

Benefiting from the Transportation Planning Process

By Dan Dalton, KFH Group

Many positive comments were received from participants at the recent *Planning Ahead: Enhanced Contracting Opportunities By Participating in the Transportation Planning Process* seminars. “I now know what to do! I will now move forward with my company’s plan to work with our Metropolitan Planning Organization” was one member’s comment. Along with my colleagues Ken Hosen of the KFH Group and Joe Rubino of J.M. Rubino Consulting, we had the pleasure of delivering five of these one-day *Planning Ahead* seminars for the Taxicab, Paratransit & Limousine Association (TLPA), funded through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and highlighted in previous editions of *Transportation Leader* magazine. We hope that the transportation leaders in these sessions gained the tools to more fully participate in the transportation planning process and identify business opportunities, while at the same time finding the day fun, enjoyable and useful.

If you weren’t able to join us at one of the 2008 *Planning Ahead* seminars, don’t worry! Thanks to the support of TLPA and FTA, another series will be held in 2009. Work is underway for seminars in New York, Providence, Kansas City, Fort Worth and Seattle and details will be announced in the near future. So, plan ahead to join us. In the meantime here’s some background on the *Planning Ahead* seminars and other opportunities to learn more about participating in and benefiting from the transportation planning process.

Planning Ahead Seminar Background

Early last year, TLPA was awarded a grant from FTA to assist private for-hire vehicle operators in understanding and becoming involved in their local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and statewide planning processes and the opportunities for business that may follow. A key component of this technical assistance program is the seminars that help equip private operators with the knowledge, skills and abilities to more fully participate in these planning processes, understand the benefits of getting involved and ultimately identify opportunities to tap into additional revenue opportunities and expand services. In May 2008, TLPA contracted with the KFH Group and J.M. Rubino Consulting to develop a manual and conduct these *Planning Ahead* seminars.

In the development of the *Planning Ahead* seminar topics and materials, we gained valuable insight from the TLPA Technical Work Group (TWG). The TWG, which included TLPA members Jim McLary, Robbie Werth, Sheri Watson and Margie Wilcox, provided input on seminar development, resources and outreach efforts. The consultant team working with the TWG, developed five modules for the *Planning Ahead Seminar: The Planning Process and Business Opportunities; Participating in the Transportation Planning Process; Key Programs for Private Provider Participation; Taking Advantage of the Opportunity for Private Sector Participation* and *Aligning Your Company to New Opportunities*. The five initial planning seminars were presented in 2008 in: Alexandria, VA (with 24 attendees on September 16); Las Vegas, NV (with 10 attendees on September 23); Tampa, FL, (with 34 attendees on October 26 as the session was held the day before the beginning of the 90th TLPA Annual Convention and Trade Show); Chicago, IL, (with 30 attendees on November 5); and Denver, CO, (with 28 attendees on November 7).

Seminar Objectives

In the development of the seminar presentation, our key objectives were to provide Planning Ahead seminar participants with:

- A working knowledge of the transportation planning process—at the state, regional and local levels.
- A forum to discuss the benefits of being involved in the planning process.
- Help with identifying potential business opportunities.

From the outset, we strived to design a seminar format and supporting materials that were practical and easy to use. We were keenly aware that talking about federal requirements and the MPO and statewide planning process, might for some people (ok, maybe almost everyone except us transportation planners) be dry and not exciting topics for discussion. Therefore, we structured the planning seminars to have sufficient information on funding programs and planning requirements, while at the same time connecting these topics to real-world experiences. In addition, we tried to promote an informal environment that allowed for discussion between facilitators and participants. Based on several comments from participants that they appreciated this informal setting and the interaction that ensued, hopefully we succeeded. One participant noted the “informal, fun, interactive nature” of the seminar. Some participants even commented favorably regarding our sense of humor—they must really like bad jokes!

Another objective going into the seminar development was to provide participants with an appropriate understanding and working knowledge of the planning processes and organizations so that they could seek out the right contacts and join the right committees back in their communities. We hoped to provide just the right amount of information and resources to allow private transportation operators to ask the pertinent questions and be able to make more informed decisions regarding their level of involvement in the transportation planning process. Again, hopefully we succeeded as several participants noted the proper balance of information and resources and as one commented the seminars provided “something new for people with more experiences while not too high for industry novices”.

Planning Ahead Manual

Seminar participants received a *Planning Ahead* manual for use during the events and for reference after the seminars. The *Planning Ahead* manual contains copies of the seminar presentations and includes a variety of resources on the planning process, funding programs, opportunities for private transportation provider participation and other key topics. In addition, the *Planning Ahead* manual

includes various checklists to assist with efforts after participants return to their communities. “Excellent handout, full of info for future reference” commented one participant. In addition to the manual, *Planning Ahead* seminar handouts included the *FTA/FHWA Transportation Planning Process: Key Issues* publication briefing book that is also available on-line at <http://www.planning.dot.gov/documents/BriefingBook/BBook.htm>.

Seminar Highlights

So why get involved in transportation planning? During the *Planning Ahead* seminars we discussed the variety of benefits, including:

- Gaining access to decision-makers and public transit and other transportation providers and the opportunity to be where they meet and use that venue to network.
- Forming partnerships and learning about opportunities to expand services.
- Enabling private transportation providers to provide their perspective to the transportation planning process, including offering ways to provide more efficient and effective services.

In addition, the wide spectrum of private sector opportunities was highlighted at the seminars. These opportunities include providing premium taxi service in urban areas, contracting for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit services, providing after hours service, contracting with human service agencies to provide transportation and operating bus services under contract.

Additional opportunities as part of United We Ride, the federal initiative to support efforts to coordinate the many federal programs that fund transportation, were featured at the seminars. There are similarities between local coordination efforts and the transportation planning process, including the opportunity to be at the “table” and the chance to form partnerships with transit operators, human service agencies, Medicaid transportation administrators and others to expand services.

The recent focus on mobility management was also a topic at the *Planning Ahead* seminars. With this focus on meeting individual customer needs through a wide range of transportation options and service providers, mobility management efforts offer taxi and other private transportation providers opportunities to provide direct services and operate transportation brokerage or call centers.

In addition to discussing key federal funding programs and ways to be effectively involved in the transportation planning process, we spent much of the day talking about taking advantage of the opportunities for private sector participation that result from these programs and organizational structures. One of the most popular segments of the seminars focused on:

Continued on page 38

Benefiting from the Transportation Planning Process

Continued from page 19



TLPA joined with FTA to present a *Planning Ahead: Enhanced Contracting Opportunities By Participating in the Transportation Planning Process* seminar which was held in Alexandria, VA (a Washington, DC suburb) on September 16, 2008. Twenty four TLPA members attended.

- Establishing the value of your company in your community.
- Selling yourself and your company.
- Knowing the right questions to ask.

We wrapped up the seminar by discussing how to put the information provided to work and aligning your company to new opportunities. This included the possible need for developing new business models to fit human service programs and coordinated transportation opportunities, effectively compete in both urban and rural areas and better understanding the community needs.

Participant Input

At the conclusion of each *Planning Ahead* seminar, we asked participants to complete an evaluation form. These results indicated that participants felt the sessions met their expectations and the knowledge they gained will be able to be applied and enable them to more fully participate in their local planning process. All participants who completed an evaluation form rated the seminar as excellent or good.

While the comments from the evaluation forms were overwhelmingly positive, participants gave us useful input that was used to make adjustments during the initial series of seminars and make improvements for the next round of *Planning Ahead* sessions.

Building Upon the Planning Ahead Seminars

On September 22, 2008, FTA awarded TLPA a second year of funding for this project. Five additional *Planning Ahead* seminars will be held in 2009. Presentation of five training seminars will

take place in New York, Kansas City, Fort Worth, Seattle and Providence. We hope that you will be able to join us at one of the future *Planning Ahead* seminars.

But with the support of TLPA and FTA, in addition to the next round of seminars we will be building upon the *Planning Ahead* events by developing a guidebook that will include key components from the seminar presentation and manual. This guidebook will serve as a valuable tool for private transportation providers unable to attend one of the *Planning Ahead* seminars, as well as a useful follow-up resource for seminar participants. In addition, the guidebook will be designed to assist transportation planners at the federal, metropolitan, statewide and rural levels in their efforts to engage private transportation providers in the planning process. We also plan to include appropriate examples of private transportation operators and MPO and other planning agency representatives involved in successful partnerships and highlight these in the guidebook. Check out future editions of *Transportation Leader* for more information on *Planning Ahead: A Guide for Enhanced Contracting Opportunities By Participating in the Transportation Planning Process*.

Technical Assistance Available Through TLPA

In the next few months, we'll be updating the *Planning Ahead* seminar presentation and manual to incorporate suggestions from participants in the initial series of seminars. Check out future editions of *Transportation Leader* or the TLPA website at www.tlpa.org for details on dates and locations.

Also as part of the FTA-funded program, TLPA is offering free technical assistance on being involved in the planning process. Possible areas for assistance include overcoming problems in getting involved in your local planning process and developing services for consideration in the transportation planning process. For more information, contact Hal Morgan at TLPA through the toll free hot line, 1-866-928-6550.

Contact Us in the Meantime

It was great to meet some of you at the 2008 *Planning Ahead* seminars. We look forward to seeing others at the 2009 events. In the meantime, feel free to contact us to follow-up a previous seminar or ask questions about a future one. ■

Dan Dalton, 301-951-8660, ddalton@kfhgroup.com
Ken Hosen, 512-372-8807, khosen@kfhgroup.com
Joe Rubino, 904-797-6941, JMRubino@aol.com