



**PTAB
MEETING MINUTES
August 13, 2020; 5:30 – 7:00 P.M.**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Andrew Ooms called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

2. ROLL CALL

PTAB PRESENT:

Doug Miller
Jennifer Ham
Genevieve Mina
Chelsea Ward-Waller

CITIZENS PRESENT:

3 unique logins were recorded for this meeting.

PTAB ABSENT:

Andrew Ooms
Dawn Groth

After roll call, a quorum was not present.

3. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Without a quorum, the agenda could not be approved; the meeting continued as an information session.

4. Public Involvement Announcement

Mr. Doug Miller stated that since this meeting was without a quorum, it would continue as an information session.

5. Action / Information Items

- a) Minutes of the July 9, 2020 Meeting (ACTION)
Without a quorum, the July 9, 2020 minutes could not be approved.
- b) Director's Update (INFORMATION)
Information provided by Ms. Jamie Acton
- c) 2021 Budget and CIP/CIB (ACTION)
Information provided by Ms. Jamie Acton

- d) CARES Act Funding Plan (ACTION)
Information provided by Ms. Jamie Acton
- e) Fare Free Discussion/Proposal from Assembly Chair Felix Rivera (ACTION)
Information provided by Mr. Bart Rudolph
- f) Service Change Update (INFORMATION)
Information provided by Mr. Bart Rudolph
- g) Ridership Update (INFORMATION)
Information provided by Mr. Nicholas Abugel
- h) Public Comments

I sold my truck and have been riding the People Mover bus #35 for a couple of months. I want to give my compliments to the bus drivers. Timely service and dependable. I have time to relax to and from work downtown with them doing the driving. Just wanted to say thank you and well done to the drivers.

Sincerely,

Steve Pence, CPA, CGMA

6. MEMBER COMMENTS

Chelsea Ward-Waller stated that she continues to be impressed with how People Mover has been operating during the current pandemic.

Genevieve Mina echoed Chelsea Ward-Weller's comment. She also was happy to see the ridership graph which helped visualize the current state of ridership. She also stated that she's looking forward to additional conversation about the CARES Act funding. She is happy to see funding allocated towards transit security.

Jennifer Ham was not available to comment.

Doug Miller stated that he is very excited about the CARES Act funding. He is also happy that the board now has two new members starting next month. He also stated that he is concerned about the state of the transit center, especially with winter coming.

7. Adjournment

Without a quorum, this informational meeting ended at 6:25pm.

The next PTAB meeting will be held on September 10, 2020, 5:30 - 7:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Nicholas Abugel, Transit Planning Technician

For detailed Board discussion, please refer to the recording of this meeting located on the Municipal Website at <http://www.muni.org/Departments/transit/Pages/PublicTransitAdvisoryBoard.aspx>



Municipality of Anchorage
Public Transportation Department
Memorandum

DATE: October 7, 2020
TO: Public Transit Advisory Board
THRU: Jamie Acton | *Director*
FROM: Christine Schuette | *Transit Planner* and
FROM: Bart Rudolph | *Planning & Communications Manager*
SUBJECT: **Fare-Free Public Transport**

Background

Anchorage Assembly Member Felix Rivera requested to the Public Transit Advisory Board (PTAB) that the Public Transportation Department (PTD) look into going fare-free. There are four different types of Free-Fare Public Transport (FFPT):

- **Spatially limited** FFPT (limited to a specific section of the network or a particular mode);
- **Temporarily limited** FFPT (limited to a specific, yet regularly occurring periods of time);
- **Socially limited** FFPT (limited to certain groups of users); and
- **Full** FFPT (available to the vast majority of routes and services available).

PTD currently offers socially limited and temporarily limited FFPT. Seniors ride free every Wednesday and youth ride free on Thursdays during the summer.

The Benefits of a Fare-Free Network

The potential benefits of FFPT deal primarily with income disparity and the environment. FFPT can enhance mobility opportunities for everyone and increased ridership can divert more single occupancy vehicles off the road. Eliminating fares removes affordability barriers and helps make the system more equitable for all users, especially for short trips. The elimination of the fare box can speed up passenger loading, reducing total trip times and making the system more reliable. Reducing trip times also makes transit more competitive with the automobile when riders have a choice between the two. This can also have a positive effect from the bus operator's perspective if they have to engage in fare disputes with customers not having correct change or boarding without fares in hand. The elimination of the fare box can also reduce the administrative expenses related to fare collection and processing and the maintenance costs associated with the farebox in general. Another big benefit is that the elimination of fares would eliminate transfer fees.

The Risks of a Fare-Free Network

The potential risks of FFPT deal primarily with over-crowding and the potential to attract non-destination riders. If ridership increases significantly, quality of service could decline if the department is not able to add more buses to increase service levels to match demand. Expenses and staff time associated with maintenance could also increase as more customers use the system. Additional operators, operations supervisors and mechanics may need to be hired. Over-crowding could drive away existing customers or weigh on their perception of safety while riding the bus. Enforcing "origin to destination" policies to prevent continuous riding may also create additional conflict. Transit security (if in place before FFPT) could help with this potential risk. Additionally, FFPT would affect more than just People Mover

operations. AnchorRIDES paratransit would be required to also go fare-free, thus increasing demand and operating costs for that service.

It will also be important to get community buy-in. Without a sales tax to mitigate the loss revenue, there could be competing city initiatives in the annual municipal operating budget and areas of town that do not have transit service could be a force of opposition.

Brief Experience

The PTD went fare-free between March 18 and April 9, 2020 in response to a global pandemic. This indirectly gave PTD a sneak peek into what a fare-free system could look like, although rider limits were in place that prevented over-crowding. During that time, there were reports that some riders were allegedly taking “non-destination” trips inflating the increased ridership numbers. The reports further claimed that some non-destination riders refused to get off the bus at the end of the route, not complying with the rider rules set in place.

Detailed Analysis

In order to better understand what a fare-free system would look like in Anchorage, there are several questions that would need to be answered and research that would need to be done.

- Analyze the 2019 APTA Fares database to compare PTD’s fare structure to similar sized networks. Research should include fully fledged FFPT transit networks that are not university systems or based on tourism.
- Determine PTD’s potential for lost revenue. What is PTD’s fare box recovery ratio? What percent of riders have fare-exempt or half-fare status already? What is the financial impact of ending employer/university agreements? What new revenue source would offset FFPT and how sustainable is it?
- What are the current costs associated with fare collection? (i.e. staff time processing the cash, maintenance time fixing malfunctioning fareboxes, operations time delayed due to faulty fareboxes or fare disputes).
- How much would ridership increase? In the literature, fare elasticity is reported to be -.03, meaning that with a decrease of 100% in fares, demand should increase by 30%. However, many transit systems have reported increases closer to 50%. Demand will vary depending on; the type of passenger, the time of day, the type of route and the length of time since the fare structure change took place.
- Will PTD be able to handle the increased support needed to customer service, maintenance, operations, and the increased need of bus stop amenities?
- Will fare-free change how PTD reports to FTA and/or change PTD’s eligibility for grant funding?
- What do the bus operators think? Bus operator satisfaction could improve by not having to deal with rider disputes at the fare box or it could be hindered by the potential of over-crowding and non-destination riders.
- Is there community buy-in and how will the community relationship to transit change with a fare-free policy?
- How will an increase in ridership affect Anchorage’s goals of mobility? For current riders that want more service (frequency, span and coverage), how does the messaging for FFPT work and not conflict with those goals?

Next Steps

The path to a fare-free system should not happen overnight. Further literature review would be needed on the benefits and risks of a fare-free system highlighting some of the case studies and lessons learned. The research outlined above needs to happen first and if a path forward is

deemed in the best interest of the community, PTD should consider incremental steps to getting there. For instance, PTD could pursue socially limited FFPT avenues first by implementing an all youth ride free program seven days a week. The same could be done with seniors and veterans. PTD could also consider making a temporally limited FFPT with certain days of the week or times of the day that transit is free for all to ride. This could be done during off-peak times to help prevent overcrowding. Furthermore, PTD could consider a pilot program to see what works and what does not, looking for opportunities and obstacles before a complete fare structure change. If there is community and political support for a fare-free system, it is recommended that a consulting firm be hired to provide an independent analysis of the questions raised in this memo.