

**Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in the Parks Technical Assistance Center**  
**Preliminary Findings of the Outreach/Needs Assessment**

**May 2010**

**Executive Summary**

The Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center (TAC) is funded by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA, USDOT) to support Department of Interior (DOI) land management agencies such as the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA); the Forest Service (USFS), an agency of the Department of Agriculture (USDA); and Federal Lands Highways (FLH) of the USDOT through the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks program (<http://www.fta.dot.gov/atppl>), formerly known as the Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands (ATPPL) program. The TAC is available to provide a full range of alternative transportation information and assistance to all Federal Land Management Agencies (FLMAs), as well as state, local or tribal governments working in collaboration with an FLMA, that manages public lands open to the general public for recreation. The mission of the TAC is to provide transportation-related technical assistance and enhanced coordination among Federal Land Management Agencies to continually improve visitor access, quality experiences and resource stewardship.

One of the first objectives of the TAC was to reach out to FLMAs to identify needs for transportation-related technical assistance. These outreach and needs assessment efforts were initially targeted at key individuals at the regional and national levels with expertise on transportation issues facing units within FLMAs. In preparation for these interviews the following information was provided to the interviewees: 1) background information about the goals and functions of the TAC, 2) the team that is implementing the TAC, and 3) the specific objectives of this needs assessment inquiry.

A total of twenty-three (23) interviews were completed during the winter of 2009-10 with 13 conducted in-person and 10 conducted over the telephone. Several of the interviews involved more than just one person, especially those conducted in person. A total of thirty-three (33) interviewees throughout the United States participated in the study, with the following agency representation: four (4) with the Bureau of Land Management; seven (7) with the US Fish and Wildlife Service; eighteen (18) with the National Park Service; and four (4) with the FHWA Federal Lands Highway. The results of this effort are reported according to the fifteen questions asked at the interviews. In order to provide a level of anonymity, interviewees are not identified for each response. The report represents preliminary findings, and future modifications may be made if, after further review by interviewees, it is found that corrections are needed or if responses require further detail or clarification. The TAC wants to be responsive to current and future needs of the FLMAs and considers this report to be a working document.

## **Findings**

The interviews conducted by the TAC identified important needs for transportation-related technical assistance within the FLMAs. One of the important themes to come from the interviewees was the need for the TAC to coordinate with other entities. Many activities are underway within different groups that support FLMAs, such as the Volpe Center (VOLPE), Federal Land Highways, Denver Service Center (DSC), and the San Dimas Technology and Development Center. The Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Technical Assistance Center has the potential to be another valuable asset to FLMAs. All of the FLMAs want coordination between region and unit. Many opportunities exist for improvements to the Transit in Parks program/process and for specific training opportunities and other methods to assist FLMAs.

Several themes emerged in terms of how the TAC can provide this type of assistance:

- Address needs common to all agencies as well as those unique to each agency
- Target assistance to regions and not units
- Cradle to grave assistance optimal but a set of expectations between TAC and FLMAs should be defined
- TAC could provide assistance with national ATS challenges/solutions, not just at the unit level
- Assist with grant applications
- Emphasize personal assistance over other approaches such as group trainings, technical guidebooks, regional forums, and assistance aimed at a broad audience
- Peer to peer mentoring was viewed favorably
- Believe Transportation Assistance Groups (TAGs) should be wrapped in with Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and General Management Plan (GMP) processes
- FLMAs should partner more often with local & private entities
- Coordination critical
  - Vertical and horizontally within FLMAs
  - Work with other support groups such as VOLPE and DSC

There are diverse transportation-related issues that FLMA units experience that require different approaches to solving problems. There was overwhelming agreement for TAC training assistance with grant applications for the Transit in Parks program. In addition, other training needs were identified on a variety of topics that included: Addressing transportation-related issues in the context of FLMAs and their missions; Planning on a variety of levels, including financial planning, such as for Operation and Maintenance (O&M), which is one of the biggest issues for transportation systems within FLMAs; and Creating TAGs to assist in identifying key data for transportation planning. Case studies and documents of lessons learned from units within the agency and units in other agencies were also of particular interest to FLMAs.

Working with other transportation assistance groups can further strengthen the TAC's visibility and help it to develop a unique role in providing transportation-related information to FLMAs. As a result of this needs assessment study, it is likely that the TAC will need to devise a broad range of outreach and training opportunities to assist FLMAs.