

Public Transit Advisory Board
January 12, 2017, 5:30pm-7:00pm
ASSEMBLY CONFERENCE ROOM SUITE #155

PTAB PRESENT:

Andrew Ooms
Carlette Mack
David Levy
Felix Rivera
Jedediah Smith
Kevin Jackson
Britta Hamre

PTAB ABSENT:

Samuel Moore (excused)

CITIZENS PRESENT:

Gretchen Wehmhoff
Anna Bryant
Lenora Morford
Henry Luther
Kimberlyn Blythe
Rex Demoy
Richard Shuravloff
Jason Bowers
Jimmy Earight
Brian Jason Luther

STAFF:

Abul Hassan
Bart Rudolph
Collin Hodges
Andrew Watts

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:32pm by Chair Jed Smith.

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

After roll call a quorum was present. Mr. Moore's absence was noted as excused.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

An announcement was made to those attending by Mr. Smith 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. Ms. Mack seconded the motion. Mr. Levy moved to add an update on ridership prior to Item 7a. Without objection, this addition was agreed to. The agenda was approved unanimously.

V. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Hamre moved to approve the minutes from November 10, 2016. Ms. Mack seconded the motion. Mr. Rivera requested that the minutes be amended to reflect his absence. Without objection, the minutes were amended. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Mr. Levy moved to approve the minutes from December 5, 6, 8, 13, 15, and 17 as a group. Mr. Rivera seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITY

- a. Jimmy Enright - Mr. Enright stated that he is here because he wants to know about the changes to the ride policy and what changes will be made. He stated that he sits on the bus and actually sits and reads everything. He stated that he is in the hospital quite a bit, and bus 45 picks him up from the hospital, and he can't afford a taxi. A monthly bus pass is really nice to have and helps him get to and from his doctors. He stated that he wants to know what changes will be made, because sometimes he stays at the hotels. He stated that his dad pays his monthly bus pass. He also mentioned a history of open-heart surgery, hip surgery, and foot surgery. He stated that any changes at ANMC would be a bad thing, and more service to get there would be nice. ANMC is a good thing. Any part of town where he is, he knows he can always get there, and that's important to him.

Chair Smith clarified that there has just been over a month's worth of public comments on the route concepts and changes and the Board isn't here to take comments on that at this time because the comment period is closed. Changes to the U-Med District wouldn't necessarily include any cuts to that area.

Mr. Enright also stated that Dimond Center, ANMC, and Downtown by the Museum are major hubs, and if the Board and the Department can improve upon that, he doesn't care about changes. Just keep in mind where people are actually going to. He didn't come down here in the freezing cold just to hear himself talk. He can't drive, and he really relies on the bus system for his health, and he sees a lot of people doing the same thing too. If the Department starts cutting services over there, especially at Providence, even Alaska Regional (which did his heart surgery) - there are only 2 buses running in there. These are major hubs, so don't cut services there, because it'll be cutting people off.

Mr. Enright also stated that bus 45 gets congested. It's the only way he has to get to the hospital, and there's also Brother Francis and the soup kitchen.

- b. Richard Shuravloff - Mr. Shuravloff stated that he agrees with Mr. Earight. He also stated that he hasn't seen anything about the proposed changes in the newspaper or anything and wonders if they're posted so people could be aware of them. He stated that he rides from South Anchorage to all over, and he hasn't seen that much about the proposed changes. He stated that he is concerned about this. He also expressed a concern about combining route 45 and route 8, which are already congested. These routes go to Mountain View, and it seems like a travesty to combine these. He stated that he hasn't seen anything on TV or in ADN on the proposed changes, and the meeting tonight is very little known, and it just hasn't been out for the public to know, otherwise it would have been very crowded tonight.
- c. Henry Luther - Mr. Luther stated that he has been on the buses a lot, and the 45 is packed for real, both to ANMC and to Mountain View. Even bus 8 has a lot of people also, so trying to combine 2 routes into 1 would have a lot of people standing up in the bus because there will be nowhere to sit. There are a lot of people who have medical problems who need to go to ANMC, and those routes are almost like a necessity. Removing 45 from Mountain View cuts off where a lot of people live, more than the other buses.

VII. BUSINESS / INFORMATION ITEMS

- a. Item 7 – December 2016 Ridership Report – Mr. Watts presented the December ridership report and noted the continuing ridership decrease month-over-month and year-over-year from 2015. Specifically, he noted a decrease of over 6% in total ridership from 2015 and 1 5.7% decrease in average weekday ridership from 2015.

Mr. Levy asked about the reliability of this data and what it was based on, and Mr. Rudolph replied that it was based on farebox data.

- b. Item 7a– Anchorage Talks Transit – Discussion and Board Recommendations – Chair Smith asked the Board what process they would like to use to go over the findings of the public comment process. Mr. Rudolph provided an overview of the findings as provided in hard-copy to the Board and public in attendance, which is also posted on the department website, including the proposed Eagle River Connect commuter concept.

Mr. Hassan provided information to the Board regarding the cost and funding sources for the Eagle River Connect concept. This is still to be finalized, but the current thinking is that it would be provided under the existing AnchorRIDES contract with MV Transportation. Mr. Levy asked whether the Department had considered the possibility of subcontracting out to a Mat-Su bus provider who comes into Anchorage anyway and has to go through Eagle River to provide that service. Mr. Hassan replied that the idea has been going around and the Department is aware of the concept. Mr. Hassan stated that the Department would much rather go after the 5311 funding to legitimize the entire portion of the Glenn.

Nevertheless, the Department is in conversations with Purchasing regarding whether this will be a change to the existing contract or would have to go out for another RFP, which would open up exactly the opportunity Mr. Levy is suggesting - other vendors could come in. Ms. Mack asked whether the estimated annual cost of the concept (\$120,000) was based on the 13-passenger AnchorRIDES vehicle, and if so, what would be the cost of a full-size bus. Mr. Hassan replied that it was, and Mr. Rudolph advised that providing the current service on route 102 costs about \$1 million annually.

Chair Smith stated that if you line up the existing service with the proposed concept, looking at the route 102 ridership numbers, people would be left standing on the curb. He stated that there are vanpool service options out there, but we saw the lack of interest out there in that.

Mr. Hassan stated that previous to the last two months' meetings, vanpool wasn't an option for Eagle River. The Department decided that since there's a new vendor, we could open it up to the area. It seemed to make sense that you can get 5 people together in a vehicle, especially if they're federal employees and already subsidized. It would be cost-neutral in that case, but only two people signed up when the Department went through the process. Mr. Hassan stated that people would be left behind, but the frequency is such that with 3 vehicles on the Eagle River Connect route, if you miss a trip, the next one isn't that far behind, so it's not as if you're waiting an hour. There have also been internal discussions about equipping the 13-passenger vehicles with straps for standees as well as bike racks, so it's really a misnomer to call it 13-passenger. The limit is actually the weight capacity of the vehicle, not the number of people as such.

Mr. Levy introduced a motion to strongly encourage the Department to look at the feasibility of contracting out the service between Eagle River and Anchorage, looking at other bus providers in the area to provide the service. Ms. Hamre seconded the motion. Mr. Levy stated that he appreciates the efforts that staff are making to meet the demand of Eagle River

service. Providing service to Eagle River / Chugiak has always been a challenge for PeopleMover simple because of the distance and the area to cover, as well as the distance to downtown. This, as well as the inconsistency of service, has led to inconsistency in ridership. There are two or more transit providers that commute between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage that could easily be interested in taking on the contract to provide that service. He thinks it's time to have that discussion.

Mr. Hassan stated the on the back end, the conversation has been about the notion of coordinated transportation. The Department is looking at two different models. One is that there are entities that have a need who contract services themselves, and the Muni government stays outside of that. The other model has the Department going out to those entities and suggesting to them that if they're already spending X amount of money on running a shuttle, irrespective of the level of service AnchorRIDES and PeopleMover provide, the Department would like to explore the idea of sharing the costs and pooling resources. From a capital standpoint, the Department is not deficient. The problem has always been how to get operating funds for this, when there are priority services like APD and AFD competing for the scarce resources of local tax funding. Those departments don't have the luxury of being able to diversify their funding source, but the Public Transportation Department does. He explained the costs and benefits of new contracts versus working with us.

Mr. Levy suggested that he appreciates Mr. Hassan's comments, but he thinks it's comparing apples and oranges. It's one thing to provide contract services to specific population groups like senior centers that need transportation service and have the vehicles to contract with as opposed to an entire community of commuters who would like to get direct service to Anchorage, and he would say that he'd rather have no service in Eagle River and let the Valley transportation systems provide that than have this service. He doesn't think this service will meet the need, and it will cause pushback. It is creative to use the vanpool program, and the challenge with that is marketing it to people now that it's available, and he would encourage the contractor to do aggressive marketing. This concept does not meet the needs of Eagle River, and he would rather see nothing than this. He thinks there has to be some compromise between the proposed \$120,000 and the existing \$1 million. Maybe there's some 5311 money or AMATS money at least for a pilot project that could look at doing a commuter service between those communities.

Mr. Ooms asked Mr. Levy to explain what he sees as the deficiencies of the proposal. Mr. Levy suggested that these include that it doesn't go to Chugiak, the timing, the size of the vehicle, and that this is really not a commuter service because that isn't what AnchorRIDES is set up to be. Even as a non-Eagle River person, he doesn't think it will meet the needs of the commuters. It's been tried before, and it hasn't worked. Chair Smith asked Mr. Levy to clarify that he doesn't agree with the Eagle River AnchorRIDES service as proposed. Mr. Levy stated that he doesn't think it's a feasible option for the community. There are some other options for the community, which is why he made the motion. Mr. Hassan clarified that the Department told the Eagle River residents that we would try to come up with something, and he asked for clarification as to whether the motion is to entertain the notion of not even forwarding the information out to them or is it to forward it but explore whether there are

other contractual solutions. Mr. Levy clarified that his motion is to strongly encourage the Department to look at other ways of providing the service through contracting with Valley transportation providers.

Mr. Ooms stated that he thinks it's critical to maintain some degree of service to Eagle River as an interim, whether a contract service, or a separately branded service with a different fare structure. However, at this point in time, he doesn't think the Eagle River concept should hold up the whole process.

Ms. Hamre departed at 6:15pm.

Ms. Mack asked whether it could be a regular bus instead of an AnchorRIDES vehicle, and Mr. Hassan clarified that it would still be a million. It's not the size of the vehicle but the medium being utilized.

Mr. Ooms asked for clarification as to whether this motion was encouraging exploring alternatives in lieu of a short term solution or as more of a long-term fix. Mr. Hassan clarified that it would take at least 18 to 24 months to get a new contract in place.

Mr. Rivera introduced an amendment to Mr. Levy's motion to support an interim transition service, possibly the staff concept, and Mr. Levy accepted this as a friendly amendment. The motion was restated as follows: The Public Transportation Advisory Board strongly encourages Anchorage Public Transportation to look at the possibility of contracting with Valley transportation providers to provide the Eagle River / Chugiak commuter service between Eagle River and Downtown, while in the interim considering other possibilities including a contract change to the AnchorRIDES contract as presented by staff.

Chair Smith called for a roll call vote. The results were: Jackson - yes; Ooms - yes; Mack - yes; Rivera - yes; Levy - yes; Smith - yes. The motion was agreed to, 6-0.

Mr. Smith called for the Board to move on to the next component of the process. Mr. Hassan advised the Board that the Department was waiting for other entities to provide resolutions of support, and if those came through before the last week of the month, they will be provided to the Board through email.

For the purpose of opening discussion, Mr. Levy introduced a motion that the Board recommend to the Mayor that the Department adopt the 80% plan as presented by staff. Ms. Mack seconded the motion.

Mr. Jackson asked why one of the plans doesn't include a high-frequency service down Old Seward to the Dimond Center. Doesn't Old Seward have a lot of ridership? He seems to remember from the report that it does, but he guesses staff must have looked at this. Mr. Hodges mentioned that the current productivity of route 60 is the fourth-lowest of all routes, at 22.3 boardings per hour. He stated that the majority of route 60's ridership is north of Tudor in downtown and midtown, which is why the 60 south of Tudor has received such scrutiny. Mr. Hassan cautions the Board that the end game isn't only about ridership, but there's more at play than that, whether it's lower ridership on the existing or potential of

higher ridership with one of the two concepts. For him, it's no longer a ridership level question.

Mr. Ooms stated that he would also support the 80% concept, with certain modifications. He introduced an amendment to Mr. Levy's motion to provide as follows: 1) Amend the 80% Concept by eliminating service on Route 2 south of Dimond Boulevard and Abbott Road; 2) Amend the 80% Concept by either eliminating service on Route 60 south of Dimond Boulevard or altogether; 3) Amend the 80% Concept by extending service as a loop into the Mountain View neighborhood to increase coverage to the very high density neighborhood; and 4) work even harder with Muni traffic to make Route 8 even more direct.

Mr. Levy seconded Mr. Ooms's amendments.

Chair Smith called for a roll call vote on Mr. Ooms's amendment package. The results were: Jackson - yes; Ooms - yes; Mack - yes; Levy - yes; Rivera - yes; Smith - yes. The amendments were agreed to, 6-0.

The motion, as amended, continued under discussion. Ms. Mack stated that she favors the 80% plan because it's not too dramatic, but it's enough. She agrees that by focusing our routes on where ridership is, it doesn't benefit her and she won't be able to catch the bus, but for what we need to do now she would support it. Her other hat is for the young people who live at Covenant House, and this plan will provide them with more opportunities. Mr. Ooms stated that he really supports and wishes the Board would go with the 100% Concept. He thinks that with the limited funding, it's the long-term vision to really enhance ridership and really focus on the high-density parts of town. However, he thinks it's important to balance the vision with the constituents' existing lives. There is a lack of mobility and affordable housing across town, so asking riders right now to move to the 100% service area to continue to ride the bus isn't very feasible now. He would love for the city to move toward the 100%, but it's a little too far, which is why he supports the amended 80% Concept.

Mr. Levy asked for clarification regarding service to the Senior Center. Under the 100% plan, there wouldn't be a route down the hill, but would it continue down the hill on the 80%? (Yes.) He warned that whatever plan is adopted is based on funding availability, so if we continue to see reductions in funding to PeopleMover over the next 3 to 5 years, all of our efforts may be for naught because we may be looking at a more draconian plan. He complimented staff on rising to the challenge of looking at how transportation is provided in our community. Part of it is looking at things with a new set of eyes, and part of it is looking at the financial realities that the city and the state are dealing with. Everyone that's here should let the powers-that-be know what public transportation means to you, because they need to hear that.

Mr. Rivera stated that he is in general agreement with the 80% plan. He thinks it is much more something the community can buy into. There are some benefits to the 100% Concept, and reviewing some of the resolutions presented, the Planning and Zoning Commission requested that the Department should be looking at some hybrid concept. He doesn't know exactly what that might look like, but starting with the 80% and considering funding, and he

thinks having greater access is probably the smartest step to take right now.

Mr. Jackson stated that he agrees with Mr. Ooms. He philosophically likes the 100% plan, but listening to all the people who have commented, it seems like that's more than we should do at this point.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Julie - Julie asked what the amendment really was. Chair Smith clarified that the existing concepts represent a funding-neutral redesign. Maybe a part of a route goes away, but we're adding service to areas that are showing higher need. She asked what the Board was trying to do with the amendments tonight. Mr. Hassan clarified that they are recommending to alter the 80%, not cutting routes. Julie still expressed concern, and Mr. Ooms restated his amendments for Routes 2 & 60 to clarify, suggesting that it might be called the 85% Concept. This clarified the situation.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Gretchen Wehmhoff - Ms. Wehmhoff stated that she wanted to clarify what the Board came up with for Eagle River. Being someone out there, she likes that staff listened and changed the proposal to go downtown. She pointed out the numbers on the comment tracking sheet that showed that while Route 102 has low ridership, they don't have low passion. The Eagle River library comment session had more people show up. What she is hearing that she really likes is the Board saying that they need to serve that area. She is concerned about it costing \$1 million for the bus, but she wants to make sure she understands the amendment. What exactly happens? Mr. Rivera clarified that his amendment would suggest some type of transition plan because it could take 18 to 24 months to go through the purchasing process to get some other kind of contracted service.

Ms. Wehmhoff asked for clarification on the interim, and Chair Smith clarified that the staff concept was the interim. Ms. Wehmhoff noted that this cuts the service for people farther out than the Eagle River Transit Center. Chair Smith noted that the vanpool option exists for those people as well. Ms. Wehmhoff noted that one of the things she heard at the meetings she went to is that it can sometimes take two years for things to get going before you can determine if it works. It's horrendous that the vanpool would go to JBER and the Valley, but not Eagle River or Chugiak, and now that it's available, you can't suggest that it's not an option because people didn't show interest. It's a whole new mindset, and you have to help people with that mindset and help them slowly condition themselves to new ways of transit. A lot of those folks who ride the bus have the thought that they've been riding the bus for 30 years and now they're going to have to get a car, and that's just not the case. We need to be creative in this community and train these people to mass transit. The highways are getting busier. It's not just for now. We need to train people to take mass transit, so someday when we get a commuter train, they're already used to riding commuter buses. We have to train people, and we can't if we keep cutting services. She also asked if there were any openings on the Board. She stated that she likes the idea, but there are 30,000 people out there, 10% of the municipal population, who pay taxes and don't get much. There's no taxicab service. They could, but the cabs don't want to drive out there. The Eagle River Connect service isn't well understood, because maybe it hasn't been marketed correctly. She has a car and doesn't mind driving, but if there was a bus that she could ride, she would do it. She loves buses.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Jimmy Enright - Mr. Enright asked how many of the Board and staff present ride the bus. He stated that he's from Bristol Bay, where there are solar panels and alternative energy that cost a lot of money to put in to save against fuel. He considers the bus alternative energy. He stated that he owns two cars in this town and chooses not to drive. Once in a while he likes to have a drink, and there's a bus stop right there. The bus is a safe way to travel, and cutting services to anywhere is like a travesty. Now, a man can get home safely. They could offer free cab services on New Years' or Christmas, but people are broke, and the bus is a cheap way to travel. He has heard Mr. Levy argue a couple times, and he likes Mr. Levy and Ms. Wehmhoff's arguments. He stated that he argues with his counselors all the time. He wants what he wants. He stated that he has sat on a bus from Panama City to Seattle, and once in a while you end up with a hard case, but the rest of the people riding on buses are normal - just people wanting to go somewhere and there's a reason they want to go there. The homeless are there too, and most of the PeopleMover drivers don't yell at them and tell them to get off, so as long as they have a bus pass, they have a warm place to sleep. He respects that. He stated that Anchorage relies on the Board and its decisions to keep this thing going. The bus keeps the drunk drivers off the road. Mr. Enright closed by saying that it's an important decision the Board is making today. He stated that Mr. Hassan is misinformed. Once in a while, a driver will let a person on a bus, and eventually they cut them off, and he has paid for people's fares before. We've all got to stay in the game because it's cold outside. The decisions the Board is making today are important. Cutting Route 2 would be a bad cut.

Mr. Levy called the question. Mr. Hassan made a brief closing remark that the Board has a very difficult task before it. They're here to talk about transportation, but the conversations show that it's really all tied in with a socioeconomic situation. He can go to a community and hear that there are 3rd-generation homeless individuals, or he can go to a community and hear about low-income housing that's far out. This is compounded by the fact that recessions hit, and you can't always predict them, and infrastructure gets pulled back. This isn't a transportation conversation, unfortunately. He would caution the Board to carefully consider not what was or what is today, but what could be. That's a very difficult decision to make from a recommendation standpoint, because the Board could sit here, and all the things they're talking about could be the right things, and they may still not help the future 10 years out. He stated that he's asking a very difficult thing, for the Board to think 10 or 20 years out. We are where we are, but the question is whether the recommendation the Board is making here and now is conducive to the fourth, fifth, or sixth generation of individuals, and uplifting them in the situation they're in. Is public transportation simply a self-fulfilling prophecy in keeping people in the status quo, or can it be an element that lifts them out of that situation for the communities that are most affected.

Chair Smith called for a roll call vote on Mr. Levy's motion, as amended. The results were: Jackson - yes; Ooms - yes; Mack - yes; Levy - yes; Rivera - yes; Smith - yes. The motion was agreed to, 6-0.

The text of the motion, as amended is: The Public Transportation Advisory Board recommends to the Mayor that we move forward with the 80% Concept, modified as follows: 1) Eliminate Route 2 south of Dimond and route it along Abbott Road; 2) eliminate

Route 60 either south of Dimond or altogether; 3) extend Route 45 as a loop into the Mountain View neighborhood to increase coverage to the very high density neighborhood; and 4) work even harder with Muni traffic to make Route 8 more direct.

Mr. Smith stated that he is reluctantly voting yes because he was hoping to go for the 100% plan, but this recommendation does move the ball down the field, and it does move us closer that land use and economic development conversation that Mr. Hassan was referring to.

VIII. BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Levy thanked staff. This has been a very difficult process for them with a lot of meetings and a lot of public comment, and staff has gone above and beyond listening to the public and discussing and relaying their concerns. He thanked staff and Mr. Hassan for all their efforts.

Mr. Ooms thanked staff for their dedication and stated that he is looking forward to where we go from here. He also thanked members of the public for coming tonight and over the last couple months. The feedback provided has been very helpful to inform decision about what the constituents are thinking.

Ms. Mack also thanked staff, the public, and Chair Smith.

Mr. Rivera stated that he was grateful that the Board was able to take the mantle of leadership and that he is disappointed he wasn't able to be at the public comment meetings, but it sounds like it was fruitful.

IX. NEXT PTAB MEETING DATE

Next Meeting Date: February 9, 2017

X. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Levy made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Ooms seconded the motion. Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 7:00pm.