Over the past twelve months, the TLPA, in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), has made a prodigious effort to educate transportation providers regarding federal grant opportunities for privately owned companies. TLPA Executive Vice President, Hal Morgan oversees the TLPA program. He has provided technical assistance about transportation planning and the coordination process to many members via a toll free phone number. In the U.S., call toll free at 1-866-928-6550 to speak with Hal. This TLPA/FTA effort has included a series of articles in TLPA publications and the creation of a coordinated planning web page on the TLPA web site. Visit the Contracting Opportunities web page at http://www.tlpa.org/meetings/fta/index.cfm. There has been an on-going and extensive e-mail campaign. Numerous presentations and workshops at TLPA events have been conducted, and, most prominently, a series of seminars given, so far, in ten different U.S. cities. The seminar features a team of consultants that provide specific information and instruction to transportation operators about these specific opportunities and how to take advantage of them. The seminars have been further enhanced by the presence of a TLPA executive, a representative of the FTA, and local transit planning personnel representing the city hosting the event.

The title of the seminar is Planning Ahead: Enhanced Contracting Opportunities through Being Involved in the Transportation Planning Process. The consulting firm, The KFH Group of Bethesda, MD, along with J. M. Rubino Consulting of St. Augustine, FL has delivered lively, informative day-long sessions in Alexandria, VA, Chicago, Denver, Las Vegas, Tampa, New York, Kansas City, Dallas, Seattle, and Providence, RI. This October the group will again present the seminar at the TLPA annual convention held in Las Vegas. Although the seminar series is not finished, some results are already in, and we can give you some good news.

In the Spring 2009 issue of Transportation Leader, we mentioned how we would soon highlight some specific success stories from private transportation operators, particularly TLPA members, who have been involved in their local planning process, and who have benefited from partnerships through the FTA Section 5310, JARC, and New Freedom Programs. To date, more than a few operators have achieved success, and a good many of them have been TLPA members. When we look at a sampling of these success stories, a common theme emerges, that is, each company has a history of being involved in local business organizations, regional transit planning, and community outreach. In fact, every company features key management representatives who are well-known in the community, and in many cases, who were involved in actually putting together the Coordinated Transportation Plan for the region.

This is no small detail. When reviewing FTA Grant applications in a given community, the members of the local review committee need to believe that the applicant is not only qualified to perform the proposed service in terms of company experience, but that the proposing firm also passes the

Continued on page 16
“belief test”. The members of the review committee must believe that the applicant will perform the duties as stated in their proposal application, and that the company possesses the kind of integrity needed to operate their proposed service in the best interest of the community. Having a company manager or executive who is a well-respected member of the business community goes a long way in establishing that belief.

In studying these examples of successful applications, we found that each applicant had spent many years establishing itself as the “go-to” company in the region. Becoming the “go-to” company is one of the goals that is strongly suggested in the seminar itself. Being the “go-to” company means just that—that your company is the company that local entities, both public and private “go to” to solve a transportation problem. The “go-to” company is considered the local expert, and is always the first option when the participation of a private company is considered. If you become your area’s “go-to” company, that means that your experience, capabilities, integrity, and reliability are already pre-established in the minds of local community leaders and transit officials. Problems that face other companies like “establishing your company’s credentials” and “selling yourself” do not concern your company as your reputation has long been cemented into the minds of prominent local stakeholders.

In short, if you are your communities “go-to” company, the road in front of you is already paved. And you have done the paving. At this point, you just need to be aware of what opportunities come down that road.

Let’s look at some of these “go-to” companies, and their successful FTA Grant applications.

Success Story #1: Yellow Cab Company of Memphis, TN

The City of Memphis, Tennessee is famous for many things, including its barbecue restaurants and its connection to musical giants such as Elvis Presley, W. C. Handy, Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding. Shelby County, in which Memphis sits, is geographically interesting in that it borders two other states, and many of Memphis growing suburbs are in Mississippi and Arkansas.

Yellow Cab is Shelby County’s oldest and most prominent taxicab company. Company President Hamilton Smythe IV, as well as his father before him (Hamilton Smythe III) has long been involved in not just the local Memphis transportation industry, but in the business community as a whole. The company is an active member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Better Business Bureau, the Hotel Association, the Restaurant Association, the Hospitality and Marketing Association, as well as being a founding member of the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

While involvement in those traditional business associations is somewhat typical of a community’s top taxicab company, Mr. Smythe’s involvement with another group—an organization with a lot less notoriety—may have been the key to his company’s recent successful FTA New Freedom Grant application.

Over the past four years, Mr. Smythe has had a seat on the Citizen’s Advisory Council of his local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Local MPO’s conduct a variety of activities and create several planning documents for the community, including studies like the area’s Long Range Transportation Plan and the Transportation Improvement Plan. Having a seat on a committee like Mr. Smythe has, not only gives him the opportunity to contribute to the aforementioned plans, but puts him a step toward being involved in putting together the community’s Coordinated Transportation Plan or the Coordinated Human Services Plan as it is sometimes known.

This is the plan that mentions local transportation needs that are not being filled by current transit services. These listed needs become opportunities for local private companies to fill by applying for FTA grant awards when the next round of projects comes out. In nearly every Coordinated Plan in the country (Memphis’ plan included) there is a mention of a need for taxicabs that are accessible to the local disabled population.

When the Memphis Call for Projects (CFP) came out in mid-2008, Mr. Smythe was acutely aware that the citizens of Shelby County had a need for wheelchair accessible taxicabs.
Furthermore, the fact that Yellow Cab was qualified to operate an accessible taxicab service was known by his MPO staff, his local transportation authority, and to the members of the grant application review committee. In fact, Memphis Area Transit Authority planner John Lancaster said that Mr. Smythe’s contributions to the local planning process were invaluable and that his knowledge of the local transportation environment greatly contributed to the Coordinated Transportation Plan itself.

Obviously, Yellow Cab Company was clearly established as Memphis’ “go-to” company. Further, the fact that his company was ready, willing and able to provide accessible taxicab service to the elderly and disabled population of Shelby County was well known to the individuals who were administering the FTA Grant Projects.

So, how did this all turn out? Yellow Cab of Memphis was awarded eight (8) accessible taxicabs, and after local transit officials matched the federal 80% capital expenditure with a 10% match of their own, Yellow Cab wound up paying only 10% of the cost of these new vehicles.

Success Story #2: Yellow Cab Company of Coos Bay, Oregon

The small town of Coos Bay, OR is the centerpiece of what’s known as Oregon’s Bay Area. This major shipping port features the largest natural harbor between Seattle and San Francisco. Despite its relatively small population, this community on the southern Oregon coast is actually the largest coastal urban area in the state.

The town is also home to Yellow Cab Company of Coos Bay. Established in 1946, the company was purchased in 1986 by current owner Richard “Dick” Leshley. Since 1986 the company has grown from a single taxicab on the street to 20 taxicabs with 40 drivers and 8 dispatchers. Mr. Leshley has grown Yellow Cab by keeping current with changing industry technology, training methods, and has demonstrated to the public that his staff and his driver fleet measures to, and if possible exceed, industry standards.

Like Mr. Smythe in the previous example, Mr. Leshley is also an active and respected member of his business community. He has been involved in the Bay Area Chamber of Commerce since 1986, and served on the Board of Directors for seven years beginning in 2000. He was President of the Chamber in 2005. Mr. Leshley has been active in the Bay Area Rotary Club, and has been a member of the Board of Directors of that organization since 2002, serving as President in 2006/2007. He has also been heavily involved in transportation planning, being a long-time member of local planning committees and mobility coalitions. Bruce Bennett, Coos Bay Area Transit Manager, praised Mr. Leshley as being the key contributor to his district’s effort to contribute to Southwest Oregon’s Region Transportation Plan.

It’s clear that this level of community involvement, as well as being the largest provider of passenger transportation in the region, has taught Mr. Leshley the pulse of the community. His additional research on census figures found that the population of elderly and disabled residents in Coos County was higher than the national averages for either category. While county population is just 64,820, the disabled population for this group is 15,513, or 23.9% of the population. Census reports go on to list the elderly population as 12,834 or 19.8% of the local population.

Mr. Leshley clearly recognized the need for accessible taxicab service in his community. Many of these elderly residents, due to a lack of physical mobility, are not able to access local transit, and would add to the overall pool of riders needing accessible taxicab service. Discharging patients from local hospitals or a nursing facility is often a problem due to a lack of accessible transportation. Mr. Leshley also found that the special transportation needs of veterans are sometimes not being met locally. Some veterans need to be transported to medical facilities far from Coos Bay, some even upstate to Portland. Furthermore, some of the smaller towns in the county and rural areas aren’t served by public transit and many county residents remain isolated. Finally, because of limited resources, currently there is no public transportation service in the evening or on weekends.

In February of this year, Yellow Cab applied for a FTA New Freedom Grant award for the purpose of purchasing accessible taxicabs. Although the final decisions on all applications have not been made, Mr. Leshley has received preliminary notice from state transportation officials that his applica-
tion was accepted and that he would be receiving formal notice of an award in the near future.

**Success Story #3: Yellow Cab Coop of Gardenia, California**

Fiesta Taxi is a Southern California taxicab co-op of approximately 100 taxicabs that service eastern Los Angeles County. Fiesta is a member of a larger organization, Administrative Services Cooperative, Inc. (ASC), which includes Los Angeles Yellow Cab Co., Long Beach Yellow Cab Co., South Bay Yellow Cab Co., and United Checker Cab Co. Combined, ASC is one of the largest taxicab co-ops in the Western United States with approximately 1,200 vehicles. ASC manages the daily operations of each co-op, including dispatching of calls, customer service, fleet management and back office administrative functions.

Within this environment, Fiesta Taxi was founded in 1996 by Mitchell Rouse and Gonzalo Pulido to service Los Angeles County’s growing Latino and Spanish-speaking community east of Los Angeles. From a humble beginning of less than 20 vehicles and a small staff, Fiesta now has more than 100 drivers. The company has grown to become the largest taxicab service in the southeast Los Angeles County area.

As we saw with the previous two success stories above, ACS has a long history of involvement in the local business community. William Rouse, the General Manager, is a director and past president of the Taxicab and Paratransit Association of California, the industry’s statewide trade association, and a current director of the Long Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

With its strong knowledge of the community and of what services the community requires, Fiesta Taxi got involved some years ago in filling local needs that were being unmet by city and county transit services. Over the years, Fiesta has developed a strong record of operating successful municipal Dial-A-Ride programs for seniors and disabled residents throughout southeast LA County. Each program features accessible taxicab service from the company’s current roster of wheelchair-ramp style vehicles. Fiesta Taxi has provided such programs for the following cities:

- Norwalk Dial-A-Taxi
- Whittier Dial-A-Ride
- Paramount Dial-A-Taxi
- Bell Gardens Dial-A-Taxi
- Huntington Park Dial-A-Taxi
- Compton Dial-Ride
- Santa Fe Springs Dial-A-Ride.

Due to its on-going efforts at providing such services, Fiesta Taxi has been honored numerous times for its commitment to excellence in filling community needs and gaps in current municipal transit services. This recognition has included resolutions from local, state, and even the federal government itself.

However, Fiesta is not a company to rest on its laurels. When the chance to apply for wheelchair accessible taxicabs presented itself in the form of their region’s New Freedom Call for Projects, William Rouse saw an opportunity to fill even more gaps in local transit needs for elderly and disabled residents of southeast Los Angeles County. With much of the work being done by ASC staff member Marco Soto, Fiesta conducted a comprehensive examination of local un-met needs, identified several large gaps in current transit and paratransit services, and tendered a proposal for 6 accessible vehicles under the New Freedom program.

So how did this story end? Fiesta Taxi received an award for all 6 vehicles, and is now expanding what was already one of the largest accessible fleets in the state. Once funding is received and the vans are on the road, Fiesta will be servicing an even larger population of disabled and elderly residents who are in need of this important service.

**Summary**

The three examples seen in this story demonstrate that regardless of size of population, number of vehicles in your fleet, and number of years in operation, a company can become its community’s “go-to” company by getting involved in your local process. When your reputation as a business leader is established, you have helped to pave your own road to success.