

Spreading the Word About ATI and Travel Training

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The Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA) Conference went very well. On October 20th, I was one of three presenters in a breakout session during the three day conference. The main subject was strategies that transit agencies could implement to help control some of the runaway costs involved in providing paratransit service in their communities.

My presentation focused on how travel training can and has helped to redirect some of the clients to either utilize the fixed-route system completely or at least combine it with their current paratransit travel plans.

I made it clear that trying to encourage “current” paratransit clients away from the curb-to-curb service to the fixed-route system was a work of futility. Ninety-nine percent of paratransit patrons are not willing to change, and by ADA rules there’s nothing a transit agency can do to make them ride the bus.

The focus of my advice was to reach out to the public school’s developmentally disabled **Exceptional Student Educational** programs and introduce fixed-route service to the next generation. I had a page in my handout that showed a graph with two columns. The column to the right reflected the national average of ESE student per state. The column to the left was Florida’s ESE population. Where the national average was around 130,000 students, Florida had a population of 390,000 students. There’s no question that a significant portion of those 390,000 students will one day apply for paratransit service unless we travel trainers can get involved and help direct many of them toward fixed-route service early on.

The last 10 minutes of the presentation was about the Travel Assistance Device (TAD), presented by Sean Barbeau of the Center for Urban Transportation Research in Tampa and myself at the 2008 ATI Conference in Minneapolis. It never fails; the TAD draws a lot of attention. At the end of the session, HART’s CEO David Armijo came from the audience to talk with me. He was so impressed with the TAD information that he made the comment that this device needs to be demonstrated at a future APTA Conference. Although it is a little too late to attend this year’s conference, I did find out that next year’s APTA Conference is to be held in Orlando, FL, just eighty or so miles to the northeast from Tampa.

Later on in October, I joined HART's CEO at another presentation before the Tampa Mayor's Alliance for People with Disabilities. The main speaker was our CEO describing what HART is doing to address the needs of our disabled Hillsborough County residents. I followed him to talk about travel training and to show the same DVD news report about the Travel Assist Device that was seen up in Minneapolis at the ATI Conference.

As a plus for ATI, in the six page handout that I had for the FPTA Conference, the last page had contact information about Project Action and ATI. From the floor, I highly endorsed both programs as being major contributors to my ongoing success in the travel training profession. I also encouraged the transit agencies that had or were planning to start a travel training program to get involved in ATI.