Putting ITRE’s Public Transportation Group on the Map

The Public Transportation Group (PTG) supports transit, bicycle and pedestrian research, planning and project oversight. The group works closely with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), municipalities, school systems, transit providers, MPOs, RPOs and other partners. PTG contributes to international, national and regional projects, and has a strong presence in North Carolina public transportation activities. The map on the right is a geographic representation of some of PTG’s work in North Carolina from July 2009 to June 2010.

National Transit Database, Operating Statistics and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act implementations are at the top of the list of PTG projects. Whether it is procuring technologies, collecting and reporting data or implementing paratransit software, mobile data computers and Real Time Passenger Information, PTG’s knowledge of advanced technologies continuously grows. Statewide projects, including skill building workshops, performance planning, updating regional and statewide ITS Strategic Deployment Plans, 511 Traveler Assistance, security cameras for 1600 community transportation vehicles and maintenance software for 82 sites, PTG is constantly communicating and visiting with the 101 NC transit systems.

PTG’s research staff recently completed an analysis of the state’s intercity bus services and developed a Statewide Intercity Bus Network Plan. Potential ridership was estimated from the density of transit-dependent persons per county and overall population density along various intercity corridors. The analysis also plotted the location of key intercity trip generators and destinations such as universities, major medical centers and military bases. The project resulted in the use of Federal Transit Administration 5311(f) pilot program funding to maintain service on five routes at risk of abandonment in eastern North Carolina. In addition, the project recommended starting intercity bus service between Boone and Charlotte, and between Fayetteville and Charlotte.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian program within PTG also assists NCDOT’s Division Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, as well as the Safe Routes to School Program. Current activities include workshops on pedestrian design and accessibility issues and administration of the Safe Routes to School program. Bicycle and Pedestrian project planning and funding guidance is given to local governments, public health professionals, schools, law enforcement, and regional-level NCDOT staff on federal funding procedures. Guiding and monitoring over 80 SRTS projects involves education and planning, designing and installing sidewalks, shared-use paths, pedestrian signals, and crosswalks.

For more information on this program, email Debbie Collins at dcollins@carolina.rr.com.

OREd Helps School District Build New Student Assignment Plan

The Operations Research and Education Laboratory (OREd), which is an ITRE-housed organization focused on working with K-12 school systems on issues pertaining to student re-assignment and long range student planning, has collaborated with the Pitt County School district on their student assignment plan for elementary and middle schools for the 2011-12 school year due to the opening of a new school in the district. ORED was founded in 1990 by Dr. Raymond Taylor to scientifically address politically sensitive school planning issues. Since its inception, ORED has been working with Pitt County Schools.

“OREd has been serving Pitt County Schools for 20 years,” Michael Miller, ORED Program Manager said. “It’s the district that we’ve had the longest relationship with and we have helped them with reassignment projects in the past. However, in 2005 the district was in the midst of a controversial reassignment plan and it was decided that ORED should step aside. The school board made the decision to draw their own lines. The results of those actions led to two complaints from parents groups, which ended up going to the Federal Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education.”

The 2011-12 student assignment plan presents an opportunity to address some of the issues lingering after the 2005 decision. ORED and the district carefully mapped out a process that included ample time for education and community involvement. The district created a website that displayed the process timeline and supplied extensive information about all stages of the process.

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Planning for a Safe 2011 with NC LTAP

From January to June, 2011, North Carolina Local Technical Assistance Program (NC LTAP) will offer forty-two training programs for transportation workers. The schedule is prepared with locations that are convenient for the attendees. Raleigh, Greensboro, Rocky Mount, Brevard, Mooresville, High Point and Wilmington are some of the host cities.

Three new workshops are being offered in 2011.

Updating your Computer Skills: Reports and Presentations is designed for anyone who uses a computer and wants to learn more about how to create reports and presentations for their organization. The class will cover programs such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

The second new course is Road Safety 365: A Safety Workshop for Local Governments. This training focuses on incorporating safety into all aspects of local and rural road projects, and on making safety a priority through inclusion in the traditional decision-making process 365 days a year. The main goal of this workshop is to raise the safety awareness of practitioners on how to incorporate safety into project development and everyday work.

Dr. Ron Eck, West Virginia LTAP, was instrumental in designing this training for Federal Highway Administration. Dr. Eck will be the instructor for the North Carolina session.

On July 1, 2011, NCDOT is requiring Work Zone Traffic Control Supervisors to be certified. NC LTAP is offering training that will help transportation workers meet that requirement. Work Zone Traffic Control Supervisor Training is a three-day workshop designed for DOT, larger municipalities and highway contractors that work on all highway systems, including two-lane roads, multilane roadways and high-volume, high-speed, controlled-access facilities. This course covers traffic control plan reading and development, positive protection, work zone capacity, night work and inspection. Part 6 of the MUTCD and state DOT “Roadway Standard Drawings” are used as the text for this course. It is scheduled for 10 locations during the first six months of 2011. This workshop will qualify attendees to be a Work Zone Supervisor.

An important part of NC LTAP is the Roads Scholar and Advanced Roads Scholar programs. These programs provide special training that allow local government agencies access to high quality training for their employees at a reasonable cost. The Roads Scholar Program consists of 14 one to two day training sessions. To become a Roads Scholar, seven of the fourteen training sessions must be completed. Upon completion of the Roads Scholar Program, graduates receive a certificate of training, a letter of recommendation, and recognition at the NCAPWA Streets Division Annual Meeting. To become an Advanced Roads Scholar, a Roads scholar must complete eight of fourteen different training sessions and write a summary on how the program has helped them in their job or community. As of October 2010, there are 609 Roads Scholar graduates in North Carolina and 145 Advanced Roads Scholar graduates.

Attendees of all three new training courses will receive Roads Scholar or Advanced Roads Scholar credit.

NC LTAP is excited to announce that beginning in December, 2010, Ronnie Lowe, instructor at Wake Technical Community College, will be our new Heavy Equipment Operator Safety training instructor. Ronnie will be teaching Backhoe Operator Safety Training as well as safety training on other heavy equipment.

To learn more about the training being offered and about the NC Roads Scholar and Advanced Roads Scholar programs, visit our website: http://itre.ncsu.edu/LTAP/index.html

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Miller presented at two school board meetings during the summer. On June 7, 2010, he discussed the challenges that face Pitt County Schools in dealing with student assignments in the Greenville area and introduced the Integrated Planning for School And Community (IPSAC) process, a data-driven and policy-based model for forecasting school enrollment and determining optimal locations for new schools and attendance boundaries. The optimal attendance boundary scenarios for Pitt County schools would be based on the student’s proximity to the school, building utilization and academic proficiency.

At the July 1 meeting, the first optimal scenario maps were presented: for each elementary and middle school, one map provided a solution driven by proximity and capacity. The second map focused on proximity, capacity and proficiency.

Community engagement meetings held during the summer allowed the district to address the concerns of impacted parents. Revisions of the optimal scenarios were prepared and the review process continued, culminating in two scenarios receiving the Superintendent’s recommendation. On November 15, 2010, the Pitt County School Board approved the recommended assignment plans for the 2011-12 school year.

“It is important to see a project like this as more than a technological or mathematical challenge. The critical piece in every student assignment plan is crafting a transparent process that actively involves district staff, the Board and community,” said Miller. “While OREd is intensely involved in the planning and initial stages of such a process, ultimately the district and the community must understand and take ownership of the plan. That is how I measure success and I think that is exactly what happened this year for Pitt County Schools.”

For more information, email Mike Miller at mamiller@ncsu.edu.