



ASHEVILLE TRANSIT COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
HR Training Room - 6th Floor City Hall
August 7, 2012
3:30 PM - 5:30 PM

RIDE.RELAX.CONNECT

Attending:

Commission Members: Julie Mayfield, Paul Van Heden, Kevin Jenkins, Ken O'Connor, Tom Tomlin

Staff: Ken Putnam, Norman Schenck, Martha McGlohon, Yuri Koslen, Janet GeorgeMurr,

Community Members: Bertha Brandon, Noah Harbin, Kristina Giles, Jeanie Rosenthal, Fran Payne

3:30 pm:

- Julie Mayfield, Chairman, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone;
- Ken O'Connor read the Announcement to the Public;
- Introductions from the Transit Commission, staff and public.

● **August 7, 2012 Agenda review and approval:** Julie stated that under Old Business: Media Response to Roll Out by Dave Erb will be moved to the next TC meeting since Dave is out of town.

● **July 3, 2011 Transit Commission Minutes Approval:** Tom stated that under TC member Experience on ATS: Paul stated that the bus was parked on the corner of "Lexington and Pritchard" - to correct to Rankin Ave and College Street. No other changes to the 7/3/12 minutes. Tom made the motion to approve the minutes with the above correction; Ken O. seconded and carried unanimously.

● **Public Comment I:**

- Fran Payne:** Is asking for TC's help on late buses which causes missed connections, therefore, missed appointments. Fran described an incident due to the difficulty of the lateness with S2 since the launch. Julie stated that Transit is keeping track of all the comments and TC is receiving monthly reports in order to keep track of the most problematic areas.
- Jeanie Rosenthal:** The late buses have become routine some at 30 to 40 minutes late and was told there would not be another bus in order to catch up for the system.
 1. On August 1, Jeanie was riding E1 to the VA; the bus driver arrived at Walmart and told the passengers on the bus to get off if they were going to the VA, because he was unable to complete the route; and that another bus would be forthcoming to complete the route to VA. One of the passengers called the ART Station and was told that a replacement bus was not coming and the passengers had to wait an hour in the heat for the regularly scheduled bus.
 2. Jeanie stated on August 6, the bus schedule indicated that S4 bus was to leave at 40 pass the hour, as well the website and IRIDE did not give the new times and still shows that the bus is running 40 minutes pass the hour. Dispatch informed Jeanie that the schedule had changed and that the buses are now running 35 minutes pass the hour.
 3. Some of the bus stops still have the old bus schedules posted and not the new stickers.
 4. Jeanie suggested having the respective bus schedule posted on the respective bus stop signs.
 5. Jeanie rode C route to see where it travels since it does not come to the ART Station. The dispatcher informed Jeanie of route and that it would be hour wait.
 6. The dispatcher was very impolite and Jeanie suspects due to many complaints.
- Julie asked:
 1. Yuri or Norman if the old bus stop signs still exist and asked if Transit is in the process of taking them down. Norman stated that he was not aware of any older bus stop signs that are still out there. The drivers were to report any existing old stop signs, but have found a few that were missed mainly on the N1 route.
 2. Julie asked Yuri if the plan was for each bus stop to have a bus schedule for that respective stop. Yuri stated that the signs are being reproduced and will be updated with all of the bus stop changes throughout the routes. Yuri stated that currently there are new bus stop signs on the new bus routes. Yuri stated there are

approximately 600 of the old signs to be replaced; therefore, it will take time for Transportation to change the signs out.

3. Julie asked Norman to look into the matter of the E1 abandon route to VA and if the time on S4 did change to the 35 minutes pass the hour. Norman stated that the S4 route change and notices were posted on the buses and at the ART Station; and announcements were made for 2 weeks. Yuri stated that the S4 change is not in IRIDE or on the website, but will be soon.

- **Transit Commission Members' Experience on ATS this past month:**

- Tom - rode the bus on 8/2 E1 at 11am - he reported the number of passengers on the bus. Tom observed that some of the passengers get on the bus at Walmart, outbound; and ride to the VA Hospital in order to be assured that they have a seat when the bus returns to Walmart, inbound and into town. Tom would like to discuss the N route coming into the ART Station.
- Julie - all rides were good and nothing to report
- Ken O. - has been out of town
- Kevin - S4 arrived at Kevin's stop relatively on time, but due to a wheelchair delay caused a misconnection at ART Station. Kevin stated that it is consistently running late at least when he is riding the bus.

- **NEW BUSINESS:**

- **Identify potential new Passport Program Participants** - Julie stated the purpose of Passport is getting riders in addition to receiving funding for the transit system and to build a closer relationship between the City and large employers in the City. The City, Buncombe County, Grove Park Inn, UNC-A and Greenlife/Whole Foods (who are withdrawing) are on the Passport program. Julie suggested that at this TC meeting to have a brainstorming session in taking the lead in approaching businesses and making the initial contacts and conversations. Potential employers are: Ingles, Mission, MAHEC, VA, Walmart and Care Partners. Ken O. stated that ABTech was approached and he will check with ABTech on their decision.

A community member suggested the GE Aviation, Plastic Card and Rudy's at industrial park off of Sweeten Creek Road near UPS. Ken O. will get in touch with them and Julie will circle back with Mariate on how to make the initial approach. Ken O. requested some information on the Passport program. Julie stated that this will be a subject to discuss at the TC Retreat. Julie thanked Ken O. for volunteering.

- **Change Date of Retreat:** Due to a conflict on Julie's calendar, the new Retreat was rescheduled to 10/16/12 from 9a-3pm. room. Sara Bensman will be the facilitator. Janet will send a meeting request to everyone involved.
- **Parking Passes to Board and Commission Members** - Ken stated that earlier this year new security passes were distributed to the employees for access to various employee parking lots, etc. Parking passes were distributed to the TC to the lower lot off of Valley and Marjorie Streets.

- **OLD BUSINESS:**

- **Transit Commission Goals Update:** Julie reported:

1. This document will also be discussed at the 10/16/12 Retreat.
2. Under #3 Strengthen Communication with Drivers: Norman stated that there were two more bus driver meetings in July regarding what routes need modifications especially on route E1.

- **Ideas for Strategic Planning Session:** Julie reported that she and Mariate met with Sara Bensman.

Julie listed agenda items to be discussed:

1. Introductions and team building;
2. Review the goals from last year; what we have and have not accomplished and what the issues are.
3. Developing new goals for the next year
4. Spend at least an hour or more prioritizing the next steps on the implementation of the TMP.
 - Staff will bring the list of the next potential items for the next phase in the TMP and where to focus on the priorities in implementing and accomplishing them.
 - TC will also hear from staff regarding the 5/21/12 roll out has shown and what are the next steps. .
 - Julie asked TC if there is anything to add to the agenda. Julie suggested thinking about goals for next year; be prepared to bring the ideas. Julie asked the community to think about goals that the community would like to see for next year.

STAFF UPDATES:

• Transit Master Plan Implementation - Phase I Update:

- ❑ Yuri reported that Transit is looking at bringing the N route to the ART Station; Route C extending to the intersection of Pearson Bridge and Bingham Roads loop in Emma; and the S4 departure time to change the time to provide more time for the S4, which is now in progress.
- ❑ Norman stated that the Summary of ART Complaints will be an ongoing report. ART had other priorities this month but will provide every month reporting.
- ❑ Ken P. stated that it is now 90 days in the implementation of the TMP of phase I. TC was aware of the challenges which had to be completed using only existing operating budget and ended up with a skeleton that needs to be built upon. One top issue that has risen is how successful E1 has been in terms of ridership, which is serving 15% or more of the entire ridership. The downside to this is towards mid-day the route is running late; but Transportation is developing a plan to try to solve this issue. Ken P. outlined three basic options to TC for guidance:
 1. Purchase a 35 foot used bus from Gastonia to replace the 30ft bus that will have 4 extra seats and carry additional 8 to 10 passengers. Gastonia received the buses with the earlier ARRA funds which makes the buses 5 to 6 years old with 250,000 miles per bus. The potential cost for this 35 ft bus would be less than \$15,000 for City Share. The operational costs would essentially be the same since it is still one bus.
 2. The second option is to add a second bus to run 13 hours a day, on a regular schedule. Both these options were discussed with the drivers and have their blessing on both of the options. The down side to this is the annual operational costs will increase approximately \$300,000/year.
 3. Third option would be to combine the two options. To institute the second bus while at the same time pursues the purchase of the 35 ft bus with Gastonia. Once the new 35 foot bus arrives the second bus would be removed from the E1 route. This possibility would have a down side in removing the extra bus off of E1 route.

Ken P. continued: What staff needs from TC are other ideas or should staff pursue any on of the above-mentioned options or all of these. Ken stated the bus would run one hour and then second bus on the 1/2 hour along with E2. Yuri stated that for clarification there was talk of going into Walmart one direction. Julie asked if that has been a problem by not going into Walmart from a rider's perspective from a number of complaints. Yuri stated that E1 goes into Walmart in both directions; Route C does not go into Walmart.

After a lengthy TC and staff discussion: Ken asked for a consensus from the Transit Commissioners of their recommendation:

1. Julie stated that her recommendation would be option 2 for the additional bus on the route every 30 minutes. Due to complaints on frequency and eliminating the on-time performance issue; and having a bus that is predictable that will be there in a short period of time would be most responsive to the complaints. Julie realizes that it is a lot more money but with the support of all the people that we have heard from who have concerns about this, Julie feels it is time to push City Council on making a better investment in the system.
2. Ken O. asked about option 2 - if a spare bus would be available should there be a breakdown. Ken P. stated that there are 16 routes and 21 buses and Ken could not say if any of the additional 5 buses could be available in case of a breakdown. However, with the 35 foot newer bus, the possibility of any unexpected break downs between now and November, when the new buses arrive, would not be as great. Ken O. stated that option 3 might be a possible option since a second bus could be added immediately, but also the 35 ft bus could be an experiment in this geographical area as well as assisting E1 or other areas that would have problems.

People from the community comments:

- ❑ Kristina Giles asked if adding another bus on E1 was due to the amount of people riding the bus or a time issue. Julie stated that it is both issues. The second question that Kristina is concerned with is having the buses stacked up at the ART Station which is very confusing when the buses are parking in a different route number at the ART Station parking slots. Norman stated that E2 has been permanently moved to the one 170 slot.
- ❑ Jeanie Rosenthal asked the question about Inbound and Outbound on E1 that goes to the VA does not stop at Walmart at Kohl's. Tom T. suggested that if there are 2 buses why not keep the IB and OB. Julie stated that it is not just ridership, but also traffic issues. Ridership is good on these routes- Last Saturday ridership was over 800 passengers on E1; a normal week day is about 800 and Saturday normal ridership is approximately 500. Norman stated that the bus no longer goes to the main VA entrance where there is an issue with the valet parking. The buses use the lower lot to save time, but it is still running late due to the traffic on Tunnel Rd.

- Julie asked Ken P if TC should vote on this. Ken P. stated that consensus would be good, but the important issue is that TC and staff all need to work together to tweak the system to keep trying to find the improvements to make it work. Ken P stated Transit is receiving valuable input from the bus drivers, as a result some changes like the bus stops in front of Tupelo Honey is a good example. The nice thing is that in general the passengers seemed to be pleased with the concept of the route.
- Julie - to wrap up in understanding E1, that it is a general agreement that it was important to put a second bus on the E1 route now and pursue purchasing the 35 ft bus. Julie feels that there would be a revolt if Transit placed a second bus out there and then take it back. This also raises the question about implementation: Jeanie raised this earlier it was a comment from last month as well. Julie asked if the connection on the C Route is still being analyzed without adding a second bus on the Route C. Ken P stated this is still being analyzed and trying to come up with a plan on Route C. Norman stated that the second E1 bus will help the Route C connection at Bleachery Blvd. It will cut some of the wait times close to one-half. Yuri stated that it would be similar to W1 and W2 having two buses an hour to connect from Route C.
- Julie stated that another public comment about the N bus stopping at 6pm which was impacting people in Montford. Julie asked if this possibility of extending the time of the N route. Yuri stated that there is a bus that leaves College and Haywood Streets at 7:15pm and the route terminates after going up Montford Avenue and coming down to S Montford terminates on MLK at 7:42pm; 7:15pm is the last time it leaves from downtown and heads for Montford. Paul stated that he lives in Montford and it is very difficult. Yuri reminded TC that for any of the changes we have to do the Title VI route equity analysis. Yuri stated that there is a late service to Hillcrest which is the heaviest point on the route at 9:40pm which was based on ridership numbers.
- Julie thanked the staff for looking for solutions on E1 and coming up with one to push the envelope a bit. On behalf of Council Smith, Julie asked Transit if Councilman Smith was needed to help to terms of a Budget Amendment to increase the operational budget in running a second bus. Gordon was supportive of the idea for E1 in general.

● **Status of RFPs:** Yuri reported as follows: There are three RFPs that are currently active:

1. Transit Garage Roof project;
2. The Marketing plan has edits for the schedules.
3. Transportation Demand Management plan being administered by Land of Sky.

□ **Future projects:**

1. Shelter construction using the remaining funds from ARRA and CDBG.
 2. AVL system
 3. Julie asked about the shelters that she sees that a good number of sidewalks and shelters are being constructed. Does Yuri have a report about how much work that has been done over the last two years, i.e. how many shelters were installed? Yuri stated that for Westgate and other locations that Transit is working with other City departments in building sidewalks and looking at where the bus stops are and trying to build the pads for ADA and even if we do not have funding for that particular location. For example, Westgate the sidewalk is being built, therefore a large ADA pad will be also constructed before the shelter installation and so the shelters are being installed are at the largest ridership or a requests from riders. Julie asked if Ken P. could get a report about the number of pads, sidewalks and shelters that have been installed in the last two years, which will be helpful to include what Dave Erb will be responding to in the media.
- **Transit Garage Roof:** Norman stated that Carolina Mtn Roofing is still working on the roof and still have areas of the roof that have not been repaired with minor leaks. Weather has delayed the roofing project. The Engineering firm overseeing the project has another engineering firm that manufacturer the materials which is taking three to four additional days to meet their standards.

● **Review of ART monthly reports:**

- **Ridership:** Yuri stated that the ridership stats comparison is a challenge in showing last year and this year's results due to new set of routes. What is interesting is the total per month for last June vs. this June, which is 115,000 for 2012 and last June in 2011, was 125,000. Yuri stated the reason for the drop in ridership is due to route changes and to can expect a drop in ridership because people are trying other modes of transportation, because they are frustrated

with the change. Ken stated that for FY12 was short of hitting 1.5 million of ridership which was the goal that Ken wanted Transit to achieve, so, again the high year was 1.6 million. Ken would like to increase the ridership from the 1.5 million annual trips threshold. Paul stated that this increase was without a gas crisis which was in FY2009.

- ❑ Passenger Per Revenue Mile Report: Norman stated that Julie had requested another way of measuring ridership on the routes, so basically it is an efficiency reading of passengers per revenue hour. When Yuri looked at some of the routes one of the most productive route was S4 which runs 20 minutes per hour which is shorter than the other routes which run longer and yet the ridership was good and rides per hour were much greater than the other routes.
- ❑ Paul described an incident that he witnessed on the corner of Cullowhee and Montford. It appeared that someone was illegally parked and the bus came through and clipped the vehicle. Paul asked how many incidents with buses that are being created by people parking along Montford Ave. Norman stated that Montford has not been a problem it has been more of a problem downtown. Especially when making a right turn off of Coxe on to Patton Avenue (Thirsty Monk).
- ❑ Safety Items Update: Norman stated that some of safety items are now requiring more money. Some of items listed are repairs at the ART Station, i.e. repairing the broken concrete, the better pedestrian notations, the fence between the ART Station and the Post Office has been part of the Capital Improvement Projects for the City. Those projects take longer but most of the other items listed have been accomplished; or are on-going programs. Ken P. stated that recently Channel 13 did a news story on the crash history of the transit system and the way it came across was not the most positive and unfortunately the reporter had miss information. Ken P. had a meeting with Bill Harned from First Transit to address this issue and First Transit tracks everything. But on every one of those accidents, Transit was not at fault. Julie stated that there should be a clarification. That there were 34 incidents of which consist of a mirror or a bent wheel. Tom sent a note to Mariate and Ken requesting that the City write a retraction regarding the article. Ken P. stated that the City's Public Media Department is handling this issue. Martha stated that technically what was requested and what was reported is accurate, but, it is how the article is interrupted.

- **PUBLIC COMMENT II**: None

- **Next TC Meeting 9/4/12**: Julie, Ken O. and Paul will not be attending 9/4/12 meeting. Tom and Kevin and Dave will be here. Julie will ask Georgia and will confirm with Dave. Julie stated that since we do not have many agenda not to have a September meeting since the agenda is low. Julie is contemplating having the October 2 meeting and the Retreat on 10/16. Ken O. and Tom stated that Mariate stated that TC could not skip a meeting. Julie will discuss with Mariate. Martha stated that if there is nothing that TC is to meet about, TC can choose not to meet that month and put a note on the City Hall door "No meeting today" and send out notices. Martha stated that a legal add is not necessary, just put a note on the door. Martha stated that Julie could cancel up to the last day as long as notices are provided.

- **ANNOUNCEMENTS**: None

- **Agenda Items for next meeting**:

- ❑ Media Response Update
- ❑ Transit Commission Goals

Meeting Adjourned at 5:20 pm.