
NIACOG

NEWS

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NORTH IOWA AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

July/Aug 2006

REGION 2 AND MASON CITY TRANSIT SYSTEMS CO-HOST ANNUAL MEETING AND ROADEO

The Region 2 and Mason City Transit Systems were co-hosts of the Iowa Public Transit Association's Annual Meeting and 20th Annual Bus Driver's Rodeo.

Transit Managers from most of Iowa's 35 public transit systems were in attendance for the annual meeting which took place June 21 through June 23rd at the Holiday Inn in Mason City. On Thursday evening a trade show was held where 31 vendors of transit specific items introduced their products to those in attendance. Additionally, maintenance personnel from the transit systems were invited to attend a transit maintenance workshop that was held at the new North Iowa Joint Transit Facility on Friday, June 23rd.

On Friday, June 23rd and Saturday June 24th the 20th Annual Bus Driver's Rodeo was held. This event tested driver's skills in maneuvering while they negotiate a bus through a course of turns and other maneuvering obstacles. The goals are to provide the most equitable competition possible, encourage the highest degree of professionalism in bus operators, and build camaraderie among all those who compete. Through sportsmanship and pride of work, the bus rodeo stands as a symbol of the important role bus operators play in providing transit's customers with safe, reliable service. There are three categories in which drivers can compete: large bus, small bus and standard van. The winners from each category received prizes and became eligible to attend the national rodeo that will be held by the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) at their national conference in Reno, NV.

BUS OPERATOR RECEIVES RECOGNITION

The Iowa Department of Transportation and Iowa Public Transit Association (IPTA) held a banquet June 23 at the North Iowa Joint Transit Facility in Mason City to

present awards to bus operators from around the state.

As part of the IPTA/DOT annual bus rodeo, the banquet honored bus operators that had been nominated to receive this special recognition. Qualifying factors for recipients included no documented incidents, complaints, at fault accidents or moving violations, amongst other requirements.

For Region 2, Ron Paulsen was this year's recipient. Jim Burns, IPTA president, said of Ron: "It is seldom you find someone to work with who makes your job easier, Ron is just that person. Ron's passengers go out of their way to call the office to rave about him, saying things like (just to name a few) he is a most courteous, kind, attentive, patient, positive man. Ron's passengers and everyone around him are his greatest concern, even under the most stressful situations Ron performs well above what is expected of him." Ron Paulsen has been employed with the Region 2 Transit system for over four years. Ron drives for Opportunity Village, operating Cerro Gordo Public Transit in Mason City.

Ron was recognized for his accomplishments and received a certificate and lapel pin thanking him for his professionalism in providing public transit service.

IDED AND CDBG RULE CHANGES

The Iowa Department of Economic Development's (IDED) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is changing its rule for FY 07 funding. The focus will be primarily aimed at the readiness of project to proceed. Before the CDBG application deadline, the following processes must occur: application submitted to other funding agencies, submitted Facility Plan and Preliminary Engineering Report to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and procurement of a project engineer. The most competitive projects will also have their funding secured, an approved Facility Plan/Preliminary Engineering Report and/or completion of additional engineering on the project. The project application deadline is November 15, 2006. If you have a project in mind, please contact the NIACOG office.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

NIACOG recently completed its annual report to the U. S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) which included several impressive numbers that our region can be very proud of. Our report outlined over \$194,500,000 in total private sector investment generated and the creation of 157 new jobs this past year. These projects leveraged \$4,137,800 in direct financial assistance through state and federal sources in addition to over \$20,000,000 in Iowa investment tax credits. These numbers only reflect projects that staff were intimately involved with and does not include other projects and expansions in the region not assisted by NIACOG.

A report recently released by the Iowa Department of Economic Development on the state's economic development efforts confirms a "change in Iowa's economic landscape," adding that Iowa's job growth is one of the fastest in the nation. Iowa's May unemployment rate was 3.4 percent, well below the national rate of 4.6 percent. The report also reflected the new jobs created an average annual wage of \$37,086, nearly 15 percent more than that of the state per capita income of \$32,315. Alan Fisher, a University of Iowa professor, said the capital investment and job-creation numbers are "impressive." I have to agree and believe north Iowa reflects those same "impressive" numbers.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE

NIACOG is currently administering owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs for thirteen cities in Region 2. All of these programs were funded by Housing Fund grant awards through the Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDED).

The Cities of Britt and Forest City have completed their rehabilitation programs, so NIACOG is in the process of closeout for these two programs. The Cities of Kensett, Lake Mills, and Manly are in the final phases of their rehabilitation programs and will be closing out later this year.

The cities of Buffalo Center, Charles City, Rake, Stacyville, and Swea City started the first phase of their programs earlier this year. Each of these cities are in the process of completing three rehabilitation projects in their first phase. The initial inspections and project work write-ups are under way for the second or final phase projects in these cities.



The Housing Fund grants for the cities of Algona, Burt and Titonka were awarded earlier this year. The environmental review process for these three communities was completed by NIACOG staff in June. The application intake period for all three programs will be completed in early July. Meetings will soon be held in these cities to adopt administrative plans, and to assure that other grant contract conditions are completed.

The IDED Housing Fund provides funding from the U.S. Department of HUD (either CDBG or HOME funds) in order to expand or retain the supply of decent and affordable housing for low-income Iowans. Only local governments (cities, counties) are eligible to receive CDBG funds. However, eligible HOME recipients include for-profit entities and nonprofit organizations in addition to local governments. Eligible activities include owner-occupied housing rehabilitation, rental housing rehabilitation and rental new construction (including transitional housing), tenant-based rental assistance, and home ownership assistance.

Housing fund grant applications are generally due in early December each year. A grant application workshop is typically held by IDED three months prior to the December deadline in early September. However, several entities and cities in Region 2 met with NIACOG staff last month to discuss their potential grant applications for this year. Two more local governments have scheduled meetings this month. These grant applications would be for Program Year 2007. This is a reminder by the NIACOG staff that it is never too early to begin the grant application process. Please contact the NIACOG office if your city is interested in applying for a 2007 housing fund grant.

ABSOLUTE ENERGY LLC. RECEIVES RAIL AWARD

Congratulations to Absolute Energy, LLC., on the recent award of \$500,000 from the Rail Revolving Loan and Grant Program funds. Absolute Energy, LLC., is constructing a 110,000,000 gallon ethanol production facility in northern Mitchell County, near Highway 218 and the Minnesota State Line. The plant is projected to employ 41 people with average wages of \$17 an hour. NIACOG staff wrote the Rail Revolving Loan and Grant Program along with several other funding applications including \$400,000 from the Valued Added Agriculture Products and Processes Financial Assistance Program, Enterprise Zone Benefits estimated at \$13,930,328, and Revitalize Iowa's Sound Economy (RISE) for roadway improvements totaling \$201,800.

STATE RECREATIONAL TRAIL GRANTS

Mitchell County (Region 2, NIACOG) and Howard County (Region 1, Upper Explorerland) in north central Iowa have submitted a joint application for State Recreational Trail Funds for development of the Wapsi/Great Western Recreational Trail. The Wapsi/Great Western Trail, when complete will be approximately 33 miles in length and stretch from Taopi, Minnesota, on the north, through Mitchell County, Howard County and into Chickasaw County on the south. The trail will travel through several county parks and the cities of McIntire, Riceville and Elma. At the connection in Taopi, Minnesota, trail users can eventually travel west to Albert Lea, Minnesota, or west to the 42 mile long Root River trail system. Once all of the trail is developed and connected, the resulting trail will be over 80 miles long and travel through two states. The unique part of this trail is the level of cooperation between the two Counties and the support from the State

of Minnesota. The Conservation Boards and the Boards of Supervisors have fully endorsed this project, with Mitchell County acting as the lead for administrative purposes.

SOLID WASTE ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

The City of Hampton recently submitted a Solid Waste Alternatives Program (SWAP) funding application to purchase a compost turner. While the City currently operates a yard waste and composting site, the process of composting is not as effective and efficient as it could be. The City has also instituted a burning ban which is expected to generate even more yard waste. The compost turner, if funded, will allow the City to much improve their process and create a more useable finished product for residents and the City to use for landscaping, soil amendments, etc.

SMALL CITIES WORKSHOP A SUCCESS!

The Iowa League of Cities in partnership with the NIACOG and our sister organization MIDAS Council of Governments headquartered in Fort Dodge, recently hosted an elected and appointed officials workshop for small cities. The meeting received excellent reviews with council meeting procedures and small city property regulations being the evening's two topics of discussion.

Due to the positive reviews of the workshop, it is our intent to continue our partnership with the League of Cities by making this an annual event tailored to cities with 1,500 or fewer population, but is open to all communities regardless of size.

REAP

It's not too late to submit a Resource and Enhancement Protection (REAP) funding application. REAP applications are due on August 15, 2006.

Grant Opportunities		
Grant	Uses	Due Date
Railroad Revolving Loan Fund	Rail Line Development.	<u>July 2006</u>
Recreation Infrastructure Grant	Recreation.	<u>July 15</u>
Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP)	Outdoor Recreation.	<u>August 15</u>
RISE Competitive Program	Roads to Business Sites	<u>September 1</u>



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NIACOG Calendar of Events

July

- 4- Holiday - NIACOG Office Closed.
- 10- NO NIACOG Board of Directors meeting (summer schedule).
- 12- HAZMAT, 1:30pm @ the NIACOG Office.
- 28- Top of Iowa Tourism, 12:00pm @ NIACOG.

August

- 14- NIACOG Board Meeting, 6:00pm @ East Park, Mason City.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) is administering a new federal funding program, Safe Routes to School (SRTS). The purpose of the program is to get more children bicycling and walking to and from school safely. Eligible schools are public and private K-8th grade schools and the applicants can be cities, counties, local governments, schools, or nonprofit organizations. Eligible projects may be, but are not limited to sidewalks, bicycle and pedestrian crossings, traffic calming, public awareness campaigns, education, and enforcement. Projects must address both infrastructure and non-infrastructure components and the infrastructure must be within two miles of a school. This competitive grant program requires no local match with approximately \$1 million available each year through 2009. Program information is available at the National Center for Safe Routes to School Web site: www.saferoutesinfo.org. The deadline for submitting applications is October 1, 2006. Please contact the NIACOG Office for further assistance with this program.

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