

Rural Transit Day Twitter Chat July 14, 2023

Summary

The nation's fourth [#RuralTransitDay](#) Twitter Chat on July 14, 2023 (Rural Transit Day itself fell on a Sunday this year) was moderated by Paula Smith, Executive Director, Tri River Transit, and Stephanie Lewis, Project Manager, Florida RTAP. Many organizations also tweeted over the weekend and even into Monday.

The chat focused on what agencies are doing to recognize passengers and staff on Rural Transit Day and throughout the year, and included a discussion about challenges, solutions, and best practices. There were over 5,796 impressions just from National RTAP Rural Transit Day tweets.

Participants included the following organizations:

AgingNY
American Planning Association
Small Town & Rural Planning
Division
American Public Transit
Association (APTA)
AMORelief
Bridging Cultures Group Inc.
Caring Majority Rising
CARTS
Chapa Consulting
ChORUS (Clearinghouse for Older
Road User Safety)
City of Lancaster
City of Racine
Common Cards
Compare the Carrier
Door County Transportation
Department
Fair Transport Lab
Federal Transit Administration
(FTA)
Florida RTAP
Fort Bend Transit
Foursquare ITP
Georgia DOT
HIRTAP Public Transit
ICF
Intelligent Healthy Life

International Association of Public
Transport
International Transportation
Learning Center
Johnson County KS Public Transit
Maker Village
MARTA
Mobility for All Boulder County,
Colorado
National Aging and Disability
Transportation Center (NADTC)
National Center for Mobility
Management (NCMM)
National Research and Training
Center (NRTC) on Blindness and
Low Vision, at Mississippi State
University
Nebraska Public Transit
North Central Regional Transit
District (NCRTD)
Open Plains Transit
Park City Transit
PDX Scanner
Pennsylvania DOT
Rideshare 2 Vote
Road to Zero
Roaring Fork Transportation
Authority (RFTA)
Salud America

Seldin / Haring-Smith Foundation
(SHSF)
Shared Use Mobility Center
(SUMC)
SIT Consultores
Southeast Missouri Transportation
Service (SMTS)
Suwannee Valley Transit Authority
A Tampa Bay Realter
TTD | America's Transportation
Unions
TAPTCO
Texas DOT
Tiki Cab Transportation Company
Transit Planning 4 All
Transit Workforce Center (TWC)
Transportation Research Board
(TRB)
Tri River Transit
TripShot
University Sans Malaysia
USAgings
The Weekend Club on Oldies
WTS International
**And last but not least, someone
whose Twitter handle is
“Demetre hunter super strong
yogi gang 50th years”**

Some important highlights:

- FTA retweeted National RTAP's video showing our team on a bus talking about what rural transit means to us with, "Proud to fund National RTAP in its work to support rural transit agencies, helping them keep the nation's buses moving,"
- Alaska's Governor Mike Dunleavy [proclaimed](#) July 16 as Rural Transit Day in Alaska.
- Georgia DOT celebrated Rural Transit Day in recognition and appreciation of rural transit providers across the state with a special [webpage](#).
- We received 244 (up from 192 in 2022) [Rural Transit Day Pledges](#).

Many training resources and best practices were shared, and there were also fun moments.

- National RTAP shared a [video](#) from Travel Tales TV grooving to Rural Transit Day.
- Cartoonist Suzanne Harris created an original [cartoon and joke](#) – Where do cows like to ride on trains? In the Cow-boose.

Other social media profiles held Rural Transit Day celebrations too. For example, Suwannee Valley Transit held a staff recognition event on Facebook where they showcased many of their staff as Rural Transit Heroes to count down to the day.

Visit the [chat transcript](#) for questions asked during the chat and attendees' replies. We also have a [news page](#) with more information about the special day. Answers to chat questions are provided below.

Question 1: Why is public transit important in rural communities?

Answers:

- From Grayson Lee from Transit Planning 4 All – Public transit connects people in rural areas to their community and to essential services, which is especially important for those who may have limited access to other forms of transportation.
- "Public transit is crucial in rural areas ensuring access to essential services. It's vital for tribal communities to bridge gaps in healthcare access & promote equity. Let's recognize the power of rural transit in fostering inclusivity," stated Dr. Mehri Mohebbi of Intelligent Healthy Life.
- From Compare the Carrier, "Today we celebrate the unsung heroes who keep our rural communities connected. From delivering goods to ensuring people get where they need to go, their work is invaluable. Thank you for keeping America moving!"
- Danny Schnathorst from HIRTA Public Transit answered, "Public Transit is important everywhere & that includes rural communities. Often, rural means less access to needed resources. It's important to work towards equal access for all."
- "Public transit is needed for rural residents to access consumer services, educational services, social services, and healthcare services," [wrote](#) Dhaval Daterao.
- "Rural transit means working together to find creative solutions for mobility. It's really about the community," said Robin Phillips, Executive Director, National RTAP.
- From Matt Crespi of the SHS Foundation - Rural transit is the difference between needing a car or not, going into debt/bankruptcy over transportation or not, going to the doctor or not. It

expands what jobs people can apply for and what educational opportunities they can pursue. It connects people. Rural areas tend to be the least walkable & bikeable communities -- in other words, the places where someone without regular access to a reliable vehicle faces the biggest barriers. Transit can be essential for daily life, economic mobility, health, and more.

- Public transit helps people access healthcare, employment, groceries. Over half of the trips on RIDE, a microtransit service in Wilson, NC, are for work commutes. [Read SUMC's resource on this topic.](#)

Question 2: How does rural transit help the community?

Answers:

- From U.S. DOT - Rural transit supports well-being of residents by providing transport to employment, schools, places of worship and social and recreational destinations, with access to seniors & people with disabilities.
- The National RTAP team boarded the bus to bring you this [video](#) of what rural transit means to us.
- A simple but powerful answer from Stephanie Lewis of Florida RTAP - It connects communities. It's a sign of commitment and passion.
- According to Transit Planning 4 All, rural transit helps the community by increasing mobility and connecting people.
- From North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) - Rural transit is more than JUST transit, it's a commitment to the community, the environment, and the people we serve. Rural Transit enhances the quality of life for its community members. Rural transit helps connect communities and get people to essential services they couldn't get to otherwise.
- Mobility for All Boulder County, Colorado tweeted in both English and Spanish: Rural Transit Day focuses on the unique needs of rural and tribal passengers and travelers.
- NADTC stated, "Rural transit means connectivity to surrounding communities and being able to age in place!" This is becoming even more and more important.
- "Rural transit fosters connectivity, acting as a lifeline for communities across America and around the world," tweeted WTS International. "This Rural Transit Day, WTS International celebrates all that rural transit stands for: mobility, opportunity, independence, and inclusion."
- Bridging Cultures Group Inc. says that rural transit is a necessity for communities across the US who have been long forgotten. Rural transit supports inclusion, mobility, and independence.
- Rural transit is an essential service for many, including seniors and disabilities. Transit can be [strengthened with shared mobility services](#) like bikeshare and microtransit, according to Macey Miner and Nate Seeskin of the Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC).
- "By bridging transportation gaps, rural transit promotes economic growth & fosters social inclusion. Celebrating Rural Transit Day recognizes the crucial role of accessible transportation in empowering rural communities," states Dr. Mohebbi of Intelligent Healthy Life.
- From HIRTA - Rural Transit helps the community by bringing connecting communities, increases access to goods and services, helps boost the local economy, and gives people who live in rural areas the freedom of mobility in their communities.
- On June 27, 2023, the Portales City Council, New Mexico, heard a proclamation of July 16 as Rural Transit Day, recognizing the role of Portales Area Transit in "meeting the unique needs of rural passengers."

Question 3: What's your favorite rural transit destination?

Answers:

- Rick L'Amie from NCRTD showed some gorgeous photos of blue sky views from the BlueBus, and a photo of himself going for a scenic ride. "Rural transit lets you see the world from a different perspective," explained Rick. "Route 190 to Chama, NM."
- HIRTA has some great local colleges in its area like Iowa State University, Simpson College, Central College, DMACC, along with some favorite events like the Knoxville races, balloon classics and more.
- One of Cara Marcus from National RTAP's favorite rural transit destinations is Amelia Island, FL, with beautiful beaches, friendly people, and she was even allowed to (pretend to) drive a Nassau Transit bus.
- Florida RTAP has made it a priority to visit their rural partners this year – they can't wait to share where they are headed next.
- You don't need a car to visit a national park, added Matt from SHS Foundation. Amtrak and the National Park Service have invested in augmenting local options to get people to and around some parks, hope to see more.

Question 4: What is the impact of rural transit on public health?

Answers:

- Bassett Network, who provides care for 5600+ square miles in Central NY, tweeted, "Our work wouldn't be possible without the local public travel systems keeping us all connected. Thank you, rural transit orgs! Healthy rural transit systems help create healthy rural communities."
- Rural transit helps people get to essential doctor's appointments that they wouldn't otherwise get to. NCRTD has many riders that wouldn't be able to get to their appointments without its system! It's rewarding to know the impact they have on people's well-being. Environmental sustainability and good health for the community are a huge part of what makes rural transit a win.
- COMPASS in Cecil County, MD [helps people](#) recovering from addiction access treatment, legal appointments, employment, and other resources. Public Transit removes transportation as a barrier to recovery.
- Rural transit gets people to vital medical appointments, but it also allows people to go to community centers, grocery stores, pharmacies, and to live independent and healthy lives, according to NCMM.
- Danny from HIRTA shared - Public transit helps reduce the risk of social isolation, gets people to medical appointments, trips for vaccines, and allows people to age in place. It also helps reduce carbon emissions and promotes environmental sustainability!
- The SHS Foundation feels the impact is mostly positive, from getting people to medical appointments and grocery stores to reducing pollution to enabling economic development and mobility in ways known to improve health outcomes.
- Florida RTAP feels that the impact is access to medical facilities that may not be available in rural communities.
- People in rural areas with Alzheimer's and dementia can remain in their own homes and communities and have fulfilling lives. The availability of accessible transportation is a vital factor to make that happen. Read an [NADTC report](#) on this topic.

- Dr. Mohebbi from Intelligent Healthy Life (who has some of the best infographics we've seen) stated that connecting communities to healthcare services ensures timely access to medical facilities and promotes preventive care. It reduces reliance on cars and fosters cleaner air.

Question 5: What creative ways do you let the community know about rural transit?

Answers:

- The SHS Foundation maps the transit accessibility of important resources. For example, its map of [New England community colleges](#)--color-coded by proximity to the nearest transit stop--covers urban, suburban, and rural areas across the region.
- From Intelligent Healthy Life - Through school collaborations, local media engagement, and community events, we creatively spread the word about rural transit. It's about empowering communities with improved mobility and connectivity.
- National RTAP started a Rural Transit Day Time Capsule to preserve the essence of rural transit through the ages. In 2023 we collected bus passes. Got some from Bond County Transit, Grundy Transit System & Hocking Athens Perry Community Action (Hapcap). We'll collect something new next year.
- Florence Center and PDRTA, South Carolina, are extending Rural Transit Day to have a National Rural Transit Day event on Jul 24, 2023.
- To celebrate Rural Transit Day, Door County Connect and Door 2 Door Rides offer free rides on Monday, July 17, to thank riders for supporting their systems.
- When GoWake SmartRide NE microtransit service was launched in rural NC, Wake DHHS, Eastern Regional Center and the Kramden Institute helped people with computer & mobile app training. Read SUMC's [case study](#).
- NCRTD loves getting out into the community, riding their system, sharing stories from their riders and teaching people about how to use public transportation. They just launched beta testing for microtransit and are expanding facilities to better serve their communities.
- HIRTA promotes rural transit at local events and works with partners such as National RTAP and NADTC to spread the word using their great resources.
- Georgia DOT celebrates Rural Transit Day in recognition and appreciation of rural transit providers across the state and encourages its providers to show their commitment to mobility options by signing the Rural Transit Day Pledge.
- Read about Rural Transit Day in local and national magazines, such as [Community News, Missouri](#), and even [Women's Day](#).
- Several graphic designers, such as <https://tinyurl.com/mr7yf4e4> and <https://tinyurl.com/k6yz7j66>, have created Rural Transit Day graphics. And of course, you can always use [our graphics](#).

Question 6: How has ridership been since “post COVID”?

Answers:

- Register for a National Institute for Transportation and Communities webinar on Jul 25, 2-3 PM ET on [COVID-19's Impact on Travel: Shifting Multimodal Behaviors](#) to find out.
- From mid-February to April 2022, national public transit ridership was approximately 60 percent of pre-pandemic levels, [according to APTA](#).

- After falling to 20% of pre-pandemic levels in 2020, ridership has [recovered](#) >70% of pre-pandemic levels. This reflects agencies adapting to changing needs of communities & delivering safe, reliable service.
- HIRTA is seeing ridership growth every month. They've done a lot of outreach and improvements to get us to where they are today. Check out this [video](#) of a commercial we ran in their region thanks to NADTC funding.
- PICK Transportation, a microtransit provider serving eastern Oklahoma, saw a large increase as COVID precautions eased. Ridership on the system was 2,212 in August 2022, compared to just 961 a year beforehand.
- Rural Transit had an advantage Post-COVID over metro systems because it IS essential for many people. NCRTD's ridership is still in the process of recovering but the growth they've seen is incredible! They're looking forward to continued growth.
- Matt Crespi said, "I think it's worth noting that COVID wastewater [prevalence](#) is currently higher than it was this time in 2021 and 2020, and wearing masks still helps protect vulnerable/high-risk riders. It's not mandatory anymore, but still smart."

Question 7: How do you celebrate your staff for the hard work they do?

Answers:

- HIRTA provides treat days, delivered goodie bags to our staff for Rural Transit Day, and even brings a wood fired pizza oven for a make your own pizza party. They also do events like an Easter egg hunt for their office staff that included bonus PTO.
- Park City Transit honors the outstanding work that their bus operators put forth by providing essential transportation services to their community.
- NCRTD brings goodies for their staff to celebrate Rural Transit Day and one of their local bakeries is making them bus shaped cookies.
- MN RTAP has some [excellent ideas](#): give staff certificates, host special events, create a compliment board, provide team-building opportunities, provide training, and ask employees what they would like.
- Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC) stated that public transit agencies have experienced widespread operator shortages. Many are offering employees hiring bonuses. [Learn more](#) about agencies can navigate this challenge.

Question 8: How have the CDL training requirements affected your transit system?

Answers:

- Watch this Understanding the [Entry-Level Driver Training Requirements webinar](#) to learn about some helpful ELDT tools from FMCSA, National RTAP, NADTC, and MnDOT.

Question 9: What's the strangest thing a passenger has brought on board?

Answers:

- One person tried to bring a whole kitchen table on the NCRTD bus. Staff were able to help them arrange a different way to transport their table home.

- HIRTA's had some unusual requests over the years from asking for help to move couches and furniture, to someone asking if HIRTA could help move horses down the street!
- Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority [collected some weird stuff](#).
- On one journey of the Okaihau Express, folks brought both a sack of mollusks and a box full of puppies, both of which proceeded to drip on passengers from the overhead storage rack. Peter Cape immortalized the event in a song named after the train line. Transit enthusiasts Ben Doyle and Adam Chase do a great rendition of it. Matt Crespi called out, "Hey, boys, you wanna help the National Rural Transit Assistance Program bring attention to Rural Transit Day?"
- A news network [posted](#) about East Midlands Railway trains revealing their list of weirdest things left behind, including half of the instruments for an orchestra, a prosthetic leg, and a life-size cutout of a celebrity.
- In the 1954 British comedy film [The Runaway Bus](#), the hapless bus driver finds he is transporting a busload of stolen money - £200,000 worth of gold bullion robbers brought on board.

Question 10: We're awarding a Rural Transit Day t-shirt to the first person who answers this question and to the tweet with the most likes by 4:00 PM ET on July 15, 2022 - We're awarding a \$25 gift card and #RuralTransitDay t-shirt to the first person who answers this question and to the tweet with the most likes by 4 PM ET today – How is your organization celebrating Rural Transit Day this year?

Answers:

- It was a tie! Both these answers got the most likes and both won.
- North Central Regional Transit District (NCRTD) - We are celebrating by eating tasty bus shaped cookies, connecting with other rural transit systems, and hearing from our community on what makes transit important to them! We wouldn't be here without our riders.
- HIRTA Public Transit - We went fare-free today in all of our counties, delivered goodie bags to all of our drivers & staff, collected success stories from our riders about their transit story, and of course, participated in this #RuralTransitDay Twitter chat!
- Here are some others that were sent later:
 - The Door County Transportation Department hosted a driver appreciation lunch on July 13th and offered free rides on July 17th and posted a [video](#).
 - Association on Aging in New York (AgingNY) was at the USAging 2023 Conference this Rural Transit Day. At the pre-intensive with NADTC they identified challenges to improving access, including sustainable funding sources, driver training, recruitment, and retention, and climate responsibility.