

Minutes of the

REGULAR MEETING OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

April 13, 2020

LOCATION: Due to COVID-19 this meeting was held electronically.

Committee Members Present: Chair Deb Barber, Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, Reva Chamblis, Molly Cummings, Christopher Ferguson, Kris Fredson, Francisco Gonzalez, Phillip Sterner, Raymond Zeran

Committee Members Absent:

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum was present when Chair Barber called the regular meeting of the Council's Transportation Committee to order at 4:03 p.m. on Monday, April 13, 2020.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Motion by Atlas-Ingebretson seconded by Chamblis to approve the agenda. Motion carried.

Aye: 9 Atlas-Ingebretson, Chamblis, Cummings, Ferguson, Fredson, Gonzalez, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 0

Motion by Fredson, seconded by Atlas-Ingebretson to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2020 and March 23, 2020 regular meeting of the Transportation Committee. Motion carried.

Aye: 9 Atlas-Ingebretson, Chamblis, Cummings, Ferguson, Fredson, Gonzalez, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 0

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION SERVICES DIRECTOR AND METRO TRANSIT GENERAL MANAGER REPORTS

Metropolitan Transportation Services Director Nick Thompson reported:

Door to Door Essential Health Care Worker service

This was announced this afternoon by the Governor and Chair Zelle. There was a need based on regional reductions of transit service and some other private services not being available. This provides 24/7 service and this is needed with health care being around the clock. Service starts today, they can call the Metro Mobility line for their city and book a ride. There will be up to two passengers on service, pick up and drop off at door, pick up within 20 minutes of scheduled time. If needed and there is capacity after this goes we will look to expand to other professions. Directly reaching out to health care providers started last Friday and we have a communication strategy in action.

Food Delivery service continues to expand

Most deliveries are from food shelves not customer orders, added trips in Dakota county today in addition to Hennepin and Ramsey, and are working with County

staff to connect with food shelves in all 7 counties. There is a shipment of masks arriving tomorrow we will provide to all contracted providers. It will be the same mask as used by Metro Transit.

Ridership

Remains stable this week with rides down 70-80% on Metro Mobility and Transit Link.

Regional Solicitation

TAB meets this week to decide on the final schedule for regional solicitation. Staff recommendation, supported by local agency staff, is to keep the May 15th deadline for application submittal. The parallel Highway Safety Improvement funding, which is administered by MnDOT will extend deadline to July 1st, which is supported by all local agencies to spread out their application work this year.

Metro Transit General Manager Wes Kooistra reported:

Update on our workforce

Protecting our riders and frontline employees – our operators, police officers, and maintenance staff – is our primary focus right now. While employee morale remains good overall, the pandemic is starting to hit even closer to home. Last Thursday - had our first employee with a confirmed case of COVID, and today we received word of a second confirmed case. Per protocols, we:

- Immediately informed staff
- Put employees with close interaction with the person on paid COVID leave
- Initiated advanced cleaning efforts

Seeing an uptick of absences

- About 350 people on sick list for bus
- 41 people on COVID leave (with 66 operators out in total)
 - We need a minimum of 70 LRT operators to cover our already-reduced service
 - Right now, we have only 75 operators

Currently, we can still cover the work because of the service reductions already in place. But we will likely need to make more service adjustments as our sick lists continue to grow.

Metro Transit Police Department is also seeing a reduction of officers available:

Down about 20 part time police officers. Even though they were part time, they worked about 36 hours/week, so this is a significant loss of force. Their primary police departments are concerned about the amount of contact they are having with transit riders due to the really challenging conditions we are seeing on our vehicles and property. This leaves us with about 16 officers at any given time to cover the whole system.

Update on ridership and operations

In general, one of the most important things we can do to protect our frontline staff is continuing to convey the message that transit is for essential travel only. And even for essential trips, people who have a viable non-transit option should not be riding transit. Thankfully, we are continuing to see low ridership. This past week – the week of April 6th to April 12th – system ridership was down 70%. However, we also continue to see a large number of biohazards on light rail. While we feel the porta-potties at rail stations have helped, we are very concerned about what our workers and other riders are being exposed to.

Other updates - masks / additional steps

Also last week, we partnered with ATU to begin distributing non-medical masks to our on-site essential employees. We started encouraging the public to cover their nose and mouth while riding. This follows the evolving guidance on masks. Initially, we were asked not to distribute our n95 masks to operators and instead donated a large number of them to the State Emergency Operations Center for healthcare workers. In general, every day we are talking about what more we can be doing for our frontline

workers who are putting their personal health on the line to continue to serve our region. This includes looking closely at what other transit agencies are doing to make sure we are on top of quickly emerging practices to protect operators and the public.

Atlas-Ingebretson asked if the Council are providing additional financial support to the drivers. Thompson said the Council has not authorized additional payments but contractors have the ability to enact raises if they want to. Zeran asked about the partnership with the ATU to obtain non-medical masks. GM Kooistra said that ATU found the vendor and the Council is paying for the masks.

BUSINESS

Consent Items:

1. There were no items on the consent agenda.

Non-Consent Items:

1. **2020-110:** Dakota County and Washington/SE Ramsey County Transit Link
Contracts 19P225/19P222

Metropolitan Transportation Services Senior Project Administrator Sheila Williams and Contracted Transit Services Manager John Harper presented this item.

Cummings asked about the timing being impacted by COVID-19. MTS Director Thompson said these contracts develop over months ahead of the RFP, and there is the ability in the long-term to be flexible renegotiating as necessary.

Motion by Cummings, seconded by Chamblis:

That the Metropolitan Council authorize the Regional Administrator to negotiate and execute the following contracts with First Transit, Inc. to provide Transit Link services from September 28, 2020 through August 31, 2025:

1. Contract 19P225 for service in Dakota County in an amount not to exceed \$8,147,378
2. Contract 19P222 for service in Washington County and SE Ramsey County in an amount not to exceed \$10,463,939

Motion carried. Hearing no objection, Chair Barber stated this item could proceed as Consent to Council.

Aye: 9 Atlas-Ingebretson, Chamblis, Cummings, Ferguson, Fredson, Gonzalez, Sterner, Zeran, Barber

Nay: 0

Absent: 0

INFORMATION

1. Highway and Transit Travel Reductions Due to COVID-19

Metropolitan Transportation Services Travel Modeling & Research Manager Jonathan Ehrlich, Data Scientist Ashley Asmus, and Analytics & Research Manager Eric Lind presented this item.

Atlas-Ingebretson voiced appreciation for this work and asked for memorialization. She asked if there could be collaboration to show the public what parks are experiencing high usage. Asmus said some groups are looking at park usage but the StreetLight has a data lag. Chamblis commented on the social distancing updates showing that Minnesota is doing well, but it would be interested to see the data disaggregated by race. Asmus said data from Cubix has recently posted data online in a dashboard that disaggregates by income level and census tracts from lower income brackets are not reducing movement as much as higher income brackets. Ehrlich added that MDH has been asking for identification of parts of the region that are hot spots, can social distance more, etc. Lind shared that there are geographic distribution of travel indicating that different patterns by race are likely.

2. 2040 Transportation Policy Plan Update Work Program

Metropolitan Transportation Services Planning & Finance Deputy Director Amy Vennewitz presented this item.

Chamblis asked about the focus of Equity, if the information will be disaggregated by income and race. Chamblis also asked about resiliency to climate change. Ehrlich said the TBI data will be disaggregated by race and income. Chamblis asked how many people of color or low-income people are participating, Ehrlich said he would report back. Vennewitz added that specific outreach was done to those communities and Ehrlich said some were slightly underrepresented. Metropolitan Transportation Services Director Thompson said regarding 252/94, it has recently been communicated that that corridor study is changing over to an environmental impact statement so that study will expand to be more comprehensive and the BRT alternative will also be studied. Barber said Network Next is continuing with prioritization on aBRTs though the roll-out may be different due to COVID-19. Atlas-Ingebretson commented on the disparities happening. Ehrlich said research methods are constantly being updated to be the most effective, but there are many factors that may go into someone not participating but the team is doing the best they can to alleviate underrepresentation. Atlas-Ingebretson said using a phone survey, especially in various languages has proven positive in her experience. Chamblis said she too has participated in surveys with high engagement from multiple communities.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Jenna Ernst
Recording Secretary