

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

May 19, 2020

LET IT BE REMEMBERED, the Public Transit Advisory Committee in and for the County of Collier, having conducted business herein, met on this date at 3:00 P.M. in REGULAR SESSION via Zoom video teleconference, with the following members present:

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Vice-Chairman: Mr. Arthur Dobberstein (via teleconference call)

Mr. James Bennett

Mr. Peter Berry

Mr. James Caton

Ms. Sonja Lee Samek

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. John DiMarco - Excused

ALSO PRESENT:

Ms. Michelle Edwards-Arnold, Director, Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement

Mr. Omar DeLeon, Public Transit Manager, Collier Area Transit

Ms. Yousi Cardeso, Operations Analyst, Collier Area Transit

Mr. Devon Browne

Mr. Zach Karto, Senior Planner, Collier Area Transit

Ms. Josephine Medina, Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization

Mr. Braian Morales, General Manager, MV Transportation, Inc.

Mr. Michael Nelson

Ms. Elena Ortiz-Rosado, Events, Sales, and Marketing Coordinator, Collier Area Transit

I. Call to Order

Mr. Dobberstein called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken, and a quorum established.

III. Approval of Agenda

Requested amendment to the Agenda:

- a. Discussion of Program Grant Application (Reports)

Mr. Berry entered a motion to approve the February 25, 2020 meeting agenda, with the noted change. Mr. Caton seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

a. February 25, 2020

Mr. Bennett entered a motion to approve the February 25, 2020 meeting minutes. Mr. Caton seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

V. A. New Membership Application

Two applications for consideration of membership of the Public Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) have been received, with one Committee seat presently available. Both candidates were in attendance via videoconference and were invited to address the PTAC for introduction, presentation of credentials, and reasons for interest in Committee membership.

- a. Mr. Devon Browne has been a resident of Collier County since 2014, formerly working for Hertz Corporation in Strategic Partnerships and Innovation, focusing on emerging transportation innovations. Mr. Browne detailed his more recent experience in management consulting, with a focus on transportation issues. Mr. Browne noted that his strategic background in seeking future transportation solutions, as well as practical operational experience would facilitate his ability to positively contribute to the PTAC. Mr. Browne fielded questions from Committee members, noting that he has had no further business with Hertz Corporation since his departure, as well as his more recent experience studying public/private business partnerships, and multi-county collaborations seeking to provide an optimal transportation infrastructure. Mr. Browne further noted his experience studying ride-share company applications and technologies, application-based parking providers, as well as employer van pool technologies.

- b. Mr. Michael Nelson has been a resident of Collier County for the past 12 years, currently working as the Associate Dean at Keiser University. Mr. Nelson is a member of the Leadership Collier Foundation, an organization which takes an active role in civic and professional issues, addressing area challenges and working towards solutions in the public interest. Mr. Nelson expressed an interest in continuing to give back to the community, particularly regarding enhancement of public transportation access for underserved members of the community.

Mr. Caton thanked both applicants for their interest in serving on the PTAC and recommended endorsement of Mr. Browne, based upon his extensive previous work experience within the field of public transportation.

Mr. Caton entered a motion to endorse the application for Public Transit Advisory Committee membership submitted by Mr. Devon Browne. Mr. Bennett seconded the motion. All members were in favor. The motion was carried.

Mr. DeLeon encouraged Mr. Nelson's attendance and input at future PTAC meetings, which are open to the public. Mr. Berry further recommended that Mr. Nelson be notified by Staff of any future vacancy on the PTAC.

B. Title VI Program Update, 2020-2023 – Mr. Zach Karto

Mr. Karto provided an overview of an update to the Collier Area Transit (CAT) Title VI Program for the years 2020-2023, which was last revised in 2017. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the regulating agency for CAT, requires that a Program update be completed every three years. The Title VI program, which is based on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, is required for receipt of federal funding, and includes all subrecipients. The objectives of the Title VI Program are to ensure that federally assisted benefits and services are made available and equitably distributed, providing equal access to all persons, with participation in planning and decision-making processes. Detailed procedures for investigation of Title VI complaints, as well as corrective/remedial actions to prevent discriminatory treatment of any beneficiary are required. The opportunity for access to programs and activities for individuals with limited English proficiency, as well as notification of rights afforded under Title VI are also required.

CAT participates in Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) public involvement activities; however, has its own Public Participation Plan (PPP), which is designed to engage both transit users and non-transit users. Public input and feedback are solicited via multi-language hang-tag surveys, as well as online surveys conducted as part of the Park and Ride Study, and the ongoing Transit Development Plan. Public feedback is encouraged via attendance at PTAC, MPO, and MPO Board Meetings. All meeting notices, press releases, and public service announcements are available in a multi-lingual format as requested or needed, as well as utilizing pictographs to display information and instructions.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that reasonable steps be taken to ensure that individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) be provided meaningful access to benefits, services, information, as well as programs and activities provided by CAT. As such, vital documents are translated from English to Spanish and Creole, as well as other languages upon request. The CAT website provides translation to other languages, including Spanish, Creole, German, and French. Translation is also provided at public meetings. Mr. DeLeon clarified that while certified translators are sometimes utilized, it is not a requirement, and noted the ready availability of Transit Staff for translation assistance. Mr. Karto noted a 1% growth in LEP population in Collier County since 2017. A suggestion was made by Mr. Dobberstein to specifically identify the Creole LEP population on the graph within the report which reflects County foreign language demographics.

An additional component of the Title VI Program is a requirement for a racially balanced composition of participation on non-elected advisory boards, councils, and committees, which is encouraged for all available vacancies.

CAT system-wide standards and policies are required to be reported, including vehicle load standards, on-time performance standards, and service availability, which is comprised of various service delivery factors. Policies are formulated which ensure transit amenities are provided equitably for each mode, including randomized vehicle selection for all routes. Fares and service changes are evaluated to not adversely impact any group, to include major service change policies, disparate impact policies, or disproportionate burden policies. It was noted that while all of CAT routes serve a minority census block group, approximately 45% of the service provided has 50% or more of the service within minority census block groups.

Executive Order 12898 in support of Environmental Justice was passed in February 1994 to protect minority and low-income populations. Measures taken to ensure compliance with the Executive Order are included in the Title VI update; detailing bus stop amenities locations for low income and minority population areas, the minority census tract and CAT fixed route and ADA service area, as well as low income census tract and CAT fixed route and ADA service area.

A copy of a complaint form and instructions detailing the complaint procedure must be included in the TDP, which may be filed with CAT or directly with the FTA. The complaint will be fully investigated, resulting in either a letter of closure or of a finding. It was noted by Mr. Karto that Collier Area Transit has had no investigations for violations, complaints, or lawsuits in this regard. Finally, the document submitted to the FTA will also include the Board Resolution or meeting minutes which demonstrate Board approval of the Title VI program.

Mr. Caton inquired as to the methods employed for engagement of the public for feedback and suggestions. Mr. DeLeon stated that opportunities for public engagement are made available in both a general fashion, such as via surveys collected from the public at a generalized location, or in a more tactical, coordinated effort, such as in partnership with community CRAs.

Mr. Bennett made inquiry regarding on-time performance measures; whether 95% is the current standard or a goal to be met, as well as frequency of measure. Mr. DeLeon clarified that 95% is the on-time performance goal, currently operating at approximately 90% on fixed routes. On-time performance data is measured monthly.

Endorsement of the Title VI Program update was being sought from PTAC, prior to presentation to the Board of County Commissioners for review and approval, and ultimately for submission to the FTA.

A motion to endorse the Title VI Program update was entered by Mr. Peter Berry. Mr. James Caton seconded the motion. All members were in favor. The motion was carried.

VI. Reports and Presentations

a. Update on the Transit TDP Process – Mr. Zach Karto

Mr. Karto provided PTAC with an overview of the status of the Transit Development Plan (TDP) process which is currently underway. The TDP is a 10-year horizon strategic plan for mobility which is required by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The TDP is comprised of FDOT required conditions which must be satisfied.

The first stage of TDP development details existing conditions, population growth, employment growth, and stakeholder input. These variables were studied utilizing a variety of measures such as the public outreach plan, existing conditions, peer and trend analysis, on-board survey, mobility perspectives, mission, goals and objectives, as well as mobility strategy discussion.

It was noted that the public outreach plan included on-board surveys, online surveys, small group discussions, and public workshops, however the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic interfered with the ability to meet these objectives, and on-board survey information was limited to active transit users. A total of 1091 on-board surveys were completed on various days in January 2020, primarily via tablet, and made available in English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole. A working group discussion was also conducted with stakeholders in the community, which focused on mobility strategies which support the CAT Vision and Mission statement, the results of which are currently being compiled.

County population density growth was studied, noting the expansive nature of the county, but with identification of areas of population density growth in Immokalee, North Naples, East Naples, and Golden Gate City. Employment density growth was seen to be greatest in the western portion of Collier County.

The second stage of TDP development involves interpretation of online survey results, with questions regarding public transit awareness, experience with using the service, general opinion, and perception of public transportation in Collier County. The online survey was conducted by a consultant firm, Tindale Oliver, and was primarily promoted via social media, as well as the CAT website. Survey results show a desire for mobility improvements in the form of more buses, expanded bus services, and greater frequency. Additional advertising revenue was identified as the most popular public response for covering expenses related to expanded mobility services. Additionally, a series of stakeholder interviews were conducted, which included questions regarding awareness of Transit, role of Transit, key improvements, the population who should benefit, suggestions for how to pay for Transit, as well as the need for more service and options.

Conceptual design principles were discussed, with a focus on streamlining the bus network to provide optimal service, but with a goal to remain cost and revenue neutral. Consideration will be given to transit network changes and expected impacts, as well as technology and policy considerations related to mobility on demand service zones, improved service frequency, the role for premium service along key commercial corridors, the role for park and ride lots, vanpools, and express buses, the need for compact and connected land use, as well as other mobility priorities.

It was noted that the current discussion was informational only, as compilation of the TDP remains ongoing in coordination with the consultant firm. The final plan will be presented to PTAC for review prior to presentation to the Board of County Commissioners in September 2020.

b. Update on Mobile Ticketing Application – Mr. DeLeon

Mr. DeLeon presented an update on the status of “Ride CAT,” the mobile ticketing application provided by Masabi. The live beta testing phase is being conducted utilizing Apple and Android devices, with a full launch anticipated in August 2020.

Implementation of a pilot program which had been scheduled for June 2020 remains uncertain at this time, as bus fares have been temporarily waived due to the coronavirus pandemic. Rigorous staff testing is being done, both on-board buses and on-site.

The process of mobile ticketing was discussed, including built in security measures to prevent user fraud. A link with “My Stop” will coordinate with a trip planning solution, which will plan the route and offer real time information, such as delays or detours for the desired trip. A link with Collier 311 is available for users to report community issues which may require attention.

There is also an opportunity for users to provide feedback regarding the mobile ticketing app or on utilizing the CAT system. On-board technology includes a pass validator, as well as a Wi-Fi router, which will provide free Wi-Fi to the public for their use. Installation of this technology has remained on schedule, performed by the CAT Fleet team.

Mr. Bennett inquired as to whether the technology would be available in a multi-lingual format for the LEP population. Mr. DeLeon confirmed the program does offer multi-lingual options, as well as a text to read function for the visually impaired.

Mr. Browne inquired as to whether integration with park-and-ride locations is included in the trip planning component of the program. Mr. DeLeon stated that all bus stops were tagged and that information regarding the availability of the mobile application will be posted at each bus stop for public awareness.

c. Covid-19 Activity – Mr. Morales

Mr. Morales discussed the procedures in place in response to coronavirus concerns, including enhanced cleaning of buses, and the availability of paper towels and DC7, a disinfectant cleaner that kills a broad spectrum of pathogenic bacteria and viruses. Operators have been provided with hand sanitizer, gloves, masks, both disposable and removable, as well as face shields. A plastic barrier is planned for placement between the operator and the fare box on fixed route buses as a long-term solution for operator safety. Due to the door-to-door service offered by Paratransit operators, the plastic barriers will not be installed on Paratransit vehicles, however operators will be provided with ample sanitizing and disinfectant materials for personal protection from potential viral exposure.

MV Transportation, in partnership with the Department of Health, has installed face mask wraps on the front of some buses, as well as informational wraps on viral protection. Mr. Morales also noted that two buses were made available for use as cooling stations at the Immokalee Health Department during a recent 3-day coronavirus screening event. Sanitizing items continue to be made available for public use at transfer stations and on the buses, and transfer stations and bus stops are pressure washed as needed. Some bus stop benches have been removed due to potential contamination by non-transit users, to ensure the safety of the ridership.

Mr. DeLeon outlined additional measures which have been taken during the coronavirus pandemic, which includes waiving fare box fees to avoid potential contamination via currency, as well as for enabling continued ridership during the economic financial crisis. Further, a rear door entry and alighting procedure was implemented for operator protection from potential viral exposure.

Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to how lost fare box revenue would be recovered for day to day operations. Mr. DeLeon clarified that grant funding has been made available via the CARES Act stimulus package which will cover lost passenger fare revenue.

Mr. Dobberstein noted the current use of the bus wraps and the potential for a transition in perception which may allow for bus wrap advertising in the future. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to how ridership had been affected by the viral pandemic, including the waiver of bus fares. Mr. DeLeon noted an initial decline in ridership of 65% due to a majority of the population staying home, however which allowed the opportunity to meet CDC guidelines for social distancing. Ms. Arnold pointed out a 10% weekly increase in ridership for the past three weeks, which may result in the use of more buses. Increases in ridership have necessitated the development of long-term plans for adherence to CDC guidelines for safety and social distancing. Mr. DeLeon further noted that issues related to capacity are being investigated, considering maximum capacity per vehicle size, as well as operator safety and training for de-escalation of any negative rider interactions.

Ms. Samek pointed out that the use of the mobile application will facilitate a contactless fare opportunity. Mr. Caton requested clarification of the rear entry and alighting process, which will result in greater passenger interface. Mr. DeLeon ensured that the procurement of plastic shields for operator protection will facilitate a one-way flow of passenger traffic, especially as ridership increases.

Mr. Caton inquired as to whether any Transit operators or staff had tested positive for the Covid-19 virus. Mr. DeLeon confirmed that several members of the operational staff had tested positive, however none of the bus operators. There were operators who were required to quarantine following exposure to an infected nursing home patient. Mr. Caton inquired as to the process and expense associated with cleaning a bus. Mr. DeLeon noted coordination with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), in which EMS personnel utilized a mister to disinfect the first floor where the virus positive operational employees worked. Buses are thoroughly disinfected using broad spectrum disinfectants. Associated costs are currently being formulated.

VII. Member Comments

+Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to the Grant application status for additional funding, especially with the recent increase in operational costs. Mr. DeLeon stated that the Bus and Bus Facilities Grant had been applied for and is a Federal Grant which is offered through the FTA. There is an opportunity to utilize Transit Development Credits as the required grant match; these are credits which are made available via the Florida Department of Transportation. No local match is required and has no local impact, if selected as a grant recipient. The grant application has been submitted, however is pending review and final disposition by the FTA.

+Ms. Arnold welcomed Mr. Peter Berry as the newest member of PTAC.

VIII. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

IX. Next Meeting: June 16, 2020

X. Adjournment

There being no further business for the good of the County, the meeting was adjourned.

Public Transit Advisory Committee

Arthur Dobberstein, Vice-Chairman

These minutes approved by the Committee on _____ as presented ____ or as amended____.