NHRTAP News

Strengthening Rural Transportation in New Hampshire

New Hampshire RTAP Quarterly Newsletter

Quarter I FY2027



NEW! Agency Spotlight

Celebrating the People, Programs & Partnerships Keeping New Hampshire Moving.

Every trip begins with a driver committed to helping reach what matters most.

IN THIS ISSUE

- New! NHRTAP Agency Spotlight
- When Can a Driver Leave the Vehicle?
- From Plan to Practice: Language Assistance Procedures in Daily Transit Operations
- Drug & Alcohol Program Update
- Drug & Alcohol Program Manager Training – November 12
- SFY27 Training Calendar & Resources

NEW FEATURE

Every Agency Has a Story to Tell

Beginning this year, the NHRTAP Newsletter will shine a spotlight on New Hampshire's rural transit providers, the people, programs, partnerships, and ideas making a difference in communities across the state.

Continued on Page 2



Introducing NHRTAP Agency Spotlight

Sharing the stories behind rural transit in New Hampshire



New Hampshire rural transit agencies do more than provide rides. Every day, they connect people with healthcare, employment, education, essential services, family and community.

NHRTAP Agency Spotlight is a new feature created to share the stories behind those connections. Each spotlight will introduce a New Hampshire transit provider and highlight its services, accomplishments, community partnerships, innovative practices, and the people who make it all possible.

The goal is simple: celebrate what's working, share ideas, and help agencies learn from one another.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN AN AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

Agency & Community
Who they are, where they serve, and the services they provide.

Programs & Ideas
Innovative approaches and program meeting community needs

Partnerships
Collaborations that strengthen transportation locally

Successes
Milestones and accomplishments they are proud of.

People Behind the Service
The staff, drivers, volunteers, and partners who make it happen.

Coming Soon

Look for our first Agency Spotlight in an upcoming edition of NHRTAP News.

From Plan to Practice

Implementing Language Assistance Procedures in Daily Transit Operations

Many New Hampshire 5310 and 5311 agencies recently completed updates to their Title VI Plans. With that work at top of our minds, now is a great time to take the next step: making sure the procedures described in your plan are understood and usable by the people who interact with your passengers every day.

One area worth revisiting is language assistance.

For public transportation providers, good communication is an important part of providing safe, accessible, and welcoming service. But what happens when a passenger and transit employee don't speak the same language?

Language barriers can arise at any point in a passenger's experience, from calling to ask about transportation options or scheduling a ride to communicating with a driver about a destination or service needed. Drivers, dispatchers, mobility managers, and administrative staff may all encounter situations where a person has limited ability to communicate in English.

Your recently updated Title VI Plan is a good resource to get things on track.

Take Another Look at Your Language Assistance Procedures

Title VI Planning is not only about having the right documentation on file. The procedures identified in the plan should help guide what happens when staff encounter a passenger who needs language assistance.

IF YOU'RE STUCK, START HERE

1. **Review your Four-Factor Analysis.**
   What populations and languages did your agency identify?
2. **Identify your points of contact.**
   Consider scheduling and dispatch calls, trip reservations, vehicles, applications, public meetings, customer service, mobility management activities, and your website.
3. **Know your resources**
   Can employees quickly find the language identification, interpretation, or translation resources identified by your agency?
4. **Give your employees a process.**
   Staff should know what to do first and whom to contact when additional assistance is needed.
5. **Test it**
   Walk through a common passenger interaction. If staff aren't sure what to do, you've identified an opportunity for a refresher.

Continued on Page 3

From Plan to Practice

Implementing Language Assistance Procedures in Daily Transit Operations

Continued from page 2



START BY IDENTIFYING THE LANGUAGE

Before staff can determine what assistance is appropriate, they need to know what language a person speaks.



An "I Speak" language identification card can be a simple and useful tool. A passenger can identify their language by pointing to it, helping staff determine the next step for providing assistance.

Think about where these resources would be most useful for your agency. Depending on how you provide service, that might include dispatch areas, customer service locations, administrative offices, mobility management staff, or vehicles.

TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP-BUT KNOW ITS LIMITS



Translation applications and other technology may be useful for routine interactions, but staff should first understand and follow the language assistance procedures established by their agency. Technology should support, not replace the resources and procedures identified in the agency's Title VI Plan. More complex or important communications may require other language assistance resources identified by the agency. Employees should know what their agency's plan says to do before a passenger is waiting for assistance.

TURN YOUR RECENT PLAN UPDATE INTO A STAFF REFRESHER

The recent Title VI Plan updates provide agencies with a natural opportunity to bring the information off the page and into everyday operations.

TRY THIS AT YOUR NEXT STAFF MEETING

A passenger calls dispatch but has difficulty communicating English

Can your staff answer:

1. **What should the employee do first?**
2. **How will they identify the language needed?**
3. **What language assistance resources are available?**
4. **Where are the resources located?**
5. **Who should be contacted if additional assistance is needed?**

If staff can confidently answer these questions, great. If not, you've identified an opportunity for a quick refresher and possibly an area where your written procedures may need review and updating.

FROM COMPLIANCE TO CUSTOMER SERVICE



Title VI establishes important civil rights responsibilities, but putting the Title VI Plan into Practice also supports something transit agencies work toward every day; helping people successfully access transportation. Clear communication leads to safer trips, better service, and stronger connections with the people we serve.

Drug & Alcohol Program Update

What Transit Agencies Need to Know



Changes and ongoing federal activity surrounding marijuana have generated questions throughout the transportation industry. For the transit agencies with employees subject to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) drug and alcohol testing requirements, the most important message remains straightforward:

THE KEY MESSAGE

Continue following the current DOT and FTA drug and alcohol testing requirements.

WHAT ABOUT MARIJUANA

Changes in marijuana law, and discussion surrounding its federal scheduling, can understandably create confusion for employers and employees.
For DOT-regulated safety sensitive employees, however, the existing federal testing requirements remain in place. State marijuana laws do not override the federal DOT drug-testing requirements applicable to safety sensitive transportation employees.

DOT has clarified that a Medical Review Officer (MRO) cannot verify a laboratory-confirmed marijuana positive as negative based on employee's use of a state-licensed marijuana product. State-issued medical marijuana cards, physician recommendations, or dispensary documentation do not constitute a legitimate medical explanation under DOT's Part 40 requirements.

REMEMBER

Do not change your DOT drug and alcohol testing policies or procedures based on headlines or changes occurring outside of the DOT-regulated testing program.

2026 RANDOM TESTING RATES

FTA's minimum annual random testing rates for calendar year 2026 remain:

50% DRUGS

10% ALCOHOL

Agencies should continue administering their programs in accordance with current FTA and DOT requirements.

NEW FEDERAL CUSTODY AND CONTROL FORM (CCF)

DOT has announced a revised 2026 Federal Drug Testing Custody and Control Form (CFF), effective **April 27, 2026.**

The 2023 CCF may continue to be used until May 31, 2027. When it is used between April 27, 2026 and May 20, 2027, a memorandum for the record (MFR) is not required. Beginning May 31, 2027, use of the 2023 CCF requires and MFR in accordance with 40 CFR § 40.205(b)(2).

Check with your drug testing service provider to ensure everyone understands the transition and is using an authorized form.

SAVE THE DATE

DRUG & ALCOHOL PROGRAM MANAGER TRAINING (DAPM)

Thursday, November 12, 2026

9:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.	NHDOT 7 Hazen Drive Concord , NH	In-person attendance	RLS & Associates, Inc. presenting virtually

Additional training and registration information will be provided as details are available

Questions about your Drug & Alcohol Program?
Bring them to the November 12th DAPM Training

When Can a Driver Leave the Vehicle?

Balancing ADA Assistance, Passenger Safety & Vehicle Security

A recurring questions is whether a transit driver is required to maintain continuous visual contact with their vehicle at all times while on duty.

The answer is more nuanced than a simple yes or no.

While safety and security considerations favor maintaining visual observation of a transit vehicle whenever practical, federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements may at times require operators to temporarily leave the immediate vicinity of the vehicle to ensure ADA-compliant service delivery.



WHAT DOES THE ADA REQUIRE

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public transit providers to provide comparable service to individuals with disabilities. This includes assistance with boarding, alighting, which may sometimes require the driver to go beyond the curb or vehicle to an exterior building entrance when appropriate.

CAN A DRIVER LEAVE THE VEHICLE?

Yes- in some circumstances.

A passenger's request for assistance at an exterior building entrance generally should be provided when it does not pose a direct threat and does not leave the vehicle unattended or out of visual observation for a lengthy period.

SAFETY RECALL ALERT

Q'STRAINT QRT-360 RETRACTORS

Q'Straint has submitted NHTSA Safety Recall Report 26E022 involving certain QRT-360 wheelchair securement retractors.

Model: QRT-360
Part Number: Q011002
Affected Production Period: November 11, 2025- February 17, 2026

Affected retractors may not lock as designed, potentially preventing a wheelchair from being properly secured and placing the passenger at risk of serious injury.

WHAT SHOULD TRANSIT AGENCIES DO?

- Check your equipment to determine whether affected retractors are in service.
- Follow Q'Straint's recall instructions.
- Affected units will be replaced at no cost, including replacement product and freight.

NHSTA Recall: 26E002 Q'Straint Recall: 26-008

Q'Straint customer service number: 1-800-987-9987

BEFORE YOU STEP AWAY

Follow these best practices to keep passengers safe and protect the vehicle:

- **Secure the vehicle-** Park safely, place vehicle in park, apply the parking brake, and follow agency procedures
- **Consider your passengers-** Confirm remaining passengers can safely remain aboard.
- **Explain the brief absence-** Let passengers know why you're stepping away.
- **Keep it brief-** Provide only the necessary assistance and return promptly.
- **Maintain observation when feasible-** Position the vehicle and provide assistance in a way that minimized time out of sight.
- **Contact dispatch when needed-** If circumstances raise a safety concern, follow agency procedures and seek guidance.

THERE IS NO FEDERAL MINUTE LIMIT

Federal regulations and FTA guidance do not establish a specific number of minutes that constitutes a "lengthy period." Agencies and operators should consider the circumstances, minimize the time away, protect the passengers and the vehicle, and follow agency procedures

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The ADA requires assistance with boarding and alighting with may sometimes take a driver beyond the vehicle.
- Drivers should follow agency policies and use good judgement to balance ADA assistance with safety and security.
- There is no federal limit, however situational awareness and communication are important.
- Clear procedures help drivers provide safe, respectful, and compliant service.

SFY27 Training Calendar and More

Plan Ahead. Register Early, Invest in Your Team.

Date	Training	Location
November 2026		
11/12/2026 (9:00 am - 4:00 pm)	Drug & Alcohol Program Manager Training (DAPM)	@ NHDOT
December 2026		
12/12/2026 (8:00 am - 11:00 am)	Defensive Driving	@ Advance Transit
12/12/2026 (11:30 am - 3:30 pm)	Emergency Procedures and Evacuation	@ Advance Transit
January 2027		
1/16/2027 (8:30 am - 12:00 pm)	Defensive Driving @ Concord, NH	
1/16/2027 (12:30 pm - 4:30 pm)	Emergency Procedures and Evacuation	@ Concord, NH
March 2027		
3/20/2027 (9:00 am - 5:00 pm)	Passenger Assistance Techniques (PAT)	@ Keene, NH
April 2027		
4/17/2027 (8:30 am - 12:00 pm)	Defensive Driving @ Berlin, NH	
4/17/2027 (12:30 pm - 4:30 pm)	Emergency Procedures and Evacuation	@ Berlin, NH
May 2027		
5/1/2027 (8:00 am - 4:30 pm)	Passenger Assistance Techniques (PAT)	@ Advance Transit





DATE:
September 15-16, 2027

VENUE:
DoubleTree by Hilton
Manchester, Downtown
Manchester, NH

HOSTED BY:
New Hamphsire DOT

State Partners:
Maine DOT & VTrans

SCHOLARSHIPS

Financial assistance may be available for eligible 5311 agencies and staff.

- Reduce training costs
- Invest in professional growth
- Strengthen your team

Learn more on our website:
https://www.newhampshirertap.com/scholarship

Quick Tips

Registration Reminders

Before you register...

- Verify your training prerequisites.
- Register early to reserve your seat.
- Notify NHRTAP if you need to cancel
- Share the training calendar with your staff.

Link to training calendar

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Find training information, recordings, tools, templates, news and more.

https://www.newhampshirertap.com/

A quarterly newsletter, NHRTAP News is published under contract with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation from a grant received from the Federal Transit Administration under 49 U.S.C. Section 5311– Formula grants for other than urbanized areas (CFDA 20.509).

The newsletter is published by:
RLS & Associates, Inc.
3131 S. Dixie Hwy, Suite 545
Dayton, OH 45439
Phone: (937) 299-5007