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The Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) was initiated in 1986 by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to provide resources, training and technical assistance to rural transit providers. The Missouri RTAP Center is located at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T) in Rolla. Since April 2012, Missouri S&T has been contracted by MoDOT to manage the RTAP program.



National RTAP is a program of the Federal Transit Administration dedicated to

creating rural transit solutions through technical assistance, partner collaboration and FREE training.

LETTER FROM THE MANAGER



Dr. Heath Pickerill Missouri RTAP Manager

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DEAR TRANSIT FRIENDS,

As many of you know, Doreen Harkins retired this spring after 22 years of service on the Missouri S&T campus. We honored Doreen at a retirement reception on April 28 at Sybill's Restaurant in St. James. We were delighted that her family and so many of her friends and former colleagues could attend. In addition, Doreen had a very special guest – her 93-year-old father drove from Pennsylvania to surprise her. See the photos of the reception.

Upon Doreen's retirement, we welcomed the newest member of our team, Pat Diaku. I am excited that Pat has joined us and will be working closely with the rural transit providers we serve. She will be responsible for verifying and processing payments for the RTAP Scholarship Reimbursement Program. She will also collect class rosters from the transit agencies, create certificates in the RTAP training database, and coordinate other specialized training requests for rural transit agencies. Pat has settled into her new role and has the accounting and reimbursement processes mastered. Pat holds a bachelor's degree in business management from the University of Sunderland, United Kingdom and is currently pursuing her master's degree in project management at Missouri State University, Springfield.

For any assistance related to RTAP training, Scholarship Reimbursement requests, or other questions, please call the same number as before (573) 341-6155 and Pat will be eager to help you. You can also email her at diakup@mst.edu. I am excited to have Pat as part of the RTAP team and look forward to all of you making her feel welcome. Please reach out to me with other questions at (573) 341-7637 or pickerillh@mst.edu.

Best wishes,

Heath Pickerill , Missouri RTAP Manager

To the right: Pictured with Doreen are her father, son, and granddaughter.







Welcome Pat!!

s many of you know, Doreen Harkins retired on April 29 after 22 years of service on the Missouri S&T campus. I am excited to introduce you all to her replacement, Pat Diaku! Pat started on April 10 and had the opportunity to train with Doreen for three weeks. Pat has settled into her new role and has the accounting and reimbursement processes mastered. Her time will be split between the RTAP and LTAP programs where she will carry out several roles. She will be responsible for the accounting and payment of the RTAP and LTAP instructors as well as verifying and processing payments for the RTAP Scholarship Reimbursement Program. She will also collect class rosters from the transit agencies, create certificates in the RTAP training database, and coordinate other specialized training requests for the rural transit agencies.

Pat holds a bachelor's degree in Business Management from the University of Sunderland, United Kingdom

and is currently pursuing her master's degree in Project Management at Missouri State University, Springfield. Pat recently relocated to the United States from her home country of Nigeria where she worked in several administrative and project management roles where she was involved in streamlining processes and building teams.

For any assistance related to RTAP training, Scholarship Reimbursement requests, or other questions, please call the same number as before (573) 341-6155 and Pat will be eager to help you. You can also email her at diakup@mst. edu. I am excited to have Pat as part of the RTAP team and look forward to all of you making her feel welcome. Please reach out to me with other questions at (573) 341-7637 or pickerillh@mst.edu.



WASHINGTON – As part of continuing efforts to strengthen safety for both frontline transit workers and riders across the country, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) today proposed an updated version of the National Public Transportation Safety Plan.

Reauthorized under President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the plan creates a blueprint for transit agencies to adopt stronger safety measures. The draft of the updated safety plan was published today in the Federal Register for a 60-day comment period. FTA encourages the public to submit comments on the proposed changes.

"Safety remains our top priority, and this updated National Public Transportation Safety Program will help make a safe transportation option even safer," said Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg. "This updated guidance incorporates new requirements in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and we look forward to working closely with transit agencies across the country on further improving safety for workers and riders."

The National Public Transportation Safety Plan is FTA's primary guidance document to improve transit safety performance on all federally supported public transportation systems and includes best practices, tools, technical assistance, voluntary standards, and other resources. FTA's proposed updates align with the U.S. Department of Transportation's goal to make our transportation systems safer for all people. The proposed updates would replace the original plan published in January 2017.

"As millions of Americans take transit to jobs, schools, and other daily activities, we must continue to ensure safety

remains the top priority," said FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez. "These proposed updates enhance FTA's safety framework, as future safety-related rules, regulations, and guidance will be informed by the National Public Transportation Safety Plan."

The National Public Transportation Safety Plan lays out a performance-based approach to reduce injuries and fatalities on transit systems under FTA's safety jurisdiction. This plan also supports the Department's long-term goal of reaching zero fatalities on America's roadways as part of the Department's National Roadway Safety Strategy by adding safety performance criteria for vehicular collisions and providing voluntary standards for bus transit.

In the updated version of the National Public
Transportation Safety Plan, FTA proposes several
performance measures, including strategies to reduce
the incidents and rates of vehicle collisions, transit worker
injuries and fatalities, and transit worker assaults. FTA
also proposes new performance measures for Public
Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) risk reduction
programs, which will be used by joint labor-management
safety committees to set targets and assess the
effectiveness of safety mitigation strategies.

FTA also proposes new practices for transit agencies to ensure public and personnel safety during an emergency.

The National Public Transportation Safety Plan is now open for public comment in the Federal Register for a 60-day comment period, concluding on July 31, 2023.

 $\frac{transit.dot.gov/about/news/federal-transit-administration-asks-comment-proposed-updates-national-public}{}$



COMMENTARY | An innovative partnership gives residents of northwest Washington state a single fare-payment option they can use on public transit to cross county lines for work, medical appointments or leisure.

Most major American cities tend to be serviced by large public transportation agencies that provide mobility for all of their residents. Large-scale transit is achievable in urban metro areas because of mixed-use residential and commercial development, dense urban planning and city infrastructure that favors car-alternative transportation methods.

In contrast, outer-urban areas are automobile-oriented. Low-density housing and streets laid out in curving patterns make it difficult to connect rural roads to larger interstates and service roads. The unique design of these areas impacts access to public transportation for residents living outside the city.

Landmass in the U.S. is mostly rural—97% of it in fact—and about 20% of the total population lives there.

For those in rural areas, an unforeseen mechanical issue with a car can be a massive obstacle to completing necessary daily tasks like getting to and from work or to the grocery store. Daily tasks aren't the only things that can get disrupted for people living outside of cities who lack transportation options.

About 9% of public transit riders in rural and small urban areas use public transit to get to the medical services they need.

The challenge rural leadership faces is coordinating across counties and city lines to guarantee public transit services reach those who need them. Any given resident may reside in one town, commute into the city for work and travel in the opposite direction for leisure. Rural residents require transit options as diverse and expansive as their daily habits are. A comprehensive transit network grants every resident the opportunity to travel freely and connects them to the destinations important to facilitate their lives.

Connecting rural Washington state residents to urban epicenters like Seattle

People across the Pacific Northwest and rural areas of the U.S. have long dealt with these transportation burdens. One example of this is rural Skagit County in northern Washington where residents have historically been unable to access the urban areas and services they need in nearby, more densely populated areas such as Mount Vernon, Seattle and Everett due to a lack of sufficient public transportation options.

However, thanks to a recent innovative partnership between the public transit agencies in Skagit and Whatcom counties, residents of northwest Washington can now cross county lines using a single fare-payment option. With the implementation of a mobility platform that enables riders to conveniently pay fares and plan trips across public and private modes, these two separate transportation authority organizations were able to create a unified experience across their respective agencies that simplifies transportation use for riders across agency service area lines.

As a result, the transportation services in the area are better structured to equitably serve communities with diverse needs. So, how can this type of partnership be implemented in other areas of the country where transportation inequality is rampant and not all residents have access to reliable, safe public transportation?

The solution centers on three key focus areas for transit agencies:

- Seamless collaboration for riders and agencies, which still allows transit agencies to operate as separate authorities.
- 2. Identification of areas with the highest need for rural-urban collaborations to fix existing transit inequities and identification of public funds available.
- 3. Selecting an expert integration partner with a future-forward mindset that has knowledge of both legacy systems and new digital technologies.

The bottom line is that urban-rural transit agency collaborations can improve access for millions.

Although transportation equity and accessibility is not a problem we're going to solve overnight, it's one of grave importance for people living in rural areas.

Brad Windler is planning and outreach supervisor at Skagit Transit.

gcn.com/cloud-infrastructure/2023/04/urban-rural-collaborations-help-eliminate-transit-deserts-and-improve-mobility-equity/385665/





PUBLIC TRANSIT NEEDS BETTER AND CHEAPER PAYMENT SYSTEMS

Improving digital payments on transit could be seen as a major green issue, Aaron Klein at the Brookings Institution suggests in a recent paper, "How Better Payment Systems Can Improve Public Transportation".

Current systems are often too slow, they are almost always too expensive in their charges for small value transactions, and their requirements are complex with different fares for seniors, students and disabled individuals.

"The existence of these numerous fare categories can present a challenge for transit agencies looking to implement open payments," he added, while citing efforts in California to provide confirmation of riders' ages so they could receive age-related discounts. Some agencies are working with local colleges to provide student discounts.

"Federal, state, and local governments have all embraced public transit to serve multiple goals of providing basic mobility, supporting equity, catalyzing economic growth, and creating a more sustainable transportation system," he writes. "...payment systems have to become more efficient and effective for low-dollar, high-volume transactions, a key characteristic of transit fare payments," he added.

A solution will probably require an open loop system so the payment method can be used for multiple types of purchases, not just transportation. Smartphone apps to store personal information such as age, enrollment at a qualifying school, or disability status would also be useful in, although complicated.

Don't expect quick progress.

Klein notes that companies supplying fare collection equipment are fairly rare in the U.S. and competition is limited.

"These factors can add years to the process of implementing open payments."

But, he writes, the federal government's infrastructure bills provide a unique opportunity for transit agencies — many still using cash fare boxes — to upgrade their ways of collecting payments.

A key goal should be getting rid of cash which is slow to collect, expensive to manage and prone to equipment breakdowns.

"Paying cash to board a bus requires extra time which adds up to slower service for all riders, vending machines that use dollar bill readers can jam, rendering them out of service and requiring repairs, while providing change in coins can tax cash storage capacity, particularly when some customers are using \$10 or \$20 bills to purchase \$2 trips."

Old systems add up to hefty costs for transit providers. He cites the experience of Greater Richmond (VA) Transit Company which collected \$7.4 million in 2019 but spent \$1.6 million to do it.

In an age when financial inclusion is a widely proclaimed goal, Klein has consistently been aware of the real financial challenges that poor people face. Offering discounts for bulk purchases of tickets rewards people with ample funds, while denying any similar benefit to riders who live on the financial edge, as he puts it. New York's MTA recently eliminated its 5% fare bonus to users who purchased or reloaded high value fare cards.

"...These benefits are likely going to riders who can afford to pre-position funds, which may be a mix of wealthier riders and heavy transit users."

The Durbin Amendment on debit adds complexity for transit systems. Poorer people are more apt to use debit cards, and the explosion of fintechs has changed the economics of interchange fees since banks with less than \$10 billion in assets can charge higher fees than larger banks.

"Many fintechs partner with smaller financial institutions creating the opportunity to earn higher debit interchange fees than if that consumer was with a larger financial institution...heavy debit users are typically lower income than heavy credit card users."

Less affluent individuals are also cautious about using bank accounts with their unpredictable high fees and penalties.

"Between 15-20% of those with bank accounts still use check cashers, money transmitters, or payday lenders for financial services as well," he writes. "About one in twelve American households rely on overdrafts frequently (defined as ten or more a year), sometimes resulting in high fees for small dollar transactions. This data illustrates that for many families, basic banking and payment services can be high cost."

The costs of banking are a reason some people use payday lenders. ... "paying \$3.50 to move \$200 instantly can make a lot of sense as opposed to dealing with a single \$35 overdraft fee."

Klein thinks the financial services sector has some potential gains from improving services to transit where it can reach people who might not be customers now.

"The benefits for the financial sector include access to the transit market in which millions of payment transactions are made each day and the potential to introduce unbanked or underbanked individuals to affordable financial products. New payment technology can make the system more accurate, faster, and easier for riders, transit providers, and third parties."

Supporting transit also ticks the increasingly popular ESG box. Citing a Department of Transportation note, Klein writes that "switching to riding public transportation is one of the most effective actions individuals can take to reduce their carbon footprint."

It is also a step to the oft-proclaimed goal of financial inclusion. "Nationwide, 60% of transit riders are non-white. Black riders represent 24% of those who use transit despite making up only 12% of the total U.S. population. Bus riders are even more likely to come from communities of color: 30% of bus riders are Black, and another 21% are Hispanic."

forbes.com/sites/tomgroenfeldt/2023/04/20/public-transit-needs-better-and-cheaper-payment-systems/?sh=2500f-d6eafe3





WHAT'S NEW FROM NATIONAL RTAP?

There's always something new at National RTAP. And there's always something being updated too!

Here are a few of our newest resources to help your transit agency's operations. We're giving our Missouri readers a sneak peak of some of the new resources that we've recently rolled out.

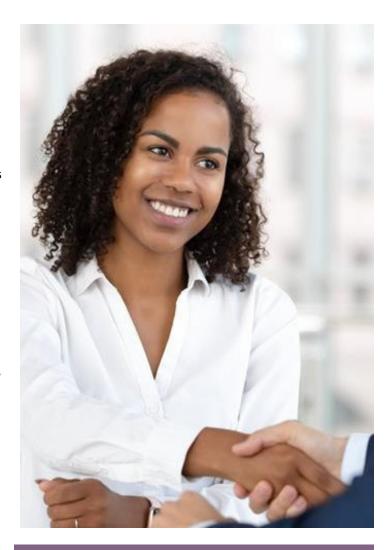
Delivering Excellent Customer Service in Rural Transit is a new National RTAP training module that is designed to provide all rural transit agency staff with the practical knowledge and skills they need to provide excellent customer service. **Managing**

for Customer Service Excellence in Rural Transit

is designed to help agency leadership, managers, and supervisors to improve the quality of service provided by the agency as a whole or within a functional area. Both training modules are available in **eLearning**, print, disc, thumb drive, and **online video formats.** These training modules update our former Customer Driven Service training module, which was retired in 2023. And for those of you who enjoyed our Customer Driven Service Word Search, we are providing a new **Customer Service Excellence Word Search**.

Our former Broadband Access and Rural Transit: Bringing Online Resources to Rural Communities technical brief was recently updated as **Broadband Access and Rural Transit: Bringing Connectivity to Rural Communities**. The brief discusses the types of broadband services currently available, new legislation and funding, implementation, and the outlook for the future. The brief has been updated with new information about the 5G network, high speed broadband definitions, and examples of states rolling out free broadband service.

Our Volunteers in Transportation: Some Issues to Consider technical brief will show you how to evaluate and explore the human and financial resources necessary for a successful volunteer program. It is important to remember that "volunteer" does not mean free. There are expenses inherent in operating a volunteer program that are discussed in this brief, such as insurance and mileage reimbursement. The brief was updated in 2023 with new cost data and case examples of successful volunteer transportation programs.











Managing for Customer Service Excellence in Rural Transit





More than 30 states have laws classifying assault on transit operators as a special category of misdemeanor. Incidents are increasing, and transit workers and their unions are pushing for action at all levels of government.

he COVID-19 pandemic brought out the best in people — and it brought out their worst as well, says Virginia state Delegate Delores McQuinn. Suicide, substance abuse, domestic violence — "all those things escalated during that period," McQuinn says. And as "frustration and anxiety" have boiled over into illegal acts, some people are more likely to be on the receiving end because of their jobs.

"TRANSIT WORKERS, WHO'VE BEEN ESSENTIAL WORKERS DURING THIS PERIOD, SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN GETTING THEIR UNFAIR SHARE OF PEOPLE TARGETING THEM AND ASSAULTING THEM," MCQUINN SAYS.

That's why she sponsored a bill in the Virginia House of Delegates that would increase the penalties for attacking bus drivers and other transit operators.

The bill, which was approved by the state Senate after amendments to remove mandatory minimum sentences, would make it a Class 1 misdemeanor to assault a transit operator, and it would ban people who are convicted of those assaults from riding the bus for at least six months.

If the bill becomes law, Virginia will join more than 30 states that have laws on the books that classify assaults on bus drivers and other transit operators as a special category of violation. It's a trend that began years ago, but which has taken on a new urgency in light of a sharp uptick in attacks. According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the rate of attacks on transit operators increased more than 400 percent throughout the 2010s. The vulnerability of bus drivers and other transit workers has also been

thrown into even sharper relief during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in the last few years.

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), which represents public transit workers in the U.S. and Canada, has pushed for a range of measures to address operator safety at individual transit agencies and at the state and federal levels. In addition to Virginia, lawmakers in Oregon have recently moved to increase penalties for people who assault transit workers.

New Jersey passed a similar law last year, and New Jersey Transit is now working to implement a "no ride list" that permanently bans riders who attack transit operators, similar to "no fly" lists in the airline industry. In general, there's a "double standard" when it comes to worker safety in the airline industry and on public transit, says John Costa, Amalgamated Transit Union's international president.

"IN THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY THEIR REACTION IS VERY SIMPLE: YOU DISRESPECT A PILOT OR A STEWARDESS OR ANYBODY ON THE AIRLINES, YOU'RE TAKEN OFF THE PLANE IMMEDIATELY, YOU'RE PROSECUTED, AND YOU'RE BANNED," COSTA SAYS.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act included a provision requiring large transit agencies to create safety plans by convening safety committees made up of an equal number of labor representatives and managers. It also defines "assault on a transit worker" as an act in which someone knowingly "interferes with, disables or incapacitates a transit worker while the transit worker is performing the duties of the transit worker." Big transit agencies will now be required to keep more detailed accounts of those assaults under FTA rules that were finalized last month. That will help workers make the case for more safety improvements, says Jeff Rosenberg, ATU's director of government affairs.

"It's very common for our workers to get spit on or slapped around, and a lot of times agencies would try to sweep it under the rug," Rosenberg says. The increasingly vulnerable working conditions have made it harder for transit agencies to attract and retain operators, contributing to a nationwide shortage of bus drivers, says Chris Van Eyken, director of research and policy at TransitCenter. Responding to assaults and other dangerous behavior on transit is a major challenge for agencies, says Van Eyken, who authored a 2021 report about safety on public transit. Beyond just increasing the amount of policing, agencies need to find ways to stop assaults before they happen — for example, by reducing the driver's role in collecting fares, an interaction that's one of the primary triggers for attacks, he says.

"WE ABSOLUTELY SHOULD BE PUNISHING PEOPLE THAT ASSAULT AND HARASS TRANSIT OPERATORS, BUT WE NEED TO BE THINKING ABOUT HOW WE PREVENT THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE," VAN EYKEN SAYS.

Beyond lawmaking, groups like the ATU are pushing for changes to the physical layout of buses to give drivers more protection — from disease as well as assaults. The group recently met with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and encouraged him to step up enforcement of FTA safety directives, requiring transit agencies that receive federal funding to establish labor-management safety committees and follow through on creating safety plans. Many agencies have been slow to carry those mandates out, says Rosenberg.

While ATU supports state laws that increase the penalties for people who assault transit operators, and that bar them from getting back on the bus, Rosenberg acknowledges that they're not likely to stop attacks from happening. Even when there are signs clearly posted on vehicles advertising the penalties for attacking transit workers, assaults tend to be spur-of-the-moment incidents in which the attackers aren't thinking about consequences.

"We do lobby for these laws, but to be honest, I don't think they serve as a deterrent," Rosenberg says. "They're just the right thing to do."

governing.com/work/rise-in-bus-driver-assaults-triggers-new-protection-laws

Upcoming EVENTS



2023 MIDWEST TRANSIT CONFERENCE

September 6-8, 2023 The Westin Kansas City at Crown Center 1 E. Pershing Road Kansas City, MO 64108

Mark your calendar for the 4-State 2023 Midwest Transit Conference. This two-day conference will provide opportunities to meet with other transit professionals, stakeholders, elected and interested citizens from across the Midwest. Hosted at the Westin Kansas City at Crown Center, this event brings forth a unique opportunity to share innovative ideas and best practices with a variety of top presentations, mobile workshops, vendors and panel discussions from Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska.

https://mopublictransit.org/event/2023-midwest-transit-confer-



Missouri's 2023 Highway Safety & Traffic Conference

September 25-27, 2023 Holiday Inn Executive Center. Columbia, MO

This year's conference promises to be another valuable event filled with great topics, presenters and something for everyone. The agenda will explore opportunities for continued progress in each of the core areas of Missouri's strategic highway safety plan, Show-Me Zero. In addition, you'll hear about some of the latest efforts for improving transportation systems management and operations (TSMO).

More information on the agenda and registration will be forthcoming, and they will once again aim to provide a suitable amount of PDHs and POST credits for attendees. Please save the date, and they look forward to your participation!

ghsa.org/events/upcoming/MoDOT/Highway-Safety-Traffic-Conf23



5th NATIONAL RTAP CONFERENCE

Navigating the Tides of Change with Rural & Tribal Transit December 3-6, 2023 Marriott Myrtle Beach Resort & Spa at Grande Dunes 8400 Costa Verde Drive Myrtle Beach, SC 29572

https://www.nationalrtap.org/News/Conference/2023-Myrtle-Beach

AVAILABLE TRAINING PROGRAMS

The following is a list of the training programs and course length of each that are currently available to rural transit providers through Missouri RTAP. Requests for training can be made by contacting Pat Diaku, MO-RTAP Program Specialist, at diakup@mst.edu or 573-341-6155.

- 1. ACTIVE SHOOTER PREVENTION AND RESPONSE 2 HOURS.
- 2. AGGRESSIVE DRIVING -1 HOUR.
- 3. ASSAULT AWARENESS AND PREVENTION FOR TRANSIT OPERATORS 1.5 HOURS
- 4. BACKING SAFETY 1 HOUR.
- 5. BASIC FIRST AID 1 HOUR.
- 6. BLOOD BORNE PATHOGENS 1 HOUR.
- 7. CPR & BASIC FIRST AID 4 HOURS.
- 8. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PASSENGERS 2 HOURS.
- 9. DEFENSIVE DRIVING 3 HOURS.
- 10. DISTRACTIVE DRIVING 1 HOUR.
- 11. DIVERSITY & AWARENESS TRAINING PROVIDING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR TRANSPORTATION PASSENGERS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES 2 HOURS.
- 12. DRIVEN TO EXTREMES 1 HOUR.
- 13. DRUG & ALCOHOL AWARENESS
 1 HOUR.
- 14. EMERGENCY & EVACUATION PROCEDURES
 1 1/2 TO 2 HOURS.

- 15. FATIGUE AWARENESS FOR DRIVERS 2 HOURS.
- 16. HIPAA 1 HOUR.
- 17. NIGHT DRIVING 1 HOUR.
- 18. OPERATION LIFESAVER HIGHWAY-RAIL CROSSING SAFETY 1 HOUR.
- 19. PASSENGER ASSISTANCE/MOBILITY AID SECUREMENT
 2 HOURS.
- 20. REASONABLE SUSPICION TRAINING FOR SUPERVISORS

 2 HOURS.
- 21. SAFE & SECURE PROPER INFANT AND CHILD SEAT INSTALLATION 2 HOURS.
- 22. SENSITIVITY AWARENESS 1 HOUR.
- 23. SEXUAL HARRASSMENT 1 HOUR.
- 24. SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS 1 HOUR.
- 25. VIOLENCE IN THE TRANSIT WORKFORCE –
 PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY 1.5
 HOURS
- 26. WHEELCHAIR SECUREMENT 2 TO 3 HOURS DEPENDING ON NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS.
- 27. WINTER DRIVING SAFETY 1 HOUR.

For more information on classes and to register please visit: mltrc.mst.edu/mortaphome/mortaptraining/

National RTAP – Rural Transit Assistance Program

www.nationalrtap.org/

Transportation Safety Institute –
Transit Safety & Security Training Division
www.tsi.dot.gov/Transit.aspx

Federal Transit Administration – Rural Transit Assistance Program Page www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants/ grants_financing_3554.html

Missouri Public Transit www.mopublictransit.org/

National Transit Institute www.ntionline.com/

Kansas RTAP – Kansas University Transportation Center

www.kutc.ku.edu/cgiwrap/kutc/rtap/index.php/index.html

Transportation Research Board's (TRB) Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) www.tcrponline.org/

