

GUIDEBOOK FOR START-UP TRANSIT AGENCIES

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As communities in Florida transition from rural to urbanized areas, the need to develop public transportation systems throughout the state increases. Quality of life issues, economic development strategies, job access, overall community mobility needs, and traffic congestion concerns are among the numerous factors that compel communities to initiate or expand public transportation services.

The public transportation industry does not have a comprehensive and consolidated source of information available for local governments or other organizations to use in starting a new public transit agency. Without access to a single source of information, agencies risk not taking advantage of all available resources or fully complying with federal or state regulations. An understanding of the extended process involved, the need for continuous and comprehensive planning throughout the process, and familiarity with the complex federal and state grant programs and regulations are key to the successful initiation of public transit services.

Given the existing size of Florida's public transit industry and the potential growth of public transit throughout the various urban and urbanizing areas of Florida, it is essential that communities and transit agencies have a reference resource to ensure effective planning and efficient transit service delivery.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project were to develop a guidebook that would assist agencies in developing start-up transit systems and be a useful tool for employees and policymakers new to the public transit industry. The guidebook would be a consolidated source of various initiatives, procedures, and programs related to initiating and operating a public transit agency. It would also be a useful reference and tutorial for training transit personnel and policymakers new to the public transit industry.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The research team consulted with a variety of transit planners, Florida DOT staff, and private transit management firms to develop an eight step process that can provide guidance, from the point of identifying need through implementation, to a community seeking to develop a transit agency. The developed guidebook outlines the institutional framework that public transportation professionals must understand and interact with at the local, state, and federal levels.

The guidebook provides a consolidated and comprehensive summary of the Federal Transit Administration's funding sources and regulations that support public transportation programs. This information is organized into the following sections:

1. FTA grant programs
2. The FTA Master Agreement
3. Reporting and administrative requirements

Similar information was compiled by the researchers for the Florida DOT transit financial assistance programs provided through legislative formula or discretionary authority. This information was organized first with an overview of the transit grant programs, followed by a summary of the significant FDOT regulations and administrative requirements.

BENEFITS

The research findings are presented in a concise and easy-to-read format and will be made available to all of Florida public transportation agencies and their community partners. The findings will be presented at the 2006 Annual Florida Public Transportation Association meeting to facilitate an exchange of information among Florida public transportation agencies.

Utilization of this guidebook will foster good transit planning and grant utilization and compliance, and it will increase understanding, among target audiences, of the federal and Florida transit grant programs. The guidebook will also assist in the professional development of individuals new to the transit industry.

This research project was conducted by Ann Joslin and Jay Goodwill, of the National Center for Transit Research (NCTR) at the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) at the University of South Florida (USF). For more information, contact Tara Bartee, Project Manager, at (850) 414-4520, tara.bartee@dot.state.fl.us.