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ASHEVILLE TRANSIT COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
First Floor Conference Room - City Hall
May 7, 2013
3:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Attending:

Commission Members: Julie Mayfield, Dave Erb, Tom Tomlin, Itiyopiya Ewart, Bruce Emory and Kevin Jenkins,

Staff: Mariate Echeverry, Norman Schenck and Janet GeorgeMurr

Community Members: David Wilson and David Boshart, Michael Crenna, Tristan Ensleg, Diana Kantor, Michele Dohse, Timothy Sadler.

3:30 pm:

- ❑ Julie Mayfield, Chairman, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone; Julie announced that she would need leave at 5pm and Dave Erb, Vice-Chair will take charge of the meeting.
- ❑ Dave Erb read the Announcement for Public Comment
- ❑ Introductions by TC and staff

● **May 7, 2013 Agenda review and approval:** Rearrange the Old Business agenda items in order for Julie to discuss before 5pm.

● **April 2, 2013 Minutes review and approval:** Dave moved to approve the 4/2/13 minutes; Bruce and Tom seconded the motion and carried unanimously.

● **Public Comment I:**

1. **Michelle Dohse** - who is an occasional rider suggests:

- a. Having signs at each bus stops showing where that particular bus route is going.
- b. Consider making available payment of transit passes at other locations other than the ART Station and to pay by phone.
- c. Julie stated that there are discussions on how to increase information availability to riders.
- d. Mariate stated that the changing of the bus stops signs to the blue and green will take approximately 10 months with the ART logo and the route corridors. The corridors that are finished are from Downtown to Black Mountain; in the progress is the West corridor. There are about 1,000 bus stops for in and outbound and since ART does not have a crew to install them, PW is installing them when they can.
- e. Julie asked if maps were available on the buses. Norman stated that due to budgetary constraints the maps are available at the ART Station with the dispatcher, City Hall, or library. Mariate stated that due to the budget problem, printing expense was cut and working with what we have. However, printing of the maps and schedules will be on an as-needed basis.
- f. Mariate stated that the when the passengers are on the buses, the talking bus announces transfers.
- g. Julie stated that if one has a smart phone the information is all on the website.
- h. Tom stated that ART has a system map showing where all of the routes without the times.
- i. Michelle stated that if she happens to be out and about, she would not have the collection of maps with her, therefore, it is difficult to determine which route to take.
- j. Iti agrees with Michelle that she has also experienced in carrying 13 different maps. Iti also stated that regarding the printing and due to the budget cuts, suggested having one map with all of the route information. Mariate stated that ART is moving forward with the Real-Time Passenger Information system which serves the riders. The riders will be able to check when the next bus is coming which will be available on the smart phone, texting by entering the bus stop number and a reply that will tell when the next bus arrives. This will also reduce the paper maps. Iti states that this is a great idea, but she does not have a cell phone and when she on the bus she asked if anyone had a phone and no one on the bus had a phone outside of the driver.

2. David Boshart - Focuses on change of information and rider's safety.

- a. Driver and rider safety - Mr. Boshart reported what he perceived as a threatening situation on the bus and called to try to call the ART Station with no success after several rings; then tried 911 to report the incident. APD stated that ART would handle the situation. The final result was that threatening person was arrested for five days. Also, he reported that people are soliciting prostitution on the buses and he doesn't know who to call.
- b. Chain of information is not accessible to the public, he has not been able to contact NCDOT.
- c. Julie stated that there is one phone number to call for any and all complaints issues. The number is located on all of the maps and schedules and on the buses. Mr. Boshart indicated that he called and there was no answer.
- d. Julie stated that the number does roll over to a voice mail message.
- e. Norman stated that there were a four or five days that the voice mail system was not working and IT was called.

3. David Wilson - At the last Transit Commission Meeting David stated that the E1 was overcrowded; but he has notice that the E1 was replaced by a more roomy but older bus which has helped with the amount of space.

3. Michael Crenna – Suggestions/comments:

- a. Not to cut Saturday service.
- b. Drivers are rude to the passengers and recommends customer service.
- c. Commends Steve Parris as exceptional driver;
- d. Lack of information that passengers are forced to find their way around.
- e. ART website is not updated
- f. Phone calls not answered; emails are not replied to; and calls are not returned.
- g. Suggests vendor machines at the ART Station.
- h. Sound system does not work properly.
- i. Dispatchers are rude, uneducated, taking smoke breaks and lack concern to the passengers; and recommends re-training.
- j. Tom suggests to Michael of the suggestion box in the ART Station and put the time, driver's name or number. Julie stated that the most useful information is the time, the driver, the bus, or time and the dispatcher's name. At that point it becomes a personnel issue and we have to know that Norman is doing his job to have the conversation that he needs with the driver and/or the dispatcher.
- k. Michael stated that he called the ART Station regarding the flood on Amboy Road and the detour with Route C. At 2pm he called the ART Station and made 3 different calls in 10 minutes and none of the phone calls were answered. Michael commends the dispatcher, Pamela, who is most helpful in giving information.
- l. Norman suggests that the ART voice messaging has a service alert on extension #9.
- m. Kevin Jenkins stated that today he was in the lobby at the ART Station waiting for the bus and there buses pulling in and out and there were no announcements.
- n. Iti agrees with Kevin and Michael mentioned that Iti has been in the lobby of the ART Station and if a dispatcher is not there the dispatcher cannot announce arrives/departures. Also, the clock inside the lobby is no longer functioning and hasn't for some time. Iti commends Joe Bob who is a good dispatcher and very helpful. There is another dispatcher that seems to have an "attitude" and very defensive.
- o. Julie stated that the drivers and dispatchers have had customer service training.

4. Tim Sadler - stated that he echoes what Michael Crenna was saying.

- a. There are two dispatchers that are rude. Tim recommends that City of Asheville interview new personnel.
- b. Tim gave comments to the last City Council that submitting a flat budget for 5 consecutive years is unacceptable. Clearly the system needs more funding.
- c. Tim stated that W3 was 24 minutes late. There was lady there that said that it happened before and transit made the decision not to run and she had no way to get home.
- d. The AB Tech route is continuing to be a problem. The E routes are disastrous in making connections. The Council is aware that this cannot continue. The current schedule is underfunded.
- e. The people of Asheville want and deserve to get to work on Sundays which needs to be a priority.

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

- **Iti** – was waiting in the lobby of the ART Station for the N3 there was no announcement of N3 arrive and depart and clock in the lobby is broken.
 - ▶ Iti was riding the E1 coming home from Walmart and a man got on the bus who could have been on drugs or drinking was harassing Iti. Fortunately, the bus driver intervened with two security people. Iti felt that if the ART Station closes and the buses are still running that situation could have been totally different for Iti if the security guards were not there.
 - ▶ This past month, Iti has had two experiences of bus drivers taking long breaks even though they have come in late. So, if the bus is late for 10 minutes and the bus driver goes to the restroom or have a cigarette it is exacerbating the problem of your personal lateness.
 - ▶ Also experienced on Patton Avenue on a Saturday night waiting for the W3 or W4 for an hour at 7:30pm to 8:30pm before they walked home and the bus never passed them during this time.
 - ▶ In general the N3 has been on time and she appreciates the larger buses for the E1.
 - ▶ S3 has been late frequently in leaving due to it being a long route. Now Iti is riding the S4 more frequently and starting to understand the topics of congestion, delays and lateness in missing her bus.
 - ▶ Iti mentioned to Norman that on some of the buses there are actually signs that say you cannot ask the driver to hold another bus for your connection. When Iti asked the bus driver about that he could not do that. Iti asked what the policy is.
 - ▶ Norman is not familiar with the sign on the buses, but will hold a bus up to 3 minutes w/o problems which is not an issue. The dispatcher has little room to hold up to five minutes.
 - ▶ Mariate stated that in the past several years ago, the buses were held for an extended period of time which made everyone late. E1, S4 and then all of the buses were late so the policy was changed not to hold the buses. The bus driver can apply their best judgment to make the call or not or the other driver if he could wait or not.
 - ▶ Tom's philosophy is if the bus is coming in right on the hour; and it is about time for the other bus to leave, Tom does not see any reason why the driver cannot call in to have the bus held for one or two minutes which is a good relationship with the passengers. Tom feels that the drivers should have discretion of deciding to call in.
 - ▶ Norman will make sure that the drivers do have a discretion and to understand that if they choose not to exercise it that they are within their rights. Norman stated that there is window that the bus drivers have to make that decision in order not having a negative impact.
- **Julie** – experience riding bus has been fine.
- **Bruce** – N1, N2 and S1 with no particular problems that Bruce noticed.
 - ▶ Bruce did notice on the N2 trip a potential for confusion on the UNC-A loop in not knowing which direction the buses are going. The trip that Bruce was on was inbound but the recording announced that it was going outbound to Beaverdam. Unless, we can get the head signs and the recording announcements to be accurate all the time that we should investigate the proposal that Bruce made previously about flipping the direction of the outbound buses on that loop.
- **Dave** - On N1 and N2 have been on time.
 - ▶ Dave has also seen the same thing that Bruce mentioned on E1 that the announcements were backwards – making the correct announcement in the wrong direction.
- **Kevin** – stated that most of the time the experience is good. Today, missed connection S4 to get to the E bus to come to the Transit Commission.
- **Tom** – rode S1 a couple of weeks ago in the afternoon and the route appears to have plenty of time to get to the end of the line and to get back and still stay on time unless they are caught by the train on Biltmore Avenue. A lady was complaining about having to walk too far to the Medical Center and Tom checked the bus stops which there are only 2 bus stops as they make the circle. Julie stated that if the lady waited the bus comes around and stops right where the road comes back in.

● **New Business:**

- **Julie's Annual Report Presentation to Council on May 14, 2013:** A copy of the PowerPoint presentation in the TC packet review. The request from City Council was to tell them what TC does and to update on the goals for the year. Thanking Norman and Janet for the photos and art and also to Kevin and Bruce for the rider etiquette pictures. Julie briefly reviewed the presentation with TC on running new routes, maps, problems that came about as a result of those changes and what has been done to address them by adding E1, N and N1 and

changes to the C route. In giving the Council the sense of where the system is operating well, the most efficient routes, how many people those are carrying and point out the problems with both of the C route and the S4 route and today the W3. We know that there are ongoing problems around S4 and C Route where ridership continues to drop. Also, mentioning goals in detail of some of those goals and some discussions in moving towards the Multi-Modal Commission. The things that we hope happens so that there is an increase in the number of transit advocates that there is an increase in the City's overall dedication to improving the system and increase in the dedication to find funding for an integrated multi-modal system. Julie has submitted the presentation to the City Clerk.

OLD BUSINESS:

● **Selecting 3 TC members for the Multi-Modal Transportation Commission (MMTC):** Julie stated this will be in effect on 7/1/13. Julie asked the TC who would be interested in being on the MMTC. After a discussion among the members: Bruce, Iti and Julie are interested. Tom, Dave and Kevin will remain on the Transit Committee. Dave moved to appoint Julie, Iti and Bruce to the MMTC; Tom seconded and carried unanimously.

● **Rider Survey:** Julie stated that the survey is in the TC packet for their review. The ridership survey was discussed at the TC retreat to have a year from the roll-out of May, 2012. Julie also met about a month ago with Just Economics who had developed their own survey and planning to do this survey in the low-income communities and populations that they primarily serve. Julie asked if the transit and Just Economics could combine the surveys as one. Asheville Homeless also wanted a survey and was asked to integrate the surveys. TC reviewed the survey and after a number of discussions and corrections, Julie stated that Land of Sky will also have a survey after SNTD and the City will explore combining the surveys for the week of 5/20/13. Julie asked for a motion to accept the changes and language of the survey, Kevin so moved, Dave second and all in favor. Julie will send an email out on how the other surveys will work together and Julie will speak with Just Economics.

STRIVE NOT TO DRIVE SCHEDULE AND UPDATE: Julie stated that in the TC packet is the schedule of SNTD events and encourage TC to attend.

- ▶ The bus fare will be \$0.25 every day that week'
- ▶ Crosstown Rumble – Asheville multi-modal commuter race to have Gordon Smith on the bus, Marc Hunt on a bike and Jan Davis in his car starting at the Sherrill Center at UNC-A campus and taking the various modes meeting at City Hall.
- ▶ Two volunteer so far to be at the ART Station;
- ▶ TC will staff the information table as follows:
 - Bruce from 9am-12pm on Monday;
 - Dave from 11am-2pm Tuesday;
 - Julie from 1-4pm Wednesday;
 - Kevin and Iti from 3-6pm Thursday
 - Tom from 11am-2pm Friday
- ▶ A sign will be made for the information table that reads: "Need Help With Your Ride."
- ▶ Mariate will contact Jon Fillman from P&R to have a bus parked at the Downtown After 5 event.

● **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:** Julie reported:

- Julie, Mariate and Tim Sadler had a meeting with AB Tech to engage in addressing transportation more broadly, helping students to get more sidewalk connectivity and to elevate the bus issues with S4.
- Julie stated there was "great" meeting with MAHEC and Mission in discussing the possibility of the Health Express. At the last meeting, there was a Buncombe County Health and Human Services representative in attendance. At this point, every participant at the meeting was having budget issues. Discussed possibilities of Medicaid funding for the route; or the possibility of finding specific grants to fund the route for a couple of years with the new Map 21.

□ Mission and MAHEC are very interested in participating with the Passport Program. Mariate had sent the representatives the information for the Passport.

● **New Shelter Locations:** Mariate reported that during the last meeting there were questions as to the location of each of the shelters that are being installed or already installed, as follows:

Merrimon Avenue Hillside – installed;
Elkwood Avenue and Merrimon Avenue – installed;
Montford Avenue and Hill Street (Chamber of Commerce) - installed
New Leicester Hwy and Patton Avenue – installed;
Bingham Rd and Keith Drive
Tunnel Road and Riceville Rd
N Louisiana Avenue and Emma Road
Patton Avenue and Florida Avenue
Tunnel Rd and Crockett Rd (New Haw Creek)
I240 Ext Ramp at Cliff Street and Westgate
Patton Avenue and Regent Park Blvd

● **Budget Update:** Mariate stated that the budget conversation continues evolving. The last conversation is to cut \$50,000 from each department as a strategy. It is difficult to cut items because the budget is flat at this time. The only way is to cut transit services. Staff would like to be able to make decisions about the cuts. If the need to cut \$50,000, one example would be a very poor performing route on Saturdays; or to cut hours on the poor performing routes in the evening. We will be looking at a lot of numbers before a decision is made. We have not heard, at this time, of the decision for FY14. Mariate stated that we were able to find some savings here and there when the budget was proposed. So cutting will put us below today's budget. Bruce asked if we got the full amount that Mariate requested for next year that would be enough to maintain the second bus on E1. Mariate stated that it would be enough to maintain everything. If the budget continues to be flat we can continue flat with all of the services that we have now.

► Iti commented on the bus shelters of the garbage can are inside the shelter that there are yellow jackets in the trash can and no can sit in the shelter. Mariate will check to see if trash cans can be arranged outside of the shelters with the concrete pad. Kevin stated that the can will fill up with rain. Mariate stated that she does not think it would be problem due to the opening of the trash can is small. The City has garbage cans without a cover and it seems to be working well.

Public Comment: Mr. Boshart offered to improve the bus shelter (Top-A-Stop) at Asheville Terrace Apartments for free. Mr. Boshart is asking for permission to improve the bus stop site where there are chunks of concrete sticking out of the ground causing a hazard for tripping. Mr. Boshart has been picking up trash from different shelter locations and trying to improve the areas. Dave stated that there is a bit of history regarding this matter. There are very well intentions, very well organized efforts to improve the shelters. Mariate stated that the shelter belongs to the Asheville Terrace. Mr. Boshart said that he spoke with the manager at Asheville Terrace and they will have nothing to do with it. Mariate will talk with Asheville Terrace management. Mariate stated that the Top-A-Stop shelter was installed before she was here at the City and they were installed with donations and many were installed on private property and there are other shelters like this that may not have an easement. Mariate will talk with the manager of Asheville Terrace. Mr. Boshart stated that the management is asking him to do the work. Mr. Boshart would like to participant in the discussions with the management. Mariate stated that if the shelter is a City shelter there is a process to do the repairs and we will need to evaluate if that shelter can be repaired first because of recyclable materials and many of them are just getting rotten and need to be removed.

- **Staff Updates:**

- **Review of ART monthly reports:** Mariate reported that the ridership stats are stable. With the March ridership comparison, the numbers continue being similar to the numbers in prior months. E1 seems to continue to be in the first in the ranking of ridership. S4 is at the same level of E1; and the next level is W3 which is the same trend that we have been seeing in other months. Norman and Mariate looked at the routes to be cut if the budget requires it– to cut S2 which is not a high performing route and #14 in the route ranking; if Saturday service to cut two routes S2 which is paired with N3 and W4 is paired with N3 would remove S2 and W4 and would pair two and three trips so that is one bus and the other possible route is N2 to cut. For the evening routes, Mariate is aware that some people really need the evening routes for to and from work so that we need to look at the evening specifically to see if it make sense to redo them. One of the considerations is to reduce service at the end of the day, we can charge the whole cost to that because transit garage and dispatch will be closed. That is why we need to cut more service if we cut Saturday that we cut in the evening. We would need to provide service for the low income areas. When we look at the routes S2, W4 and N2 are not serving low-income and N1 passes every hour. .W4 goes to Patton Avenue and New Leicester which is not serving low-income specific area.

Mariate stated that in order to cut \$50,000 from the budget three routes would need to be cut, S2, W4 and N2. For Evening trips 12 hours would need to be cut and 12 to 15 hours on Saturdays to make the same amount of money. Mariate stated that she hopes by June we should have a better idea of the budget situation.

Bruce stated that he was disappointed of the March ridership because it is lower than January and February not by much but typically March is higher in the last two years there was an upward slope from January to February to March and this year we did not see that. March last year was the same as October which is one of the higher months of the year and now March is one of the lowest months of the year.

- **RFPs:** Mariate reported:

- ▶ **Shelters** – are moving forward.

- ▶ **Cameras** – for the new buses have arrived and will finalizing this project.

- ▶ **Automated Vehicle Locator (AVL)** – The Real Time Passenger Information System is being evaluated and once the decision is made for the demonstration, there will be a contract awarded in approximate one month. The time frame is good with all of the vendors by December, 2013.

Accident Reports: Norman reported that there is one pedestrian accident at the end of March with no injuries and this week that First Transit's annual safety program accident which showed a decrease.

Norman stated that he continues to see the improvement in safety with the fence along the Post Office side is giving and that the fence is there until the end of June and hoping to come up with a solution to keep the fence longer.

▶ Do not have plans to reduce coverage at the ART Station in the evening and the plans to continue to have a dispatcher and an officer until 10pm for added security. It is not necessarily part of the cuts that Mariate had mentioned by the budget that if we do the reduction in service. Mariate stated that is why we began looking at the service because we have cut everything that we can cut.

▶ Tom asked who pays for the APD security at ART Station. Tom noticed that in the afternoons and evenings the officers are staying in the transit office longer and/or sitting in their vehicles instead of walking up and down the platform. Norman will talk to the officers.

▶ Norman stating that we have a few officers that stay out on the platform and others we have to encourage them through their scheduling officer. So, once dispatcher tells Norman of an issue, we call the scheduling officer and then he reminds the men to be out on the platform.

▶ Mariate stated that regarding safety that the decision was not to eliminate the officers or the dispatchers as long as there is service.

▶ Iti thanks Tom for mentioning of the officers not patrolling on the platform. Iti often time sees the police officers in their vehicles or in the dispatcher's office. Iti also stated that APD is not enforcing the designated smoking area. Tom stated that one of the police officer had given someone a ticket for smoking in the non-smoking area.

● **Passport** – Green Opportunities (GO) is on the PassPort Program but the stats are not showing due to GO purchase IDs. Iti is happy to hear that GO is on board with the PassPort Program.

● **Public Comment II:** None

● **Agenda Items for next meeting:**

▶ Debriefing on SNTD

▶ Budget Update

▶ TC Goals

▶ Rider survey on what the MPO/Land of Sky

● **ANNOUNCEMENTS:** None

Dave adjourned at 5:15pm