

OHIO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT (OTAP) 2012 OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ODOT)

Project Timeframe: 1989 to current

Since 1989 RLS & Associates, Inc. is the primary contractor and primary contributor to the Ohio Department of Transportation's "Ohio Technical Assistance Project (OTAP)." The purpose of this project is to provide the technical expertise necessary to ensure the efficient, cost-effective operation of the new and existing small urban and rural transportation systems within the state. The topics defined as part of the project include those that are beneficial to many systems as well as those that are specific to particular sites. The emphasis is placed on topics that are technical in nature with "hands on" solutions rather than large research studies.

- ◆ **Transit Manager Training "Transit 101"**

RLS is developing a comprehensive "Transit 101" Transit Manager Training Program for Ohio's rural and small urban transit managers. The training will consist of a computer-based training (CBT) "Orientation to Section 5311 Transit" module along with up to five additional training modules targeting different components of transit management, including financial management and cost allocation, operations, maintenance, and compliance. Modules will be taught both in class room type sessions in up to 2 locations within the state as well as a CBT module to facilitate refresher training. Each module will have both in class and follow up exercises to maximize learning. The CBT portions of the project are being developed jointly with ODOT's Office of Training.

- ◆ **Rural Transit Program Manual**

RLS is completely re-organizing and updating ODOT's Rural Transit Program Manual, the guidebook for compliance and rural transit system operation for ODOT's Section 5311 transit systems. In the updated version, the Manual will be organized in up to 15 different chapters to address state and federal compliance, financial management, third party contracting and procurement, invoicing, initiating new service, etc. Unlike the previous manual, all supporting documents will be included in the manual as weblinks to ensure that the systems have access to the most current information available.

- ◆ **Rural Transit Circuit Rider and Grants Management Support**

The RLS "Circuit Rider" was originally developed for ODOT to provide technical assistance to the Ohio new start rural transit systems to ensure a smooth transition and implementation of transportation services and compliance with State and Federal requirements. In this capacity, the circuit rider would visit each system, develop an action plan, identify needed corrective actions, develop an implementation plan, and provide ongoing follow-up assistance. Eventually, the circuit rider efforts were also offered to existing systems with new transit managers to help facilitate the transit manager's transition into transit system management or to existing systems requiring assistance in a particular area or to follow up on issues identified as part of its ODOT Technical Assistance Review (TAR). For example, assistance has been provided in the form of developing sample policy and procedural manuals, drug and alcohol recordkeeping procedures, system brochure assessment, contract rate evaluation, and regulatory compliance reviews. Currently, RLS provides multiple staff as part of the circuit rider services to assist in a number of areas including invoice processing, vehicle maintenance and Buy America

reviews. One staff person is assigned on-site, while up to 3 other staff members travel on-site as needed.

◆ **Rural Transit System Transition Assistance**

RLS has provided technical assistance to various coordination projects in Ohio that were making the transition to the rural general public transportation program. As part of this effort RLS staff met with local agency representatives to assess the nature and extent of technical assistance needs. Subsequently the scope of the technical assistance was outlined. Typically, the assistance is focused on short-range implementation-oriented strategies. Expertise has been provided in the areas of management and organizational structure, policy development, data collection, MIS, scheduling and dispatch procedures, fare and contract pricing policies, and performance evaluation.

◆ **Contract Rates White Paper**

Issues surrounding contract service and the methods for developing a fully allocated rate structure are summarized in this paper. The White paper illustrates the basic approach to the appropriate use of rural transit funds and other Federal and State subsidies in providing mobility for a special contracting group. Suggested methods for establishing equitable payment by the contracting group, as well as for determining the positive and negative fiscal impacts of providing contract service were outlined in a step by step format.

◆ **Technical Assistance -- City of Newark**

RLS assisted the City of Newark with the establishment of its "service consumed" data collection and record keeping procedures consistent with Section 15 requirements. Developed vehicle specifications, determined suitability of fare structure, developed Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Plan and reviewed the Drug and Alcohol policy.

◆ **Section 5311 Funding Allocation Formula Assessment**

RLS conducted an assessment of Ohio's Section 5311 Funding Allocation Formula. The assessment included a review of ODOT's database of financial and non-financial, statistical and performance information, and a review of other states' formula distribution mechanism. An alternative incentive/disincentive based formula was recommended and subsequently adopted for the Section 5311 Funding Allocation. The allocation method was subsequently reviewed and updated to reflect issues such as "left-over" funding, service expansion, new starts, under usage, and capitol replacement.

◆ **Ohio Coordination Program Evaluation**

RLS developed a methodology to evaluate the coordination projects funded by ODOT. The evaluation methodology utilizes a computer spreadsheet that tracks the accomplishments of the projects from the year prior to coordination through a two-year funding grant and computes changes in the cost per mile, cost per trip, passengers per mile, and passengers per hour among others.

◆ **Rideshare Program Funding Allocation Methodology**

RLS developed several alternatives for funding the Rideshare Program agencies using a performance-based methodology. RLS conducted a database survey to collect inputs for the new methodology.

◆ **Fare Analysis**

RLS conducted a statewide transit fare analysis to identify current practices and to provide guidance on ways to improve farebox recovery ratios. The discussion included a detailed explanation of how to calculate the recovery ratio, definitions, identification of additional revenue sources, and fare elasticity.

◆ **Section 5310 Program Review**

RLS conducted a review Ohio's Section 5310 program for ODOT. The review process focused on the current application process, evaluation and selection criteria, vehicle procurement, monitoring, and disposition, and overall program administration. A summary of recommendations was made to ODOT.

◆ **ODOT Charter Manual**

RLS developed and later revised, a manual designed to assist Ohio's public transit systems comply with FTA's new charter regulations. RLS also developed and provided two charter compliance trainings for ODOT's rural and small urbanized transit systems.

◆ **ODOT Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Compliance Manual**

RLS researched and developed a compliance manual for meeting the requirements for interstate transportation in compliance with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Federal officials and several operators were interviewed to determine the issues and requirements of providing interstate transportation. An easy to follow, step-by-step guide was then provided to assist transit systems with achieving FMCSA compliance.