

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, February 5, 2014

Committee Members Present: Ron Biss, John Schatzlein, Kjensmo Walker, James Williams, Bob Anderson, Darrell Paulsen, Mark Hoisser, John Lund, Chad McGuire, Colin Stemper and Nichole Villavicencio.

Committee Members Absent: none.

Committee Members Excused: Margot Imdieke Cross, Heidi Myhre and Patty Thorsen.

Council Staff Present: Pam Steffen, Chuck Wurzinger, Rob Milleson and John Levin from Metro Transit, Claire Schleichert from OEO, Andy Streasick, Andrew Krueger, David Russell and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Bill Moore and Claudia Fugile.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Biss called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:45 p.m. on Wednesday, February 5, 2013.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Due to a lack of quorum at the December 4, 2013 meeting the November 6, 2013 minutes were approved at this meeting.

It was moved by McGuire, seconded by Paulsen to approve the minutes of the November 6, 2013 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Lund, seconded by Villavicencio to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Williams, seconded by Walker to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2013 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

INFORMATION & BUSINESS

a. Metro Transit Procuring Coach Buses Discussion

Chuck Wurzinger spoke to the TAAC committee. He is an assistant director in the bus maintenance department. He gave a brief presentation on an upcoming coach bus procurement. Currently there are 83 coaches operated by Metropolitan Transportation Services. These are operated by SouthWest Metro, MVTA and some others. Forty-one are operated by Metro Transit. They operate the Maple Grove service and service to Lakeville and Forest Lake. There are other routes that are serviced by coach buses as well. They go primarily to outlying communities. For the upcoming procurement MTS will be purchasing 46 replacement coaches over five years. Metro Transit will replace three coaches under either the previous contract or this contract. There are seven that are being built this week up at MCI for service in Anoka County. So that would ultimately bring Metro Transit's total to 48.

The procurement timeline is that the review of the technical specifications are in process. Wurzinger finished his part of the process and now Paul Colton of MTS is now reviewing those. They would issue the RFP at a target date of March 1, 2014. Evaluate the first proposals by May 2014. Select the manufacturer by July 2014. The North American coach manufacturers are limited. There is only one coach company that qualifies to sell coaches in north America under the FTA rules and that is MCI.

He showed a picture of the seating layout that they currently have on the coach buses. That layout would be incorporated into any new coaches that they purchase. There are two positions that are a little tight but meet ADA standards.

They are currently buying 40 foot buses from Gillig Corporation out of California. They are low floor buses equipped with a ramp. They have 38 seats and two wheelchair securement areas in them. They just switched manufacturers of the ramps. They used to have a Ricon ramp, which is a four to one ramp. For this current order they have a lifting ramp. It has a six to one slope or a seven to one slope which makes it easier to board the bus. This is the new ramp they will be using. These buses are low floor. They have a couple of steps leading to an area in the back. They are not accessible in the back. The fuel economy is 4.5 on those. The current batch of articulated buses have 60 seats in them. Some of the older ones have 64 seats. They are 60 feet long and low floor. They are about 40,000 pounds verses 29,000 for a 40 foot bus. There are two wheelchair securement areas.

Metro Mobility is in the process of finalizing a procurement contract with New Flyer to build coach buses in the next five years. They have the lift ramp specified in those to make it a better entranceway for folks in mobility devices. They are roughly \$750,000 each compared to a 40 foot bus which is about \$430,000. That is a non hybrid bus. The coach buses are about 45,000 pounds. They have 57 seats. The isles are narrow. They are designed primarily for commuters. MCI took an over the road coach platform and modified it so it would fit with commuter service with the seats that we see and some securement areas. There are some options there for seating on 40 foot buses that can be made a little more comfortable for longer hauls but they tend to use them on short haul or inner city runs. They have opted to use the commuter coach on the longer runs. They use 40 footers and articulated buses on express runs as well.

The three buses they will purchase will replace the three that they already have. The seven that are being built right now are expansion buses. They are going to run out of Anoka County. The last coach buses were about \$515,000 each. The buses purchased on the next contract will probably cost around \$560,000 or \$570,000.

All of the mobility devices, like lifts and ramps, can be operated manually. In the case of the wheelchair lift there is a hydraulic system that raises the lift and stows it. It is powered by an electric motor. Should the motor fail there is a hand pump that can be used to do what you need it to do. In the case of the ramps there are some that are electric over hydraulic. Most of the new ones are electric but can be deployed and stowed manually. There is a latch that can be used and then the ramp can be lifted out. In the MCI's there is also a way to manually stow them.

They just approved a different seating arrangement for 40 foot buses. There will be 74 that they will be starting to build in March. That will increase the space on the curb side significantly. They went from over 60 inches to 70 inches. There will be four flip up seats along the isle facing seats. There are three flip up seats on the driver side of the bus on the low floor buses. The current ones have two. That is going to be expanded to four. You gained a lot more on the curb side.

John Levin said that if necessary, Metro Transit can switch out a 40 foot bus if there is someone with a wheelchair who consistently rides a certain route. They would also allow time in the schedule to accommodate the wheelchair user.

b. Designated Seating Signage

Pam Steffen spoke to the TAAC committee. She handed out a color copy of the final draft of the signage for all of the buses and trains. The goal is to provide consistent signage throughout the entire fleet so they won't have multiple stickers. It will be this one. It says "Priority Seating is for customers with disabilities and seniors. Please move when asked."

Paulsen suggested adding Braille to the bottom of the sticker. Steffen said it could be useful on a train but on a bus you have the driver there to help. She will look into it as an option. The committee discussed the wording and raised letters.

c. Recap of Meeting on "Downtown Zone" Fare for Metro Mobility

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. They had the first of two public meetings on the proposed fare change for Metro Mobility. They need to change the downtown fare zones for Metro Mobility so that

they are in line with the regular fixed route. When the trip begins and ends in the downtown zone the Metro Transit fare is 50 cents on regular fixed route. By federal law Metro Mobility fares cannot exceed two times the regular fixed route fares. So with that in mind the Council approved an action to go out for public comment to see what kind of feedback they were getting from people with a one dollar downtown fare zone. This morning there were five people from the general public along with some of the TAAC committee members. The questions centered around not the one dollar fare but concerns that reducing the downtown fare zone would increase fares for other areas. The answer to that is no. Any increase in fares for Metro Mobility would likely be in conjunction with a fare change from Metro Transit. There is no discussion of that happening at this point.

Some of the other questions that came up are, is there going to be an increase in ridership in the downtown fare zones? We don't know. There could be. But as Andy Streasick pointed out it is a fairly difficult process to schedule rides on Metro Mobility. You have to schedule the rides a day in advance. You have to allow time in between the rides so that you aren't getting dropped off after you are supposed to be picked up. There was one woman who asked if she could go bar hopping using Metro Mobility and paying 50 cents. The answer is yes but it would have to be scheduled a day in advance.

McGuire asked how the free ride zone got resolved. Krueger answered that it hasn't been resolved yet. Metro Transit has a few lines that run up and down Nicollet Mall from the Convention Center to Washington Avenue where you can ride on Nicollet Avenue for free. There will be some discussion with the FTA about what does comparable mean? They have not heard back from the Office of Civil Rights yet on the ADA audit that they had. Part of the discussion is Metro Mobility wants to provide comparable service on that corridor. The problem is that they generally define comparable service as anything that is within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. If you draw a $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile boundary around Nicollet Mall you can do free rides from what used to be the Metrodome to Target Field even though it is perpendicular to Nicollet Mall you can go from Metrodome to the other side of the river. You can go south of 35W. The argument from the Metro Mobility perspective is they would like the FTA to weigh in on what comparable means. They do want to provide comparable trips just not trips that could not be done along that line. Until they have discussion with the FTA on what comparable means they have not moved forward on that project.

d. Metro Mobility Stats

David Russell and Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. He focused on phone calls. Phone calls to the service center and to the providers. It is a reflection of what is happening in the system overall to give an idea of what the impacts are and external factors that may be occurring as well. It is a good litmus of what is happening in the world of Metro Mobility. Across the board there has been a significant increase in inbound calls not only to Metro Mobility but to the providers as well. First Transit is getting over 5,000 more calls a month than before. This creates an increase in wait time for incoming calls. The hold time is usually a little less than a minute. At the service center the hold time is about 30 seconds.

Metro Mobility had not done a good job of tracking and monitoring hold times by time of day or day of the week. They are now tracking this on a deeper level than before. More and more people are waiting until the last hour that reservations are open to book a ride. When you are looking at the hour of the day in midday there are very low hold times. The last hour of the day there are very high hold times because of the volume of calls. So you are working with our providers to address that with their staffing levels. The other thing they are doing is they are working with their IT department to change how they are doing the reporting. Historically Metro Mobility has looked at the service day overall. So they would look at what is the average hold time for a day. Then they would look at it hourly. Sometimes you would have five seconds hold times. Sometimes you would have six minute hold times. If you have one hour of six minute hold times you need to address that. In 2015 our contracts with our providers will reflect that new ability. So they would be breaking that down by hour and making sure they address hold times on an hourly basis.

On bad weather days they are impacted when they have three or four inches of snow. Not just on the day that it snows but on two or three days after it snows. As people get out to shovel the sidewalks. They are seeing extremely high spikes of call volume when there are snow events. Metro Mobility and all of the providers were on the Met Council phone system. So there are a dedicated number of lines coming in to the Council. The IT staff noticed that on snow days and the days after a snow event people calling in to the Met Council were getting busy signals. In the last week we have doubled the capacity for phone lines. They have also split Metro Mobility and the Metro Mobility providers apart from the Council. With doubling

the phone capacity hopefully you won't get busy signals. Doubling the phone capacity also doubles the amount of people who may be placed on hold. Everyone needs to be cognizant of that as well. Metro Mobility has not doubled staff. They are working closer with the providers than they ever have before just to see what the providers are doing.

Metro Mobility has a real time monitoring system that shows how many people are on hold and how many people are in the queue. Who is logged in and who is logged off. They are adding monitors at each of the providers. So they are going to put that on the wall so that anybody walking into the customer service center at any of the providers can see how many calls are on hold and how many people are logged into the system so that they can be more proactive in managing the calls.

Andy Streasick added that they have given upper management, at the providers, access to login to the queue. This allows them to monitor how many calls are waiting and answer some of the calls themselves.

They determine the wait time by how long someone waits once they enter the queue, which is when the announcement ends and the music starts.

In December there were 12 severe weather days which caused some of the rides to be longer. They are not seeing as many cancellations as there used to be. There are less than two complaints per 1000 rides across the system. DARTS has seen an increase in ridership throughout the year last year, but a decrease in the amount of drivers. They were trying to provide more service with overall fewer drivers. On time service was suffering because of this. DARTS has done some hiring fairs to hire more drivers to correct that problem.

The federal government says that by law Metro Mobility cannot prioritize rides.

e. Continued Discussion on Metro Transit's Response to TAAC's Letter of Concerns of Accessible Seating on Generation II LRV's

Chair Biss checked into the issue of companion seating. It has been explored and it is not a workable situation. In discussion with Imdieke-Cross they decided not to pursue this issue at this time.

f. Any Additional Items

Chair Biss said that they checked into seeing if they could get the language changed in the state statute that says there should be a Transportation Advisory Committee. The State Council and the Met Council have been working on it. Andrew Krueger and Margot Imdieke-Cross have been working on it. It will go to Senator Dibble's office. They will refine the language from there. If they accept it they will bring it forward.

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. The current statute that talks about the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee is tucked into the language on the special transportation service a.k.a. Metro Mobility. In the original state statute the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee is to advise on issues related to special transportation services or Metro Mobility. As the TAAC committee has expanded and grown over the years, so has the scope on what they have been doing and commenting on like light rail vehicles. The fact that they now have Metro Transit staff coming to the meetings, I think the Council recognizes that the TAAC has taken on a larger and more active role in advising the Council on issues related to mobility. A request came forward to change the statute to reflect that. The Met Council's legislative agenda was already done and full so we said we would not push that forward. Margot took that on with the State Council on Disability and proposed some language which I took to Arlene McCarthy, who is the Director of MTS. I also forwarded it on to Brian Lamb at Metro Transit and our legislative liaison. None of them had an issue with the changes to the language.

It looks like Senator Dibble will be putting it in his Transportation Bill to change the language on TAAC's expanded role of advising the Council not just on Metro Mobility service or special transportation service, but aspects of all fixed route including light rail. The Met Council saw that as just an acknowledgement of what it is that the TAAC is actually doing and what we consider to be an appropriate role for the committee. There will be a change in language proposed and then we are going to move that language out of the special transportation section to the broader Metropolitan Council section. It is not a change in the mission or mandate. It is a recognition in state law of what you are actually doing.

Krueger would like to form a subcommittee of the TAAC to provide input and feedback on the Metro Mobility vehicle orders going forward. Metro Mobility has recently seen a spike in complaints on the new

buses they just purchased. They are the smaller chassis busses that hold six ambulatory passengers and two passengers in wheelchairs. They have received seven complaints in six months. Considering they normally would have had seven complaints in the last 10 years that is a lot of complaints. It was passengers in wheelchairs who made the complaints. Krueger rode one of the buses in a wheelchair to understand the complaints.

Metro Mobility has put an air suspension system in one vehicle as a test unit. Krueger will ride that bus next week. The passengers are saying that there is a noticeable difference in the ride. They will see if they can retrofit the vehicles that they have so that will improve the ride for everybody. There are over 60 buses deployed right now. The new bus order will be the longer chassis bus. They are doing a pilot project with the air ride suspension even on the larger vehicles as well.

MEMBER COMMENT

Chair Biss asked if someone was waiting to be picked up by Metro Mobility at some facility and the facility says it is closing time and it is cold outside, is the passenger forced to wait outside in the cold for the bus to come or does the facility have a responsibility to a vulnerable person that they cannot be put out in the cold?

Streasick said that the answer is no. They do not have a legal responsibility. This person has opted to use public transportation so they need to go and wait for their public transportation. You would hope that they have some common sense though.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Pam Steffen spoke to the TAAC committee. There will be March service changes. Metro Transit has something called subscription service. You would go to their website then go to the upper right corner. If you have an account, you go into your account and you can subscribe to receive detours and alerts via text message or emails. One or the other. This is for scheduled changes.

Chair Biss asked at the Met Council offices can someone come in and access the internet on their laptop?

Russell said yes but you have to have a password. The front desk has the password and so does Alison.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary