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## Mark Your Calendar

### IPTA Mid-Year Meeting

October 22-23, 2013

Hotel Fort Des Moines and  
Des Moines DART  
Des Moines, IA

### Legislative Meeting & Day at the Capitol

February 4-5, 2014

Marriott Hotel Downtown  
Des Moines, IA

### Washington DC Legislative Meeting

February 18-19, 2014

The Liaison Hotel  
and US Capitol  
Washington, DC

## From the President's Desk



A very successful Midwest Transit Alliance conference was held in Kansas City just a few weeks ago. The conference was attended by transit professionals from Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa. This was the first conference ever that I can remember, where these four states gathered to discuss issues that each of us are faced with.

The main topic was the total destruction (maybe I've watching too many sci fi movies) of funds to replace buses. As most of you know, MAP21 was not kind to "bus operating transit systems". This conference was a great opportunity to discuss the impact the bill had on the difficulty transit systems in these states will have in replacing their aging fleets. Great ideas and discussions, but I just want to remind everyone just discussing the issues will not solve the problem. As Ed Redfern (IPTA federal representative) explained very clearly, and might I add very clearly, we must follow up and act upon these ideas. We can no longer sit and stand by and hope that our representatives (both federal state) understand, as we do, the importance of transit in our communities.

The Midwest Transit Conference was a start, but now we must put all of these ideas and opinions in action before it's too late. Our passengers are counting on us!

I hope everyone has had a great summer and I look forward to seeing you at our meeting in Des Moines on October 22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Mark Little  
IPTA President

# Mobility Manager Award to Jeremy Johnson-Miller

By Julia Castillo, Des Moines DART

This award honors a mobility manager in FTA Region VII who has displayed exceptional leadership in developing and implementing a local and/or regional vision for coordinated transportation. The award criteria included:

- Providing service with a focus on individual rider needs
- Inclusion of stakeholders in the development and implementation of a coordinated transportation system
- Educating stakeholders, elected officials, and the public about the need for transportation service
- Developing or encouraging development of a system that can be easily accessed by the rider (e.g. a One Call Center)



The winner of this inaugural award is Jeremy Johnson-Miller, a rural mobility manager (central Iowa) in FTA Region VII. Mr. Johnson was nominated by his colleague Jennifer Roberts, who believes he fits the criteria identified in many ways, and always goes above and beyond in his position. He has shown leadership through Iowa Mobility Manager Network and always keeps the Iowa mobility managers abreast of new ideas/ways of implementing coordinated transportation projects.



# Bettendorf Transit Signs IGA with MetroLINK

By Mark Garrow, Bettendorf Transit

With personnel and organizational changes over the last year and a half, along with the desire to improve its public transportation system, the City of Bettendorf began to investigate all options to enhance our transit related services. It was the right time for the City to partner with an organization with administrative and operational management expertise whose sole focus is transit. It was staff's recommendation to Council to team up with the Rock Island County Metropolitan Mass Transit District (MetroLINK) to move us into the future. On June 4, 2013, the City of Bettendorf entered into a 28E Intergovernmental Agreement with MetroLINK, which brings forty three (43) years of transit experience to the table. In that span they have thrived with numerous infrastructure updates and improvements. Along the way they have stayed on top with the latest in technology such as INIT (GPS) equipment that tracks the location of buses, communicates with dispatch via two way radio, and tracks ridership with an automated passenger counting system. They also utilize the INIT equipment to feed data to a Smartphone app and transfer stations to allow the passengers the ability to see when and where the next bus will arrive in real time. MetroLINK is also in the process of constructing a new transit maintenance facility in Rock Island, IL that is slated to open in March 2014. This structure is expected to be LEED certified which means that it will meet nationally recognized standards for green infrastructure.

In 2012 MetroLINK won the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) Outstanding Public Transportation System for all agencies in North America for transit systems carrying between 1 million and 4 million passengers annually. This award was based on performance data related to MetroLINK's operational and financial management, safety record, and customer service and community involvement from 2009 through 2011.

The City of Bettendorf and MetroLINK are confident that this agreement will foster a growing relationship and serve to improve the quality of service to the community through better coordination of the systems. By refocusing Agency and City management, we will be able to take advantage of greater resources for planning and marketing which in turn will



# Mobility Manager Guides Transit Provider in Strategic Planning

Brock Grenis, East Central Iowa Transit

Long term strategic planning is crucial to any organization, and dedicating time to undertake such an event is a great opportunity for a public transit system to look into the future and decide where they want to be in the next 10 to 15 years. Such a planning session was recently held by Washington County Minibus, one of six transit providers who make up the Region 10 transit agency, and the session was aided by the expertise of Iowa's statewide mobility manager, Angie O'Brien.



Washington County Minibus is a non-profit agency who is contracted by Region 10 to provide demand response transit service throughout Washington County. In the past year Minibus has come under new leadership in their manager, and in recent years several new volunteers who serve on the board of directors. Recently, Minibus has experienced a downward trend in their year-end balance due to flat revenues and increasing operating costs. Additionally, many in the community have expressed that Minibus' services are underutilized and largely unknown. Together, these reasons prompted the board of directors to undertake a long term strategic planning session.

Before the strategic planning session, Minibus had no mission statement or long term vision, so creating these was a priority and has proven essential to guide both day-to-day decisions and policies that will shape the organization over the long term. The Minibus Board of Directors is composed of locally elected officials and representatives of organizations that utilize the Minibus service, so creating a mission statement and vision was naturally cognizant of the populations that rely on the service and the limitations of providing public transit service.

Angie O'Brien facilitated the meeting by providing examples of what other transit systems across the state have done to improve their service and attract new ridership. In addition, O'Brien helped the group identify innovative ideas to market their service, structure fares, balance the budget, and provide outreach to populations in the county who may be underserved.

Results of the planning session have led to action steps and work items that should reverse the trend of negative year-end balances, and improve the image and outreach of Minibus.



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# Starting a “Flex” Route: Lessoned Learned

By Jim Tishim and Georgia Parkey, Des Moines DART

Changing any type of public transit service can be difficult, but replacing an “On Call” service with a “Flex” route comes with a unique set of challenges.

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART) changed two On Call services to Flex routes in June 2012, and the staff learned many valuable lessons along the way.

## Lesson 1: Clearly explain what Flex is

Welcome to the first challenge – introducing a concept that is unfamiliar to most people.

The original On Call service was an on-demand, reservation-based service. It was for general-purpose travel within an area with clearly defined boundaries.



By contrast, a flex service is a hybrid of fixed-route service and demand-response service. It’s like a fixed route because it has a route map, established bus stops and a published bus schedule. It’s like a demand-response service because, unlike a truly fixed route, there is extra time built in between the time points, allowing operators to deviate off of the regular route to pick up and drop off customers nearer their origins and destinations.

## Lesson 2: Educate, Educate, Educate

It was important for everyone to understand the concept of Flex, including operators, dispatchers, schedulers, customer service representatives, and of course the riders themselves.

Beyond explaining the basics about how the service operates, it is important to describe the *intent* behind the move to a Flex route. In DART’s case, the intent was to serve more people with limited resources. This required a change in thinking for everyone involved.

Sharing not only the details of the service – but also the underlying idea – is critical to educating everyone involved.

## Lesson 3: Tiered fares

The fare structure needs to reflect the intent of the service.

As previously stated, DART’s goal was to serve more people with limited resources. That meant encouraging people to use the Flex route more like a fixed route and less like a demand-response service.

Accordingly, the fares were set at \$3.50 for a “flex” trip in which the bus deviated from route – a premium fare for a premium service. Meantime, the fare was only \$1.75 if the rider caught the bus at a regular bus stop.

More than a year since the Flex routes started in Des Moines, a majority of the trips on the routes are now from people catching the bus at regular stops.

## Lesson 4: Planning nuances

The basic principles of transit planning apply to Flex routes. For example, the surest way to produce ridership is to place the route near destinations that are major “trip generators.”

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# Starting a “Flex” Route: Lessoned Learned

However, these trip generators need to be accounted for carefully with Flex routes. Because of the flexibility of the service, locations that might not be trip generators on a truly fixed route could be a major attraction on a Flex route.

What does that mean for planning the route? It means you could have two legs of the route that are exactly the same distance, but you could need twice as much time to get between the time points if there are major trip generators that people are likely to flex to.

## Lesson 5: Consistent operations

Riders expect consistent operations, so it’s important that operators are clear on the policy and procedures of the service.

For example, it’s important to establish how far the operator will go to meet riders. Riders who are used to demand response service might be accustomed to being met at their front door and escorted to the bus. If the Flex route policy is to only meet riders at their curb, riders will be understanding if the policy is applied the same to everyone – but upset if some people appear to be getting preferential treatment.



## Summary

DART transitioned two On Call services to Flex routes in June 2012. While one is doing quite well, the other needs work.

Ridership has grown considerably in the suburb of West Des Moines, where a city-wide On Call service was replaced with the Flex Route 72. The new Flex route connects numerous residential, retail and medical destinations not only in West Des Moines but also in the adjoining suburb of Clive. Ridership on the Flex Route 72 reached 2,563 in May 2013, a 75 percent increase over the May 2012 ridership of 1,485.

By comparison, ridership has suffered in the suburb of Urbandale, where the On Call service was replaced with Flex Route 73. The Flex Route 73 is a peak-only feeder service, connecting commuters with Express routes into downtown Des Moines. Ridership on the Flex Route 73 has fallen considerably, to 683 rides in May 2013 as compared to 2,246 in May 2012. Staff is reexamining the service this fall in an effort to turn around the ridership trend.

The difference is in the details. The successful Flex Route 72 is rich with destinations, while the underperforming Flex Route 73 is trying to act as a feeder service alone with limited destinations.

*Jim Tishim is the Planning Director and Georgia Parkey is the Paratransit Operations Manager for the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART). For more information, please email them at [jtishim@ridedart.com](mailto:jtishim@ridedart.com) or [gparkey@ridedart.com](mailto:gparkey@ridedart.com).*



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