

Minutes of the

REGULAR MEETING OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

February 8, 2021

LOCATION: Due to COVID-19 this meeting was held electronically.

Committee Members Present: Chair Deb Barber, Reva Chamblis, Kris Fredson, Francisco Gonzalez, Phillip Sterner, Raymond Zeran

Committee Members Absent: Molly Cummings, Christopher Ferguson

TAAC Liaison Present:

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum was present when Chair Barber called the regular meeting of the Council's Transportation Committee to order at 4:02 p.m. on Monday, February 8, 2021.

AGENDA

There were no changes to the agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Sterner, seconded by Fredson to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2020 regular meeting of the Transportation Committee. Motion carried.

Aye: 5 Chamblis, Fredson, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 3 Cummings, Ferguson, Gonzalez,

TAAC REPORT

Fenley reported that the TAAC has been discussing and providing input to Metro Transit on the Orange Line, Network Next, and the Statewide Pedestrian Plan. The TAAC also worked on a letter regarding two motions committee members passed supporting increasing priority/accessibility seating and an awareness campaign about the seating.

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION SERVICES DIRECTOR AND METRO TRANSIT GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS

Metropolitan Transportation Services Director Nick Thompson reported:

COVID update

Staff continues to work with Metro Transit on coordination of vaccine for public transit workers. The Council is still waiting for details on the number of vaccines and when they will be available so a process can be established to get the public transit workers quickly vaccinated. There is a vendor who will provide the vaccines for the public transit workers. In testing last week, there was only 1 positive test, down from 5 in the prior report, and 9 in the report prior to that. To date there have been 129 contract workers who have tested positive, or less than 1% identified.

Essential Services

The transition for Metro Mobility and Transit Link services back towards normal operations ridership has begun. Last week Metro Mobility had the highest ridership levels since the beginning of the pandemic. To accommodate the return of riders requires transitioning the essential health care trips off the system. Step one in this transition is to reintroduce fares starting on March 1, 2021 for health care

workers, this will likely cause ridership to transfer to fixed route or at least stop growing. It is at the point where between Metro Mobility customers and Health Care Trips the contractors are reaching capacity to deliver – it is good news but requires these adjustments. Staff feel this change can be made now as all health care workers have been given access to the vaccine and should have completed their second doses by March and many of the trips can be made on fixed routes.

Legislative Update

The Council continues to make presentations at the House and Senate in the new legislative session. Last week there was a hearing at the Senate to cover Transit Operations and Transportation Planning. Next week, the House Local Government Division will hear a presentation about the findings of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Council Governance that completed their report in December.

Chamblis asked about the Blue Ribbon Committee findings. Barber asked about communication plans for the essential worker changes. Thompson said there are communications sent out at multiple points in the process.

Metro Transit General Manager Wes Kooistra reported:

COVID Update

There have been a total of 362 employees diagnosed with COVID from March 2020 through yesterday. This figure includes 3 new cases since the committee last met on January 25. Each of the new cases was at a different work location. There was a total of 20 cases in January. To put those 20 cases for the entire month of January in context, in December 2020, there was a total of 60 cases, back in November, there were about 120 cases. Metro Transit bus and rail services are not experiencing service impacts due to COVID leave.

Federal mask mandate

The CDC's federal mask mandate went into effect last Monday, February 1 at 11:59PM. For Metro Transit customers, not much has changed. Metro Transit has had a mask requirement since May 2020. And the Governor's Executive Order further reinforcing that requirement became effective July 2020. This new law applies to all transit systems in the United States and is aimed at setting a uniform expectation for all travelers regardless of local/state laws, rules, or suggestions. The federal law does require the agency to deny boarding and to remove passengers who fail to comply which has not been the primary approach of Metro Transit. Bus Operators have been provided with a step-by-step Bulletin for how to address this new requirement with instructions to contact the Control Center if someone is not in compliance to avoid conflict between our employees and customers. Operators will continue to bring masks from a supply that is available to them at each of the garages for customers who do not have one. Transit Police have the enforcement responsibility for monitoring compliance on light rail and at transit stations. The Marketing and Communications teams updated the website and social media channels before the new mandate went into place. Metro Transit sent out a Rider Alert to all subscribers notifying them that wearing masks is now a federal requirement. Staff will continue to use the existing signage on the bus and the overhead "destination sign" that have said "facial coverings required" for months now. But staff also created new visuals for LRT and BRT station digital message boards. Additionally, Metro Transit staff recorded a new on-vehicle message to clarify that wearing masks is required by federal law. This message is being uploaded across the system.

Vaccines

There continues to be eager anticipation waiting for vaccine information from the State on the 1B prioritization for front-line staff and Metro Transit is ready to get going as soon as word is received that Metro Transit has been allocated a supply.

Ridership

Ridership remains down 62 percent of pre-COVID levels. For the week of January 25 through January 31:

- Bus down 61%
- Blue Line down 65%
- Green Line down 61%
- Northstar down 96%

Sterner asked about Northstar ridership. Kooistra said Metro Transit is communicating with downtown businesses to discover what their plans are for return-to-work.

BUSINESS

Consent Items:

There were no items on the consent agenda.

Non-Consent Items:

1. 2021-42: 2021 Transportation Committee Work Plan

Metro Transit General Manager Wes Kooistra and Metropolitan Transportation Services Director Nick Thompson presented this item. Chamblis asked if there were items on previous workplans that were not included on this 2021 workplan. Thompson answered that this year the items listed were those that would come before the committee for action or information, not every project MTS is working on. Thompson said major project updates from external partners is another change to the workplan from previous years.

Motion by Fredson, seconded by Sterner:

That the Metropolitan Council adopt the attached as its 2021 Work Plan.

Motion carried.

Aye: 6 Chamblis, Fredson, Gonzalez, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 2 Cummings, Ferguson

2. 2021-39 JT: 2021 Budget Amendment - February Budget Amendment

Metro Transit Finance Director Ed Petrie, Budget Operations Director Stewart McMullan, and Metropolitan Transportation Services Finance and Administration Director Heather Aagesen-Huebner presented this item. Fredson asked which facility was referenced, Petrie answered it is the current facility. Chamblis asked about disadvantaged businesses, Petrie said it is available.

Motion by Chamblis, seconded by Gonzalez:

That the Metropolitan Council authorizes the 2021 Unified Budget as indicated and in accordance with the attached tables.

Motion carried.

Aye: 6 Chamblis, Fredson, Gonzalez, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 2 Cummings, Ferguson

3. 2021-36 SW: METRO D Line BRT Construction, Contract 20P279

Metro Transit BRT Project Manager Shahin Khazrajafari and BRT Assistant Director Katie Roth presented this item. Chair Barber asked for the in-service date. Khazrajafari answered the line is planned for operation in December 2022.

Motion by Chamblis, seconded by Fredson:

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the Regional Administrator to award and execute contract 20P279 with Thomas and Sons Construction Inc. for the construction of the METRO D Line BRT project in an amount not to exceed \$26,142,556.

Motion carried.

Aye: 6 Chamblis, Fredson, Gonzalez, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 2 Cummings, Ferguson

INFORMATION

1. Transit Information Technologies Update

Metro Transit Customer Service and Marketing Director Bruce Howard and Transit Information Manager Ben Rajkowski presented this item. Zeran commented on the importance of human connection. Zeran asked about the monetization of data. Rajkowski said the public-facing data is available to third parties. Chamblis asked about the cost-savings for the reduction in hours. Rajkowski said the goal is to utilize existing staff and resources but support the tools in different ways. Chamblis brought up the importance of notifications in winter. Rajkowski said that there are multiple ways to get notices now. Fredson voiced appreciation for staff work updating technology. Sterner commented on the visibility and professionalism of the work done. Barber asked how feedback will be garnered. Rajkowski said there are relationships with various organizations, and the goal is to benefit all customers.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 5:23 p.m.

Jenna Ernst
Recording Secretary