



TRANSIT COMMITTEE Minutes

**Regular Meeting
September 1, 2015**

Attending:

Committee Members: Julie Mayfield, Bruce Emory, Dave Erb, Tom Tomlin

City/ART Staff: Ken Putnam, Yuri Koslen, Sean Spiller, Mariate Echeverry, Martha McGlohon, Diane Allen, David Webb, Francine Young, Tammy Haynie, Alvin Robinson

Community Members: Jim Grode, Vicki Meath, Sabrah nha'Raven, Amy Cantrell, Kim Roe, Leigh Mullins, Tonya Clark, Michele Dohse, Ariel Harris, James Gambrell, Lib Angus, TJ Amos, Joshua Veridd (?), Greg Brown, Joseph Lopez, Carmen Procida

3:32 pm – Call To Order

Julie opened the meeting. Members introduced themselves.

4 August 2015 Minutes - will need to be approved at next meeting, due to lack of quorum.

3:36 pm - Public Comment I

Kim Roe commented that clients must walk a quarter mile up 14% grade to get to the State Office of Vocational Rehab and Independent Living (8 Barbetta Dr. in Ridgely Business Center), with no shelter at the nearest bus stop. She would also like bus service on Long Shoals and expanded hours on E1, E2, and Black Mountain Trailblazer. Sabrah nha'Raven, Leigh Mullins, and Diane Allen reinforced Ms. Roe's comments about the severity of the hill.

Yuri relayed a message from Darlene Hamlin, saying that she wishes she could be here for today's meeting.

3:47 pm – Presentations

City Staff and Just Economics made presentations relating to the contractual relationship between the City and the transit management company (First Transit, at present). Mariate provided details of the relationship and the reasons for its existence. Vicki Meath (Just Economics, People's Voice on Transportation Equality) requests an appropriate accountability process through which the City can review whether First Transit is performing adequately. In particular, her group would like the City to issue a new RFP as a way of getting First Transit to provide the necessary information. She provided a list of eight specific questions to be answered: 1) How do we hold the management company accountable to its contract with the City? 2) What is the City's, driver's, or rider's recourse for dealing with a company when/if they are not following best practices for transit management, jeopardizing public safety? 3) Are the facilities and buses being maintained adequately, given the resources available? 4) Are all of the resources for improving our system being accessed by First Transit? 5) Do we have hiring, training, and monitoring practices that are employing and retaining quality employees, lending to an efficient and safe system? 6) Is adequate supervision operating at all times the buses are in service? 7) Is our management staff, including the Resident General Manager and mechanic staff, generally qualified to be doing the work outlined in the contract? 8) Is the management company communicating appropriately with the City of Asheville and the riders regarding daily operating changes to the system? A number of concerns have led her group to conclude that certain undesirable patterns of management may originate with First Transit, and would like the above questions answered through an accountability process, whether a new RFP for the management contract or some other adequate accountability measure.

Julie opened the floor for public comment. Diane Allen (union president) relayed concerns that buses are falling into poor repair, causing serious degradation of service. The union has documented the incidents which they find

unacceptable. The system is presently short-staffed by 11 drivers and two mechanics, resulting in significant overtime. First Transit drivers in Wilmington will strike soon if similar conditions aren't remedied there; Diane suggested that a similar action is likely here. Amy Cantrell mentioned "deep patterns of concern for safety," and cited 2011-12 RFP as an example of addition of best practices to the contract.

Mariate mentioned weekly meetings with general manager and monthly meetings with the drivers as part of the quality assurance process; triennial reviews by FTA (most recently in 2013); and periodic reviews of all contractors (not just management company) to comply with FTA guidelines. Tom asked about City's knowledge of excessive overtime; Mariate explained that Rose (general manager) had called it to her attention, requesting additional resources. Martha mentioned the complexity of the budgeting process as it relates to this issue, saying that Rose can't simply request additional resources and expect to get them automatically.

David Webb (26 year operator) said that processes for dealing with immediate maintenance needs are needlessly complex, with parts, extra buses, and shop personnel unavailable when maintenance is needed. He criticized the excessive overtime, mentioning the effect on safety and drivers' personal lives.

Julie asked if problem appears to be more a resource problem or a management issue. Ken mentioned that money is already allotted for drivers, so the problem appears more like management. Julie requested clarification of City's response when needs are unmet. Mariate said staffing increase is underway. Martha mentioned that most recent contract places burden of hiring skilled, competent, safe drivers on the management company, through company's assumption of liability.

Diane Allen mentioned that Maruti Transportation (Jacksonville, FL) has an excellent reputation among drivers as a desirable employer, and said that there are others whose names she can provide. Amy Cantrell expressed concern that City seems to be somewhat in the dark about the maintenance issues. Vicki Meath reiterated the desire for RFP as an accountability mechanism; also requested much more transparency for the system. Francine Young (17 year operator) cited statistics showing very poor retention of drivers; also requested much more direct ability for drivers to contact shop without going through dispatcher at Transit Center. Bruce asked about relative roles of working conditions vs. salary in driver dissatisfaction; Francine said problems stem mainly from working conditions ("a little more salary is always nice, but ...").

No vote could be taken, due to lack of quorum. Julie summarized the sentiments of the TC members present as "very concerned," and will pass that message on to the Multimodal Commission.

5:02 pm – Unfinished Business

MMTC Update:

Policy for sidewalk prioritization was approved at last meeting.

TC Openings:

Call for applications has been posted. Deadline will be Friday, 23 October.

Fees and Charges:

Update presentation scheduled for October.

5:06 pm – New Business

MMTC social will be 23 September at Hi-Wire Brewing on Hilliard.

MMTC willing to allow Tom Tomlin to serve an extra year, but needs TC to waive our rules in this case. No vote possible (lack of quorum), but members present unanimously support the waiver.

TC members need to consider issues to be discussed at Council's retreat in early (Jan or Feb) 2016.

5:12 pm – Staff Updates

Bruce questioned the passenger counts. Yuri and Mariate clarified the change in accounting method.

RFP for Transit Master Plan funding won't be available until October. Draft is currently under review (Yuri and Adam).

5:16 pm - Public Comment II

none

5:16 pm – Agenda Items for Next Meeting

approve minutes from both August and September; policies and priorities for Council's retreat; Sean's presentation on fees and charges; vote on one-year waiver of term limits for Tom Tomlin; Sunday service; TC goals; Transit Master Plan RFP; management company RFP; MMTC update; TC openings

5:16 pm – Meeting Adjourned