

Public Transit Advisory Board
October 13, 2016, 5:30pm-7:00pm
ASSEMBLY CONFERENCE ROOM SUITE#155

PTAB PRESENT:

Carlette Mack
Britta Hamre
David Levy
Samuel Moore
Jay Dulany
Andrew Ooms

EXCUSED:

Jed Smith
Kevin Jackson

STAFF:

Abul Hassan
Whitney Tillman
Andrew Watts

CITIZENS PRESENT:

Vera Rosier
Candace Dunn
Shirley Smith
Jack F. Tatum
Alan B. Rice
Laura Vachula
Mike Vinsonhaler
Andrew Klein
Joe Pichler
Jillanne Inglis
Tina Kask
Richard Ungarook
Graciela Paz
Tara Carman
Joycelyn John
Julia Bill
Steven Johnson

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:29pm by Vice-Chair Carlette Mack.

II. ROLL CALL, INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS, STAFF, AND GUESTS

After roll call a quorum was present.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

An announcement was made to those attending by Ms. Mack that there will be a public comment period in which those wishing to make comments will be allowed two minutes.

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Levy made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Dulany seconded the motion. The agenda was approved unanimously.

V. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Dulany moved to approve the minutes from September 8, 2016. Ms. Hamre seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITY

- a. Shirley Smith – Ms. Smith notes an improvement in drivers kneeling the buses and deploying ramps for her, but she says that many ramps need repair. She states that sometimes the drivers have to pull them out manually and sometimes they don't go all the way to the ground. She also said that some people were using wheelchairs for reduced rates but did not seem to be disabled. She stated that the Dimond Transit Center needs patrols. There are people sleeping inside and the snack bar staff knows them by name. She also states that the ticket vending machine at the Downtown Transit Center is cash only, and you should be able to use cards because of the panhandlers downtown. She also said that some drivers have bad attitudes, but she has noticed improvement. An incident of note is when a driver moved her mobility device from one side of the bus to the other, and she feels that this was inappropriate. She also commented that people are talking to the bus drivers non-stop and disregarding the signs. She also stated that some drivers are letting people ride without paying and this is unfair. She also requests high frequency service, especially during the winter.

Mr. Moore asked about progress on getting a card reader installed in the TVM. Mr. Hassan replied that he was under the impression that this was already taken care of. He will check on it again and report back.

Ms. Smith mentioned that her smart card stopped working because of a small crack away from the electronics. She also mentioned that a driver did very well handling a rider who had no more rides on her card and was disruptive, but the fare policy ("no fare, no ride") should be enforced more consistently.

- b. Vera Rosier – Ms. Rosier commented that a lot of places have free rides for seniors every day, and she proposes that we expand the program to 3 days a week because of the difficulty in scheduling everything on one day. She states that she has been riding sporadically since 2009 and has seen a lot of improvements in the system since then. She states that she has been mistreated by people who don't think she's disabled and notes that not all disabilities are visible. She states that passengers should learn more courtesy and learn how to ride the bus, especially waiting for people to get off the bus before they try to board, and she would like us to enforce this. She noted an uncomfortable situation on her way to the meeting. A customer rode from Dimond TC to the YMCA, and he was "ranting and raving about racial issues" the entire way, and she almost got off before Dowling because she couldn't take it. She expressed concern for the drivers and the conditions they have to deal with. Mr. Hassan said that he would address these issues later in the meeting.
- c. Jack Tatum – Mr. Tatum stated that he would like information about who decided to remove the benches from bus stops, specifically at Walmart. Mr. Hassan stated that he wasn't certain who made the decision since it was made a couple months ago, but he could explain the thought process. Mr. Tatum replied that he knew it was because of chronic inebriates. He stated that people who are disabled need the benches in order to be able to ride. Mr. Hassan stated that APD provides data regarding problem areas with

criminal activity that are near or at bus stops, and when there are trends we have to weigh the safety of passengers against the need to deploy assets (both amenities and actual bus stops). He states that PTD is being compelled by others, including APD, to remove stops in unsafe areas. Mr. Hassan suggests that Mr. Tatum contact the Mayor's Office. Mr. Tatum replied that APD and his community council both sent him to PTAB and that the issue is that people are not being held accountable. He suggested that we post phone numbers for public to report loitering and post "no loitering" signs. Mr. Hassan reports that there is no loitering law in the Municipality of Anchorage, so calling APD won't help. Mr. Hassan discussed internal conversations about cost of retaining private security to serve as a form of transit police. He stated that he will discuss this in more depth later in the meeting.

Mr. Tatum also states that the drivers request more recovery time, two of them want another route through C Street, and they wonder why the rules aren't posted on the bus anymore. Mr. Hassan replied that the rules aren't posted because no one reads them. About a year ago, we changed to displaying the Big 3 rules and displaying them graphically.

Mr. Tatum also asks where we draw the line with chronic inebriates getting on the bus. Mr. Hassan replied that he will address this later in the meeting.

- d. Candace Dunn – Ms. Dunn stated that she had walked from her home to Muldoon and was going to ride the bus home. She states that she is disabled and can't stand while waiting, but there were homeless people sleeping on the benches.
- e. Mike Vinsonhaler – Mr. Vinsonhaler states that he's been riding the bus for 3 years. He asks why so many benches have been taken out when he's seen people who have had hip replacements sitting on the ground waiting for the bus. He also asks why so many shelters have been taken out. He stated that he would think that Alaska would have more shelters because of the weather. He states that he understands the issue with loitering and damage to property, but questions the costs to people with disabilities.

Mr. Vinsonhaler also expressed concerns about people who are getting on buses "flat out bombed" and he has seen people getting on the bus with open containers, drinking in the back, and unable to count their change or anything. He commends the drivers on removing problem passengers when they become aware of them and recognizes that they have a tough job and are doing a good job, but he wonders where we draw the line. He also expressed concerns about the safety of female operators at night and wonders why there isn't security to look after them. He's worried about their safety because of abusive and belligerent passengers.

- f. A commenter stated that he sees bottles of alcohol and also drivers have to wake people up and sometimes can't. He's worried about the safety of the drivers and states that people are cussing out drivers and starting fights on the bus. He stated that he often has to kick people off of benches who are sleeping. He states that people shouldn't be drinking on the bus. Mr. Vinsonhaler added that he smells a lot of marijuana on the buses as well. Both encouraged the Board to ride route 45 Mountain View sometime in the late afternoon and evening to understand what it's like.

- g.* Vera Rosier – Ms. Rosier mentioned the cleanliness of the Dimond Transit Center is an issue. She stated that one table has had the same ketchup stain for two weeks. She has called and made a report and nothing has been done. She also reports that many bus windows are dirty.

VII. BUSINESS / INFORMATION ITEMS

Mr. Hassan requested the board's permission to jump around in the agenda items, which was given by Ms. Mack.

- a.* Item 7c: MOA Operating Budget, 7e: Assessment Center Relocation, 7h: Anchorage Talks Transit Update - Mr. Hassan presented a graphic to the board visualizing revenue and expenses in the proposed budget. He invited the public to attend the Assembly hearing on the budget. He explained the contents of the charts and the sources of revenue and expenses for the department. He states that the money that is allocated by the Municipality is not sufficient to get the service out there for the level we currently have, so without sustaining or increasing revenue and without getting additional federal grants (which we are going out for), levels of service will continue to decline. The cuts in the proposed budget are a total of \$500,000 - \$300,000 in direct expenses and \$200,000 in fuel costs. A cut of this level might mean cutting bus operator positions or cutting service levels. This year, the service cut proposed is to eliminate all service on 7 holidays, which will save \$300,000. The remaining \$200,000 would have to come from eliminating two bus operator positions or delaying our capital plan.

He states that there are conversations about generating additional revenue. One possibility is advertising at bus stops. Another is the Dimond TC. Currently, the coffee shop is based on a level of understanding with current tenant, and conversations are happening about whether we put out an RFP for that space.

The cuts also mean sacrifices at the Downtown TC to reduce the rent cost. The assessment center will be relocated from DTTC to the MLK campus on November 30. This will result in savings by reducing our footprint there. Discussions are still in the works with ACDA about the future of our space. Right now, we are looking at 1480 sq ft based on a federal allocation in that space. We are changing the paradigm to be considered partners or stakeholders at the DTTC rather than tenants. What we end up with is possibly a customer service office and a small lobby to provide services there, but nothing has been finalized. The goal is that if we are paying rent of \$3000 for the space we have now, he expects to pay no more than \$5000 once renovations are complete.

From a user standpoint, budgetary constraints and revenue generation mean that it is difficult to provide additional free service. Mr. Hassan emphasized the importance of each contribution in helping to sustain the current level of service.

Ms. Mack asked how the Anchorage Talks Transit project plays into the budget proposal. Mr. Hassan replied that the Municipality is focused on the budget process right now. He sees the visioning project as an opportunity to flip the table and no longer have conversations about gradual degradation of service. If there is enough support for the ideas put forward, we create a new metric and a new standard that creates a system infrastructure that can last for the next 20 to 30 years. He also recommended that the public look into the 2040 Land Use Plan because land use, transportation, and housing need to go hand in hand and haven't in the past.

Mr. Ooms asked whether we had looked at reallocation of the FTA urban transit funds that are split with the railroad. Mr. Hassan replied that this is being worked on but it is happening at a higher level and he isn't able to speak to it at this time.

Mr. Levy asked whether we have done a cost-benefit analysis on continuing to provide Sunday service. Mr. Hassan replied that the premise of Anchorage Talks Transit was to bring up our level of service to bring transit service to people who have the greatest need for it. The goal was to look at density of population and density of jobs and whether transit was there or not. If transit was not there, then the gap needs to be filled in, and the level of service is brought up to allow people more decision points. This is done by decreasing connection times. So, the short answer is no, because ultimately even the cuts to holiday service affect the people who need transit the most, such as single mothers, people working minimum-wage jobs, and the like, and Sunday service would do the same. Mr. Levy encouraged us to let the business community know about what was proposed due to outcry from them in the past when holiday cuts were proposed.

Mr. Levy is also concerned about the future footprint at the Downtown TC. He feels that we are getting mixed messages from ACDA on this. Mr. Hassan replied that he didn't think it would be an issue and that we were waiting on decisions to be made at the executive level that would give both transit and ACDA direction on how to proceed. He stated that the footprint will be sufficient to provide customer service at a comparable level to today, some where for people to go to complete transactions, and a lobby area. This will not be as huge as it is today, but instead now minimal space.

Ms. Mack asked whether this will come to the board for them to at least look at, and Mr. Hassan replied affirmatively.

Mr. Moore notes that he would never consider cutting service completely on a day every week in a municipality this size, but he mentioned different levels of service for days, nights, weekends, holidays and asked how many of these options were being explored in relation to the budget. Mr. Hassan replied that the options this time that he will present to the Assembly were for either no holiday service or reduced holiday service (at a Sunday service level, half of that, or even a quarter of that). Mr. Moore asked whether it would make sense to run fewer routes or fewer altered routes rather than all routes with longer headways. Mr. Hassan replied that it was much easier to do it this way, given the six month lead time required for developing new schedules. His hope for the future is that we can look at the visioning process next year instead of talking about more cuts to the current system.

- b. Item 7d – Security – Mr. Hassan noted that PTD is paying a certain amount toward security at the Downtown and Dimond Transit Centers. We are looking at additional security because the impact is on bus operators and passengers. If there is an issue with a passenger on a bus, the current options are to call APD and delay the bus 40 minutes while waiting for them to respond or divert the bus to the Downtown TC. He asked how many calls to APD would this be every day, and would it result in a cry wolf effect that would result in slower response when there is a serious incident such as an assault on an operator, given the homicide rates and personnel shortage at APD?

Bus operators are being hired right now for their personality and levels of judgment because we evaluated these were important for customer service, so there was a trade-off that we no longer have the people who can handle rough situations so well. We choose to hire people who can better interact with the public, but the sacrifice is that they are not equipped and are not required to be equipped to handle people who are high on spice, inebriates who refuse to get off buses, or individuals making racist remarks. The only thing the bus operator

can do is ask them to stop. After that, the only options we have are calling APD or diverting to the Downtown TC.

Mr. Hassan reports that the cost of engaging private security would be \$250,000. This would take the burden off bus operators by allowing them to contact dispatch who can advise the security firm to contact the problematic individual when they are getting off the bus, collect their information, and impose a fine, which is allowed under current law. This would remove the issues from the bus. Mr. Hassan also explained that having uniformed personnel on the buses would reduce many of the issues transit currently faces.

Mr. Hassan explained that there is only so much that supervisors and bus operators can do, but PTD has started providing drivers with lists of banned drivers. He explained that because of FTA and Title VI requirements, it is not possible to ban people indiscriminately. There has to be documentation of issues and evidence to support a ban. He discussed that policies are being developed for progressive discipline for passengers that ultimately lead to bans.

Mr. Hassan then explained the thought process behind amenity placement. He explained that there is an ongoing conversation. An internal data-driven process is being developed that will help allocate limited resources. This is based on ridership and conversations are beginning based on what the appropriate number of boardings is for each amenity type. Mr. Hassan explained that as far as taking away amenities from stops, it is based on safety and crime information that is coming from APD. He explained that removing amenities does not stop the crime from happening, so the conversation may shift to removing the bus stop altogether. In short, data and ridership-driven plans are in process.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Steven Johnson – Mr. Johnson states that he is 17 and a high school student who rides the bus daily. He expressed that he is concerned about the safety and comfort of his peers at stops and on buses, especially women. He requests that there should be phone numbers posted at bus stops for people to call about issues that don't rise to the level of 911. He reports that he has seen people using heroin next to bus stops and does not feel comfortable waiting at a stop where that is happening. Mr. Hassan replied that he will look into options for discreet ways to contact transit.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Candace Dunn – Ms. Dunn stated that she saw a woman assaulted at the Downtown TC this week and security sat in the office and did not do anything, so she feels unsafe there as a woman. Mr. Hassan shared that all occupants of the center except for PTD customer service would be vacating November 30, and this should help.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION: It was suggested that there should be cameras at all stops and someone monitoring them to call for help before issues escalate. It was noted that many retail outlets have their security personnel check by the bus stops and remove people loitering, and it was suggested that this could be done more frequently. Mr. Hassan replied that there were conversations ongoing in this regard.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Jack Tatum: Mr. Tatum asked whether he was allowed to carry a concealed weapon on a bus. Mr. Hassan replied that in Municipal facilities it is not allowed to carry a concealed weapon but that he would table this question for further research. Another member of the public stated that he had seen people get off the bus with big knives. Crosstalk occurred, and Ms. Mack gaveled the session back to order.

- c. Item 7b – Youth Connect Program – Mr. Hassan stated that despite these cuts, public transportation is not absolving ourselves of our responsibility in this area. Youth Connect

now serves six schools in ASD, and we continue to see a net benefit to this type of venture and getting our youth on these buses.

- d. Item 7a – AnchorRIDES Vehicles – Mr. Hassan reported that someone had come to him with concerns about the wheelchair capacity of newly acquired AnchorRIDES vehicles. These vehicles were purchased as part of the normal cycling of the AnchorRIDES fleet (which have a useful life of 4 years or 100,000 miles, whichever comes first). An RFP went out, and the contract was let. The vehicles were advertised as having capacity for 2 wheelchairs. In reality, because of varying width of wheelchairs and of drivers, the vehicles (13) can only accommodate one wheelchair at a time. This changes the dynamic of the fleet so that nearly 50% of the MV fleet can only accommodate one wheelchair. Logistically, this is not an issue because statistically each vehicle only serves two wheelchairs per day, so there is no major impact on operations.

Mr. Hassan also reported that the same individual had expressed concerns over how vehicles would be evacuated in case of an onboard emergency. An evacuation plan is being developed that works with AFD on drills and better training for operators to assist seniors and people with disabilities as well as the general public in case of an emergency.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Tara Carman – Ms. Carman commends the drivers for being as proactive as they can safely. She rides multiple times a day, sometimes with her daughter (but sometimes not, because of space and safety – depending on the route). Ms. Carman suggests something similar to the Trail Watch program for the buses to help the drivers document issues. She suggests that the participants could be screened in the same way. Mr. Hassan reports that a mystery rider program will be on the agenda in the future. Ms. Carman also asked for an update on issues with the app. Mr. Hassan replied that the app is by a third-party vendor, but there may be an official app with a future ITS solution that depends on obtaining a federal grant, but that is 3 years away. Mr. Moore asked which app Ms. Carman is using. She replied that it says “Anchorage” and has a bus icon. Mr. Moore expressed that these apps routinely fail due to needing to restart servers and other reasons. Ms. Carman takes screenshots of things that need to be addressed. Mr. Moore mentioned that the Municipality is looking at a See, Click, Fix type application. Mr. Hassan encouraged Ms. Carman to continue sending her information to customer service. Ms. Carman again reiterated that she commends our drivers for the work they do.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Candace Dunn – Ms. Dunn asked whether drivers were trained in first aid and actions to take in case of (for example) someone having a seizure. Mr. Hassan replied that due to liability we are unable to train our operators as first responders, but AFD paramedics have a response time of less than 4 minutes.

- e. Item 7f – Collective Bargaining Agreement Negotiations – Mr. Hassan reports that negotiations are ongoing with the Teamsters regarding the new contract for bus operators. Issues are being addressed, but he is not free to discuss the details right now. Mr. Hassan stated that as a CDL holder and former bus operator, he is cognizant of the importance of comfort for the bus operators, which allows them to do a better job for the public.
- f. Item 7g – PTAB Sub-Committees – Mr. Hassan described some of the issues related to amenity distribution, a joint maintenance and operations safety plan, four major projects ongoing (U-Med, Dimond Intermodal, C Street & 7th, and a fuel storage tank at MLK facility), the visioning/planning process, and GIS. Mr. Hassan explained that he was assigning budgets to divisions of PTD and expecting the managers to manage to those budgets. Mr. Hassan invited the board members to participate further and allow the department to benefit from

their varying areas of expertise. He stated that staff would follow up by email to ask the board members what areas they would be interested in helping with.

- g.* Item 7i – August/September 2016 Ridership Report – Mr. Watts introduced himself and discussed his background and how he came to his position with PTD. He presented the August and September ridership reports and noted that while most metrics saw a continuing ridership decrease from 2015, Saturday ridership in September increased 1% year-over-year. Mr. Hassan advised attendees that we would be providing a free day pass for each person to attend the meeting.

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Levy thanked staff for a productive meeting, and he thanked Mr. Dulany for his service on the board over the years and the senior and Eagle River perspectives that he has provided.

Mr. Dulany stated that it has been his pleasure to serve on the board, and he wishes everyone well.

Mr. Ooms thanked Mr. Dulany for his service. He also reported that he is PTAB's representative on the AMATS Air Quality Advisory Committee. This committee held its first meeting of the year last month, and there were not many action items. There are refinements to the code regarding air quality, and there are no issues with non-conformity in the future. Mr. Ooms also reported that he was elected vice-chair of the committee. There are no upcoming meetings scheduled at this point.

Mr. Moore stated that we have a world-class system for a city our size. He commented that the public wants more transit, more buses, more routes, more service, lower fares, more security, more safety, more free rides, and lower taxes, so the challenge is how to get to that.

Ms. Hamre thanked Mr. Dulany for his service.

Ms. Mack thanked Mr. Dulany for his service and thanked the public for attending and commenting. She invited the public to return for next month's meeting.

IX. NEXT PTAB MEETING DATE

Next Meeting Date: November 10, 2016

X. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Levy made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Ooms seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 6:57pm.