



INDIANA DISPATCH

*A Newsletter for Indiana's
Transportation Professionals*



Issue 1, 2015

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To ensure that
this newsletter is relevant to your
needs, we would appreciate your
input. Please send us article sugges-
tions, agency news, coordination ac-
tivities, "best practices," etc.

Do you know of someone from
another agency who would like a
copy of this newsletter? Do you
want to be removed from our
mail list? Give us a call...

YOUR AGENCY'S MOST IMPORTANT ASSET IS?

There is no arguing the fact that, for the majority of rural transit agencies, the bulk of their limited operating budgets are eaten up by equipment purchases and maintenance, labor costs, and insurance. Since these are the largest expenses, it is an easy leap to believe that buses, equipment, and staff are the most valuable assets of any transit agency. While it is true that these are critical components to any successful transit organization, the most important asset for a transit agency is sometimes taken for granted and often under-valued. Without transit passengers, there is no transit agency.

Passengers are a transit system's most important asset and should be treated that way. Loyal customers can assist with building relationships for your agency in the community, can help with developing political support, and will ultimately help you fulfill your mission.

How do you, then, enlist and maintain their support? By asking for and valuing their opinions! Passenger feedback and input is a valuable resource and, when it is actively sought and used, can make the difference between a transit agency that is just getting by to one that is a vibrant, active, and responsive participant that is valued and supported by the community it serves. Successful transit agencies use passenger input to:

- ◆ To Help Determine System Vision, Goals and Objectives
- ◆ To Guide Planning Efforts
- ◆ To Aid in the Decision Making Process
- ◆ To Avoid Mistakes
- ◆ To Help Transit Management, Board, Drivers and Customer Service Agents Stay Focused

Passenger input can be collected in several ways, but usually a combination of methods is the best way to get objective, unbiased feedback.



continued on page 5



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
Driving Indiana's Economic Growth

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DRINKING?

Transit drivers tend to work odd hours and due to the nature of their job, lead sedentary life styles. A part of this lifestyle often includes consumption of caffeine to keep them alert. Many may decide to drink coffee, soft drinks, or an energy drink, which is growing more and more in popularity. The typical energy drink has three times the amount of caffeine than in other drinks, such as coffee or soft drinks. High intake of caffeine can trigger rapid heart rates, palpitations, and rises blood pressure and in severe cases, seizures, or sudden death.

Think about the caffeine that is consumed. Caffeine starts to become dangerous when one consumes more than 1 gram of the substance and it can be lethal at 10 grams. Cleveland Clinic cardiac surgeon Dr. Marc Gillinov recommends that people do not consume more than 400 to 500 milligrams of caffeine per day. The average cup of coffee has about 100 milligrams of caffeine, although a cup of Starbucks coffee contains 260 milligrams of caffeine. Dr. Gillinov states that consuming large amounts of caffeine can lead to caffeine toxicity, which can lead to irritability, hyper-aroused states, an abnormal heart beat and cardiac arrest.

A new study presented at the American Heart Association's 2013 Scientific Sessions revealed that energy drinks may increase blood pressure and change the heart's rhythm. The Food and Drug Administration has confirmed that it received five reports in the past few years suggesting that people died after drinking caffeinated energy drinks. The number of emergency department visits involving energy drinks doubled from 10,068 visits in 2007 to 20,783 in 2011.

In addition to the concern about caffeine, most energy drinks are high in sugar in the form of high fructose corn syrup and/or cane sugar. High sugar drinks are linked to obesity, tooth decay, and the increased risk of type 2 diabetes. The sugar causes blood sugar and insulin spikes, which can later result in a "crash-like" feeling. So, while your drivers may think these energy drinks are the solution to drowsiness and/or fatigue, they are actually quite the opposite.

With the normal stressors that come with the occupation, transit drivers encounter higher rates of cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and musculoskeletal disorders, increased blood pressure and higher level of stress; why add to the list?

Although there is a growing awareness of the effects of energy drinks, there are no regulations of sales. If your drivers choose to consume these drinks or other caffeine beverages, they should be aware of the amount of caffeine they ingest and the potential side effects.

Resources:

www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2012/10 Can caffeinated drinks kill you? Experts say it's possible.

www.cbsnews.com/news/energy-drinks-may-increase-blood-pressure Energy drinks may increase blood pressure, change heart's rhythm.

www.redding.com/news/2014/jun/16/dentist-in-redding-when-energy Dentist in Redding: When Energy Drinks Kill



INDOT News & Notes

We have received your Rural PMTF (Public Mass Transportation Fund) Contracts and they are currently being routed through the State's contracting process.

INDOT conducted 13 Compliance reviews during 2014, and there were only a few minor issues, which have

been addressed. In 2015, INDOT will be conducting compliance reviews for Jay, Cass, Dekalb, Fulton, Johnson, Lagrange, Madison, Marshall, Rush, and Steuben Counties as well as KIRPC, KABS SIDC, SIRPC, and Waveland.

USE OF ACCESSIBLE PARKING SPACES BY TRANSIT VEHICLES

The INDOT and RTAP offices were recently contacted regarding the use of accessible parking spaces by public transit vehicles. According to the Indiana Code (I.C.9-14-52), excerpt provided below, public transit systems are permitted to use the accessible parking spaces.

The bureau shall issue a placard to the following:

- (2) Any corporation, limited liability company, partnership, unincorporated association, and any legal successor of the corporation, limited liability company, partnership, or association, empowered by the state or a political subdivision to operate programs, including the provision of transportation, or facilities for persons with physical disabilities.

To be clear, public transit vehicles, while allowed to use designated accessible parking spaces, are required to display the accessible parking placard in the windshield of all vehicles when using these designated parking spaces. All vehicles should have these placards displayed even if accessibility stickers are displayed on the outside of the transit vehicle. Transit systems that do not have these accessible parking placards can obtain them at their local DMV license branch.



However, a best practice, which transit systems are strongly encouraged to adopt regarding this issue, is to establish and implement a policy that directs the use of accessible parking spaces by public transit drivers in the following manner: 1) Whenever possible, drivers should pull up to the entrance of a facility for passengers to safely exit the vehicle, then park the vehicle in a non-accessible parking space; or 2) Drivers may park in an accessible space while passengers safely exit the vehicle, then move to a non-accessible parking space; or 3) Drivers may park in an accessible parking space for passengers to safely exit the vehicle, and, if there is no other available parking, leave the vehicle in the accessible parking space with the accessibility placard displayed. This same methodology would apply, as appropriate, to passenger pick-ups.

Accessible parking spaces are intended for individuals with physical disabilities where such disabilities make it difficult for that individual to travel the distance from the parking lot to the entrance of the building. For some, not having this parking available will mean the difference between this individual accessing and not accessing needed services. Whenever possible, transit drivers should be encouraged to park in non-accessible parking spaces.

Remember, too, your vehicle is a moving billboard for your transit service. The image of an empty vehicle being parked in an accessible spot, although parked legally, and a fully able-bodied driver walking into the building might not be the image that you want to project to the public.

To summarize, properly placarded public transit vehicles are permitted by Indiana law to park in accessible parking spaces; however, transit systems are strongly encouraged, as a best practice, to establish and implement a clear policy for drivers to follow for the appropriate use of this parking privilege that incorporates not only the letter of the law, but its spirit. This will ensure that the transit service puts the community's and its citizens' best interests first.

If you have any questions, require clarification, or need assistance with developing a procedure on this topic, please contact the RTAP staff at (800)709-9981.

REMINDER

The annual State Rodeo will be held again in April. Watch the mail closely for the date, location, and registration information.

RTAP News & Notes

The Braun Corporation has announced Commercial DPA Lift Training webinars for interested parties to participate in on the following dates:

Apr 16, 2015 at 1:00 PM EDT **Register now!**

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6096458087751343617>

Mar 26, 2015 at 1:00 PM EDT **Register now!**

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7763930143436400385>

Feb 19, 2015 at 1:00 PM EST **Register now!**

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4750893349864620546>



Rick Jacobs with the Braun Corporation has noted in his e-mail announcement about these classes that although this is not an MSE Certification class, it does serve as an excellent tool to keep transit systems and their employee's current with information related to BraunAbility wheelchair lifts. These classes are free of charge, but you must register for the classes via the links provided above.

Follow the instructions on the website to register as soon as possible. Classes are offered only one time each month. Each class runs about two hours in length and reviews the technical features of the lifts, while also touching on the basics of maintenance and lift adjustments. This is a great way to keep your fleet in top shape. Please take advantage of this excellent opportunity!

GERI CHAIRS DEFINITION AND REQUIREMENT TO TRANSPORT

Over the last few years the Indiana RTAP office has received more and more questions regarding the requirement to transport passenger who utilize 'Geri chairs' as mobility aids. In the past it has been very difficult to obtain clear guidance on this issue, but the general consensus and guidance has been that transit systems were not required to transport passengers using this type of device. However, the *definition of a wheelchair as identified in 49 CFR Part 37.3 created the argument that these devices must be permitted. 37.3 states that a wheelchair means a mobility aid belonging to any class of three- or more-wheeled devices, usable indoors, designed or modified for and used by individuals with mobility impairments, whether operated manually or powered.*

This definition on the surface would indicate that systems are required to transport these types of devices and permitted the ongoing debate of whether or not transit providers are required to transport passengers using them.

Recently, the RTAP office was contacted again on this issue by two different transit systems looking for guidance on the use of these devices by passengers. One system was specifically looking to implement policy language to inform passengers that these devices are not considered mobility aids and, therefore, would not be transported on its vehicles. In order to respond accurately to these two requests, the RTAP staff contacted Easter Seals Project ACTION to obtain clarification and guidance specific to Geri chairs.

Ken Thompson, a Technical Assistance coordinator with Easter Seals Project ACTION, replied to this request with the following statement:



"In general, Geri chairs are not considered as a wheelchair but rather as furniture for indoor use. Casters on the chairs are for ease of moving the chair and person, but not for transport in a vehicle. Though Geri chairs may seem to be a wheeled mobility device, they are not constructed for transport use. They are more like recliners as furniture but have wheels.

Some transit agencies state that they do not transport Geri chairs in their policy."

This response and the definition of Geri chairs provides clear guidance to transit systems regarding passengers who may try to use these devices as mobility aids. It also further clarifies a transit system's ability to develop policies that clarify the system's position on transporting such devices. In an effort to ensure the safe transportation of all passengers who utilize mobility aids RTAP encourages transit systems to develop such policies and adequately inform the riding public.

If you have questions or would like further guidance on this issue, please contact the Indiana RTAP office at (800)709-9981.

YOUR AGENCY'S MOST IMPORTANT ASSET IS? *continued from page 3*

Creating a way for passengers to provide 'in the moment' feedback via on-board comment cards or surveys; monitoring complaints received by mail or phone; holding public forums; conducting telephone surveys; conducting focus groups with specific passenger groups; creating passenger driven planning workshops are all tactics that can, and should be, used to involve passengers in the daily operations of your agency. Holding regular employee meetings where customer service is a focus can also provide useful customer service information.



Once you have gathered this feedback, how is your agency going to use it to provide the best possible customer service to your passengers? You cannot just say you will provide good customer service, it must be an attitude that is woven throughout the agency and reflected in every decision you make! To do this, involvement from an equally important asset, your employees, is vital. Specific and on-going training to teach the fundamentals of excellent customer service is critical and should include:

- ◆ Effective Verbal Skills
- ◆ Effective Non-Verbal Communication
- ◆ Situational Examples
- ◆ Empathetic Handling of Situations
- ◆ How to Develop a Positive Responsive Relationship
- ◆ How to Add Value to the Service
- ◆ Making Every Interaction Positive
- ◆ Being Knowledgeable, Dependable, Reliable

By recognizing that passengers are your most important asset and focusing on creating a culture of excellent customer service in your agency with your employees, you will be well on the way to mobilizing your system's best supporters.

The Indiana RTAP staff is available to answer your questions or provide training on excellent customer service. Give them a call at (800) 709-9981.

INCOST Conference 2014 Recap

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If you missed out on the 2014 annual INCOST conference, you missed out on some great information and fun! We had 2 key note speakers. One spoke about marketing our agencies on tight budgets and gave some great tips and examples that were very easy and practical. Our next speaker presented on stress management and relieving compassion fatigue. She was able to touch on some things we all struggle with and taught us how to redirect. She also used some great examples specific to all of our missions. Our vendor room was available with a lot of great information and vendors to answer any questions and show us some great products. We also had a session with Medicaid. This year the Medicaid representative was one of the best and had some great scenarios and answered some tough questions. Aside from the normal schedule, we enjoyed some fun activities such as our wine and canvas event. This was back by popular demand and a great time was had by all. Our 2015 annual conference will be around the first of October and we hope you make time to attend. Not only do we get some quality time with our peers, INDOT staff, RTAP staff and vendors, but we all leave feeling more confident and refreshed with some great information, door prizes, and more. Stay tuned for more information. Hope to see you all again.

Laurie Paulik, Executive Director
Fulton County Council on Aging, Inc.

Who else in your agency could benefit from the Indiana Dispatch?

Route to: _____

In This Issue...

- Your Agency's Most Important Asset Is?
- Do You Know What You Are Drinking?
- INDOT News & Notes
- Use of Accessible Parking Spaces By Transit Vehicles
- RTAP News & Notes
- Geri Chairs Definition and Requirement to Transport
- INCOST Corner

For additional resources, please visit: www.rlsandassoc.com

Reminder: Check the RTAP website for the current RTAP training calendar. If you would like to send drivers to one of the trainings, please RSVP a list of your drivers to Megan Lawson at mlawson@indianartap.com.

CALENDAR

February:

2/14/2015

Valentine's Day

2/16/2015

Presidents' Day



March:

3/8/2015

Daylight Saving Time Starts

3/20/2015

Spring Begins

April:

4/5/2015

Easter Sunday

