Von Krog has done everything from organizing annual "holiday lights" tours for the community, to ensuring riders safe, convenient, responsive service. Although planning her own retirement, von Krog was earnestly working out detailed plans for refining existing service and developing a new subscription route service for members of her community right up to her last day.

von Krog's dedication to a challenging job has been remarkable. Her ongoing commitment to public transit in Iowa, and to Marshalltown in particular, is exhibited by her willingness to provide consulting services to her replacement in an effort to ensure a smooth transition in management. Iowa DOT's staff have enjoyed supporting von Krog in her endeavor to upgrade the city bus fleet, implement new projects, and improve the high quality of service Marshalltown Municipal Transit riders deserve. Good luck in your retirement Karlyne. You will be missed.

route for seniors to use for grocery shopping on specially designated days in partnership with local grocery stores.

On her watch, von Krog has seen to it that the city's buses work well, and present a safe and clean public image that is both inexpensive and easy for elderly persons to use. Marshalltown Municipal

Transit currently has six, state-of-the-art, small vehicles with a very comfortable "air ride suspension" and ramp accessibility to make boarding and alighting using a wheelchair or other mobility aid as safe and easy as possible.

Public Transit Rodeo Winners

By J.P. Golinvaux and Donna Johnson

Driving skills earned three Iowa transit vehicle operators top honors in Iowa's 15th Annual Public Transit Rodeo held in Sioux City, June 9.

Jean Dalsing of Dubuque was the winner in the competition for van operators, representing the Delaware, Dubuque and Jackson County Regional Transit Authority.

Rob Littschwager of Iowa City was the winner in the competition for small bus operators and placed third in the van competition, representing East Central Iowa Transit and its contractor Johnson County SEATS.

Paul Klimesh of Ames won the large bus competition and placed second in the small bus competition, representing Ames' CyRide.

Dalsing and Littschwager will represent Iowa in the International Paratransit Rodeo sponsored by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) at the association's annual meeting in Austin, Texas, next May. Klimesh will represent Iowa in the American Public Transit Association (APTA) Rodeo conducted in conjunction with its annual meeting in Philadelphia, Pa., this September.

Four operators that have previously been rodeo division winners repeated wins or were strong competitors again this year. Jean Dalsing repeated this year her first place finish in the 2000 and 1999 rodeos' van competition. Dalsing placed eighth in the national CTAA rodeo competition held in Salt Lake City, Utah, last May.

She had previously placed third in 1997 and won the 1996 van division statewide competition. Paul Klimesh repeated his first place finish at the 2000 and 1997 rodeos' large bus division. Klimesh has represented Iowa and Ames' CyRide at the APTA national rodeos and finished high in the ranking of national contestants. Carl Nelson posted third, fourth and fifth place finishes in the large bus division at previous state rodeos and repeated his second place finish in 2000 in this division at this year's rodeo, representing Iowa City Transit. Rob Littschwager had previously won and placed in past rodeos, representing East Central Iowa Transit.

Four rookie contestants at this year's rodeo broke into the ranks of top finishers. Ron Schneider, representing East Central Iowa Transit and its contractor Johnson County SEATS, placed second in the van competition. Terry Winningham, representing University of Iowa Cambus, tied for third place in the large bus division with Chris Wisner of Ames' CyRide. Eric Williamson, also representing CyRide, placed third in the small bus division.

The Iowa Department of Transportation and Iowa Public Transit Association jointly sponsor the annual rodeo with funding under a Federal Transit Administration program. The rodeo was held at the Western Iowa Technical Community College campus in Sioux City. The purpose of the rodeo is to

promote and provide recognition for safe driving skills by Iowa's public transit vehicle operators. At this year's rodeo, 34 operators from 17 transit systems displayed their skills. Each operator performed a series of maneuvers that represent many of the actual situations they face as they carry out their daily duties. Some of the maneuvers included were: pulling up to the curb at a bus stop closely flanked by parked cars; making left and right turns in narrow lanes that might be created by

parked cars along a route; stopping short of an obstacle; and backing into parking stalls.

Transit Manager's Dan Jensen, Sioux City Transit, and Amber Clausen, Siouxland Regional Transit, co-chaired the Transit Rodeo Planning Committee. IPTA members and representatives of the Iowa DOT, as well as other local volunteers, judged the competition.

Making rural transit count

By Peter Hallock

As we look to the next reauthorization of the federal transportation program and seek to increase the funding for rural transit programs, one of the biggest barriers is getting recognition that there even is public transit outside of urbanized areas. Part of the problem is that the National Transit Database, which is compiled from Section 15 data collected from large urban transit systems receiving funding under the Federal Transit Administration's 5307 program, does not contain any data on what goes on outside large urban areas. Nor is there really any other consistent source of data on rural transit operations. This has made it difficult to argue the case that rural transit needs an increased share of the national transit program funding.

FTA has been working with several states to try to develop a much-simplified data set for rural transit; one which would not be overly burdensome for transit operators, but would allow the inclusion of key rural transit statistics in the National Transit Database. The information collection tool is being developed to work over the Internet, with a series of templates that rural transit managers can bring up in their browser, fill in the blanks and submit. An electronic draft of the proposed data screens and definitions was shared with Iowa transit systems after the June Iowa Public Transit Association conference.

It is expected the collection process will begin in the next few months so an accurate picture of rural transit across the country can be built up and ready for the coming battles over the reauthorization bill, which will be acted on in 2003.



Flooding in eastern Iowa

By Samil Sermet

In early April flood predictions were released for Davenport calling for a near record-breaking flood. “The water came up quickly, but fortunately, sandbags were filled faster,” said Charles Lowery, Davenport CitiBus transit manager. As more and more streets were closed, it became necessary to alter the routing of the buses in the downtown area.

The ground transportation center (GTC), downtown transit center, and the offices of Davenport CitiBus, were designed to act as a floodwall to protect portions of their downtown area. The GTC did not flood because it was built

with the Mississippi river in mind; however, they were able to watch trees and trashcans float by their windows. “It was a daily struggle to keep amateur photographers, tourists and school kids off of our floodwall, which is the area the buses drive through,” said Lowery. The Mississippi River is receding now, but in April the river crested at 22.3 feet, just under the 1993 and 1965 records. In May the river delivered a second crest of 21.3 feet.

Lowery reported at the time of the flooding, “the most amusing aspect of this experience for us here in Davenport was the presentation of the flood by the media to the rest of the country. Believe it or not, we’re not hanging in the trees or sitting



on our rooftops. The flood affected the downtown area only and it wasn’t really that bad.” None of the Davenport CitiBus vehicles were reported as having received water damage during the flood. Fox News Live and CNN covered this story during the visit to Davenport by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

(Top photo) This is River Drive (literally!) in Davenport. No buses on this bus route.

(Above) Flood waters lap against the wall of the ground transportation center in Davenport. The GTC is normally two blocks from the river bank. Note the ducks in the foreground.

Iowa's student transportation rule drawing national attention

By Peter Hallock

Iowa's new rule on transporting students aboard regional transit buses has now been in place for one school year. The rule came about after the Iowa Public Transit Association asked the Iowa Legislature, during the 1999 session, to confirm and clarify the right of regional transit systems to carry student riders. The legislature did so, but also specified that the Iowa Department of Transportation should, in consultation with the Iowa Department of Education, establish administrative rules covering this practice. In drafting the rule, Iowa DOT worked with a committee that included the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Public Transit Association, and Iowa Pupil Transportation Association.

The group agreed to establish standards for driver qualification and training, vehicles, safety equipment, maintenance, and operating policies. There were minor issues that needed to be worked out in each of these areas, but the primary point of contention was over the vehicle standards. The school industry representatives mostly took the position that students could only be safely transported in a yellow school bus, while the transit community felt that transit vehicles could provide an equivalent level of safety.

After considerable discussion, it came out that—although a few Iowa transit systems were using some standard 15-passenger vans that everyone agreed were less safe—the transit systems had for many years voluntarily incorporated many school bus safety standards into their specifications for both modified vans and light-duty (body-on-van-chassis) buses. This included the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) for vehicle rollover, joint strength and fuel system integrity. Nearly all Iowa transit vehicles bought since at least 1990, and many from before that, had been built to meet these standards in addition to all the normal safety standards for commercial buses.

The primary differences then between transit buses and school buses are seating, color scheme, and features like the lights and stop arms. Iowa law prohibits vehicles other than school buses from being painted with the “school bus yellow” color scheme, and also prevents them from being equipped with stop arms and strobe lights like a school bus.

On the seating issue, the school industry representatives preferred the school bus style seating which is highly padded and closely placed. The transit community pointed out this style of seats makes it difficult to serve adult riders comfortably. They also pointed to the benefits of

training young persons in the use of seat and shoulder belts since they are standard safety equipment in all other types of vehicles and are now even starting to be required on school buses in some parts of the country. In the end, it was decided that regional public transit vehicles carrying students could either be equipped with school bus seating complying with FMVSS 222 or with standard seating, and crash protection/seatbelt systems complying with FMVSS 207, 208, 209 and 210.

One additional provision agreed to was that each new regional transit vehicle will be purchased with a rear emergency exit door. Although transit vehicles have emergency egress windows, and some also have escape roof hatches, the inclusion of rear emergency exit doors on all transit vehicles used for student transportation would be an added safety feature similar to what is used on many school buses in Iowa.

Among the other new features of the rule were requirements to add to the driver training curricula, course work which would match up with annual school bus training sessions, and to have vehicles inspected twice a year by the Iowa Department of Education to ensure compliance with the vehicle and safety equipment parts of the rule.

Now that Iowa regional transit systems have gotten through the first year under the rule with only minor friction over scheduling of inspections and definitions of compliant first aid kits, there is a real desire to see whether the Iowa model can be used in other parts of the country. Iowa DOT's Office of Public Transit staff were asked to make presentations concerning Iowa's student transportation rule at two recent national conferences for community transportation providers and for state departments of transportation. Participants in these conferences expressed considerable interest in seeing the federal rules on Head Start transportation changed to something more in line with Iowa's rule, particularly with regard to the vehicle requirements. (Head Start's current rule requires use of either school buses or “alternative vehicles” which are school buses without yellow coloring, stop arms and strobes, but with the high floors and the close-spaced school bus seating.)

2001

August

Aug. 30

Fundamental Concepts of Environmental Justice, Ames, Iowa. For more information, call Office of Systems Planning, Iowa DOT, 515-239-1630 or E-mail stephanie.hickman@dot.state.ia.us.

September and October

Sept. 11-12

Partnering for Success, Technical Assistance Grantee Conference, Des Moines, Iowa, Region VII, Federal Transit Administration. For information, contact Leon Snead 301-738-8190.

Sept. 24-27

Instructor's Course in Bus Operator Training, Des Moines, Iowa, Federal Transit Administration and Transportation Safety Institute 405-954-3682; Fax: 405-954-0367.

Sept. 26-Oct. 4

American Public Transportation Association's Annual Meeting and Bus Operators' Roadeo, Philadelphia, Pa, 202-496-4800. For information on APTA's International Bus Roadeo, contact APTA's Tom Urban at telephone 202-496-4853 or by E-mail at turban@apta.com.

November

Nov. 1-2

Iowa Public Transit Association's Mid-year Meeting, Sheraton Inn, West Des Moines, Iowa.

Nov. 10-15

National Association for Pupil Transportation Annual Conference, Nashville, Tenn., 800-989-6278.

For more detailed conference listings, see the following Web sites:

<http://www.apta.com/meetings>

<http://www.ctaa.org/calendar>

<http://www.fta.dot.gov/library/intro/calendar/cal.html>

Transit training library

Feature video

"Safe Transport of the Public Under ADA"

A good video that can be used as part of your safety and education program for drivers is "Safe Transport of the Public Under ADA." In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law. ADA promotes equal opportunities and access to persons with disabilities in five major areas: employment, public services, public accommodations, telecommunications, and transportation. For transportation, this includes both public and private.

This video covers topics such as: safe transportation with courtesy and respect; and working with passengers with mobility, communication, visual or other impairments. The program addresses some of the ADA requirements for public transportation and what passengers can expect in regard to assistance. The primary focus of this video is to remind everyone to "just ask" the rider if they need assis-

tance. They will tell you what kind of assistance, if any, is needed. It also helps viewers obtain a greater awareness of obstacles facing persons with disabilities. There are opportunities to stop the tape for discussion or practice at various intervals.

"Safe Transport of the Public Under ADA" is produced by University Research Corp. and Take One Productions for the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), Federal Transit Administration, U.S. DOT. The Office of Public Transit has a large selection of training resources available to loan at no charge to public transit systems and other passenger transportation providers. To borrow this video, or to obtain a complete listing of available training materials, call Kay Williams, Office of Public Transit, at 515-239-1875, or e-mail your request to kay.williams@dot.state.ia.us.

New look, from page 4

Scoles, executive director, HIRTA. As with Peoplerides, HIRTA's goal is to increase ridership on its current services while keeping costs low. The new, reflective striping and lettering will increase vehicle visibility and help improve the safety for public transit riders. Telephone numbers to call for bus service are also publicized on each vehicle in large numerals. Contract service providers' agency names are shown on the lower, rear sides of each vehicle in smaller lettering. To find out more about public transit in this seven-county area, you can call HIRTA at 1-877-686-0029.

Both Peoplerides and HIRTA Public Transit provide rides to places such as: work, school, medical appointments, shopping, banking, dining, or even just to visit a friend or relative.

New drug and alcohol testing rule proposed

By Donna Johnson

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recently published a notice of proposed rulemaking combining FTA's existing drug and alcohol testing regulations into a single regulation. It also incorporates guidance that FTA has issued administratively, or as a result of court rulings, since the testing programs were initially required.

The proposed rule would affect all passenger transportation providers who received funding, either directly or indirectly, from FTA. Other agencies providing passenger transportation, but not receiving FTA funding, are subject to similar rules from Federal Motor Carrier Safety

Administration (FMCSA). FTA also proposes changes to conform FTA's rule to the U.S. Department of Transportation's revised drug and alcohol testing rules promulgated at 49 CFR Part 40 and published Dec. 19, 2000. This change would make several aspects of FTA's rule more like that from FMCSA.

The FTA proposal can be found in the April 30, 2001, Federal Register. Comments received from the public can be viewed electronically at <http://dms.dot.gov/search/>. FTA expects to issue its final rule quickly so that it can go into effect Aug. 1 to coincide with the effective date for a number of new procedural

changes related to drug and alcohol testing done for all transportation providers, including those regulated by both FTA and FMCSA.

Providers who receive FTA funding should watch for FTA's final rule. The Office of Public Transit will try to get word out via our electronic "Transit Updates" as soon as the final rule is published.

All of the rules referenced here are part of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). FTA's existing rules are found at 49 CFR Part 653 and Part 654. The new FTA rule will be 49 CFR Part 655. FMCSA's existing rule is found at 49 CFR Part 382. The common procedural requirements are found at 49 CFR Part 40.

These can be found on the Internet at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/cfr-table-search.html>.

CONNECTIONS

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