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# National Transit Institute A Training and Education Resource for the Transit Industry



ROMANENKO

National Transit Institute workshop on transit-supportive design.

NTI management development training focuses on improving the effectiveness of transit managers.

The National Transit Institute (NTI), established in spring 1992 at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, was created by Section 29 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and is funded by a grant from the Federal Transit Administration. The mission of NTI is to promote, develop, and deliver high-quality education and training to employees of federal-aid transit systems to improve public transit in the United States. To date, NTI has provided training to nearly 7,500 individuals from transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, state departments of transportation, and other organizations.

"In order to provide the maximum benefit to the transit industry, NTI programs are focused in subject areas of critical importance where training does not exist or is limited," according to NTI Director Alan Gibbs. "Our goals are to directly provide training courses and materials, support existing training programs, and improve the exchange of training information in the industry." Current NTI program areas offer training in federal program responsibilities, multi-modal transportation planning and programming,

advanced technologies and innovative practices, and management development. NTI's small professional staff relies heavily on input from a

wide array of industry representatives to help shape the program areas and develop specific courses.



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## FEDERAL PROGRAM TRAINING

NTI federal program training focuses on improving compliance with federal regulations, guidance, and policy. Courses are developed in close cooperation with FTA and staff at other divisions of the U.S. DOT and are offered tuition-free throughout the United States. The courses provide participants with a working knowledge of U.S. DOT rules and regulations and opportunities to share information and network with one another. Some of NTI's federal program training courses are Orientation to Third Party Contracting, Contract Negotiation and Cost/Price Analysis, Contract Administration, Americans with Disabilities Act

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National Transit Institute workshops for transit trainers are augmented by other programs such as Achievements in Transit Training Awards.



Paratransit Implementation and Eligibility, and ADA Complementary Paratransit Planning and Operations: Plan Updates. Additional courses are included in the curriculum for multimodal transportation planning and programming.

## MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

ISTEA and the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require changes in the way state DOTs, MPOs, and transit agencies handle transportation planning and programming. The changes are both procedural and technical and are expected to result in increased attention to public transit service and its role in improving the efficiency of the nation's transportation system. NTI seeks to assist in the development and successful implementation of multimodal planning and programming by providing education and skills training to prepare planners to meet the challenges of the new planning processes. "Changing the mindset of transportation planners from a concentration on what is best for their mode to what is best for the transportation system in terms of access for both freight and passenger is no easy task," according to Neal Denno, Assistant Director for Multimodal Transportation Planning and Programming. "Representatives of each mode bring their own set of values and priorities to the planning process. They need the knowledge and skills to work in the new mode-neutral planning environment."

NTI's efforts in this area began in fall 1993 when it joined forces with FTA, the Federal Highway Administration, and the National Highway Institute to present a series of eight two-day workshops on the newly released interim final regulations on state and metropolitan transportation planning. Policy represen-

tatives from Washington, D.C., discussed the new requirements in the final regulations and addressed the concerns of the transportation professionals who attended. Since those first outreach sessions, NTI has developed two tuition-free, three-day courses in this area, Financial Planning and Programming for MPOs and Major Investment Studies. These two courses are currently being offered at locations throughout the United States. Courses under development include Public Involvement in Transportation Planning: Effective Techniques and Process; Transit, Planning, and the ISTEA Management Systems; and Introduction to Metropolitan Transportation Planning.

NTI recently produced a nationwide teleconference on the major investment study process. The four-hour conference enabled participants to address questions to FTA and FHWA staff. An audience of more than 1,700 included staff from federal, state, local, and regional transportation planning and environmental resource agencies in the United States and Puerto Rico. The telecast, which originated at the Rutgers University television studio, was broadcast to 89 downlink sites. In addition to providing much-needed information and insight into the major investment study process, the event represented NTI's first test of the effectiveness of teleconferencing technology and its capability to help meet the training and education needs of the industry. Feedback from participants indicates overwhelming support for the use of teleconferences in the future.

## ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

The Advanced Technologies and Innovative Practices (ATIP) program is designed to aid in the transfer of research results to the industry by promoting applica-

tions that improve transit service and operations. According to Linda Howe, Assistant Director for ATIP, "The program offers transit operators diverse opportunities not only to learn about functions and benefits of various advanced technologies but also to find ways to smooth the implementation of innovations of all kinds. Its focus is on concepts and systems, not technical equipment training. One can also expect from us a lot of discussion about the role of information in transit—and computers. We think the program is really something quite different, and quite exciting." The ATIP program is built on research results from the Transportation Research Board's Transit Cooperative Research Program and FTA's Advanced Public Transportation System and innovative planning demonstrations program. It evolved from a series of one-day New Technology Seminars sponsored by NTI during the last two years. Seminars in the series included Implementing Total Quality Principles in Transit, Alternative Fuels for Small Buses and Vans, Computer-Aided Dispatching and Scheduling Software, Advanced Vehicle Monitoring Systems, Geographic Information Systems, and Transit Supportive Design.

Several new projects are currently under development and will be available in late 1995. They include a hands-on, three-day course, Transit Applications of Geographic Information Systems, to be taught by faculty from Rutgers, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Georgia Institute of Technology, and a technical assistance program to support FTA's Livable Communities Initiative. Future plans include training on and education about Smart Vehicle Systems, Information-based Systems to Improve Ridership, Multimodal Transit Integration, Innovations in the Maintenance Shop, and How to Procure Advanced Systems. In June NTI selected its first class of NTI Fellows. This group of practicing transit innovators functions as an important adjunct faculty for the ATIP program, providing workshops in various advanced applications to transit groups and associations around the country.

## MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISORY PROGRAMS

"Improving public transit is the job of management," according to NTI Director Alan Gibbs, "and NTI must be actively involved in helping transit managers, from first-level supervisors to senior managers, achieve personal and organizational success." Current course offerings for first-level supervisors include Changing to Supervision, a program designed to help people make the difficult transition from the ranks into a supervisory position, and Effective Supervision in Transit, which provides experienced supervisors with an

opportunity to enhance their supervisory skills. The course entitled Changing to Middle Management assists new middle managers as they take on the challenges of a new organizational level, and Effective Management in Transit is designed to teach skills that are unique to middle management.

According to Donald Miklas, Associate Director for Management Development, "NTI's programs are transit-specific. They have been designed with the constant input of transit industry and management experts. The courses develop management competencies and explore contemporary topics such as constant innovation, full-participation teams, process diagnosis, cultural diversity, and labor-management cooperation." Courses are delivered by regional teaching teams throughout the country. FTA-subsidized registration fees and flexible course delivery options make attending a course easy and inexpensive. More than 100 transit agencies have sent more than 2,500 supervisors and managers to these courses in the last two years.

## MAXIMIZING TRAINING RESOURCES

In addition to providing direct training NTI supports existing industry training efforts, encourages the development of comprehensive training programs by transit agencies, and facilitates the exchange of training information within the industry. Each March NTI sponsors a national Transit Trainers' Workshop, which provides transit trainers with the opportunity to improve their skills, learn new training techniques, and confer with their peers. As a result of these workshops a state training network was formed in Ohio and a group of trainers from across the country is exploring the feasibility of a multimedia transit training consortium for joint development of multimedia training applications.

NTI recently created the Achievements in Transit Training Awards to recognize excellence in transit training. The program awards individuals and teams for developing and implementing training activities that have improved transit agency performance. Highlights of successful training programs that are nominated for awards are published and distributed to the industry. NTI also publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Transitions*, dedicated to training and education issues and a calendar listing training opportunities, workshops, and courses specifically offered to transit audiences on an open enrollment basis. "These are exciting and challenging times for the transit industry," says Gibbs, "and our job is to provide training and education to help the industry meet these challenges."

*For more information, contact NTI at 120 Albany Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901 (telephone 908-932-1700).*