

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, November 6, 2013

Committee Members Present: Chair Ron Biss, Kjensmo Walker, Bob Anderson, Heidi Myhre, Darrell Paulsen, Mark Hoisser, John Lund, Chad McGuire, Nichole Villavicencio and Patty Thorsen.

Committee Members Absent: John Schatzlein

Committee Members Excused: Margot Imdieke Cross, James Williams and Colin Stemper.

Council Staff Present: Paul Colton, Andrew Krueger, Andy Streasick, David Russell, Pam Steffen from Metro Transit and Clare Schlehert from the Office of Equal Opportunity.

Public Present: Claudia Fugile, Nancy Whalen and Lauren Siegel.

There was a tour of the new Metro Mobility bus before the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Biss called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:32 p.m. on Wednesday, November 6, 2013.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Paulsen, seconded by Anderson to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Lund, seconded by Walker to approve the minutes of the (date), 2013 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

MEETING ETIQUETTE AND GUIDELINES

Chair Biss briefly discussed the meeting etiquette and guidelines.

INFORMATION & BUSINESS

a. Metro Mobility Vehicle Configuration

Paul Colton spoke to the TAAC committee. Forty-five of the 70 vehicles ordered are here. Most of those are in service on the First Transit side. The East Metro side. The West Metro side at Transit Team will be getting theirs. DARTS has received most of their vehicles. Metro Mobility went with the six ambulatory passenger and two wheelchair configuration on this particular order. This is the E350 Ford chassis, which is a deviation from the past four years when they utilized the bigger E450 chassis with eight and three configuration. All that was purchased prior to 2008 was the E350 for demand service. But they had the three wheelchair configuration. The purpose for moving to the E450 configuration was they were pushing the gross vehicle weight limits. The concern was if there was a full load they could be over that based on how tight the math was done by the manufacturers.

In the last go around they took a look at data that showed how often they had three wheelchair customers on board at any given time. The data showed that it was less than one percent of the time of all trips on Metro Mobility. So they went back to the E350 because it is a less expensive vehicle to purchase than the E450 and they invested the money in the low floor buses that will be coming on line by the end of the month. In order to make sure they made the gross vehicle weight, they took it from a three wheelchair capacity to a two wheelchair capacity vehicle. Staff will talk about where they go from here.

Right now there are approximately 425 Metro Mobility vehicles in service. They will have 60 of this type of vehicle in service. That represents about 14 percent of the fleet. If you look at the core fleet of Transit Team and First Transit it would represent about 20 percent of the overall fleet operating in the core. For DARTS it is three out of 38 vehicles or less than 10 percent. So a small percentage of the fleet. They don't want to put themselves in the position where they don't have a portion of the fleet that could handle three customers. That could present scheduling issues.

After the bus tour the TAAC members had some comments. There was some comfort issues for customers utilizing mobility devices in the rear of the vehicle. It was not a comfortable ride. There was too much bounce and too much give. The space over the rear axels was a little more stable, less bounce. He will check into other suspension alternatives from a comfort and maintenance standpoint. There were positives on the layout of the vehicle in terms of continuing to use some sound deadening properties in the vehicle, spacing. They are looking at where to place heaters.

b. Metro Mobility Vehicle Advertising

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. There will be a "Now Hiring" sign for the contractors on the back window of some of the Metro Mobility buses by First Transit and Transit Team. People can see out of the window but not in from the outside. The other type of advertising on the Metro Mobility buses is general consumer advertising like you would see on Metro Transit buses or light rail.

1. Now Hiring – the better the economy the harder it is to hire qualified drivers.
2. Vehicle Advertising – the costs for Metro Mobility service are going up substantially. They are looking at advertising on Metro Mobility vehicles. They are looking at four principles or guidelines. If they do any advertising on Metro Mobility vehicles they don't want that to have any significant impact on the branding. When you see a Metro Mobility bus you know it is a Metro Mobility bus. If they are going to advertise on the side of the vehicle they had requested that it be only on the driver's side. Some advertisers requested full wraps. If they did that they would keep it to a limited number. They haven't identified the number of buses but it would be only 10 percent of the vehicles. They want to look at an acceptable benefit to effort ratio. Because of the advertising contract they have through Metro Transit all of the costs are included in the advertising. The vendor Titan actually pays for all of the advertising costs and then part of the profit is passed on to Metro Mobility. They want to make sure that the amount of effort they are going to go through provides a benefit. With the size of the fleet from Metro Mobility there is a potential in year one for about \$300,000 in gross returns, which Metro Mobility would get 2/3 of that. Essentially they would use the entire back of the bus except for the Metro Mobility logo, the yield and the "How is my driving" number on the back.

There is a hybrid bus that has a full wrap that is still in service out of the Roseville facility. If they do a full wrap like this one the Metro Mobility logo would be superimposed over that. On a full wrap they would not do the driver's side window or the passenger doors.

c. FTA Federal Civil Rights Audit

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. Metro Mobility received a letter from the Federal Transit Administration Office of Civil Rights announcing that the FTA had decided to start doing ADA federal compliance audits. It was the FTA's Office of Civil Rights out of Washington, DC that does these audits. They do them regularly. To date there have been 36 ADA audits where the findings have been published from 2000 to 2011. In 2011 the FTA stopped doing these audits and just started again this year. This is the first audit since 2011. They decided that they would randomly select agencies across the United States and go out and perform these audits.

There was a team of two federal employees and three independent contractors that showed up in the Twin Cities on Monday a couple of weeks ago. This was the beginning of the government shutdown. Monday at 10:00 the federal employees were recalled to Washington, DC. The consultants stayed. These findings are going to be somewhat preliminary. The findings are going to take several months to come out. The auditors have 60 days to do their work, which will be up

early next month. Then they are going to turn it over to the FTA and we have a chance to go back and forth with them.

The comments that the auditors gave while they were here is that they were very impressed with the service overall and the level of care that is provided and the concern. We have been having some challenges with one of our providers in terms of on time performance this year.

There are anticipated findings and potential findings. Anticipated means the auditors said to us while they were here that chances are really good that this is going to be a finding. The potential findings were open for interpretation with the FTA. The four that are going to cause the most impact for us are unattended transfers, our no show cancellation policy, the downtown fare zone and then free fares on Nicollet Mall. When it comes to the certification appeals process they mentioned a couple things on how we do certification and how we do appeals. All of those findings were minor and they were language changes in our denial letter that goes out in terms of what we tell people they can and can't appeal and how that process works. David and Andy have already been working on changing that wording for the FTA so that when we get the final findings we will already be in compliance.

Some of the potential findings they mentioned is the reservation hours are different for the county contractors than they are for the core contractors. They said that would not be a problem except that it is in our service guide that reservations are taken from 6:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. seven days a week. But they are not in Dakota County, Anoka County and Scott County. We have to either change the service guide or change the contracts. So we will do that.

Our no show appeals process was too generous. So what happens if you are appealing your no show suspension you talk to customer service. If you don't like what they say you talk to the customer service manager. If you don't like what he says you talk to the senior manager. Then finally it goes to an independent panel. They said that is one too many levels. So Andrew took himself out of the appeals process. Now they are in compliance.

Common wheelchair definition. In our service guide it says we will transport people in wheelchairs if the combined weight of the passenger and their device is no more than 600 pounds. Then we have the dimensions there as well. In practice if the lift will lift the wheelchair and the rider and if we see that our service can secure them in the vehicle then we are taking them. That guide has to say that.

There are two other potential findings. One of them is the agency contract. Where we are providing service for people going to the same place and back every day. Some of the same people are the first people picked up and then at the end of the day they are the last ones dropped off. There might be six or seven other people on the bus. So the same people every day are getting rides that are longer than they should be. The solution is to add additional service and reduce the ride times.

The last thing they mentioned is the phone service capacity. There are times of the day when someone is on hold for longer than they should be. What we had done is said that the average hold time can't be more than 90 seconds averaged throughout the day. What we found was for seven hours of the day that was fine but between 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. there might be hold times of four, five or six minutes because everyone is calling to get their rides in by the end of the day. We need to do a better job of staffing and looking at that by hour. So we are working with our contractors to do that right now.

The first finding which we will get by March 2014, is unattended transfers. Let's say you are getting picked up in Burnsville and are going to Minnetonka. So DARTS will pick you up at your home in Burnsville and take you to the transit center in Burnsville and drop you off there. Then the DARTS bus goes and then you wait for a while and Transit Team picks you up and takes you to your final destination. What the FTA is saying is there is there is an implied origin to destination requirement where we need to supervise the passenger from origin to destination. So they asked what do we do for passengers that can't be left alone? We responded that they are able to bring a personal care attendant along free of charge. They said that was the wrong answer. The right answer is that someone needs to be with that passenger at all times. There are a couple of ways we could do that. One is that we can eliminate transfers altogether. This is not economically feasible given the way we currently do service. We could do bus to bus transfers. We have been working with our

providers to look at a couple different options. Trips from January through September there were 9,221 transfer rides coming out of Dakota County. Scott County had 1,800 rides and 2,400 coming out of Anoka County.

We are looking at creating a dual buffer zone and what that would do to our service. The goal is to reduce the overall number of transfers. The second thing we are looking at doing with the FTA is looking at doing a handoff on request. So if somebody wants or needs a vehicle to vehicle transfer we would do that. The other option is we are looking at doing vehicle to vehicle transfers for everybody. The impact there is now you have to coordinate two vehicles who are in a shared ride service and get them to meet up at exactly the same moment at exactly the same time. We don't think we can do that without some technological improvements so we are working with our software vendor Trapeze to see if there is a way we could better automate this process.

The last thing we are looking at is having a consulting firm come in and give us some suggestions on ways we could tweak our service territory or our service delivery model or how we do transfers in general. If we as a service provider require a transfer then we need to make sure somebody is there in case something happens.

We had a meeting yesterday with all of the Metro Mobility providers. We came away from this meeting saying there is no one good solution. It is more than having somebody there like when the transfers are done in public places like Cub Foods. It has to be somebody who is concerned with the welfare of the rider. We do have an opportunity to go back and forth with the FTA. So all these findings are preliminary. This is one of those things we will be going back and forth with them on to see if we can come to some sort of agreement. We are going to have to make some changes. We have some transfer rides that go really well and some that go poorly. We are going to use this as an opportunity to improve customer service regardless of what the federal government comes back with.

There will be no changes in how Metro Mobility certification is done.

The next item is no show cancellations. Our current policy is if the rider no shows the outgoing leg of their trip the service provider automatically cancels the return. This was done because 99 percent of the time if you don't show up for the first leg of your trip you don't usually appear at your destination. What the FTA told us is we are in violation of the federal law in this instance. Each leg of a trip has to be considered separately. They said we can make an effort to contact the passenger to see if they need their ride. If we are unable to get in touch with the passenger then we need to leave their ride. This will cause us to significantly increase the number of no shows. When we do that the corresponding outcome is we are going to increase the number of suspensions which will reduce overall satisfaction. We told the FTA that we are not going to do anything with this until a formal finding comes out. Just because of the impact it would have on our riders. We would have to advise everybody that this policy is changing. We are going to talk about implementing it over a series of a couple of months. We will tell people this is what happened and we will excuse that afternoon no show. Then after that we will have to start doing something about it.

You can travel in either downtown St. Paul or downtown Minneapolis for 50 cents on the fixed route. Metro Mobility by federal law can never exceed more than two times the regular fixed route fare. What that means for us is that for all trips wholly within the downtown St. Paul fare zone and all trips within the downtown Minneapolis fare zone we can charge no more than \$1.00 on Metro Mobility. We will be implementing this after it goes to the Council. In St. Paul the analysis estimated for this year would be 1,152 trips. Three hundred and forty-two of those were peak time. Eight hundred and ten were off peak. So it would be a reduction in our revenue of \$3,798. This is assuming that we do a \$1.00 downtown fare zone instead of three or four. There is a similar issue in Minneapolis. There are fewer trips in Minneapolis wholly contained in the downtown fare zone. So we are looking at a slightly less reduction in revenue of \$3,051. That is based on an estimate right now.

The one we are most concerned about is Nicollet Mall. There are free rides on Nicollet Mall from the convention center to the end of the mall from 5:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. They said a customer using fixed route could reasonably walk up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to catch a regular fixed route bus. So the implication here is that all trips within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of Nicollet Mall and that free route need to be free

on Metro Mobility. Metro Transit provided 920,000 free rides on Nicollet Mall in 2012. For $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile today that is 5,148 trips a year or roughly \$17,000 in revenue. This is another one we will go back and forth with the FTA. We are going to look for a little bit different analysis to see if we can shrink that down to trips that could be reasonably done on Nicollet Mall. Denver has a similar situation. They did an analysis on trips that could reasonably be done on that fare. What they said in Denver was given the number of routes in downtown Denver that that $\frac{3}{4}$ mile doesn't really fit. So Denver was able to demonstrate that that really should be $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. Then you would get free rides in that corridor. That is how Denver handled it and the FTA accepted their analysis. We are going to do a similar analysis on Metro Mobility.

d. Metro Mobility Statistics and Update

Andy Streasick spoke to the TAAC committee.

1. Ridership by year

In the past seven years ridership has increased by almost half a million rides. From about 1.26 million in 2006 to 1.73 million last year. This is an increase of about 28.5 percent. In 2006 the Metro Mobility budget was just over 32 million. By this year we are looking at 53.4 million, an increase of 39.9 percent or an average increase of about 5.7 percent a year. This compared to the average rate of inflation, which is about 2.04 percent increase per year. Ridership increases largely drive the need for budget increases. Ridership in 2013 is up 5.62 percent through September 30 of last year. At this rate we will finish 2013 at 1,844,049 rides or up 110,000 rides more than 2012.

2. On Time Performance

We now take the zero denials seriously. All the denials are non ADA denials. They fall within the Metro Mobility service area but outside the federally mandated ADA service area. First Transit has struggled with on time performance. It is largely around driver hiring. We took some rides away and had county providers absorb some rides that would have been First Transit rides in the buffer. Transit Team is above the 95 percent mark all year. DARTS has taken a nosedive over recent months. We gave some rides to DARTS that would have been handled by First Transit.

Unacceptable late trips as a percentage, First Transit is a non issue. With DARTS it is going to be addressed.

Cancellations and no shows. There are a significant number of rides that are cancelled or no showed. Through September 30 we are talking almost 311,000 rides or 22.5 percent of all the rides taken get cancelled. Over two percent of the rides are no showed, which is about 30,566 rides.

3. Complaints by year.

Complaints are up slightly this year. With our ridership increases from year to year we are pretty close to the level we want to be at. When we compare ourselves to others and the feedback from the auditors they said the complaints here are 0.6 per thousand rides and Dallas has 7 per thousand rides. Milwaukee has 2.2, Orange County tries to keep to a standard of one. Palm Beach tries to keep to a standard of two.

4. Other

Productivity numbers. We have an outdated 1.65 in our contracts. That will be changed. Both of the core providers are consistently above 1.65. Transit Team is about 1.85 where customer service does not suffer and productivity is as good as we can get it. First Transit is about 1.75.

Preventable accidents by year. We have always defined preventable accidents as our fault and at least \$1,000 in costs associated with the accident. Now it is our fault and \$100 associated with the accident. In 2010 we had a total of 66 of those. In 2011 there were 65. In 2012 there were 66 and so far this year 59.

MEMBER COMMENT

There is a Public Transportation Disability Town Hall Forum tonight at the Maplewood Library. Four TAAC members will be on the panel.

Pam Steffen spoke to the TAAC committee. Buses are returning to Washington Avenue starting December 7. December 7 is also service changes for Metro Transit. Those changes will be up on the website by the end of the week. There is also an on board newsletter "Connect" regarding those changes by November 15. On Thanksgiving and the day after Thanksgiving there will be reduced service. Check the Metro Transit website for times.

Designated seating and signage. By next TAAC meeting she will have a draft of what she believes to be the signage that they should have on all of the buses and trains. She will bring that with her.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nancy Whalen discussed some of her concerns. Claudia Fugile also discussed her concerns. They don't want to have someone with them when they transfer buses. Andrew Krueger asked that when someone has a concern to please call customer service.

Andy Streasick said that the escort waiver will not be impacted by the requirement of a bus to bus transfer. If someone fills out the escort waiver and has it notarized will continue to be able to waive the state law escort requirement. That will be a non issue. Because we require that a person and or their guardian has signed that escort waiver form that will tell us that for those folks we don't have to worry to the same degree about a bus to bus transfer. The bus to bus transfer may end up happening with everybody depending on what we end up doing and what works for us. But the non escort policy will remain in effect for the people who have that waiver.

Andrew Krueger said that the GoTo cards are moving forward. We are looking at starting a pilot project with Anoka County in the second quarter of 2014 with a full roll out to all of Metro Mobility in July 2014.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:28 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary