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**Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority
Named Most Improved Transit System**
CMRTA Driver also wins Statewide Bus Operator "Roadeo"

[Columbia, SC] The South Carolina Department of Transportation, Division of Mass Transit named the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority (CMRTA) its 2005 Most Improved Transit System at the Transportation Association of South Carolina's annual conference.

The award recognizes a public transit system that has undergone noteworthy improvements in the past three fiscal years in areas such as service performance, revenue increases, and community involvement, among others.

"Since assuming ownership of the Midlands-area system from SCANA in October 2002, CMRTA has made incredible strides in improving the system, better serving its riders and the community at large, upgrading an outdated fleet, increasing ridership, reducing overall operating expenses and marketing the availability of their services," said Glennith Johnson, SCDOT's Deputy Director for Mass Transit.

The first visible sign of improvement came in the form of 43 brand new buses - seven of which are powered by compressed natural gas - and 19 ADA-compliant mini-buses for the paratransit division serving the disabled.

In an effort to better serve riders and increase the user-friendliness of the system, CMRTA also reviewed, analyzed and restructured routes and schedules, printing new route maps and schedules and launching a website. These efforts are ongoing, and in August and September 2005, a series of changes eliminating underutilized routes and services and expanding service to new areas resulted in an annual cost savings of nearly \$1,000,000.

Ridership is on the rise. Since 2003, annual system ridership has increased 30 percent, 2.1 million riders in 2003 to 2.7 million at present.

"We're pleased that the SCDOT recognizes the steps we have taken to give the Midlands area the public transit system it needs and deserves," said Pat G. Smith, CMRTA chairman. "We will continue our efforts to improve the system to better meet the needs of our community and attract new riders."

The TASC conference also included the annual awards ceremony for the statewide "Roadeo" Competition among bus drivers, and CMRTA's Phillip Patterson took home first place in the 35-foot bus category. It was the fifth win overall and the fourth consecutive win for Patterson. Patterson has also represented South Carolina in the International Bus Roadeo for the past 4 years with a top finish of 11th in 2005.

The "Roadeo" competition involved navigating an obstacle course that included reversing in tight spaces and maneuvering through tennis balls creating a narrow lane. The competition also included a "fast stop" maneuver that mimics an emergency stop: drivers traveling at top speed down a narrowing lane had to stop within 18 inches of a safety cone.

"We're very proud of Phillip and of all the drivers in the CMRTA system who move people throughout the Midlands safely and efficiently, everyday" Smith said.

About CMRTA

Established in October 2002, the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority (CMRTA) is committed to providing safe, dependable and accessible public transit service to the heart of the Midlands, serving Columbia, Cayce, West Columbia, Forest Acres, Arcadia Lakes, Springdale and the St. Andrews and Harbison areas.