Supporting the needs of Texas’ public transportation systems through statewide advocacy and education.

TTA partners with CWI Digital Systems to locate masks for Transit Agencies

The Texas Transit Association is always looking for ways to add value and support for our members. Recently, when the COVID-19 pandemic was on the rise and personal protective equipment was in short supply, the TTA partnered with Chris Ishmael of CWI Digital Systems. Chris had a supplier that he had worked with for several years and was able to acquire the masks at a very reasonable rate. What started as a gesture of goodwill on Chris’s part soon became a matter of necessity for many transit agencies. Chris could have easily marked the price of the masks up but chose to make them available to our members at his cost.

From late March through early June, CWI Digital Systems, along with help from the Texas Transit Association and the Oklahoma Transit Association will have provided nearly 500,000 masks to hospitals, fire departments, retirement homes, and transit agencies throughout Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.

TTA is grateful to have such a generous and forward-thinking Associate Member like CWI Digital Systems. If you are still having challenges locating PPE or cleaning supplies, please feel free to contact us at info@txtransit.org for assistance.

TTA is excited to share the news that Gail Lyssy has been selected as the permanent Regional Administrator for the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Region VI office.

Gail has been serving as Acting Regional Administrator since November of 2019 - and for many years has been your partner in building transit capacity, responding to emergencies such as natural disasters, and improving public transportation throughout Region VI. As the Region VI Administrator, Gail is a member of the Federal Senior Executive Service and will lead FTA’s Fort Worth, Texas office, which serves five states: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas. The Region VI team typically awards over $1 billion in grants annually to about 120 State, Tribal, and local transit agencies, and manages an active multi-year grant portfolio of approximately $5 billion.

Gail has a distinguished career and is more than prepared for her new role, with over three decades of transportation industry and leadership experience. She was appointed as the Region VI Deputy Regional Administrator in 2014, and previously served as the Region VI Director of Program Management and Oversight, leading all management and oversight activities. While at DOT, her recognition includes receiving the Secretary’s Award of Excellence for her exemplary achievements.

Congratulations Gail! TTA and it’s members are looking forward to continuing to work with you for many more years.
Jay Banasiak has served as Director for Sun Metro-City of El Paso since January 2009 and an active Board Member to the TTA for a number of years. Jay has brought more than 39 years of transit experience, ranging from general management to transit consulting, all for First Transit Inc. (formerly ATE Management and Services Company).

As Director of Sun Metro, Jay was responsible for a $73 million operating budget, which included over 633 city and contracted employees and 244 revenue vehicles—of which 100 percent are run on compressed natural gas. Ridership for FY 2018 totals about 15 million passengers, utilizing fixed route, paratransit, and streetcar services. Under Jay’s leadership, Sun Metro has received numerous accolades including the prestigious 2011 American Public Transportation Association’s “Outstanding Public Transportation System”, 2014 Texas Transit Association “Outstanding Metropolitan Transit System of the Year”, in 2014 featured cover story “Sun Metro Shines over El Paso” in Mass Transit magazine, February 2019 Mass Transit magazine cover story titled, “Sun Metro Brings the Heat to El Paso, and numerous safety awards within First Transit managed systems.

Some of Jay’s most recent accomplishments for Sun Metro have included introducing Sun Metro Go and Sun Metro Now, real-time phone apps and QR code/text systems; increasing bus shelters throughout the transit system from 103 shelters in 2010 to 536 shelters in 2018; overseeing the development of route planning, construction specifications, and PCC car rehabilitation for the $97 million dollar El Paso Streetcar; and introducing the Mesa Brio route in 2014 and the Dyer and Alameda Brio routes in 2019.

Prior to El Paso, Jay managed Wichita Transit, where he was instrumental in numerous achievements including the construction of a new operations and maintenance facility, several successful union contract negotiations, improved safety program, as well as the maximized use of federal and state grant dollars. Significant recognitions include Wichita Transit being showcased in Mass Transit magazine in 2007, being awarded the “Top Ten Most Improved Transit System in North America” by Metro magazine in 2004, as well as “Transit System of the Year” in 2004 and 2007 by the Kansas Public Transit Association, and Achievement Award by FTA in 2002 for “Zero Deficiencies in the Triennial Review”, first ever in Region VII.

Jay has been a transit consultant for over 10 years specializing as the interim general manager/troubleshooter for transit systems throughout the country. As a consultant, he managed transit systems employing 40 to 1000 employees, with operating budgets from $10 million to $100 million.

Jay started his management career in 1980 as Assistant, and then General Manager, for Greater Peoria Mass Transit System until 1987.

Jay is also a retired Lt. Colonel in the USAF/Air National Guard.

The Texas Transit Association would like to wish Jay the best of luck as he begins this next chapter of his life.
Due to ongoing concerns and uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic, TxDOT will not hold an in-person Semiannual Business Meeting for Transit Operators in Austin this July 15th, 2020.

- We ask that transit operators save the date of Wednesday, July 15 for a potential virtual meeting. We will reach out to transit agencies by email when more information is available.

**CARES Act Funding**

At its May 28 meeting, the Texas Transportation Commission will consider the Public Transportation Division’s proposal for the award and distribution of more than $74.5 million to rural transit districts and intercity bus carriers.

- The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) apportioned these funds to Texas through the federal §5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas Program based on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) to help rural transit districts in Texas prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19

**Grant Funding – Formula and Discretionary**

At its June 25 meeting, the Texas Transportation Commission will consider the Public Transportation Division’s proposal for the award and distribution of state and federal formula and discretionary program funds. If approved, this will allocate:

- FY 2021 state funds to large urban, small urban, and rural transit districts
- Second-year awards to projects selected last year in the biennial Section 5310 call for projects
- Funds to various entities that responded to this year’s biennial Coordinated Call for Projects
- FTA Section 5311 funds to rural transit districts based on vehicle miles
Implementing the New Normal
Total Decontamination and Driver Protection Systems

Creative Bus Sales has expanded its services and expertise to meet the demand of our marketplace as it adapts to the "new normal" of operating safely during and beyond COVID-19.

Total Decontamination System
We have partnered with AeroClave to bring you the latest in decontamination technology. AeroClave fogging, CIO2-based systems offer fast turn-around times and ease-of-use with the ability to ensure whole area decontamination utilizing a safe, EPA-approved disinfectant.

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Vital Oxide Disinfectant is:
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- Tested by Boeing Corporation as safe on wide range of aircraft interior equipment and surfaces

Driver Protection System
To further enhance protection in the bus/transit industry, Creative Bus Sales is also manufacturing custom driver guards designed to allow quick installation and minimal vehicle modification. Our unique designs provide the best protection based on your vehicle type and chassis. These solutions are easily segmented to accommodate any existing vehicle components or customized for specific applications. Manufactured with quality material, the polycarbonate side barriers are AS-4 certified, meeting the FMVSS 205 and the textile barriers meet the FMVSS 302.

Rotating Hinge Design
Vehicle Type: Single-Cab Door Cutaways with Front Passenger Entry
Chassis: E-Series, F-Series

Sliding Hinge Design
Vehicle Type: Dual-Cab Door Cutaways
Chassis: E-Series, F-Series

Textile Design
Vehicle Type: Minivans, Full-Size Vans, Dual-Cab Door Cutaways
Chassis: Ford Transit, Dodge ProMaster, E-Series, F-Series

Explore Kits and Components
Recognizing new opportunities to serve the public during this pandemic, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) has partnered with cities and other organizations to deliver meals, care packages, groceries and medications to vulnerable North Texans.

As shelter-in-place orders took effect across the region, DART continued to provide transportation to essential workers and riders who rely on transit to access grocery stores, pharmacies and other critical needs. In partnership with the Dallas and Garland independent school districts (DISD), the agency makes weekly food deliveries to assist children and their families.

DART also has worked with cities and faith-based organizations to make sure that area seniors get food and other essential items. The agency partnered with the city of Dallas to deliver care packages to participants in the Dallas Park and Recreation Active Senior Adult Program, a free program for citizens 60 and over. DART vehicles supply 150 to 200 Senior Care Packages per day, five days a week, to numerous recreation centers throughout the city. The agency provides routing logistics, drivers and vehicles; the city of Dallas delivers individual packages.

The agency embarked on a similar partnership with the Catholic Charities of Dallas. The organization’s Brady Center – a community center and food pantry primarily for seniors – temporarily shut its doors in response to the COVID-19 crisis. With only one van to serve approximately 130 seniors, the charity had a growing waiting list for its food-assistance services. DART deployed its paratransit operators and vehicles to serve an additional 50 seniors. Each Wednesday, the operators deliver a week’s worth of groceries. With a Catholic Charities staff member on board, the operators deliver the food directly to the seniors’ doorsteps.

Additionally, DART has provided free grocery pickup and delivery services to its paratransit customers, with drivers picking up groceries and delivering them directly to customers.
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Capital Metro and AISD team up to bring Wi-Fi to Central Texas students. Capital Metro has partnered with AISD to provide Wi-Fi hotspots to students living in neighborhoods with the greatest need. The goal of this program is to give students internet access to work on assignments and finish homework.

AISD has been providing Wi-Fi hotspots on their school buses since early April. Every weekday, 110 district buses provide internet access to students at multiple locations from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Capital Metro is now sending MetroAccess vehicles to locations from 2 to 8 p.m. to supplement the AISD service times. MetroAccess vehicles were chosen for this program since the Wi-Fi remains accessible for eight hours after the engine is turned off. During the service times, students can access Capital Metro Wi-Fi from their school devices to work on assignments. Vehicles are placed strategically around apartment complexes in order to give students the opportunity to study from the comfort of their homes. No one is allowed on the buses in order to promote social distancing.

Capital Metro is working with AISD to offer Wi-Fi hotspots to as many areas as possible. The transit agency is also reaching out to other school districts to see if this service is needed.
VIA Metropolitan Transit and San Antonio Food Bank Unite Against Hunger; ‘VIA Cares’ partnership delivering meals and aid to those in need

VIA and the San Antonio Food Bank are partnering to help make sure home-bound residents don’t go hungry during these challenging times.

VIA operators are delivering meals and supplies prepared by Food Bank staff and volunteers to homes and distribution points throughout San Antonio, Monday through Friday beginning March 31.

Since VIA joined the Food Bank’s mission to “fight hunger and feed hope,” operators have distributed more than 650 food packages to nearly 500 locations throughout the city.

“As part of the San Antonio family, VIA mobilizes when our community is in need or in crisis to keep people moving with essential service and offer a lifeline for those who need it,” VIA President and CEO Jeffrey C. Arndt said. “The COVID-19 crisis has made access to food and other basic necessities even more challenging for everyone, not just VIA riders. Making that connection—to food or work or critical services—is how we can show we care about the community we serve.”

VIA has continued to operate transit service in a safe environment as part of its COVID-19 response that includes a fare-relief period for all VIA services through April 30, and safe capacity limits on its buses and vans to help maintain social distancing for passengers and operators.

The San Antonio Food Bank serves an estimated 60,000 individuals each week in one of the largest service areas in Texas. That was before the coronavirus shuttered hundreds of businesses and thousands of jobs, leaving many with little resources and few options.

The immense need for local food assistance became abundantly clear when 10 thousand people formed long lines and waited several hours to receive rations from the Food Bank’s popup distribution at Trader’s Village on Thursday, April 9. One million pounds of food was handed out by volunteers and City staff that day—just one of several distributions the Food Bank staged last week.

“So many are suffering and struggling in this new environment of COVID-19. Our partnership with VIA and VIAtrans will ease the hunger pains of seniors and those with disabilities by bringing grocery products and household supplies right to their doorstep. This type of innovation and partnership is San Antonio at its finest,” Eric Cooper, President/CEO of the San Antonio Food Bank said.

VIA’s collaboration with the Food Bank marks the launch of its VIA Cares Program, an extension of its effort to connect our community by organizing available resources to help make ends meet for neighbors in need. Other VIA Cares initiatives that kicked off this month focus on providing Wi-Fi access for students through a partnership with the City of San Antonio, San Antonio Housing Authority and San Antonio ISD, and matching VIA volunteers with opportunities to serve. To learn more about VIA’s crisis response, visit VIAinfo.net/covid-19.

VIA will continue to deliver food bank supplies as long as resources are available. If you are home bound and in need of food, please call the San Antonio Food Bank at (210) 431-8326 to pre-register or click the link at the Food Bank’s home page and sign up online. Learn more about the Food Bank’s mission to fight hunger at SAFoodBank.org.
TTA Welcomes Transdev as a New Associate Member!

Transdev is based near Chicago and is one of the largest private-sector operators of multiple modes of transit in North America, including bus, rail, streetcar, paratransit, and shuttle services. Transdev is committed to being the trusted partner of cities and transit authorities through quality execution and innovations in mobility. Its parent company, Transdev Group, is a leading global operator and integrator of mobility, operating in 18 countries and provides passengers every day the freedom to connect to what they care about in their cities.

www.transdevna.com
METROLift Goes the Distance to Deliver Groceries to Hundreds of Families

The generosity of Houstonians was on full display in April; and because of it, hundreds of families will not go hungry. METROLift partnered with the city of Houston, the Houston Food Bank, Walmart and Sam's Club for the Food Access Program. The program, led by the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, was launched to ensure the most vulnerable in our community are not left behind as we fight COVID-19.

60 METROLift vans and Yellow Cab minivans hit the road to make more than 600 deliveries. It was a team effort with more than two dozen METROLift employees, First Transit and Yellow Cab contractors helping with scheduling, dispatching, loading boxes of groceries and encouraging volunteers.

The deliveries included shelf-stable goods and fresh produce as well as some basic home necessities thanks to a $30,000 donation from Walmart to the Houston Food Bank.

Anyone interested in signing up, or learning more about the program can call 832-394-0814 or go to the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities website.

The Houston Food Bank is America's largest food bank in distribution, leading hunger relief in 18 southeast Texas counties.
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Display and mobile technologies have rendered the printed schedule obsolete.

By Matt Schroeder
Director of Marketing, ETA Transit Systems

The printed schedule must die. There, I said it and if feels amazing. And if you’re sitting there with your mouth agape wondering how I could blaspheme such a longtime staple of public transit; I don’t blame you. But hear me out.
The inherent problem with printed schedules is that they are set in stone; immutable and inflexible. Ultimately, they do riders a disservice by setting a one-sided expectation that’s nearly impossible to live up to. Oh, riders must do their part by showing up on time, but if the bus is early or late, they must wait.

According to ETA’s 2018 transit agency survey, 84 percent of transit agencies still list printed schedules as their primary means of communicating travel times and stops to their riders. My question is why? Printed schedules are outdated the second they are produced.

Printed schedules cost money. Lots of money to design, edit, and produce. Not to mention that the need to repeat this cycle happens every time a route is changed (62 percent of agencies makes seasonal changes to routes). It’s also well-known just how tight operating budgets are for transit operators; so, the printing of schedules represents a significant expense.

A few more statistics to underscore the obsolescence of printed schedules…
- 96 percent of Americans now own a cell phone.
- 81 percent of Americans own a smartphone
- 75 percent of Americans own a desktop or laptop computer
- 71 percent of Americans earning under $30K per year own a smartphone (that number jumps to 95 percent for incomes over $75k)
- 51.9 percent of Americans have a wearable smart device (such as a smart watch)

Source: https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/

As of 2018, 88.8 percent of transit agencies have already invested in at least one technology to track their vehicles. It seems obvious to say that if riders want to know when the next bus will arrive the answer is already in their hands. Pull up an app. Visit a website. Schedule a SMS alert. Dial in to an IVR system. Boom! There’s your schedule. Source: 2018 APTA Fact book

- 70 percent of transit agencies currently offer a mobile app
- 52 percent offer vehicle tracking websites
- 43 percent offer SMS alerts

Source: ETA Transit 2018 transit agency survey

But I can hear your objection now. What about those four percent without a phone? Or the 25 percent without a computer. For that I give you the powerful trio of GTFS, GTFS-R, and digital signage. The General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) is a data formatting standard created back in 2006 for allowing other computers, transit agencies, and connected systems to display transit information. The GTFS-R standard is a variant that provides this information in real time. If your transit agency has a modern intelligent transit system (ITS) for tracking its vehicles, odds are it can export schedule information into the GTFS format.

Once you have your schedule in GTFS, you open a world of possibilities for your agency and your riders—including sharing and displaying this information at stations on digital signage.

Once upon a time, digital signage was an expensive proposition; available only to the largest, deep-pocketed operations. However, technology and economy of scale have drastically lowered the cost of digital signage in recent years. LED, LCD, and solar-powered e-paper displays have become incredibly more affordable—and connected.

Internet, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth technology have made it easier to push schedule information directly to any connected device. Paired with the GTFS-R specification, this information is updated in real time at every stop without the need for interaction on the part of a transit dispatcher. Riders can watch the progress of any bus on an interactive map, see updated arrival predictions, and make proactive adjustments to their travel schedule.

Modern technology has rendered the need for printed schedules obsolete. My 1970’s era father—with his bushy mustache, mutton chops, and paisley polyester shirt—would jump at the chance to have real-time access to transit schedules and vehicle status.

Technology has provided new and more reliable means of communicating schedules to transit riders, and with very few exceptions, the public already has the means to interface with these new connected transit systems. Ditch the time and expense of printed schedules and use the money saved to invest in traveler information solutions that deliver accurate, real-time results.

But hey, that’s just our take.

What’s your argument for keeping printed schedules? Have you ceased production of printed schedules, but then brought them back? If so, what were the reasons?

For the entire unedited article: It’s time to bury your printed schedules six feet deep.
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Get the latest COVID-19 news and information for professional transit system managers. This information is made available to our members due to a partnership between TTA and HTG.

July 14th Meeting Canceled

Unfortunately, TTA will not hold an in-person All Member Meeting and Reception on July 14th, 2020, due to the ongoing concerns and uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic.