



## TRANSIT ASSET MANAGEMENT

# 2024 FTA Transit Asset Management Roundtable Summary Report

## Introduction

On July 30-31<sup>st</sup> 2024, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted its fifteenth Transit Asset Management (TAM) Roundtable in Chicago, Illinois. This event brought together nearly 80 participants from transit providers of varying sizes and service types, State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and the US Department of Transportation (USDOT). The one-and-a-half-day event included a session for attendee introductions, a peer learning presentation session on Strategies for Continuous Improvement, a peer learning panel session on participating in the TAM State of the Practice Review Pilot, an update from FTA on TAM program accomplishments and future plans, a keynote from Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), as well as a tour session provided by Metra and CTA.

During the round robin style introduction, participants shared their organization, their role, and either the part of TAM they felt they were an expert in, or where they find themselves needing the most assistance. While the responses were varied, one of the main areas of interest or pride was in the way individuals manage the data at their organizations. Another area of expertise for many people was facilitating interdepartmental relationships. Many attendees mentioned they were new to TAM, and needed assistance with understanding the program requirements or better understanding asset management. Some attendees also stated that integrating data presented a challenge.

The first day's peer learning session on Strategies for Continuous Improvement featured two panelists, Sheila Hockel from St. Louis Metro/ Bi State Development and Ryan Wilhite from IndyGo. The panelists shared how they conducted assessments of their agency's practices to refine and improve their TAM program. St. Louis Metro developed a robust system for documenting and tracking their assets, especially when a new asset is purchased. IndyGo conducted an internal FTA maturity assessment, and also contracted out to a consultant to identify areas within their agency that could be improved.

After some group discussions, the keynote address from CTA and lunch, attendees were separated into groups to go on tours which highlighted various aspects of transit asset management at CTA and Metra. The CTA Guided Red and Purple Modernization tour showcased CTA's capital project to bring their nearly 100-year-old rail lines and stations into a state of good repair. CTA also offered an e-Bus and Charging Facility tour, which allowed participants to ride an electric bus, tour the charging area, and better understand how CTA is prioritizing their investments in electric bus infrastructure. Metra offered a tour of their rail yard facilities, where they rehabilitate their coach cars and bring them into a state of good repair.



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The second day began with a presentation from Tamalynn Kennedy, FTA TAM Program Manager on TAM program updates, as well as dedicated time for questions from the audience. The launch of an updated Introduction to Transit Asset Management course offered by NTI was discussed, as well as a new update to the TAMPLATE, a software application used to develop TAM plans. FTA's method for analyzing over 600 NTD narrative reports was also discussed, which involved using a natural language processing model to scan the reports and identify key themes. The model was able to identify themes such as challenges with bus ordering including extended delays for the amount of time needed to procure a vehicle, as well as cost increases.

The presentation from FTA was followed by the TAM State of the Practice Review Pilot panel session, the second peer learning session of the Roundtable. Patrick Hester from WeGo Public Transit in Nashville, Zach Trogdon from Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT), and Rene Vega from Metrolink in California shared their experiences participating in the FTA-led TAM State of the Practice Review Pilot, and what their agencies were able to learn from the experience. Overall, the agencies had positive experiences with the pilot. Metrolink plans to establish a more robust education program about asset management, WeGo is looking into a centralized EAM, and Virginia DRPT is trying to figure out how to engage the many Group Plan participants they work with to provide more robust data.

### Key Themes

#### *Varied Approaches to Evaluating a TAM Program*

The first day's small group discussions focused on if the organizations had conducted an evaluation of their TAM program and plan. This discussion was continued into the second day, where the transit agencies discussed the pros and cons of the different approaches presented at the Roundtable. Most agencies in attendance had tried evaluating their TAM plan, though the approach to this varied based on agency size, funding availability and agency culture.

#### *Hiring an External Consultant*

Hiring a consultant seemed to be the most common approach for agencies that had undergone an evaluation of their TAM program, especially for the larger transit agencies in attendance. Some agencies mentioned they would like to hire a consultant but did not have the funds to do so. Not having enough time to conduct a full evaluation with a consultant was also mentioned as a barrier. In general, hiring a consultant was seen as a way to have an external party evaluate the program, and get buy-in from leadership. One agency first tried to conduct an internal assessment but got a lot of questions from the staff about why they were doing it. As a result, the agency decided to hire an external consultant, and got more support from participants.

Another point of discussion related to hiring an external consultant was where to get funding to do so. Many attendees were curious if other agencies had been able to use grant money to conduct an assessment with a consultant, and some responded that they had been able to do it with FTA formula funds.



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### *Conducting an Internal Assessment*

Though many agencies discussed the benefits of hiring an external consultant, there was still interest in conducting an internal assessment using FTA resources and continuing to self-assess at a reoccurring interval as the TAM program continues to grow in the agency. One agency discussed how they first hired a consultant, and from that practice began to develop the necessary tools to continue to self-evaluate after the consultant finished their assessment. Another agency discussed the value of having a chief audit officer or an internal audit team to be able to continuously improve their program practices. Many smaller agencies chose to conduct an internal evaluation because they felt that hiring an external consultant would be too much work, a major time commitment, and provide a level of detail that was not needed. One small agency mentioned that they would start with an internal evaluation, see if that highlighted any areas of focus, and from there consider hiring an external consultant to further refine their process. One of the biggest drawbacks to only conducting an internal evaluation was the perception that it would not get as much buy-in as an evaluation conducted by an external party, such as a consultant or FTA.

### *Using FTA Resources to Evaluate a TAM Program*

Many agencies expressed interest in learning more about what FTA resources are available to evaluate their program. One attendee noted that they had only just learned that there is a TAM self-assessment tool available from FTA, and other attendees noted that they were still not very familiar with what resources FTA has to offer. Some agencies had been using FTA resources, for instance one attendee mentioned that they were just beginning an internal evaluation using the tools offered on the FTA TAM program website. Most attendees stated that having a review conducted by FTA would be beneficial and something they would be interested to participate in if it were offered. They felt that a review from FTA would carry more weight with their leadership than an internal review.

### *Importance of Leadership and Agency Support*

In addition to the actual process of conducting a TAM plan evaluation, attendees discussed the importance of getting support from leadership and other staff within their organization. The support of the accountable executive was noted as a critical element to creating a successful TAM plan. For example, one agency had an accountable executive that was not very involved with the process. This led to a lack of enthusiasm for TAM at their agency, and the perception that the plan was only created to meet regulatory requirements. On the other hand, one agency had an accountable executive who was very involved with the process, and personally reviewed the plan. This led to greater backing across the organization for the TAM program. Beyond endorsement from the accountable executive, many attendees noted that broader agency support and coordination is also essential to a successful TAM program. Exchanging information across departments is something that can be difficult to implement but is useful for all parties involved.

### *Training for TAM Employees*

Another common theme for attendees was the need for training around the TAM rule requirements. Training and staff knowledge is a key component of any successful TAM program. Many of the



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attendees were themselves new to TAM, and thus looking for more resources related to building a successful TAM program. Other agencies noted that they were seeing a lot of staff turnover at their organizations. Transferring the knowledge of TAM best practices and procedures was something that staff struggled with. Some solutions to this mentioned by attendees included assigning roles to multiple people to disperse responsibilities, rather than having a single person, or developing more robust SOPs so that knowledge could be retained.

### Conclusion

Overall, the 2024 TAM Roundtable was a very successful event. Many attendees were able to share their experiences with forming and refining the TAM program at their agency, including challenges, best practices, and lessons learned. Additionally, the attendees enjoyed getting the opportunity to tour the CTA and Metra facilities to learn more about what the Chicago-area agencies are doing to run a successful asset management program.