

2026 TTA State Conference Breakout sessions:



Wednesday, April 29th, 2026

Breakout Sessions

Low-Cost Transit Planning Resources for Rural and Small Transit Agencies – RM: 101

Wednesday: 10:00-10:55 am (55 Min)

Description: This presentation describes a transit planning process for rural/small transit agencies and provides information about readily available and inexpensive tools and data that can be used to inform rural/small agencies' transit planning. The tools are practical and informed by research.

Presenter: Kelly Blume, Texas Transit Institute -TTI

ADA Vehicle Procurement & Preventive Maintenance: Foundations for Compliance and Reliability - RM: 104/105

Wednesday: 10:00-10:55 am (55 Min)

Description: This introductory session provides a high-level overview of key considerations for procuring accessible vehicles and establishing effective preventive maintenance practices. Participants will be introduced to relevant FTA and DOT requirements, measures to consider before accepting a new ADA vehicle, and important factors related to alternative fuel vehicles. The session also highlights foundational elements of a successful preventive maintenance program—whether maintenance is performed in-house or through a contracted provider—with an emphasis on protecting agency investments, supporting ADA compliance, and extending vehicle service life.

Presenter: Robbie Sarles, President and founder of RLS & Associates, Inc.

RAPIDO: A Rapid-Response Framework for Crisis Management and Decision-Making in Transit – RM: 106

Wednesday: 10:00-10:55 am (55 Min)

Description: Transit moves fast, and critical decisions must move with it. This session introduces RAPIDO, a streamlined decision-making model built for high-pressure transit environments. Designed for transit supervisors, frontline leaders, control center and dispatch staff, operators, field supervisors, emergency management and safety teams, HR, training, workforce development staff, and new or emerging leaders, this session offers practical tools for real-world challenges. Christina Villarreal will guide participants through examples and a hands-on crisis simulation to show how Receive, Accept, Pause, Investigate, Decide, and Own can strengthen safety, consistency, and operational response.

Presenter: Christina Villarreal, NPMT, MPA, MAHS, Executive Director, Latino's In Transit (LIT)

Strategic Planning: Building a Plan to Define and Achieve an Outcome – RM: 107

Wednesday: 10:00-10:55 am (55 Min)

Description: This session will explore how transit agencies can use strategic planning to clearly define success and focus decisions on desired outcomes. Attendees will gain practical insights on setting priorities, aligning resources, and building a plan that drives measurable results for their organization and community.

Presenter: Jill Barnett, TransPro Senior Project Leader, and Matt Webb, TransPro Principal

Transitioning to EV in Paratransit Operations (adding chargers and EV vehicles to diversify the fleet) – RM: 108/109

Wednesday: 10:00-10:55 am (55 Min)

Description: Sun Metro's current paratransit fleet utilizes vehicles powered by Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). As part of our commitment to building a more robust and resilient fleet, Sun Metro plans to replace 45 vehicles with Paratransit Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs). This initiative is designed to improve the quality of life for our customers while advancing our commitment to reducing carbon emissions and promoting environmental justice in the communities we serve. By transitioning to electric vehicles, Sun Metro continues to provide safe, dependable, and timely public transportation while moving toward a more sustainable future. To guide this transition, we evaluated several key areas, including: project concept, scope, financial considerations, electric vehicles, infrastructure, training, operational challenges, project launch, and lessons learned. This presentation will highlight both the challenges and pitfalls encountered during the process, as well as the successes and best practices that helped make this initiative successful.

Presenter: Anthony R. Dekeyzer, Director of Mass Transit City of El Paso, Sun Metro

Transitioning Staff from Being Peers to Taking a Supervisory Role – RM: 111/112

Wednesday: 10:00-10:55 am (55 Min)

Description: Transitioning from a work colleague to a supervisor can be very difficult for newly promoted individuals. Many are not equipped with the skills and tools to effectively make a smooth transition. This workshop will assist agency directors or managers to gain knowledge, skills, and learn best practices to help you help your staff to effectively move into their new roles. You will learn how to assist your new supervisors (whether promoted internally or coming into your agency) and avoid common pitfalls. Come and learn how to lay the path for their and your agency's success!

Presenter: Carol Wright Kenderdine, Principal/Owner, Carol Wright Consulting

Investing in Roadway Safety is Imperative – Doubling Down on What Works – RM: 101

Wednesday: 11:05-11:50 am (45 Min)

Description: Texas roads are deadly: in 2024 alone, there were 4,150 traffic fatalities (TxDOT). But employers have a powerful tool to change that—by influencing the driving behaviors of their workforce. With over 60% of Texans employed, organizations have a "captive audience" to promote safe driving, prevent crashes, and reduce costs. The good news? Roughly 90% of crashes involve human error, meaning targeted driver safety programs can make a real difference. By leveraging proven countermeasures and best practices, employers can transform their transportation safety programs into powerful drivers of behavior change. This session will provide practical strategies for making roadway safety a core part of your organizational culture. Attendees will walk away with actionable tools to reduce risk, address liability, and implement effective safety initiatives that protect employees behind the wheel. What Participants Will Learn: • Why transportation safety is critical to an organization's culture and bottom line. • Evidence-based countermeasures that truly work to prevent crashes. • How to integrate policies, training, and resources into your safety program to address current trends and real-world risks.

Presenter: April Ramos, Program Manager, Our Driving Concern-NSC

Prepare for Kickoff: Moving the Masses with Event-Based Transit – RM: 104/105

Wednesday: 11:05-11:50 am (45 Min)

Description: As Texas continues to host major events—from the World Cup to the State Fair of Texas and the Texas–Oklahoma football game—transit access on game day is becoming increasingly important. Big events bring large crowds, and with the right strategy, transit agencies can move people efficiently while boosting ridership and visibility. Beyond transporting attendees, agencies can also generate revenue through on-vehicle and station advertising, digital promotions, and partnerships that include co-branded marketing and discounted tickets. This session highlights practical insights from agencies already managing large event transportation, including how CitiBus supports Texas Tech football games, how Minnesota Valley Transit Authority prepares for professional sports events, and how DART and Trinity Metro are planning to move millions during the World Cup. Attendees will learn how event-based transit can increase ridership, create new revenue opportunities, and expand community engagement through effective planning and partnerships.

Presenter: Jonathan Braddick, Sr Manager Partnerships, GoPass, Dallas Area Rapid Transit

Public Transit Marketing: Strategies for Community Engagement – RM: 106

Wednesday: 11:05-11:50 am (45 Min)

Description: Join transit professionals from across the industry for an interactive discussion on effective marketing strategies that build awareness, strengthen community relationships, and increase ridership. This peer-to-peer session will provide an opportunity to share ideas, discuss challenges, and highlight successful outreach efforts that help connect public transportation with the communities it serves.

Presenter: Rita Patrick, Managing Director of Public Relations, CCRTA, and Oscar Gomez Jr., Marketing and Communications Manager, El Metro

Measure What Matters: Customers & Community in the Driver's Seat – RM: 107

Wednesday: 11:05-11:50 am (45 Min)

Description: This session will explore how transit agencies can develop meaningful performance measures that reflect real community impact. Attendees will learn how to build scorecards that go beyond reporting activity, empowering employees, engaging customers, and using data to guide better decisions and stronger results.

Presenter: Jill Barnett, TransPro Senior Project Leader, and Matt Webb, TransPro Principal

Microtransit: Planning and Implementation Lessons and Practical Tools - RM: 108/109

Wednesday: 11:05-11:50 am (45 Min)

Description: Microtransit continues to gain attention as transit agencies explore new ways to improve mobility beyond traditional first- and last-mile service. This session highlights key findings from TCRP Synthesis 178: Microtransit in Rural Communities, examining whether on-demand microtransit can effectively serve large rural service areas. Presenters will share research insights from agencies across the country, discuss the challenges of covering vast territories with limited resources, and outline practical steps for planning and implementing microtransit service—from market analysis to service design and financial planning. Attendees will gain real-world lessons, best practices, and tools to evaluate whether microtransit could work in their communities.

Presenter: Jessica Klion, Project Manager and Senior Transportation Planner

Understanding How FTA's Funding Formulas Really Work– RM: 111/112

Wednesday: 11:05-11:50 am (45 Min)

Description: FTA's Funding Formulas depend on a mix of data from the National Transit Database and the decennial Census. But what data elements are actually most important to determining how much formula funding goes where? Also, some of the formula factors date back to the 1980s. The nation has changed a lot since 1980. How has that impacted how the formulas work? Attend this session and learn how FTA calculates those formula apportionments, and how the NTD data your system reports contribute to deciding formula allocations.

Presenters: John D. Giorgis, Consultant, KFH Group

Managing Operational and Capital Costs at Rural and Small Urban Transit Systems – RM: 104/105

Wednesday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: As costs continue to rise, Texas rural and small urban transit agencies need practical tools to better manage both operational and capital expenses. This workshop condenses 2.5 days of training developed by TTI with support from TxDOT into a focused session covering key cost management strategies. Participants will receive an overview of the free Managing Costs guidebook and online course, learn foundational concepts such as transit cost drivers and cost analysis, and explore practical approaches to managing labor, fuel, vehicle maintenance, and replacement costs.

Presenter: Michael J. Walk, Research Scientist and Program Manager, Texas A&M Transportation Institute & Christina Bune, Research Specialist, Texas A&M Transportation Institute

Women Shaping Transit: A Leadership & Networking Forum - RM: 106

Wednesday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: Join a dynamic panel of women leaders from across the transit industry as they share insights from their professional journeys and the projects helping shape the future of mobility. Panelists will discuss career paths, leadership lessons, and the evolving role of women in public transportation. The session will conclude with audience Q&A and a brief lightning round of practical advice for the next generation of transit professionals.

Presenter: Moderated by
Moderated by: Kristen Joyner, President, KJ Backpack, LLC

Creating a Culture of Ownership (Not Just Accountability) – RM: 107

Wednesday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: Strong organizations do more than hold employees accountable—they create a culture where staff at every level feel personally invested in outcomes. This session will explore strategies for inspiring employees to take pride in performance, align daily actions with agency-wide goals, and embrace shared responsibility for success. Attendees will gain practical insights on building a workplace culture that strengthens engagement, improves results, and supports long-term organizational growth.

Presenters: Jill Barnett, TransPro Senior Project Leader, and Matt Webb, TransPro Principal

Growing Your Own Workforce: Inside VIA's Fleet Maintenance Training Program – RM: 108/109

Wednesday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: VIA's fleet maintenance training program follows a curriculum designed to take non-technical employees through a series of training modules that provide classroom, instructor-led training with experiential in-shop assignments. The program includes defined learning objectives and evaluation criteria that must be met. Employees who successfully

complete the program are hired into open fleet mechanic positions within the fleet maintenance division. The presentation will provide a detailed overview of VIA's program, highlighting success stories and discussing challenges encountered during implementation. Attendees of the presentation will receive editable e-copies of VIA's curriculum, syllabuses for all training modules, and samples of written exams and hands-on evaluations. Maintenance managers and training staff who would like to create or enhance an in-house training program that will provide opportunities for non-technical personnel to move into technical positions would benefit from this presentation.

Presenter: Steven Rodriguez, Maintenance Technical Trainer, VIA Metropolitan Transit

Navigating the Insurance Market: Collaborative Approaches for Transit Systems - RM: 111/112

Wednesday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: Transit agencies across the country face increasing challenges in securing stable and affordable liability coverage due to rising claims costs and limited insurance market capacity. This session explores collaborative procurement strategies that transit systems can use to strengthen their risk financing approach. Participants will learn about cooperative insurance models, including risk purchasing groups, and how these structures can help agencies pool resources, share best practices, and improve access to specialized coverage. The presentation will also highlight lessons learned from developing the Community Transit Insurance Program, which was designed specifically for transit operations. The session will also explain how traditional guaranteed-cost insurance differs from collaborative risk-sharing approaches used in cooperative transit insurance programs.

Presenter: Barbara J. Rhoades, AIC, Health Transit Pool of Ohio, David L. Cooper, BBA, Partner, Risk Advisor, and Program Manager at INSURICA

A Panel of industry leaders discusses the landscape of electric and low-emission transit vehicles-An update on where the industry is on EV and low-emission vehicles-Panel discussion – RM: 101

Wednesday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min)

Description: Join industry leaders for an engaging panel discussion on the current state of electric and low-emission vehicles in public transportation. Panelists will share updates on where the industry stands today, including technology advancements, infrastructure needs, operational considerations, and lessons learned from agencies already deploying cleaner fleets. This session will provide practical insights into the opportunities and challenges transit agencies face as they evaluate and transition to electric and low-emission vehicles. Attendees will gain a clearer understanding of the evolving landscape and its implications for the future of transit fleets.

Presenter: Panelist: Daniel Rodriguez from San Antonio VIA's Maintenance Department, Moderated by: Jeff Johnson from Model1

FTA's Recipient Toolkit: Practical Tools for Grant Compliance and Management – RM: 104/105

Wednesday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min)

Description:

Join Deputy Regional Administrator, Donald "Don" Koski, from FTA Region 6, for an overview of the Federal Transit Administration's Recipient Toolkit and how it can help agencies successfully manage federal grants. This session will highlight practical resources and guidance designed to support recipients in maintaining compliance, strengthening oversight, and improving grant administration from award through closeout. Attendees will gain a better understanding of how to use the toolkit to navigate common grant management challenges and ensure their agency remains aligned with FTA requirements.

Presenter: Donald "Don" Koski, FTA Deputy Regional Administrator, Region 6

Time Management: How to Use Your Time More Effectively, Accomplish More, and Stress Less – RM: 106

Wednesday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min)

Description: Today, we are being asked to do more than ever before. We need to be able to multitask not only at work but also in order to manage our home lives as well. Everyone seems to be demanding your time and attention and pulling you in multiple directions all at the same time! Time management is a crucial business skill that successful people must master. This workshop will help you identify the things that are most important for you to spend the majority of your time on, and the things that are currently preventing you from doing just that. Most people spend way too much time on the little stuff, then scramble to complete the important things in time to meet looming deadlines. The key is to make better decisions early on about how to spend the precious time you have. This workshop will help you identify how you are currently spending your time, evaluate your choices, learn real-world productivity skills, and develop a plan to stop spending your days feeling stressed in deadline-driven crisis mode. Workshop activities will be directed to individual situations so participants can apply techniques directly to their own lives and concerns.

Presenter: Carol Wright Kenderdine, Principal/Owner, Carol Wright Consulting

Coordinated Transportation and Mobility Management for Rural Regions – RM: 107

Wednesday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min)

Description: Rural communities face unique transportation challenges that require strategic coordination and strong partnerships. This session will highlight practical approaches to mobility management, resource sharing, and coordinated service delivery that expand access and improve efficiency.

Presenter: Robbie Sarles, President and founder of RLS & Associates, Inc.

Getting Started with NRTAP Tech Tools: Resources for Transit Agencies – RM: 108/109

Wednesday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min)

Description: Discover practical tools and resources available through the National Rural Transit Assistance Program (NRTAP) designed to support rural and small urban transit agencies. This session will introduce attendees to NRTAP's online tools, training resources, and technical assistance materials to help agencies improve operations, planning, and staff development. Participants will learn how to access these free resources and explore ways to incorporate them into their agency's daily work to strengthen service delivery and organizational capacity.

Presenter: Al Benedict, National RTAP

Community Partnerships: Supporting Riders Experiencing Homelessness – RM: 111/112

Wednesday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min)

Description: Public transit agencies often serve as a critical point of contact for individuals experiencing homelessness. This session will explore how transit providers can work with local service organizations and community partners to respond compassionately while maintaining safe and reliable service. Presenters will share practical strategies, real-world experiences, and partnership models that help connect riders with resources while supporting frontline staff and the broader community.

Presenter: Valerie Longoria, Executive Director, Echo West Texas

Thursday, April 30th, 2026

TTA Legislative Committee Meeting and update TTA Transit Funding Task Force— RM: 101

Thursday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: The TTA Legislative Committee will have an open meeting focused on current legislative priorities and ongoing efforts to strengthen public transportation across Texas. The session will also include an update from the TTA's lobbyist and the Transit Funding Task Force on potential strategies and opportunities to support sustainable funding for transit agencies. While this meeting is intended for Legislative Committee members, all conference attendees interested are welcome to attend and listen in.

Presenter: Legislative Committee Members

AI and the Future of Everything: A Deeper Dive with Dan Chuparkoff;— RM: 104/105

Thursday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: Join keynote speaker Dan Chuparkoff for an engaging follow-up session that takes a deeper dive into the ideas and insights shared during his keynote presentation. This moderated discussion will give participants a unique opportunity to ask questions, explore practical applications of AI, and discuss how emerging technologies are reshaping the future of work across industries. Attendees will gain additional perspective from Dan's decades of experience in technology innovation and leave with actionable ideas for navigating the rapidly evolving AI landscape.

Presenter: Dan Chuparkoff, AI, Innovation, & Future of Work, Moderated by Mario Delgado, Director of Transportation, Metro McAllen

Maintenance Workshop: Troubleshooting Common Issues on Transit Bus Electrical Systems, Doors, and Interlock Systems – RM: 106

Thursday: 1:30 -3:30 pm (2 Hours)

Description: This hands-on maintenance session will focus on diagnosing and resolving common defects related to transit bus electrical systems, entry doors, and interlock systems. Participants will review common failure points, learn practical troubleshooting techniques, and discuss defects that can affect vehicle safety and reliability. Designed for technicians and maintenance supervisors, this workshop will provide real-world tips to help keep vehicles in service and minimize downtime.

Participants will also have the opportunity to attend the State Expo and network with other agency technicians.

Presenter: Simmon Johnson

Fare Free? Fare Capping? A Look into the Latest on Fare Policy – RM: 107

Thursday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: This is a lot of discussion on new approaches to fare policy and technology. However, what does the research say about these different approaches? This session will discuss recent reports on fare-free transit, fare capping, and other fare innovations and provide attendees with key takeaways and considerations when weighing fare policy and technology options.

Presenter: Jim Cline, Texas A&M Transportation Institute

Attracting and Retaining Talented Workers Throughout the Employee Life Cycle – RM: 108/109

Thursday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: Many transit agencies across Texas and the U.S. are understaffed and struggling to attract and retain great frontline employees. How do we get the best possible candidates in the door and support their success in the industry? In this presentation, team members from the Transit Workforce Center, FTA's national technical assistance center for workforce development, will share innovative recruitment and retention initiatives gathered from local-level experience and national-level research, highlighting a range of potential solutions for agencies of all sizes. First, presenters will discuss innovative messaging and recruitment strategies used in various transit settings to convey the benefits of working in public transportation and how agencies have used partnerships to recruit from untapped employee populations. Next, the team will introduce best practices from recent research on methods for streamlining bus operator hiring practices. Third, Texas-based transit agency presenters will speak about structured mentoring programs and the benefits of mentorship for morale and retention among frontline employees. The session will conclude with a discussion of how agencies are experimenting with work schedules to improve employees' work-life balance, reduce absenteeism, and promote retention.

Presenter: Shayna Gleason, Senior Researcher, Transit Workforce Center

Strengthening De-Escalation Practices in Transit Operations – RM: 111/112

Thursday: 1:30 -2:30 pm (60 Min)

Description: Most escalation incidents in transit don't begin with violence—they begin with frustration, confusion, or miscommunication. This exploratory session examines how de-escalation fits within the broader framework of transit safety, customer service, and workplace expectations. We will highlight the role of clear policies and supervisory guidance in shaping consistent responses to disruptive or emotionally charged situations. Participants will explore practical approaches for reinforcing expectations, documenting incidents, and addressing performance concerns related to de-escalation practices. Designed for transit administrators, managers, and supervisors, the session emphasizes building a culture that prioritizes safety, respect, and effective problem-solving.

Presenter: Kristen Joyner, President, KJ Backpack, LLC

Advancing Rural and Small Urban Transit: A Collaborative Networking Forum - RM: 101

Thursday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min.)

Description: This interactive session brings together leaders, managers, and staff from rural and small urban transit agencies to share challenges, successes, and innovative solutions. Participants will engage in peer-to-peer discussions, explore collaborative approaches, and exchange ideas for improving operations, service delivery, and community impact. Attendees will leave with actionable insights, new connections, and strategies to strengthen transit in their communities.

Presenter: RJ Garza, General Manager of El Metro and VP of Small Urbans – TTA, Chris Mandrell, General Manager, Citibus and Sarah Hidalgo-Cook, MSCD, CCTM, General Manager, SWART, and VP of Rural Systems - TTA

Tips and Tools for Subrecipient Oversight– RM: 104/105

Thursday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min.)

Description: Effective subrecipient oversight is essential to ensuring compliance, accountability, and strong program performance. This session will provide practical tips and easy-to-use tools to help agencies monitor subrecipients, manage risk, document oversight activities, and address findings with confidence.

Presenter: Robbie Sarles, President and founder of RLS & Associates, Inc.

Doing More with Less: Cost Savings through Productivity, Communication, and Service Design – RM: 107

Thursday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min.)

Description: Rural transit agencies are often facing a reality of decreased funding mechanisms for public transit. This session is designed to give rural and small urban transit agencies strategies to ensure excellent transit service delivery without breaking the budget. Strategies discussed will include proper service design and productivity, stakeholder and public engagement, and communication and marketing efforts that can help transit agencies transport more people using fewer service hours or dollars. For each strategy discussed there will be real-world examples of how transit agencies have improved service delivery with revenue-neutral or cost-saving strategies that can be employed by other transit agencies across the country. In addition to cost savings, this session will discuss innovative ways to find new funding through sponsorships, in-kind match and grant opportunities.

Presenter: Bennett Powell, Senior Transportation Planner, KFH Group

PTN-128 Redesign: It's Coming! – RM: 108/109

Thursday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min.)

Description: TTI and TxDOT are working together to redesign the PTN-128 system to align with current reporting requirements and streamline reporting where possible. In the session, TTI will discuss the major changes, implementation timeline, and training plan. A glimpse of the new system will be previewed to provide a general sense of the improvements that are still under development.

Presenter: Christina Bune, Research Specialist, Texas Transit Institute -TTI

Skills for the Next Generation of Transit Leaders – RM: 111/112

Thursday: 2:40 -3:40 pm (60 Min.)

Description: This exploratory session examines how transit agencies can better prepare emerging managers and directors to grow into future leadership roles while excelling in their current responsibilities. The discussion highlights common professional development gaps in areas such as public speaking and board presentations, navigating transit funding, negotiation and conflict management, media and public communication, and strategic thinking. Participants will explore why these gaps often occur and identify practical strategies agencies can use to strengthen leadership development pipelines. The session is designed for executive leaders and HR teams responsible for cultivating the next generation of industry leadership, as well as early- to mid-career transit professionals

Presenter: Kristen Joyner, President, KJ Backpack, LLC