

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Committee Members Present: Chair Kjensmo Walker, Ken Rodgers, Robert Platz, Kari Sheldon, Heidi Myhre, Pam Zimmerman, Bob Anderson, Margot Imdieke Cross, David Fenley and Patty Thorsen.

Committee Members Absent: Julianne Bina.

Committee Members Excused: Christopher Bates, Adora Sage and Nichole Villavicencio.

Council Staff Present: Brian Funk, Michael Conlon and Pam Steffen from Metro Transit, Andy Streasick, Andrew Krueger, Sheila Williams, Mai Thor, Lesley Kandaras and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Shannon Tietz from First Transit.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Walker called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:33 p.m. on Wednesday, March 2, 2016.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

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

It was moved by Anderson, seconded by Platz to approve the minutes of the January 6, 2016 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

BUSINESS & INFORMATION

1. Rail Safety

Brian Funk and Mike Conlon spoke to the TAAC committee. Brian Funk is currently the Director of Light Rail Operations for Metro Transit. By the end of the month he will be transitioning into Deputy Chief of Operations on the bus side. Mike Conlon serves as Director of Rail and Bus Safety for Metro Transit. He has held this position for 15 years. They are going to talk about how modifications to the system are made. They are charged with getting people to their destinations safely. They showed a number of departments and stakeholders, including the public, internal stakeholders and the TAAC committee who provide input to them for the Rail Change Review Committee. It is made up of directors from various departments at Metro Transit. The goal is to evaluate what is being recommended. Whether it is a modification to something physical or it is a procedural change to ensure there isn't a down side. If it is it can be fully vetted and thought about and overcome before any changes are made because it seems like a good idea.

One chart showed the total amount of LRT collisions by month. In the months of December and January there were a number of collisions with pedestrians. They made it through February without any collisions. They have over 200 trips a day on each line. After they had the collisions in December and early January they did request that a consultant come in to make sure that they had the house in order and that they were able to bring new ideas to the table to consider. They were on site for about three days in January. The gentleman had experience in Boston, which is an older light rail system, the Green Line. It has been around since the 1960's and some other iterations since the beginning of the 20th century. He and his colleagues are working to compile a report so they can give an assessment of other things Metro Transit is doing and what areas they can work on improving.

The scope of work includes an assessment of the collisions that they had in December and January as well as grade crossing collisions in the whole and what they have done to mitigate those collisions from happening again. Other engineering ideas that the firm might be familiar with across the country, how they manage

hazards, operating practices and what additional measures they might be able to do for public outreach and coordination with other agencies.

They do have a daily attention toward safe operations. They have an employee job brief. This is their way of connecting with the operators before they go out on the line to give them a sense of what to expect when they start operating. They are made aware of notable events that might impact the light rail system as well as work that might be in the right-of-way, worker safety and people that are working on tracks. It happens 24/7. They have to make sure those folks are safe as well. They have Rule of the Day and Tip of the Week reminders for those very important items and things to keep operators in that mode of following through with things they have in place for safe operations.

They have a light rail track warrant. This is something the operators receive. It tells them if any restrictions are in place. If they have a grade crossing that is not functioning or is being taken out of service for maintenance this gets updated. The operator keeps it with him throughout the day so they can update it for themselves. It also includes any work zones in effect. Areas where they have to be operating at restrictive speeds for any number of reasons. This keeps everyone on the same page so they are operating safely.

Another thing that light rail does is rule compliance testing. They have a long list of rules. It is a three-ring binder that everyone is trained on and tested on. They receive annual testing. The supervisors are constantly testing the operators to make sure they are following through on the rules. Each supervisor has to complete 120 tests per month. In the year 2015 the train operators were tested 45,000 times on whether or not they were operating according to their expectations. They also do instructor ride alongs. They can be both planned and unplanned. There is a ride check form with the items they measure. They give the drivers a rating on starting, speed, overall safety, braking and all of the components that go into operating the machine. There are training operators who get brought in to train and test other operators. Some ride alongs take place after a collision. Everyone receives at least one ride along per year. The managers ride the system and record their observations and give feedback to the operators.

They spend a lot of time and money training employees. They have an annual Train Operators Annual Rules Training. It covers the basic rules and things they feel need to be brought to the forefront again. There are five keys to safe train operation. That falls in line with what they have on the bus side. It talks about defensive driving. It has the same lingo as the bus operators. The light rail operators used to be bus operators.

Platform messaging. They try to keep them up to date.

When the operator sounds the horn the headlamps alternate back and forth for 15 seconds. The operators are to sound the horns when they come to a grade crossing or coming into platforms and pedestrian crossings.

They are adding high visibility tape accents to all of the LRV's as an attempt so that if people are seeing a train and the light catches it there is that additional sense of movement that can be picked up by many people and that will help to have fewer collisions.

There is a sticker on the doors of all of the LRV's that says "See Tracks, Think Train". The Blue Line is done and the Green Line is next. The commuter rail will also have these stickers. There is a train approaching light for the pedestrian grade crossings. They are on all of the Green Line pedestrian grade crossings. They are governed by a traffic signal. They have flashers. They have a Look sign with a double ended arrow. Pedestrian mid-block crossings have the signs on both sides of the street.

After the accident in January, they looked over the grade crossings on the Blue Line. They found some spots that could use some enhancements. They were thinking of adding some railing to point people in the direction from which the train is coming during normal operation. They have billboards at Lexington Parkway and on 45th and Hiawatha. They are on Facebook. They have digital platform displays. "Stay Alert and Don't Tempt Fate. Safety is a Shared Responsibility". "Tracks are for Trains". "You vs Train".

At every pedestrian grade crossing they have bells that sound when the train comes. A grade crossing is a sidewalk where a pedestrian would cross the tracks at track level. On the Green Line there are crossings that are controlled by traffic signals. At those (Dale, Lexington, Snelling, etc.) they will not have the same bells that they have at other crossings. Those are governed by the "Walk, Don't Walk" traffic control device. That is where all of University Avenue is retrofitted with the audible one. Downtown Minneapolis does not have audible signals. It is a Minneapolis jurisdiction. Metro Transit can look into it to see what they can do about getting the audible signals. He will get back to Pam Steffen with the answer.

2. First Transit South Metro Mobility Update

Shannon Tietz spoke to the TAAC committee. She is the customer service manager with the south contract in Burnsville. First Transit has been working with the Metropolitan Council for over 20 years on the Metro Mobility contract for the east. Twelve years ago they did the agency contract as well. They became First Transit less than 10 years ago. Just recently they adopted five core values to be first:

1. Committed to their customers
2. Dedicated to safety
3. Accountable for performance
4. Supportive of each other
5. Setting the highest standards

Metro Mobility South Startup. They started hiring drivers and reservationists in March. They had the ability to train them in an existing Metro Mobility contract setting. Reservations began June 24, 2015. They moved some of the reservationists from the Roseville location to the Burnsville location. Service began June 28, 2015. They had months of preparation. The drivers were learning about existing routes from Roseville before they started in Burnsville. They hired people from the ground up. All of the staff in Burnsville is new staff. The managers, the drivers and the reservationists. They have exceptional support and dedication from the regional and corporate office. They have daily contact and support from Roseville.

Startup challenges. Burnsville was a brand new service area. It was a new contract, new managers and employees, new service area and new passengers. They are constantly recruiting new drivers. This is a constant challenge. There are no transfers. Some rides are up to 42 miles long. It is a challenge to get people picked up and to their destination on time. Retaining drivers is a challenge with the current job market. There were technological challenges with the new location in Burnsville. There were some software difficulties. All of the drivers were trained on how to read a map.

In July the on time percentages were in the 80's. This was because they were short drivers. Now the January on time percentage averaged 94 percent. There were seven days above 97 percent on time. They have stronger staffing levels. Now the new drivers and staff are excelling.

The on time performance is based on getting people picked up within the 30 minute window and getting people to their appointments on time.

The south zone is all of Dakota County, the South Saint Paul area, part of Lakeville and the Prior Lake/Shakopee area. They were around for the two days in December when they had the most riders. They are expecting a surge in riders within the next few months. They have half as many buses in Burnsville than they have in Roseville. The Burnsville location has its own shop and garage. The call center for both locations is in Burnsville. In the month of February, the daily call volume was between 2,000 to 2,500 total for both contracts. The hold times are 95 percent of the calls in three minutes or less and 99 percent of the calls in five minutes or less. The average hold time now is generally less than 50 seconds.

3. Metro Mobility GoTo System Update

Andy Streasick spoke to the TAAC committee. They started with a soft launch in February. It has gone well. All of the customer feedback they have heard so far is positive. They are currently having trouble with a total rate of 18 bus mobile validators (BMV's). That is the scanner that they call footballs because they look like a football. They are currently failing due to the onboard mobile gateway (OMG). That is about three percent of the buses. This is being addressed with the IT department.

The other issue is driver awareness. When they start in the morning they can set the football to Metro Mobility or Transit Link. Some of the drivers have accidentally set it to Transit Link. That means they pay a different fare. Sometimes a driver misses that a passenger paid their fare and asked them to pay again. They can only pay once within a 20 minute period. This is an ongoing training issue. Metro Mobility is off of the soft launch now. They have not advertised or released anything. Effective March 1 anybody who goes to the Transit Store or sends anything in or encounters a Transit Store staff to buy Metro Mobility tickets is being told by store staff that they can get a GoTo card rather than getting tickets. The 10 percent bonus that exists on Metro Transit does also exist on Metro Mobility fares. This gives an incentive to purchase the GoTo card. Only stored value works for Metro Mobility. All you can ride passes don't work. The GoTo cards can hold both. You can use your Metro Mobility GoTo card on the city bus.

All of the providers have been educated that if there is a hardware failure or driver error where no fare can be collected then no fare needs to be collected. They are not requiring passengers to have more than one kind of fare media. So if the GoTo card doesn't scan because of a hardware failure they are not requiring that the passenger pay cash.

So far with a soft launch with no advertising they are hitting about 150 passengers per weekday right now using GoTo. It has climbed steadily since they started. Metro Mobility is going to send out a newsletter shortly and talk about the GoTo card there.

As of April 1st they are notifying a lot of their agencies that use this heavily demand service that they can switch to GoTo cards so they can see an uptick there. Metro Mobility is not planning on doing another ticket order. They have enough tickets right now to probably last through August. They are looking at no longer having tickets in August. If customers have tickets they can put them on a GoTo card. If customers want to pay with tickets they can do so.

Metro Mobility ID cards have GoTo functionality. If people are interested in doing so they can have their Metro Mobility ID reprinted onto a GoTo card so that they only have to worry about having one card.

4. Metro Mobility Technology and Redundancy

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. In January 2015 Metro Mobility had an average weekday ridership of 6,640 passengers. In 2016 they have seen that increase of 800 rides on average per weekday. January 2016 they are at 7,400 rides per weekday. In 2015 they had two days with over 8,000 rides. In 2016 they have over 8,000 rides in each of two days. Ridership tends to increase steadily throughout the year. So this has been consistent over the last five years as Andrew has been tracking it. January and February are fairly slow. June and July are fairly slow. The rest of the months have a steady progression up. Last year they increased 800 rides from January to December on average by the end of the year. So if they do the same thing as the pattern they have seen the last five years they will be averaging over 8,000 rides by the time they get to December this year.

Metro Mobility implemented the PASS scheduling systems (Paratransit Automated Scheduling System) in June of 1994. When Andrew was working as a dispatcher for Mayflower Metro Mobility they upgraded the system to the Windows version in 1999. They have been using that ever since. The company that does that is a company out of Ontario and also out of Arizona called Trapeze. In 2013 they added onto their existing software system local data computers. That will tie information into all of the vehicles. They added interactive voice response so people will get outbound calls and emails from Metro Mobility about their rides or cancel the rides using the automated phone system 24 hours a day. They are becoming more dependent on their technology. The only way they are able to manage the increase in ridership that they have had over the last three years was with the increase in technology. If they did not have the technology that they have in place right now with the number of vehicles and resources that they have they would be denying rides. They have not denied a single ride in 2015 and 2016.

Back in December they had a software outage that lasted over 36 hours. It was an intermittent outage that was more out than in. It caught the attention of the IT team, Trapeze and some other vendors. The root cause or analysis of that was that there was a disc on the database server that was failing. It did not give warnings it was failing but it was going out. The database server is a redundant server. It has 26 drives on it. Any one of the 26 drives can do the work. The data and information is shared among the 26 drives. If you lose any of them it continues to operate. What they found out in December is if you have ever been on the freeway and the person in the left lane in front of you was driving at 41 miles per hour and the person next to them slows down to 41 miles per hour it doesn't matter how fast you want to go you will be driving at 41 miles per hour. What the system did is slowed the rest of the drives down to work at the same speed as the one that was failing.

Once they replaced the failing hard drives the system went back to normal operations. When that happened they took several actions. A formal backup process has been created by the providers to ensure that should the computer software go down there is a manual backup system that is in place. That manual backup system means that they print a manifest for the drivers. They have a customer call back sheet. They have a manual reservation form so they can continue to take reservations. There is now a manual process in place in case they lose their computer systems. The providers are saving those reports on a daily basis so if they lose that they have that backup system.

Metro Mobility has taken some steps so that the providers never have to use that manual system. The Information Services team has escalated this to the highest level. They now have a weekly meeting with the Deputy Director and Director of Information Services. Over the last month there has been daily meetings with Andrew and the rest of his team. They are doing a full health check on the database server network. They have made changes so that now if a drive is going out the techs are emailed or texted information so the drive failure that caused the issue can be taken care of. They actually had a drive failure last week. There was a text that went to the database administrator who then swapped out the drive in real time and there was no impact on the system.

Last week they added more tools to the database server. It can identify potential issues before they become a problem. They reconfigured the database server doubling the memory so it processes things more quickly. They found that in looking at everything that on Saturday mornings between 7:00 and 8:00 there was some heavy network traffic due to some backup. So they went to their backup system and rescheduled all of those. The last two weeks they have seen some significant increases in performance. They have a datacenter here in Saint Paul and a sister datacenter in Minneapolis. Data is shared in real time so that if there is a problem in Minneapolis, Saint Paul will continue to run.

They have increased the bandwidth between Minneapolis and Saint Paul and they are running two gigs of information across. They have increased that this week to 10. In case there should ever be an issue now they can pass 10 gigs of data back and forth. The data now goes seamlessly and instantly from Minneapolis to Saint Paul should there be an issue. They also have Trapeze Software coming out to do a house system check in the next couple of weeks.

Continuity of operations is something that you hear a lot about at the Council. That is continuity of operations plan that is a COOP Plan. It started in 2013. It is our disaster recovery plan. It gives them an estimated recovery time. In 2013 their estimated recovery time was 12 hours. Somebody would have taken a backup and driven over to Minneapolis, gotten on the new server and built it manually. That is down to four hours maximum including travel time. So should there be a failure at one location it would only be down for four hours. They also have the paper backup system in place so the providers would continue to run.

On the buses they have implemented two separate data links. So Andy talked about the Onboard Mobile Gateway or OMG that has a cellular data card in it. The mobile data computers have a backup cellular card on a different network so they have two separate providers and two separate network cards so if they lose one the bus can continue to communicate. All of the Rangers store at least six hours worth of data. If they do have an outage where something happens and the computer in Saint Paul is gone the Rangers or the computers on the bus have six hours worth of data and it would take only four hours to have the system fully back up and running.

One of the things about the backup system and redundant system is that they have built the redundancy in five separate locations. They had a contractor that was doing some street work cut the fiber optic connection that runs to Transit Team. In less than one hour all of the Transit Team dispatchers were over at Metro Transit's training center. Reservationists were taking reservations here at the Council so the dispatchers were logged into there. So if they were to lose Transit Team's facility, the Council facility and/or First Transit's south facility they have redundant backups at each garage so staff can literally move from one to another. The down time is simply as long as it takes to get staff from one place to another.

They have had frequent complaints that the drivers are much too dependent on the Rangers. Here is what they have learned during one of the Ranger outages. Even the long time drivers. There is a big difference between pushing the button that says a go to destination and taking the paper manifest and saying "O.K. I am going to 300 Fourth Street West" and not knowing where that is. So they take out their Kings Map book and look in the back and find out that the address is on page 321 D-4. They go to that page and look for that street. Even somebody that does that a lot, it takes three minutes of time. They have significantly more rides today than they did two years ago when they implemented this system. The drivers are more reliant on the technology now. It is the only way they can handle the fact that they are doing 800 more rides per day on average. They are also doing more rides per hour than they were before. While they can go back to the paper system. Looking at the map books and reading manifests, dispatchers calling out every single change to a manifest takes significantly more time. They can't afford that given the volume they have today. That is why they are going out of their way to keep that technology up and running as much as possible.

They have an increase in premium same day rides as well but Andrew doesn't have the numbers at this time. During the monthly meetings they have the drivers use the map books. When they use a paper manifest the next address is listed on the manifest along with the map page location.

5. Legislative Update

Lesley Kandaras spoke to the TAAC committee. She works in the Government Affairs Department of the Metropolitan Council. The legislative session doesn't start until next week. This legislative session is unusual because it is going to be very short. It starts on March 8 by the constitution and is done by May 23. The capitol is undergoing extensive renovation limiting the amount of meeting space and access to numbers to some degree as well. All of that is going to put pressure on this session to make sure it goes by quickly and they are expecting it to be a whirlwind of activity.

It is also an election year. Everything at the legislature is political. During the election years it is more ramped up. They are thinking about how they are going to be positioning themselves for the general election in November.

In Minnesota budgets are set for two years. Last year was a budget year. 2016 is a capital bonding year. The legislature is not required to pass a bonding bill. It is expected. Under state law the governor has to release his proposal for a bonding bill by January 15. Governor Dayton did do just that. For the Metropolitan Council they had two projects in the Governor's bonding proposal. Neither of them are related to transportation. One of them is a \$10 million regional parks funding request. The other one is a \$5 million inflow and infiltration grant program which is part of the environmental services program.

There is a budget surplus. Last week they announced that the surplus is around \$900 million. This money would be available for a supplemental budget. They are waiting to see what the governor and the legislative leaders are going to do with the budget surplus. There is nothing that requires them to spend that money.

Shifting to the Council's priorities. It is a bonding year. They do have those parks and water bonding projects. Another piece of work they are going to be continually working on is a comprehensive transportation funding bill. Governor Dayton does support a comprehensive transportation financing bill that would include a gas tax for roads and bridges in a metropolitan area sales tax. At the end of the 2015 session that bill was in the conference committee but was not acted on. Starting next week, in March, the bill is still in that conference committee so the legislators would have the option to pick up where they left off and they could streamline some of the procedural stuff that bills that are starting from scratch have to go through in terms of working their way through several committees. Both the House proposal for transportation from last year that could have really decimated the bus operations in particular by shifting a lot of general fund money to the rail operations. That is still technically on the table as is the Senate bill. That was much more aligned with the Governor's proposal for a comprehensive transportation bill. They are not sure where they will take that conference committee bill.

Another priority for the Council related to transportation is this is the year they have to ask for Regional Transit Capital Bonding Authorization. It is not part of the general obligation bonding process. Rather as a creation of the legislature the Metropolitan Council has to ask for the authority to levy a bond to raise money essentially in the region to strengthen the capital fleet replacement. This is the year they have to go to the legislature and have them to allow us to raise \$80 million for fleet replacement and other transit capital needs. This is for Metro Transit and all of the suburban providers and all of the transit capital needs in the region.

In addition to following the comprehensive transportation bill they will also be advocating for regional capital bonding authority. The Council's priorities are also responding to other's priorities over all of the system.

Last year the House formed a subcommittee on metropolitan accountability and transparency. There was an oversight committee asking the Council to talk about how they do their planning functions and how they operate. If this year is anything like last year they will be asking those questions again.

Streasick said that Metro Mobility gets their funding from the general fund.

President Obama put \$175 million in his budget proposal for the upcoming federal fiscal year for the US Transportation budget for the Southwest LRT line. It has a long way to go through both chambers and then signed by the president.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEMBER COMMENT

Ken Rodgers spoke about the Metro Mobility stats. He would like more raw numbers instead of percentages on the on time statistics.

Chair Walker mentioned that tomorrow, March 3, there will be a tour of the A-Line. Then the Southwest Light Rail design workshop is next Wednesday, March 9, from noon to 2:00 p.m. at the Saint Louis Park office. This is the first one that TAAC has ever done. TAAC participation is key to making this a success. The Metro Mobility community conversation is Monday, March 14, from 10:00 a.m. to noon at Wilder.

Pam Steffen said that Saint Patrick's day free rides are from 6:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. Then the service changes are happening starting March 19.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary