MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

Your Membership Committee has developed a new work plan for recruitment and retention of CalACT members. Pending approval of the Board of Directors in December, the Committee will begin the following programs and activities:

- Return of the “Get On Board” membership drive. Existing members will be eligible to win discounted registration fees at a future conference. Central Contra Costa County Transit, the County Connection, was the winner in the 2007 drive.

- Deep discounts for members at CalACT Conferences.

- Members only access to information and programs.

- Annual membership awards and recognition, including the Wall of Excellence.

The Committee is also exploring the concept of joint membership with other organizations. More information on this concept and implementation progress will be made available in future newsletters.

The Committee always welcomes ideas from members. Please send them to dennis@calact.org.

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Making Transit Websites Accessible

By Aaron Antrim

When I was hired to launch new websites for three transit services in Northern California recently, one of the requirements for the new sites was that they should be usable for riders who are blind or low-vision. After the launch, I received an email from a local blind man. The new websites offered him superior access and usability, he said. He invited me to attend a Humboldt Council of the Blind meeting to learn and discuss more about transit, the web, and accessibility.

Attending the Humboldt Council of the Blind meeting and talking with blind transit users caused me to have a small revelation. Until then, my focus on accessibility had been on technical standards to meet my client agency’s requirements, but at the meeting I gained a deeper appreciation for web-accessibility and transit. Most of the Council of the Blind members are dependent on transit to get around, many of them riding ten times per week or more. The new websites for Humboldt County, they said, were far more usable than the ones they replaced.

Unfortunately, I learned, many other transit websites are still difficult or impossible for transit riders who are low-vision or blind to use.

There are many reasons to make accessibility a priority for transit websites. The first, and best reason is that it is simply the right thing to do. Out of all the groups that look for transit information online, don’t the most transit-dependent groups deserve to have their needs well-served?

The second reason is to take an important legal precaution. In 2003, California Senate Bill 302 declared that California state agencies must comply with section 508 of the United States Rehabilitation Act “in developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic information technology.” Previously, Section 508 standards, including those for web-accessibility, had only applied to federal agencies, but SB302 applied these standards not only to California state agencies, but any recipient of state funding. The third reason to prioritize accessibility is that well-designed, accessible websites serve all users better. As a rule, these websites are standards-compliant, meta-information rich, and contain real data rather than image-only representations. What this means is that these websites are listed higher in search engine results pages, and show up in response to more queries. The websites also load faster and are more broadly compatible with older and newer versions of web-browsers. In short, they provide more robust usability for everyone.

With Disabilities Act and two California civil rights statutes: the California UNRUH Civil Rights Act and the California Disabled Persons Act.

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For next publication date, please call 916-446-8018.

EASTERN SIERRA TRANSIT AUTHORITY
JOB ANNOUNCEMENT FOR:
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Definition: The EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR shall organize, control, and direct the activities of the Eastern Sierra Transit Authority and carry out the goals and policies of the ESTA Board.

Distinguishing Characteristics: This classification is the lead position of the ESTA organization and involves a broad range of assignments requiring independent thinking and excellent transportation management, personnel, financial, statistical, writing, and oral communication skills.

Typical Tasks: The following are typical tasks of the Executive Director position. This listing is not meant to be exclusive, as there may be other tasks assigned to the Executive Director.

Meetings--Organize and administer ESTA Board and ESTA committee meetings. Represent ESTA before ESTA jurisdictions and various individuals, groups, and agencies, including public and private organizations.

Personnel--Hire, compensate, train, fire, promote, demote, and discipline employees of ESTA, within the constraints of the adopted Personnel Policy. Maximize use of reasonable training opportunities for staff and employees, within budgetary constraints. Administer all aspects of labor relations including negotiating labor agreements and representing ESTA in dealings with any unions.

Financial--Develop and manage operating and capital budgets for all ESTA activities. Authorize appropriations including transfers within major expense items. Find ways to optimize ESTA access to outside funding.

Approve purchases consistent with policies established by the Board of Directors. Approve purchases of assets listed in the adopted budget or by minute order, approve payments for contracts authorized by the ESTA Board, and approve other purchases authorized by the ESTA Board.

Submit grant applications for ESTA capital, planning, and service projects. Sign grant agreements for projects approved by the ESTA Board.

Transit--Manage transit-related projects, including planning, operating, marketing, and capital activities. Perform contract negotiations, monitoring, and administration. Enforce contractor compliance with ESTA requirements.

Establish and maintain a fare collection and deposit system.

Perform service planning, scheduling, and driver scheduling where appropriate. Organize and conduct workshops and public hearings on transit matters affecting a significant number of existing or future riders on any particular route.

Lease buses, vans, and other equipment on an “as needed” basis from public or private organizations when deemed necessary to assure continued reliability of transit operations.

Comply with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Short Range Transit Plan, unmet transit needs process, and other transit-related regulations.

Delegation--The Executive Director may delegate such of the responsibilities and duties assigned herein as he/she deems appropriate.

Knowledge and Ability: Recent knowledge of public transportation services, innovations, programs and issues, including alternative fuels, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and SAFETEA-LU, as amended. Ability to administer ESTA policies and programs, enforce ESTA personnel policy, develop and convey ESTA policy on transportation issues, provide leadership and direction to ESTA Board, analyze and prepare own reports and board communications, analyze complex statistical and technical information pertaining to transportation issues; communicate effectively, both orally and in writing; establish and maintain a cooperative working relationship with others, including the ESTA jurisdictions and the public; think independently with minimum Board oversight; complete tasks on time.

Minimum Requirements:
Experience: Minimum five year’s recent experience in managing a public transportation system, or in a closely related field. A college degree as described below in a related field may be substituted for one year of the experience requirement.

Education: Minimum four-year degree (prefer Master’s degree) in Transportation management, engineering or planning, land use planning, environmental planning, public administration, business administration, management study, or closely related field, from an accredited college or university. Senior level management experience in an organization of comparable or larger size and complexity in transportation or a related field may be substituted for college degree.

License/Cert: A valid California Driver’s license will be required. Employee will be required to use his/her personal automobile which employee shall insure. Employee must be capable of obtaining a bus driving license (Class B with Passenger Endorsement) subject to organization needs.

Medical Class - Light Work: This class will require light physical effort which may include frequent lifting of up to ten pounds and occasional lifting of up to twenty pounds. Some bending, stooping, and/or squatting may be required. Considerable walking may be required.

Compensation:
Salary Range:
PERS: 2.5% @ 55
Health Ins.
Dental/Vision:
Life Ins.:
Comprehensive Leave:
Holidays:
Application Process:
Application for the position of ESTA Executive Director must be submitted no later than December 31, 2007. Applications may be obtained by contacting:

Eastern Sierra Transit Authority
703 B Airport Road
Bishop, CA 93515
Phone: 760-872-1001

Resumes along with completed applications should be returned to:
Philip McGuire, Interim Executive Director
431 I Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: 916-866-6215
Email: philm@innovativeparadigms.com

JOB POSTINGS
The past couple of CalACT years have been an amazing—and scary—adventure for me. Losing a founding chief executive is a significant event in the life of any corporation, and so it was with CalACT. Thanks to the great team of Board members I’m privileged to work with, our organization weathered the transition from Pete to Jacklyn in fine form. Try to imagine being in Jacklyn’s shoes with all that was on her plate: landing a new contract to manage the Rural Transit Assistance Program, improving CalACT’s financial outlook, securing and retaining competent staff, while leading CalACT outside of its comfort zone to pull off the first-ever Speed of Life Summit—with panache I might add! This last one was a whopper for the Board to wrap its arms around right up to the moment of birth. Even though the labor pains were intensive, the baby was beautiful and I hear-tell mom and dad are “expecting” again in a couple of years.

Sadly, this is my farewell article as your Board chair. I ended up serving far longer in this role than I had ever intended. But I was truly happy to do it—even during the challenging times. For those of you who don’t already know, Paratransit’s decades-long Executive Director, Bill Durant, decided to retire and I was appointed to replace him. It’s times like this that I pull out my tried and true mantra, “Change is good.” I’m absolutely certain your next chair will lead CalACT to an even greater future. And I’ll be there to help in any way I can—I have CalACT in my blood you know!

Chair’s Message

Making Transit Websites Accessible (cont.)

To gain a prerequisite understanding for web-accessibility design, it is necessary to understand how blind people browse the web. Most often, they use special software called a “screen reader” that literally reads the contents of a page aloud using text-to-speech technology. Blind users generally use special software called a “screen reader” that reads the contents of a page aloud using text-to-speech technology. Blind users generally browse the web by clicking on links and content items, a mouse, to select links and content items. Certain software cannot read what this image represents.

Accessible vs. inaccessible: The original Redwood Transit System website (top), used a layout approach called frames which hindered accessibility and search engine indexing. The new www.redwoodtransit.org (below) is visually-pleasing, accessible for everyone, and search-engine friendly.
Making Transit Websites Accessible [cont.]

[From Page 3]

An especially poor practice I’ve seen on transit websites is offering transit timetables as images instead of raw text. While the timetable may appear as text to a sighted user, it is actually transmitted and displayed in the web-browser as an image file. You can tell this because individual bits of text cannot be selected and cut-and-pasted into a word processor, and the text-size does not change when with the browser’s text-size adjustment features. These transit time-table images are essentially inaccessible to sight-impaired users, as it is not feasible to provide useful alternative text for such lengthy and highly-structured information.

Providing only PDF files of schedule files can be fraught with some of the same problems. PDF files, while generally more screen-reader friendly than images, do not provide the same quality of access as a well-designed webpage if they are not “tagged” with special invisible cues, and most are not.

On accessible transit websites, timetables are formatted as HTML tables. Note that tables on webpages are more than just visual elements, but are a way of logically arranging data into columns, rows, and cells with headers. This logical organization facilitates easy screen-reader access.

I’ve seen some timetables presented online with a fixed-width font using spaces to create the visual appearance of a table without actually defining real columns, rows, and cells and headers that a screen-reader could use. Here’s an example: Let’s say we have a timetable with stops listed across the top in a well-structured table. Column headers are marked as such for screen-readers. Screen-reader users can use the column headers to find the stop they want to leave from and quickly move down through that column. The screen-reader announces each stop time in the column until they find the one they need. If a user becomes disoriented in a table, the software reads the column and row headers associated with a given cell.

On the web, data can be described in ways that are invisible to most sighted users. These tags define document structure with headers of varying levels, show where paragraphs begin and end, and indicate other kinds of important information. Formatting pages in this way is crucially important for sight-impaired users, but also produces more search-engine friendly websites that work better with older browsers.

Does your transit agency offer braille schedules for blind riders? Few do, because they are potentially difficult and time-consuming to produce.

Compare the experience with a screen-reader on a page designed like the former example to one where data is in a well-structured table. Column headers are marked as such for screen-readers. Screen-reader users can use the column headers to find the stop they want to leave from and quickly move down through that column. The screen-reader announces each stop time in the column until they find the one they need. If a user becomes disoriented in a table, the software reads the column and row headers associated with a given cell.

Does your transit agency offer braille schedules for blind riders? Few do, because they are potentially difficult and time-consuming to produce.

One alternative is to offer downloadable text files that blind users can load into a braille notetaker. These are portable devices for taking, storing, carrying, and retrieving notes on-the-go (like a PDA for people who use a refreshable braille display.)

Calendar of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 14 - 16, 2007</td>
<td>Electrical Training</td>
<td>Van Nuys, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 3, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Lake County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 4, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 5, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Stockton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 6, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Concord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 7, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Monterey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 8, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Clovis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 10, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 11, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 12, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13, 2007</td>
<td>Securing Community Mobility &amp; Wheelchair securement Training</td>
<td>Palm Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 23, 2008</td>
<td>ADA Workshop</td>
<td>Concord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 31, 2008</td>
<td>ADA Workshop</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 20, 2008</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 3 - 4, 2008</td>
<td>Response &amp; Recovery Conference</td>
<td>San Diego</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 6 – 7, 2008</td>
<td>Response &amp; Recovery Conference</td>
<td>Monterey</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 10 – 11, 2008</td>
<td>Response &amp; Recovery Conference</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
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<tr>
<td>March TBD</td>
<td>10-11-2008 Roadeo</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 21 - 23, 2008</td>
<td>Spring Conference &amp; Expo</td>
<td>Lake Tahoe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For details on any of the upcoming events, please contact Meg Desmond at 916-920-8018.
Making Transit Websites Accessible [cont.]

...are blind). Information is outputed on a one or two-line refreshable braille display consisting of tiny pins made of metal and plastic.

Blind users can download the same transit schedule files sighted people use for their iPods, PDAs, and mobile phones. One of the innovations Transit Information Solutions offers is software that makes it easy to publish schedule information in a variety of formats — on the web, as text files, and on Google Transit — without having to manage redundant sets of data for each.

There are several ways to determine if a website is accessible. The first is to give it a quick once-over to see if it shows any of the red flag for accessibility described here — excessive images for content and navigation, PDF-only content, etc. However, because much of accessible web-design isn't immediately apparent to a sighted user in their web-browser, it is better to take an "under-the-hood" look at a a website's HTML code.

You can use free online code validation and accessibility checking tools to test any website, just by entering a URL. One excellent service is the Web Accessibility Versatile Evaluator (WAVE) at wave.webaim.org. Information about other tools is available from the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative at www.w3.org/WAI/ER/tools. HiSoftware’s free Cynthia Says service at www.cynthiasays.com helps evaluate websites according to the Section 508 standards. Also, ...
Making Transit Websites Accessible [cont.]

one of the best first steps for ensuring accessibility is to make sure pages are web-standards compliant. The W3C’s Markup Validation Service (validator.w3.org) is a terrific help for this.

These online tools are extremely useful but they can’t check for everything and may flag issues that are not genuine problems. In the end, the best approach is to seek the feedback of sight-impaired users themselves or a professional who works with blind users and understands accessibility on the web.

There is no reason not to offer an accessible website. It will serve all users better and can result in better search engine rankings. Transit Information Solutions understands accessibility on the web. It will serve all users better and can result in better search engine rankings. Transit Information Solutions specializes in ensuring online accessibility, going beyond requirements to ensure usability by working with leading experts and sight-impaired end-users. If you would like to learn more about Transit Information Solutions services, including accessible transit website design and re-tooling, as well as our service to help agencies take advantage of Google Transit, please contact me. Transit Information Solutions will be happy to provide a free accessibility assessment consultation on your existing transit website.

[Aaron Antrim is the Principal of Transit Information Solutions in Arcata, California, on the web at www.transitinfosolutions.com and the Outreach Director of Green Wheels, at www.green-wheels.org. He can be contacted at aaron@transitinfosolutions.com, or at 707.633.4464.]

California Department of Transportation

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
Division of Mass Transportation (DMT)

Caltrans DMT undertakes many activities to make transit a more viable travel option for improving mobility across California. Below are some highlights of recent activities led by DMT:

State Transit Programs: Proposition 1B
Proposition 1B, The Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality, and Port Security Bond Act of 2006, was approved by California’s voters last November. Proposition 1B is a bond investment packaged of $19.9 billion to support 16 funding programs. The Public Transportation Modernization, Improvement, and Service Enhancement Account (PTMISEA), one of the 16 funding programs, will receive $3.6 billion for transit capital projects over the life of the bond. Six hundred million dollars will be available for allocation in Fiscal Year 2007-08.

Although Senate Bill 88 requires the State Controller’s Office to identify project sponsors and distribute PTMISEA funds, it requires the Department of Transportation to act as the administrative agency in Fiscal Year 2007-08. The Department, welcoming this opportunity, assigned the Division of Mass Transportation (DMT) the lead for developing the Public Transportation Modernization, Improvement, and Service Enhancement Program Fiscal Year 2007-08 Guidelines (Guidelines). The Guidelines are to assist project sponsors and the Department in verifying that a sponsoring entity’s project(s) is consistent with the PTMISEA criteria contained in Senate Bill 88. The Guidelines are being developed with input and review from a variety of stakeholders including the Rural Counties Task Force, transportation planning agencies, and the California Transit Association. The guidelines will be available in November 2007.

Rural Transit and Procurement: FTA Section 5311 Program

Drug and Alcohol Testing

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires DMT to ensure that Section 5311 subrecipients adhere to FTA drug and alcohol testing regulations intended to prevent drug and alcohol misuse in the provision of public transit services. To implement this intent, DMT has developed policies and procedures to assist project sponsors in ensuring adherence to the FTA drug and alcohol testing regulations.

[continues on Page 07]
We are pleased to report that on August 1, 2007, RLS and Associates completed their charge and all Section 5311 subrecipients were reported compliant with the requirements. As required by FTA, DMT will ensure continued compliance through annual monitoring activities performed by the Department’s local district staff.

Section 5311(f), Intercity Bus Program.

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The California Transportation Commission (CTC) has reconvened the Section 5310 Advisory Committee (COSSAC). The Committee will meet again soon to finalize the changes in November 2007. We anticipate that the revised application and scoring criteria will be completed and placed on the CTC January 2008 calendar for approval. After CTC approval, DMT will issue a call for projects, followed by the application workshops. Applications are anticipated to be due next Spring 2008.

SAFETEA-LU Coordinated Plan Requirement

DMT staff met with rural planning agencies to conduct a preliminary assessment of local transportation and human service resources to assist the consultant in expediting the coordinated planning process. Starting in November 2007, the consultant will assign teams to 23 specific geographic areas to meet with each agency’s representative(s). Each consultant team will be responsible for preparing the coordinated plan for the respective rural area. The consultant will facilitate and conduct the public participation processes required in the completion of the coordinated plan.

Job Access and Reverse Commute/New Freedom: FTA Sections 5316/5317

The Advisory Committee is a source of information, a forum for discussion, support and guidance for the small urban communities on issues concerning transportation, coordination and outreach under SAFETEA-LU. Committee members include representatives from Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Regional Transportation Planning Agencies, Health and Human Services Agencies, public/private non-profit and for profit transit providers, and the Department District Transit Representatives. The Advisory Committee plans to meet once a month until January 2008. The Small Urban Area Advisory Committee’s primary goal is to bridge the gaps between transportation, employment and human services.

The State of California Mobility Action Plan for Improving Human Services Transportation Through Effective Statewide Coordination (MAP)

The MAP is based upon the United We Ride (UWR) coordination grant to implement the goals, action steps, and deliverables contained in the MAP.

Goal 1: The California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS), in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency (BTH), and other State leaders will make human services transportation a priority through their respective departments that will set clear direction for improving human services transportation within the State.

Goal 2: To address restrictive and duplicative laws and regulations related to human services transportation-funding programs.

Goal 3: To ensure continuity in improving coordination of human services transportation.