

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, April 04, 2018

Committee Members Present: Chair Kjensmo Walker, Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates, Ken Rodgers, Robert Platz, Kari Sheldon, John Clark, Lukus Zuker, Diane Graham-Raff, Margot Imdieke Cross, David Fenley and Patty Thorsen.

Committee Members Absent: Heidi Myhre

Committee Members Excused: None

Council Staff Present: Doug Cook and Jan Dietrich

Public Present: Joe Russell and Claudia Fuglie

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Walker called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:32 p.m. on Wednesday, April 04, 2018.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Bates, seconded by Jasmine to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Rodgers, seconded by Thorsen to approve the minutes of the March 7, 2018 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

BUSINESS & INFORMATION

1. Metro Mobility Stats

Dana Rude spoke to the TAAC committee. The thing that is most noticeable since the first of the year is the increase in ridership overall. Most of 2017 was flat. There was no uptick in ridership until October when the fare increase went into effect. Then it suddenly shot up. It was really quite sharp. It continued on through November and December. It is picking up again this year. Historically, what that means is that we are back to what we were in 2016 where we got this rather sharp curve upward overall. In terms of overall ridership. We flattened out for about 12 months. The actual rate of increase dropped back to about two or three percent. I have no explanation for that. It completely goes against everything we normally associate with a fare increase. It usually works in reverse.

As the weather has improved and our overall employment picture has improved for all providers, our on-time performance have improved. Most of the metrics across the board have improved. The only exceptions to that in the first quarter of the year have been because of weather. We have had some pretty scary weather since April 1st. Any time that occurs, we along with everybody else suffers with on time performance. However, that is normal in Minnesota. You have to endure it up to a point. Depending on where it strikes and how heavily it hits.

Other than that, I don't really foresee that this year. I think we are probably looking at if not a record year in terms of overall increase, it certainly will be quite noticeable from start to finish.

I would like to continue on with one other thing. I am going to be retiring. My last official day will be July 2nd. My last real day will be June 1st. I don't know who will be replacing me. I am assuming that whoever that will be will be here next month. So will I.

Rodgers said in terms of increased ridership, is there an increase in the number of people being qualified to ride Metro Mobility? Or is it that just more people who are qualified to ride are riding?

Rude said in general most of Metro Mobility's ridership comes from a core group. There are about 40,000 people that are certified. About a quarter of those people are regular daily or weekly riders. That age group is basically late teens to getting close to retirement. So it is people that are working and going to school.

With the uptick in the economy overall, and access to more functions and disposable income. A lot of those things can explain the increase. I don't think that overall. But I am not the person to explain this. It would be Andy. I don't think we have seen that much of an increase in the overall number of people that are certified. Part of the problem is that we can't always identify when somebody is no longer in use of their certification. We find that they have passed on or moved. We are usually the last ones to be informed. At least in terms of the base structure of the group that usually does all the riding. I think that probably we are looking at the use more than everything else. That really doesn't cover it.

Fenley said there was an extensive messaging campaign too to your email list. Could that have played into the increase in ridership?

Rude said there certainly was an impact when you are dealing with either social or electronic media. There are also a lot of people out there that aren't connected that way. It is hard to say. Christine may have something on that. I don't. We are dealing with usually after the fact. Picking up the pieces so to speak.

Christine Kuennen said I don't know what you mean by messaging campaign. We do have the gov delivery email list. We have been using that to get information out. Most recently there was a newsletter in January and then a rider. The fare increase was used for that. So maybe just presence of mind. Metro Mobility is out there in the media as well. I don't think we can pinpoint one thing that would increase the ridership. I concur with what Dana said. Typically, we don't want a message and market the service beyond just informing people of the service that is available. We have done a little bit more of that.

Fenley said I meant messaging surrounding the fare increase. To the people who are already connected to Metro Transit.

Platz said just my take from where I come from, DT&H. The movement with the Olmstead Plan and person directed service. The trend we are seeing is a lot of people are moving towards being self sufficient by utilizing Metro versus opting into a DT&H transportation. This is the trend I have been seeing during the last year. That could impact that also.

Rodgers said I do have some specific questions about that premium same day service. Could you walk us through those stats, generally? I do have a suggestion. The way the tables are presented is very difficult for a screen reader to find everything. Side-by-side does not work. If they are below each other, that is fine. But I don't expect to find something far to the right once I have reached the end of a table. When I went through all of the stats initially, I thought there has to be more than just this. So I went back and looked a little more carefully and I did find that there were some tables that were side-by-side and below each other. That is extremely difficult for a screen reader to follow. I would suggest in the future that they just be single tables one after the other. I know it will make for a long sheet but that is the only way we can effectively find them using a screen reader. There is no systematic way to do this that is uniform with looking at excel spread sheets. If there could be some indication in the first cell at the top of the page that there are multiple pages, that would help. I get to the bottom and I don't know if I have gotten to the bottom. I have no way of knowing that there are multiple pages unless I do a command to change pages. I don't know if there is a systematic way to do uniform that is a best practice. If you put some kind of a note in the first cell that will help those of us that use screen readers to know what to expect. If we can expect multiple pages. If we just have a short report this month.

Rude said stacked vertically on the page? That should be possible. We certainly can agree to use the first cell as a page count.

Rodgers said if you can just put page one of whatever. That will help. We will know there are X number of pages that would be great.

Rude said we can do that. In general, the stats follow a pattern. We have been modifying it every other month, it seems. We can certainly look into stacking things vertically. I will have to see what that consists of when we do it. You will end up with quite a few pages.

Rodgers said that is absolutely fine. As long as we know that they are there. And I know to expect 20 pages. As long as I know they are there I can access them. The stats to me are one of the more important tasks of our council as we review Metro Mobility overall. It is the only real means we have of looking at the program. Those

are really important to us. I don't want to miss something. I look at every single one of those tables and try to make sense of those numbers. I think that is the only way we can be effective in providing advice moving forward.

Rude said with regard to PSD, the way that it is laid out is that the first column delineates the number of trips that were actually scheduled. That isn't the number of trips that were actually authorized. The rate of trips scheduled to the rate of trips authorized. Trips scheduled equals about 85 percent of trips authorized. The second column is no shows. The third column is the actual ridership. Then we go into no show costs. The Council's total costs. The trip cost. Then the average cost per trip for PSD.

The desire is to be able to do the same thing with the supplemental services. However, those stats currently just simply are the ridership that we have paid for. What we did pay for it. Then the average cost per trip.

Rodgers said what is the difference between the number of rides that have been scheduled verses the number of rides that have been authorized?

Rude said the number of rides that are authorized are the number of trips that have been requested by an individual where they have asked for a Premium Same Day Trip. However, because the way Premium Same Day works, they have to make contact with the carrier to schedule that trip for a particular period of time. Of the number of trips that are authorized, roughly 85 percent over the last year have actually been scheduled. Apparently, a phone call was made and providers put it into their schedule. The intent is that somebody is going to use it. That is what the difference between the two is.

Rodgers said so I call Metro Mobility and schedule a Premium Same Day. That is the number of scheduled rides. Are you saying that if I do not then call Airport Taxi to arrange the ride, it is not authorized?

Rude said it has been authorized. But you have to schedule the trip through Airport Taxi. If you don't do the scheduling, make the scheduling call, then the trip isn't there to take place. It is authorized but it hasn't been taken.

Dietrich said define what authorized means. So I have to call and get permission to do the same day service. If it is given, then it is authorized. Then it is on me to call and schedule it.

Rude said right.

Rodgers said so why there is a difference between scheduled and authorized?

Rude said because we have agreed to take the trip and to pay our portion of it. The authorization is the permission granted. If you were just to call the cab company and say I want a Premium Same Day trip, you shouldn't be getting one. We haven't authorized it and said it is O.K. to take that trip.

Kuennen said it is a two-step process. The customer is getting an authorization to schedule a taxi ride. Whether or not the person does the scheduling and gets a trip is step two. We are separating out those two factors. There would be fewer scheduled than authorized. Some people don't schedule a ride they were authorized to take. Because it is Metro Mobility that is authorizing. It is the taxi service company that is scheduling.

Walker said you are saying that 15 percent of people who call Metro Mobility to ask for a ride don't actually schedule that ride.

Rodgers said so that 15 percent that didn't end up taking their ride, but they authorized it, Metro Mobility is still charged for that ride. That \$5.00 fee.

Rude said no.

Rodgers said so why are the charges so high for a no-show?

Rude said because there is a no-show charge. The no-show cost is because we compensate the cab company for a no-show. If they pull up and they wait the required amount of time and there is nobody there. Then they are permitted to move on. Because they made the trip there, we compensate them the \$5.00.

Jasmine said can you go back to the no-show? Can you explain exactly what this entails because I have a lot of problems with this. Is it just strictly they come, they pull up, they say you are not there and they leave?

Rude said they would contact their dispatcher and tell them they have a no-load situation. Nobody is there. With cabs it is somewhat different than it is with Metro Mobility. Our instructions to them is they have to wait five minutes just as Metro Mobility would wait. They are not required to go up to a door.

Jasmine said sometimes they come and see the dog and say no one was there. Or they pull up somewhere else and you were there. How do we communicate this? When we have called to complain I never get a call back. I am calling the complaint line. I also call the head of Airport Taxi. The one call I got back was so offensive I hesitate to go into it. I will let you explain what we should be doing to get a response.

Rude said the first thing you should be doing is calling Metro Mobility's customer service line and letting us know that there was an issue with the cab ride. Whether it is a no-show or something else. We would get in touch with the contractor at that point in time and ask them to resolve the issue. If the issue isn't resolved to your satisfaction, you would have to call us back and let us know that you didn't find the response appropriate.

Kuennen said in the fall forum we tried to provide information about the program. It does say contact Metro Mobility Service Center with issues related to our contracted services. Including our supplemental services should come through us and can be resolved by us. The providers themselves have accountability, but we have oversight accountability. They are contracted with us. It will be a subject at tomorrow's Spring Conversation. We did put information about the Premium Service in the newsletter. We are hiring an intern. The number one priority for that intern's work is to do work along the audit and follow through on our supplemental service contracts because it is something that we do realize that we need to do a little more visibility on as far as the follow through on the ride from the authorization all the way through to the delivery of service.

Dietrich said what does a resolution look like?

Rude said we would ask them to investigate the situation. Their vehicles are all equipped with a location tracking system. They can follow every trip. If we end up with a situation where we have an address that they have confirmed. That is where the cab is going. We see the cab pull up and sit there for the requisite amount of time and they call in and say it is a no-show. We are pretty much stuck with what the driver has to say. The information is logged in at Metro Mobility.

Kuennen said our no-show policy is we do not hold the customer currently accountable for a no-show with the taxi service. We don't have a way to do that. It is something that we have been discussing internally because we think maybe there should be a way for us to do that. We are paying for customers that schedule a ride and then don't show. That is part of our discovery process that we will be going through this summer is what mechanisms can we use and what policies should be put in place. Currently there is no penalty for a customer if that taxi counts that ride as a no-show.

The focus of the work will be on service quality and accountability on the provider's side. Not on whether the customer is no showing or not. There is an absolute need for us to create a lock solid quality assurance process for all of our contractor providers including our taxi and our supplemental service. That is a focus.

Rodgers said as we look at expanding the Premium Same Day Service program there are two areas that need to be clarified very succinctly. How they handle blind customers needs to be different than how they handle sighted riders. We could be standing right at the curb and cannot see if somebody pulls up and takes off. Unless somebody else with vision is around us to let us know that. There are times when I am standing there and the cab is sitting there and then takes off. When I call to say they were not there I was told that they no-loaded me. When they no-load they are supposed to call dispatch and get permission to no-load. That rarely happens. There are no checks and balances in that system. This needs to be addressed.

If I request a Premium Same Day ride, and I get the authorization for that ride because at the time that I plan it that is my need. And then something occurs, a meeting gets cancelled and I don't need that ride after all. If I need to call Metro Mobility to let them know to cancel that ride so that we don't get charged a no-show fee. That needs to be clarified. Nobody has ever told me that. There isn't any loss for me to just not show up. If that is costing Metro Mobility that can be cleared up by making that a part of the policy that a rider needs to know. And maybe even be reminded when you make the call and arrange the ride with Metro Mobility that someone tells you call back and cancel the ride. Eliminate that \$5.00 charge. The rider needs to be informed.

Fenley suggested that this be an agenda item at a future TAAC meeting. Christine should get the policy information to the TAAC committee before the meeting.

2. Metro Mobility Update

Christine Kuennen spoke to the TAAC committee. I wanted to remind everyone about the Spring Conversation at the Minneapolis Public Library tomorrow night from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. I also wanted to follow up on Dana's retirement. It comes at a time when we also said goodbye to our most senior staff member yesterday. One of our customer service reps retired yesterday. So we are down one in that department. We will be down one in the Program Administrator role. We are hiring. We are going to be short staffed. If there are some increased hold times on the customer service side it will be short lived. We have a temporary person in that role, but she is out on leave. It is a matter of balancing the work. This comes at a time when we are seeing increased ridership.

We changed the name of the premium service to Premium On Demand Service on February 1st of this year because we started accepting advanced bookings for that service. We can't call it Premium Same Day anymore. We did update it in the contract too. We will be awarding the next five-year term of the agency contract on Monday at the Transportation Committee. We will be working on starting the notice to proceed that we expect at the end of this month. That new contract will begin on October 1st of this year. There are some changes to the structure of that contract. That will be providing service to agencies and trips to those agencies that are within the ADA service only. If you want a presentation on that topic to the committee that would be appropriate this summer as well on what those changes will be and what transition work we are doing to make that transition as easy as possible.

I want to also say that speaking of no-show policy, effective April 1st of this year, just this week, we made a change to our no-show suspension policy in two ways. It used to be that a rider needed to accumulate more than three no-shows and more than four percent of his requested rides in 30 days. We have moved that to five percent. Also to suspension terms, we no longer have a 42 day suspension term, we have a 14 day and a 30 day.

The Premium Same Day was changed to Premium On Demand for customer convenience.

Jasmine asked why they did this.

Rodgers said if I know there is going to be a snow day tomorrow I will schedule a ride early so that it is in the system. The rides go out 15 minutes before the scheduled time. They start going out to the drivers to be picked up. The cab drivers are all independent contractors. Normally there are 400 to 500 cabs available for service on any given day and any given time during the regular day. But when it snows, maybe only 200 drivers will show up. That really impacts the ability to meet the demand of the rides. So we wait longer. If you have a scheduled ride in place, the chances of you getting your ride, even delayed, is greatly enhanced if you arranged for it in advance.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Blue Line

This item was not presented

2. Orange Line

David Fenley said the planning and design is done and moving along.

3. Southwest

Christopher Bates said the money for the Southwest was appropriated. We now have the money to start building. He asked Cook about the Gold Line coming from White Bear Lake.

Cook said that the Gold Line is a BRT. Instead of having just express service, the Bus Rapid Transit runs all day long.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MEMBER COMMENT

John Clark said I would like to know what kind of update you can do on the status of Uber and Lyft.

Chair Walker said we did have an update on the Metro Mobility Task Force last month. If you look in the minutes it should be there.

3. MCI Low Floor Motor Coach Demonstration

Paul Colton, MTS Fleet Manager and Aram Nikitas, Vice President of Sales for MCI, spoke to the TAAC committee. Colton said I am the fleet manager for Metropolitan Transportation Services. One of my tasks is anytime we have new technology in fleet is to come to TAAC to share that with you. To let you know what is going on. This is some pretty exciting technology that is coming to us from MCI (Motor Coach Industries). Patty had a great opportunity back in February to come take a look at it and experience the coach out at East Garage and really be able to go through it and experience the low floor features. We will go through a brief presentation from Aram Nikitas. We have a contract with MCI right now for the purchase of our express coaches through them. This is a new product that we would like to demonstrate and try in our region. We would also like to get the feedback from the TAAC.

Nikitas said Motor Coach Industries manufactures motor coaches in Winnipeg, Manitoba and North Dakota. Our parent company is New Flyer Industries. We have several facilities in Minnesota as well as Winnipeg and Alabama. The commuter coach has had great success not only with the Met Council and the subsidiaries here, but all throughout the country. For longer commute scenarios where coaches are going on the highway. It is a much more comfortable ride. One of the issues has been that ambulatory passengers have had to ride on a hydraulic lift up to about five or six feet off the ground. It is not very comfortable. When they get into the coach, the driver has to ask passengers to move, slide seats forward, to create the space for tie-downs. We have been working very diligently with a solution for this. We worked with BMW Design Works and came up with 30 different iterations of how we can solve that problem. We then went to several mobility groups both in Canada and the United States. Sought their opinions and suggestions. We came up with one solution they whole heartedly endorsed. We then honed in on it. We built a substructure in our factory. We invited them to come in. They actually experienced a space in which we were going to create and give us some great feedback. We were able to then proceed. Our owners have been wonderful in allowing us to move forward with this project. So we currently have one of our coaches outside. The original coach is at the Altoona test getting the Buy America certification. That will happen in the next month or two. We anticipate it will happen.

We looked at the dwell time that it took to get an ambulatory passenger into the coach. To close the door and stop the elements from getting into the coach. In the summer it is the heat and the winter when it is very cold outside. In the best scenario, it was eight to 10 minutes from the coach pulling up to the curb. To lifting that passenger up and doing that. It was a lot of work for the driver. It was also an inconvenience. Most importantly it put the spotlight on the passenger in the mobility device. Now the focus of the large group of people in the coach and the biggest inconvenience. That is what we heard over and over again.

The design that we have now. It is one minute. From the coach pulling up to the passenger going in. There is a Quantum automated securement system. The passenger on the mobility device can go up a ramp, pull in and go in. It is actually much better than a low floor vehicle. It is on a low floor bus. You had to maneuver through that. You are maneuvering between the front wheels and you are moving seats.

We released it to the APTA show in the fall to incredible reviews.

The ADA was founded in 1990. We were ahead of that curve. Six years prior to that we had actually developed a wheelchair mechanism in one of our coaches. We were running in the Logan Airport. We have been trying to work hard on that. This was just the next step of that.

He showed a picture of the current coach. Our mean distance between failures is very strong. It gives your passengers great comfort. They are higher. They are safer on the highways. That is what we wanted to do. We worked through the process. There were 32 possible alternatives we came up with. Essentially this is the coach. It is a high deck coach. It is a new chassis. It is one which we were building for 10 years. It is new to this configuration. We have built in an actual vestibule at the lower level. We put a safety cell around it.

It gives us a couple of things: Quicker loading and unloading of passengers into that area. They are more comfortable. They have more space as well as giving a second door for ease of loading and unloading of standard passengers. Over on one side you see a Quantum lift. That is an automated system where the

passenger can back their wheelchair into a set position, press a button, and arms come down and hold it in. Then it is simply a three-point seat belt to hold them in. Quantum is working on a forward facing position that we anticipate probably in the next 12 months. But currently that would be a more standard configuration where it will be locked in with standard tie-downs.

Our focus was to make the best product for the community. That meant that we got them involved. As an OE we understood that there was a solution to be had. We really needed the entire community to help us do that. It was exciting to see that our ownership and our management team were open to that and brought everybody in.

Imdieke Cross said even though the Quantum securement device grabs onto the wheel, you still require a tie-down system?

Nikitas said it is simply a three-point seat belt. That is a rear facing position. The arms will come down and hold on to the side wheels and they will cinch in and hold the pressure. The force is forward if there is a hard breaking. The three-point seat belt would be for any impacts that would cause the vehicle to move to the side or of an acceleration.

Colton said to lay the framework for everybody. Today's coaches are four-feet above the ground. You have to go up a stairwell at the front of the bus in order to board the bus. Or if you are in a mobility device it means that the door at the floor level of the bus opens and the lift comes up from underneath the coach. Six to 12 seats need to be moved depending on if it is one or two passengers. That loss of five seats is three benches.

The change in the coach is this: the low floor vestibule area with an additional door with a ramp and an additional stairwell. So there are all kinds of additional benefits. Not just the loading time but quickly getting in and out of downtown. You can open both doors and board passengers.

Clark asked how this system would work with light weight scooters and three-wheel scooters.

Nikitas said I believe you will find it much more stable. It is much more similar to a low floor vehicle. The deck, which you will be going to, is slightly higher than the curb. It is only two or three inches above the curb level. The ADA requires 660-pound capacity. All of our coaches meet that requirement. In today's environment, with multiple batteries and oversized chairs, there are instances where the current lifts on the market will not go much above that. They will all meet 660 but we are seeing instances where people are coming with multiple batteries and heavier packs and the vehicle cannot service that passenger. With this system once the ramp comes out, it is designed in a way that it is firmly affixed to the vehicle. So our capacity is well over 1,000 pounds. Additionally, you mentioned the stairwell. The current coaches are somewhat narrow. Limited by the farebox. That is an older design in an L shape. You go up four steps then you turn left and go up more. This is a rounded staircase. It is much wider and much more comfortable. For passengers who are not going to use that it is still a better entry into the vehicle.

The TAAC committee went outside to see the demonstration of the vehicle.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary