

Minutes of the

MEETING OF THE EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, June 20, 2017

Committee Members Present: Co-Chair; Acooa Ellis, David Ketroser, Kadra Abdi, Ishmael Israel, Ruthie Johnson, Steven Chavez, Rebecca Stratton, Tie Oei, Jennifer Munt, Harry Melander, Shirley Cain, Sindy Garcia Morales, Leslie Redmond

Committee Members Excused: Co-Chair; Edward Reynoso, Metric Giles, Nelima Sitati Munene, Leon Rodrigues

Committee Members Absent: Elham Ashkar, Kimberly Carpenter

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Ellis called the regular meeting of the Council's Equity Advisory Committee to order at 6:06 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

A motion to approve the agenda for the June 20th meeting was made by Rebecca Stratton, and seconded by Tie Oei. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion to approve the minutes of the May 16th meeting was made by Ishmael Israel and seconded by Tie Oei. The motion passed unanimously.

RACIAL EQUITY WORK PLAN

Lesley Kandaras, Manager of Enterprise Initiatives, presented on the latest draft of the Council's Racial Equity Work Plan, filling in for Deputy Regional Administrator Meredith Vadis, who is out on maternity leave. The most recent version of the Racial Equity Work Plan was distributed to members of the EAC before the meeting, and Lesley is hoping to return to the committee in July for a recommendation on the draft. This plan is designed to help the Council with transformational organizational change by organizing and prioritizing Council staff work towards meeting Thrive commitments. In the presentation, Lesley outlined four questions for the EAC to consider:

1. This plan is focused on making sure Council employees have a roadmap to advance equity commitments in Thrive. How will you know if we are making progress?
2. Does the plan address what you expect it to address? What are we missing?
3. We will come back to the EAC seeking your recommendation before the work plan goes to the Metropolitan Council. What information do you need when making this recommendation?
4. Moving forward, what role should the EAC play in plan implementation? How frequently do you want updates?

Members of the committee had the following questions about the plan:

1. What is the implementation and evaluation plan for this document?

The document does not include the plan for implementation and evaluation. This has been a reoccurring comment received on the plan. The Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) will be responsible for the implementation and evaluation of the plan. Each of the five divisions create their own annual work plan, and the senior leaders in those divisions will be responsible for including how they're going to implement the Racial Equity Work Plan in those work plans. The goal that is, through this process, equity will become a part of the everyday work at the Council.

2. Will there be measurable outcomes in the evaluation process of this plan?

Yes. The question is currently what will be measured at a Council-wide level versus being measured by each individual division.

3. Will the Racial Equity Work Plan go to the general public?

Work plans often are not made public, but the Communications department is trying to do more to highlight the equity work at the Council. This will eventually be included on the Council's website, as well as the Council's internal intranet site.

After these questions, members of the committee discussed the plan and tried to address the four questions that Lesley had outlined:

- It would be helpful to see a link established between the hiring goals that will be set as a part of this plan and statistics regarding the mitigation of disparities and poverty.
- It does not seem that OEO does not "have any teeth" to carry out the enforcement of this plan and to hold people accountable.
- It would be helpful to see an intentional report back to the EAC on a routine basis.
- Council plans sometimes make it difficult to grasp how the Council goes through its internal processes. It would be helpful for this plan to be made so that the public can really understand it
- Including measurable goals is important because, oftentimes, if something is not able to be measured it does not get done.
- Although it is planned for this plan to be available on the Council's website, it might only be found by people who are actively looking for it. There are other methods to more effectively get information out to the public.
- The Council should consider holding meetings in the community on a regular basis, which would help promote awareness of things like the Racial Equity Work Plan.

REGIONAL FARE CHANGE

After presentations in the EAC meetings in March, April and May, Equity Manager C Terrence Anderson shared that the hope for the June 20th meeting was that the EAC leave with a recommendation on the regional fare change. Co-Chair Acooa Ellis shared some of the goals and success factors that Nicholas Eull, Manager of Revenue Collection at Metro Transit, shared in his May 16th presentation:

Goals:

- Increase fare revenue
- Promote equity
- Simplify fare policy

Factors for success:

- Ensuring community participation
- Generating sufficient revenues to offset transit cuts
- Mitigate impact of a fare increase on the transit reliant

A motion to suspend the rules for the remainder of the meeting was made by Shirley Cain, and seconded by Rebecca Stratton. The motion passed unanimously. Members of the committee then shared their thoughts and recommendations around the regional fare change:

- A fare increase is short-sighted, as is having the transportation system focused on generating revenue. Having a more robust system may help pay for itself through other benefits, like regional growth etc.
- Low-income populations need the transit system, and there could be another way to work through budget issues. Some solutions could include incentivization to taking transit, community education, or more agreements with community organizations for GoTo cards
- The EAC is supposed to focus on issues surrounding People of Color, who will be affected primarily by a fare increase. The roughly \$7 million shortfall should be found somewhere else.
- Decreasing ridership through increasing fares would decrease revenue, as well. What about decreasing fares to try to increase revenues?

- The discussion around a regional fare increase has not included discussions on whether the current infrastructure is being used to its maximum capacity. Can the Council approach Minneapolis or St. Paul and ask how to tailor transportation to their means in exchange for any form of compensation? There have been some solutions to help decrease the amount of people who rely on parking in Downtown Minneapolis. Could something similar work to see if the cities are willing to pay additional funds to support Metro Transit?
- There are large institutions, like the University of Minnesota, where \$7 million is not a lot of money. Hopefully Metro Transit looks for other revenue models that can be more innovative and futuristic. Perhaps large organizations can help close the funding gap
- Large private companies often have philanthropic organizations that are very charitable. Why isn't Metro Transit working with them to see how they could help offset the cost? They often depend on the transit system to allow their employees to get to work
- Having large organizations or cities come together to opt into a solution would be very difficult. A more sustainable option would be to push for a half-cent sales tax at the State Legislature which would provide Metro Transit with more stable funding.

Co-Chair Ellis then opened the floor for attending members of the public to weigh in on their view on the EAC's potential recommendation:

- The conversation about transit funding should be larger than just fare increases. There were several community organizations that received money from the Council through Corridors of Opportunity, and those groups were not consulted to their full potential. Through meetings at the State Legislature, it became evident that the Council and the community need to talk more. There is also a lot of power among EAC members that has not been utilized to properly influence conversations around transit funding.

Members of the committee then asked several questions of Council Staff and the Council Members:

1. What impact does the EAC have on the ultimate decision or outcome? If the input from the public feedback process was to not increase fares, what impact would that have on the decision?

Council Members Melander and Munt shared that the EAC recommendation would weigh heavily on members of the Council. Council Member Munt shared that it would be irresponsible to "walk customers off a cliff" by choosing to raise fares now, raise them more drastically in the future, or cut service in the future. Council Member Munt also shared that there should be exploration on how to have some people pay more, specifically those who have the ability to pay more. This may be achieved through the TAP program, but it takes money away from the budget shortfall to establish permanently.

2. If the EAC were to recommend no increase, would that be a non-starter at the Council?

Council Member Munt shared that the Council has turned over every stone to find efficiencies. Recommending no increase would be "kicking the can down the road" and delaying the decision. The Council will have a push to increase fares, but that there may be progressive ways to achieve that.

Council Member Melander shared that previous budget shortfalls led to reduction in service in Washington County. Given the current budget shortfall, and that there has not been a fare increase since 2008, the fare increase conversation should instead be tailored on how to protect transit opportunities for people who are most transit reliant.

3. When would a fare increase go into effect?

A fare increase would go into effect in either September or October 2017.

4. Could the EAC recommend changing the timeline? This could allow for looking into specific alternatives that might help prevent a fare increase.

The EAC could recommend changing the timeline, but Metro Transit staff anticipates presenting to the Council in July. Postponing the decision also increases the revenue gap by roughly \$500,000 per month. There are additional barriers to delaying the decision, including the start of the school year for schools that provide transit passes.

5. Are there federal requirements regarding fare increases? What would the timeline look like with changed proposals?

If the proposal were to be changed, the public engagement and comment process would have to start again. There would also need to be additional Title VI analyses for any drastically different proposals.

After these questions, Co-Chair Ellis asked how many people supported asking for an adjusted timeline, to which the majority of the committee agreed. To hear more about each individual's thoughts on the matter, the committee then went around the table and shared their thoughts:

1. Ishmael Israel recommends no increase. Ishmael struggled with the concept of a "non-starter" around fares having to be increased, and that he did not believe that the Council has looked at all ways to generate the revenue. The committee should consider recommending no increase, which may push the Council towards a lower increase rather than the higher increase scenario.
2. Harry Melander believes that there will have to be a fare increase. This would start with a 25-cent increase and smaller incremental increases as time goes on.
3. David Ketroser recommends no increase, but that the timeline for a Council decision be shifted to give the opportunity to figure out a better solution.
4. Rebecca Stratton recommends no increase, as it would be a disservice to the community. Rebecca would want the timeline to be adjusted to look harder at innovative solutions.
5. Shirley Cain recommends no increase, and to look at other options. Additionally, Shirley was concerned about the long-term budget deficit, and that a fare increase would probably still require a further increase in the future. The Council should try to figure out how to fix the long-term budget shortfall and pursue more stable funding. One way to do this could be through partnerships with neighborhood community groups who could purchase Metropass cards to try to reach more riders.
6. Kadra Abdi recommends no increase, and that the Council should consider innovative and equitable approaches. Meetings with the community should be involved as well, both with the fare increase conversation and other Council topics.
7. Ruthie Johnson is not opposed to a 25-cent increase, as long as it is an increase on people who can afford an increase. This would involve protections for low-income populations as a part of the increase. Ruthie also suggested changing the timeline to ensure that other options were explored.
8. Sindy Garcia Morales does not like the current decision timeline. Sindy would recommend that there be no increase, as long as this could be packaged with a long-term solution on how to increase future revenue.
9. Jennifer Munt thinks that there would need to be a 25-cent increase. A gradual increase in fares is easier for customers than tackling the future \$110 million budget deficit
10. Tie Oei was uncomfortable with a fare increase, and would rather extend the timeline to look at options for generating other revenue.
11. Steven Chavez proposed a 25-cent increase that is indexed over time. This would be accompanied by fare protection for the appropriate income strata, as well. A fare increase impacts all ridership, but there should be a way found to protect low income populations. There was also a discussion at the

Community Development Committee about taking money from the Council's general levy and reallocating it towards fund protection

12. Leslie Redmond agreed with Steven Chavez's suggestions. There is an obvious need for fare increases, but that there should be a way to ensure that low income populations are not negatively impacted. Leslie shared that in Washington D.C., fares were increased but people still had to use transit and so ridership did not decline drastically. A gradual increase like this could work.
13. Co-Chair Acooa Ellis proposed a 25-cent increase on express routes, and that the current bonus structure on loading GoTo cards be reduced to 5%. This could then be reallocated towards the TAP program

Through committee members sharing their thoughts, Co-Chair Ellis summarized that there was a lot of agreement around not increasing fares and a desire to look at alternatives. Included in these alternatives are:

- Lower bonuses on GoTo cards
- Increased fares on express routes
- Increased fares on Northstar
- Different fares on suburban opt-out transit providers
- Fare protection for low income populations
- Exploring money from sporting authorities, university or foundations
- Partnering community organizations with Metropass programs

A more general discussion then followed on these suggestions:

- Increasing fares on express routes would not only impact higher income people. There are several routes, including the 94, that are used by low income populations and People of Color, and increasing these routes would also impact them
- There might be a better argument towards protecting fares for low income populations, rather than increasing fares for those with higher incomes
- Distance based fares could help target higher income populations, but they could also prove problematic for other groups
 - Council Member Chavez shared that distance based fares would impact the Latino/a community in his district in Burnsville, many of whom travel long distances on transit to reach their jobs
- If the decision to increase fares was only based on equity, increasing express and Northstar routes would make sense. However, the decision is much larger and takes into account many other realities in addition to equity
- What if the Council does not use the EAC's recommendation? The message the EAC sends should be considerate of the fact that the recommendation might not be followed
- If the Council does not acknowledge the recommendation, it would not be a new phenomenon to members of the EAC. Is the goal to represent the communities or find a solution that is more popular or palatable to the Council?

Co-Chair Ellis concluded the discussion by summarizing that the EAC was not comfortable recommending an increase at the time, but that they would like other options to be further explored by Council staff.

REPORTS

Co-Chairs –

Co-Chair Ellis reminded members of the committee about the open invitation to the EAC's Standing Committee. These meetings occur on the Wednesday immediately after an EAC meeting, at 677 Transfer Road in Saint Paul at 5:30 p.m.

Announcements –

Equity Manager C Terrence Anderson shared that the EAC's recording secretary, Kevin Murphy, would be leaving the Council on July 14. Kevin will be replaced by Yolanda Burckhardt, who currently works in the Office of Equal Opportunity.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Kevin Murphy
Recording Secretary