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ASHEVILLE TRANSIT COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
First Floor Conference Room - City Hall
April 2, 2013
3:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Attending:

Commission Members: Julie Mayfield, Dave Erb, Tom Tomlin, Bruce Emory, Kevin Jenkins, and Gordon Smith, Council Liaison.

Staff: Ken Putnam, Mariate Echeverry, Martha McGlohon, Norman Schenck, Janet GeorgeMurr

Community Members: David Wilson, Tim Sadler, Darlene Hamlin, John Spitzberg, Garrett Male, Bill Harned

3:30 pm:

- ❑ Julie Mayfield, Chairman, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone;
- ❑ Bruce Emory read the Announcement for Public Comment
- ❑ Introductions by TC and staff

● **April 2, 2013 Agenda review and approval:** Add under New Business: Ken Putnam to report on the Budget Work Session on 4/3/13; Moving agenda item Multi-Modal Transportation Commission Report to first item under Old Business.

● **March 5, 2013 Minutes review and approval:** After minor changes in the minutes, Tom and Bruce moved to approve the minutes; Kevin seconded and carried unanimously.

● **Public Comment I:**

1. **David Wilson** - lives near the Social Security Office. On 4/1 at 2:03pm due to E1 being full the bus passed David (with heavy groceries) and other passengers at Ingles on Tunnel Road.

-Mariate stated that once the larger buses from Gastonia are on the road for E1 that will carry 32 seating passengers rather than 26 passengers and more standing room. Mariate stated that once the buses are wrapped with the new logo design and the talking bus installed; the fareboxes can be moved in one day. Approximately, one month would be the ETA for the Gastonia buses to be on the road.

- Tom suggested that the bus driver ask the passengers to move towards the back for more passengers to board. Bruce asked with extra service on E1 at the same time of E2, if the schedules could be shifted around to distribute the load more evenly. Mariate stated that this topic was discussed, E1 is on the quarter time would be uneven frequency and when E2 is running. E1 and E2 share only a piece of the corridor and it changes the riders' experience.

2. **John Spitzberg** - representing the Asheville Homeless Network (AHN) commends TC in having a holiday schedule. Suggest using the same ingenuity and the same commitment for holidays to have a similar schedule on Sundays. Groups that John represents indicated that they would help financially, since Sunday service would impact the poverty stricken and the homeless. After a group discussion, Council Liaison Smith stated that there has been a further development coming out of Raleigh that the City is facing a significant increase in the budget gap this year. Mr. Spitzberg made the following suggestion: Having a transit service 7 days a week that was abbreviated so that it would fit into the budget. Gordon stated that anyone is welcome at the Budget Work Session is also a Town Hall Meeting tomorrow and will be an opportunity 2-5pm at the Civic Center.

● **TC transit experience in riding the bus:**

- **Tom** - N2 was on time; E1 was full and running late due to traffic; a large traffic problem on Swannanoa River Road and S Tunnel Rd is the reason E1 is always running late.
-Tom was at the ART Station on Good Friday to see all buses running smoothly, except E1 which was getting later and later after each trip. The driver would call in to say that he is trying but the traffic is backed up.
- **Julie** - rode a couple of other buses due to working on an event for Strive Not To Drive that put Julie on the N2 one morning before 8am and the N1 on another morning; both were great.
- Julie had forgotten about the abbreviated schedule for the Good Friday holiday and waited longer for the 9am rather than the 8am route on W2.
-Julie stated that whatever Norman is doing on the customer service that the drivers are extraordinarily friendly recently and most of the drivers do not know Julie being on the TC.
- **Dave** - On N1 and N2 during the winter it seemed that there are more people riding the buses as time passed.
-Dave also had the same experience as Julie on Good Friday.
-Dave asked Norman if there is a way to make it more obvious for passengers that they should exit the rear of the bus unless they need the lift or the bike rack b/c that has caused significant delays, now that the buses are running fuller. Norman stated that this will be programmed to the "talking bus" to say "please exit from the rear doors." Not only are the drivers more aggressive in asking the riders to exit the bus, the talking bus will remind them.
- **Bruce** - On N1 and N2 - noticed that the ridership was higher.
-Bruce has experienced late trips over the past month.
-Rode S1 from Habitat Store the bus was running late due to construction in Biltmore Village and missed his connection to N1.
-On another day rode N1 from Broadway to North - he saw the bus coming in on time, Bruce figured that the bus would be on time on the return and he waited 10-15 minutes more than the scheduled time. A different bus showed up for N1 which Bruce later learned that the previous bus was low on gas and had to be swapped with another bus.
-Today (4/2/13) the N1 was 10-15 minutes late.
- **Kevin** - Bus schedule and rides have been running smoothly for S4.
-Kevin also showed up at the bus stop early on another holiday which had an abbreviated schedule.

● **New Business:**

- **Rider Survey:** Julie stated that this was discussed last fall. John Spitzberg of the Asheville Homeless Network and his group raised the idea of doing a rider survey.
-At the time the City and staff wanted to do the rider survey a 1 year after the roll-out to get feedback and input from riders on the system. After a group discussion:
 - a. Julie requested that under the TC Goals under Supporting the Implementation of the Transit Master Plan (TMP) that Dave, Julie and Itioyopyia and anyone else on the TC would like to be part of helping in the process of the rider survey, to include what would be on the survey; what the timing is.
 - b. Mariate stated that there is an existing survey in English and Spanish from the TMP with questions that could be update.
 - c. Julie suggested looking at the questions from John Spitzberg's group.
 - d. Mariate stated the only way to do the survey is with volunteers; the staff will process the survey. c.Mariate stated this survey could be done for a longer period of time to target all of the areas.
 - e Julie asked if the set of survey questions could be ready by SNTD since it is one of the goals for SNTD Week.
 - f. Julie asked John Spitzberg for the survey that they put together last year. John stated that the Asheville Homeless Network (AHN) arranged with ART for AHN survey to be part of the ART survey. John asked for the results of the survey because Asheville Homeless Network did the labor but was not given

the results. Julie would like the AHN survey to be incorporated into the City's survey.

g. Julie asked Dave to schedule a meeting and Mariate requested to have the meeting quickly.

- **Budget Work Session 4/3/13**: Ken stated: As Gordon had mentioned earlier, Ken encourages Transit Commission members to attend the work session at the US Cellular Center in the Banquet Hall. Transit Commission to review the attached Talking Points handout from City Council. Council will convene at 2pm at City Hall and will be shuttled to the US Cellular Center at 2:15pm and then the public meeting at 2:30pm. Along with the long list of the Talking Points it is suggested to cut Saturday service. If the bills that are active in the State Legislature today, if all were to be approved, the City of Asheville would go from \$2 million to \$5.7million budget gap to be closed. A hit from the State Legislature in the neighborhood of \$3.7 million. Ken encourages everyone to go to the website indicated in the handout, which will have the most updated information housed for the public review. Julie asked if an analysis is being done of cutting back service in any other way. Ken stated that the Talking Points were to give an idea of what it might take City wide to come up with \$3.7 million worth of savings. Gordon stated that this is a scenario presentation. Staff is waiting for Council direction on how to proceed, whether to have a property tax increase this year to make up some of the gap. If not, then what services are we prepared to cut and how to do so. The Council is waiting from Transit Commission for some possible scenarios.

OLD BUSINESS:

● **Multi-Modal Transportation Commission (MMTC)**: Ken stated that the attached MMTC concept diagram has been updated since the last TC meeting due to some concerns raised by Transit Commission, whether it was addressed at the TC meeting or individual emails. The changes that Ken is aware of are of the following:

1. The idea of Transit and Greenway Subcommittees would technically function more loosely similar to Bike and Ped Task which was a concern by Transit Commission and Greenway Commission. So the major change that is now being processed is the idea that the structure of this Transit Committee will still stay intact with a specify number of members. Presently, TC members have made application and are appointed by City Council. In the future, potential members would make application and be appointed by MMTC since MMTC is appointed by Council.

2. There would be a small number of Transit members for the Transit Committee, due to not worrying about 10 people coming to one meeting because of an agenda to push through then they no longer attend future meetings.

3. Gordon stated that the target date of initiating the MMTC would be 7/1/13.

4. Tom stated that he is in agreement with the MMTC, but would like to keep Transit Commission similar to Planning & Zoning Commission but have members represented on the MMTC. Julie asked Tom if the structure that Ken mentioned, where this would still be an appointed body with a limited number of people would help to address Tom's concern. Tom agreed. Tom feels that transit is a big commitment. Julie stated that clearly all of the items discussed at the TC meetings cannot also happen at the MMTC which would be a four hour meeting.

5. Julie asked Gordon if Council has a sense of the kinds of things around transit that would get dealt with at the subcommittee level versus the MMTC level. Gordon said no. Ken stated that he thinks most of the issues that are discussed at the TC meetings presently, would still be discussed at the Transit Committee meetings. This is the forum where you get the statistics; hearing information about the rider experience, etc. There needs to be a forum for the public to still come and make their case. The routine operations Ken sees are not changing, especially now that emphasizes that the structure of the committees will remain the same.

6. The Bike and Ped Task Force (BPTF) has worked fairly well for a long time under the structure that they now have with good successes in the past years.

7. Once the transition is in place, BPTF may move towards the structure of the GC and TC.

8. Ken agrees that the MMTC cannot take on the routine items that are very important.

9. Julie asked how the MMTC would be initially appointed. Ken stated that the structure has not changed since the information has been presented. Three members from TC; 3 members from GC; 1 from P&Z, etc.

Discussion of who from each Commission would be on the MMTC. Is it presumed that it would be the Chair and Vice-Chairman and one other member; or does TC elect among themselves. Ken does not know that information yet. Ken stated assuming that a TC member under the new format could be anyone that is interested in transit. With the MMTC you have to be a city resident. No other decisions have been made on the structure of MMTC.

10. Mariate stated that a change in adding the SACEE is being considered to be on MMTC. The next step on the City side is that it comes back to Board and Commissions to finalize the form that MMTC will take and the processes around the appointments.

11. Gordon asked Transit Commission to continue with feedback which will help Boards & Commissions.

12. Tom asked why Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) are remaining the same, but Transit Commission is changing. Gordon stated with the City moving towards creating MMTC Department is a real achievement on the part of the Transit Commission. Other commissions folding together into a larger body are a way to align those visions, in order not to compete for the same resources, but aligning the goals across commissions.

13. Julie stated that P&Z C has specific authority in City Ordinances, to approve developments and authority for binding votes that decisions can be appealed.

15. Martha stated to also look at the title of Transportation and that Planning and Zoning is not connected to Transportation. Julie stated that in the new configuration would P&Z would have a liaison. Ken stated that the importance is to make sure, especially with projects that come forward, that there is an alignment, a connection with MMTC.

16. The MMTC agenda item will remain on TC agenda until it is resolved.

● **Transit Commission Goals:** Julie stated that in the TC packet are the goals that TC agreed to at the 10/16/12 Retreat. Updates are the following:

1. **Support the Implementation of the Transit Master Plan (TMP):**

A. **Increase Funding for TMP:**

- Increase public/private partnerships: Julie reported of another meeting regarding the Healthcare Express idea on 4/29/13 at MAHEC. Meeting with AB Tech is also scheduled for next week on Wed 4/10 at 8:30am with Hank Dunn and Scott McKinney. This will be building public/private partnership and broadening support for the transit system.

2. **Improve Rider Experience:** Bruce reported on two items:

1. Items related to Strive Not To Drive (SNTD);

2. The issue of bus etiquette in how to convey messages to riders on things to do and not to do on the bus. Kevin and Bruce did some online research of other cities have done, ranging from a simple sign listing rules to posters that would visually convey the messages in a humorous or artistic matter and another approach is videos. Also, independent efforts of individuals or groups other than the transit system of conveying messages about etiquette. The question that needs to be discussed is how we want to approach this going forward. Bruce thinks that a poster on the bus makes the most sense. Producing a video would take a lot of resources considering the budget situation. Julie stated that she is encouraged in finding good examples of positive messaging on how to be on the bus as opposed to very descriptive "don't do this...." Will continue to work on that.

3. **Improve Communication with Driver:** Tom reported there was a drivers meeting along with Ken and Mariate. The drivers concern was the safety at the ART Station of alcoholics, disturbance at the ART Station and on the bus.

a. Mariate stated as part of this year's budget and changes staff was trying to identify ways of savings and one of things that was identified was closing the ART Station earlier in the evenings which would result in not having the police. We all have the concerns about safety and the decision

was not to close the ART Station early and continue to have a police officer and a dispatcher until 10:00 pm. until further notice.

b. The County and the City met to discuss common items. The next level is coordination that would involve same fare and transfers without additional fare. Mariate needs to go back to see what was proposed and she will speak with Denise Braine of Buncombe County on how she interprets the list. In the past, the idea was to have bus transfers from the three different systems without the need to pay an additional fare. This will definitely help the rider, but how it affects the revenue; having different systems; and how to account for the fares.

c. Mariate stated that the County will go through a very difficult time. The legislation stated the State is hiring a broker to deal with all of Buncombe County's Social Services Schedule.

d. Mariate will report back on further developments.

● **Strive Not To Drive (SNTD) Week 5/13-17/13:** Julie reminded TC that at the last meeting a decision was made to have a Transit Leadership ride and Mariate is in charge. Mariate does not have anything to report at this time. Mariate stated that she would like to see what Dawa Hitch thinks about the Leadership Ride in promoting this year.

-Julie stated that using SNTD as an outreach opportunity to help people learn how to ride the bus, to improve the riders navigation of the system and the SNTD Committee decided to have a information table at the ART Station everyday of the week during SNTD.

-The information table would be staffed for 3 hours a day. Monday 9am-12noon; Tuesday 11am-2pm; Wed 1-4pm; Thursday 3-6pm; Friday 11a-2pm.

-The information table in assisting riders in reading the system maps, making sure that they are navigating the system to the most effectively way; and to complete a survey.

-SNTD would like to recommend to TC to have one TC member and the rest would be volunteers, which means 1 shift per person.

-Mariate stated that she spoke with Marsha Stickford who has requested volunteers from Hands On.

-Julie will have a schedule for the SNTD week that TC could sign up for a shift.

● **Review of the procedure for appealing a suspension from the bus system:** Martha reported that there is no real formal process in terms of the appeals process for a suspension.

-In the past the appeal initially goes to Norman; then to Mariate.

-If it does not stop there the appeal goes further and brought before the Transit Commission and provides the Commission brief facts and details for input.

-Norman Schenck, GM, through his delegated authority to make the suspensions.

-Julie asked if there is anything that is written or printed anywhere that states if there is a disagreement with the suspension and how to appeal.

-Martha would put something together and bring it to TC and to place a copy in the bulletin board.

● **Review of ART monthly reports:** Mariate stated the monthly reports still show the average changes minus 5% and are still under the line. However, our ridership increased a bit in January.

Passport: Mariate reported that Green Opportunities has joined the Passport Program. Grove Park Inn has increased a bit.

Ridership: S4 is number one for the month of February. Mariate highlighted that when David Wilson mentioned that E1 & E2 had been very busy that you can see in February in the first chart that says percentage change in ridership in routes from July to January, N1 increased 3% from January which

increased 17% the overall is large and N2 is 15% and the prior month was 8%. N2 is showing a very steady increase in ridership.

1. Mariate continues to receive phone calls about how to make the transfers and she feels that education is very important.
2. Tom asked about the status on the complaints that are coming into IRIDE. Mariate stated that the complaints are logged in by Norman and report. The City has a new app called "Asheville Stuff" and Mariate would like for Norman and his staff to log the complaints that they receive in Asheville Stuff in order to maintain the same document for everyone. Norman stated that anyone can register for the Asheville Stuff site. The app will show how many complaints come in and how quickly staff is responding to the complaints.

Public Comment II:

- **Tim Sadler:** Stated that the ART Station looks great with the kiosk and the new signage.
 1. Good Friday - what can be done to have Good Friday not classified as a holiday for the transit schedule? Tim stated that it is not intuitive to have Good Friday as a holiday.
 2. Tim likes the fact that there is a bulletin board notifying the public of the Transit Commission Meeting, although the notice does is not changed on a regular basis. Mariate suggested posting a general notice of the regular monthly TC meeting. Tom posts the TC agenda one week prior to the TC meeting from IRide. Tim requested to place notices of the TC meeting and the agenda on the kiosk and a notice to go to IRide.com for complaints, as well as in the bulletin board in ART Station and on the windows for more visibility.
 3. In terms of ridership etiquette, Tim's thinks that TC and staff should reconsider the video. Julie stated that all considerations are being reviewed.
 4. Bruce asked Martha if transit necessarily has to follow the COA employee policy. Martha stated that if it is a holiday then the COA has designated that the transit system follow that holiday schedule unless COA wants to make an exception. Martha stated that if TC makes for an exception for Good Friday, then it would have to make exceptions for other holidays as well. There would need to be some standards for doing that. The moment you refuse one and grant the other then there would be a claim of discrimination. Mariate stated that the funding that we had for the holiday service was a certain amount which is providing reduced service. If we had more funding independently of being a holiday we can extend the hours.
- **Darlene Hamlin:** Stated that the ride coming to TC was great.
 - a. Darlene suggests putting the survey on IRIDE.
 - b. Route C - Julie acknowledges that Route C is a challenging route. Darlene suggested incorporating W3 to come through Emma Community to the ART Station. Mariate stated that the way the City is designed that is not an option. In order to be able to separate W3 or W4 from the routes, additional funding is required. .
 - c. Darlene is aware of the crosswalk at the Ice Service Store. Mariate stated that NCDOT has installed the cross walks and the ped signals at Louisiana and Patton and the City will be installing the ADA ramps which will make intersection much safety.

- **ANNOUNCEMENTS:** None

- **Agenda Items for next meeting:**

1. SNTD schedule; 2. TC Goals; 3. Budget Update; 4. MMTC update

Julie adjourned at 5:05pm