

# Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, September 2, 2015

**Committee Members Present:** Vice Chair Villavicencio, Julianne Bina, Adora Sage, Ken Rodgers, Kari Sheldon, Kim Trenary, Heidi Myhre, Bob Anderson, Margot Imdieke Cross, David Fenley and Patty Thorsen.

**Committee Members Absent:** Douglas Moody

**Committee Members Excused:** Chair Kjensmo Walker, Robert Platz and Christopher Bates.

**Council Staff Present:** Pam Steffen and Clarissa Schleichert from Metro Transit, Andrew Krueger and Alison Coleman.

**Public Present:** Rick Cardenas.

## CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Vice Chair Villavicencio called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:32 p.m. on Wednesday, September 2, 2015.

## APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Vice Chair Villavicencio made an amendment to the agenda. Rick Cardenas wants to talk about city bus issues in the public comment section.

It was moved by Imdieke Cross, seconded by Thorsen to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Anderson, seconded by Thorsen to approve the minutes of the August 5, 2015 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

## INFORMATION & BUSINESS

### 1. Metro Mobility Demographic and Ridership Trends

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. Metro Mobility staff started tracking things in 2006. They also have some historical information prior to that. Over the last decade they have seen about a 50 percent increase in Metro Mobility ridership and a corresponding increase in the operating expenses. If you look at 2006 they had 1,261,054 rides provided in that year. They are projecting that in 2015 they will have given 2,104,860 rides. In 2006 the operating budget for Metro Mobility was \$32,096,201. This year the operating budget was \$62,233,782. They have seen the ridership growth and the budget come together. Part of that is because of some advancements in technology. The cost of the ride hasn't gone up at the same rate as the ridership increases.

He referred to a recent question by Chair Walker. What are other areas of the country seeing? They went to the planning department and looked at some of the other cities that they use as peer cities, which include Atlanta GA, Austin TX, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Pittsburg and Portland. They look at the amount of people that are there and economic vitality. Most of them are seeing the same ridership increases in ADA paratransit as Metro Mobility is. Atlanta did some consolidation so they are leading the pack. They have seen an 89 percent increase in ADA ridership since 2006. Austin TX is at about 45 percent. Boston has done some consolidation. They are at 61 percent. Denver is at 52 percent. Metro Mobility is at 51½ percent.

The only places that aren't growing is Pittsburg, who has seen a decrease in ADA ridership. They are the one place in the country that puts an emphasis on conditional eligibility. For instance a person using a wheelchair here in the Twin Cities might be eligible for Metro Mobility conditionally in the winter time. They have a clear path to the bus in the summer but can't in the winter. Pittsburg would enforce that. Metro

Mobility does not. Portland Oregon is seeing under a 10 percent increase. Metro Mobility compares themselves to Portland quite often. Andrew has a call into Portland to see why they are not seeing the same increases. They are seeing the same increases in population. If you average the peer cities out, the average comes to about 50 percent and Metro Mobility is at 51½.

Metro Mobility is seeing the number of certified riders increasing. The number of applications is going up every year. As of yesterday, they had 47,102 certified customers in the Metro Mobility database. That doesn't mean that all of them have ridden. People get certified for Metro Mobility just in case they need to use it. They may or may not ever use it. They also have an increasing number of people who are certified for their lifetime. This means if you have a condition or as a symptom of your condition you are not going to improve over the course of your life, and you would never be able to ride regular service, or if there is somebody who is 75 and has Alzheimer's, they are not going to ask that person to recertify when they hit 79.

An active customer is someone who has ridden at least once since this date last year. Between August 31, 2014 and September 1, 2015, Metro Mobility has 20,273 active customers. There are 26,032 Metro Mobility customers that have a permanent certification as of yesterday.

Metro Mobility is funded by the state general fund by about 85 percent, about 10 percent comes from rider fares and the rest is federal funding.

Regarding the GoTo project, the next generation GoTo card readers in the Metro Mobility vehicles. The intention was as of last April or May. In order to save installation costs for two projects that were happening simultaneously was GoTo for Metro Mobility and the other was a vehicle area router. They were running all of the electronics through a single router on the vehicle. It is a project that Metro Transit started very successfully a year and a half or two years ago. They are the same routers they are using on their big buses. They now have wifi and everything is running through the same device. Rather than paying Verizon or AT&T or whatever the carrier is for three separate devices, you put one card on the bus and you pay just one fee. So instead of paying \$60 per bus you are paying \$20. That pilot project was very successful with both the router and the GoTo.

Once they started implementing it in the Metro Mobility fleet they started to see a 20 to 40 percent failure rate in those devices on the small buses. Some of it was power issues. Some of it was installation issues. They knew that with 20 percent of their fleet not working on any given day they could not roll GoTo out because you would have people trying to get on and not be able to pay. They think they have identified and resolved 96 percent of the issues. In October of this year they are going to try this on TransitLink because it is a smaller fleet and roll them out. If that remains stable in October and November then Metro Mobility will try a soft roll out in December and January to get GoTo out and working on the Metro Mobility buses. They need to make sure it is working on every bus every day.

Those people who have GoTo cards should hold onto them. If they need to exchange that value that is on the GoTo card for the Metro Mobility fare tickets they can contact the Metro Mobility Service Center and they will coordinate that for them.

Metro Mobility currently has 274 people who are temporarily eligible. Metro Mobility certification is determined by your current functional abilities. Somebody who slips and falls and breaks a leg or an ankle or a hip and doesn't have the ability to get regular route service is eligible for Metro Mobility while they are in rehab. They are temporarily eligible for three, six or nine months. If there is a condition that goes longer than nine months then they look at a full eligibility. There are 6,248 customers who would be conditionally eligible. This means the symptoms of their disability may fluctuate. Or there are conditions under which they could use regular route training sometimes. That might be that they have specific travel training to go to a specific destination. Or there could be an accessible path of travel. Or it could be just the temperature. There are times they can use regular route and there are times that they can't. Metro Mobility is not enforcing conditional eligibility. Under the FTA guidelines if they see that someone is conditionally eligible they have to let people know that they have a conditionally eligible certification.

If you look at the certified riders in the top 12 cities in Minnesota, Minneapolis has the most certified riders (20,912). Saint Paul comes in second (16,503) third is Bloomington (4,316), and fourth is Brooklyn Park (3,559). That is also the order of the population in each city. St. Louis Park is fifth for Metro Mobility in certified ridership but 17 in the metro area. What you want to look at when you are doing the demographic analysis is there are more certifications and more ridership in places based on age of population or based

on where senior housing is located or based on where group homes are. They are not sure but people are moving out. Woodbury is 10<sup>th</sup> on certified ridership but seventh in population. They want to do some more analysis to find out why. This is where certified riders are today.

They are looking at the census work and the Thrive information. If you look at the population in the Twin Cities for 2005 it was 2,736,575. They are projecting that it will go up to 3,674,406 by the year 2040. This is for people over the age of 18. When you look at ridership in Metro Mobility there are some certified riders under the age of 18 but they ride very infrequently.

They looked at the census data and the increase that they can expect to see in the Twin Cities area. Between 2005 and 2020 in the 18 to 34 year old category they will see a decrease of 3.2 percent. By 2040 there will be a 13.3 percent increase. What is most interesting for Metro Mobility is the age group of 65 and older. The group 65 to 74 increases 28.7 percent between 2005 and 2020. They increase 67.4 percent between 2005 and 2030 and 50.3 percent by 2040. Even more dramatic is the people age 75 and older. Between 2005 and 2040 they are looking at region wide increase of 179 percent.

Four or five years ago Metro Mobility had an ADA certified mobility specialist working with them to do travel training and certified mobility training. There was a strong interest in people who were no longer eligible for Metro Mobility. Anytime they denied someone Metro Mobility certification, they offered travel training. Over the years that they had the travel training in place there were just a handful of riders who took advantage of that training. Because of the cost they discontinued the service. Andrew is interested in bringing back travel training. He is working closely with Metro Transit to do that.

When they look at the ridership patterns and the people who are riding Metro Mobility, the largest block of people who are riding the most is the group between the ages of 35 and 64. They are taking an average of 22 trips a month on Metro Mobility. They are not the largest block of certified riders but they are the most heavy users. People in that population are most likely to be working five days a week and then doing life things and being more active. It mirrors the travel patterns for the community as a whole.

Then if you look at the Metro Mobility certifications by age that is heavily weighted to 70 and over. So someone is more likely to be certified at age 70 than at age 30. Just with some age related functions and the ability to get around. Once you get to age 65 to 67 the average number of trips per month drops off to eight. As that population ages, chances are we are going to see a lot more certifications for Metro Mobility. But as people age they tend to travel less. So their trips are going to go down.

Here is where they are thinking of bringing in a Travel Consultant. As the baby boomers move through into their 70's and 80's they traditionally have been more mobile than the previous generation. They are much more engaged in a lot of social and extracurricular activities than perhaps their parents were. So how much is that going to play a role in their ridership patterns? They are going to be at a higher income level. There are so many variables that that bubble might move with us. They may not ride 22 times a month but they may ride 15 times instead of eight. As our population increases, as the older population grows older and is mobile, they can see a significant increase in Metro Mobility ridership.

Bob Anderson said that the statistics say that 10,000 people across this country turn 65 every day. Hennepin County did a study on the aging population, especially regarding transportation. In their research they found that an older adult male lives anywhere from six years where he is depending on others to get around. With women it is 10 years that she is no longer driving and will need transportation until the end of her life.

As the numbers of riders go up the cost of the ride has remained at a lower level than inflation. Metro Mobility gets lower rates from their vendors. They are able to do things more efficiently and buy in bulk. This is the first year in the last nine years that the Metro Mobility budget has remained flat from one year to another. That was based in part to fuel but a large part to the restructuring this year with the Metro Mobility service areas. They got much better rates.

Metro Mobility has sent out a newsletter whenever there is something new that comes up. They send it out to all of the active riders, which is anybody who had ridden Metro Mobility in the last year. It is also sent out electronically. They are also part of the gov delivers system. Where if they have someone's email address they will send out a bulletin. You can sign up for it at [metro council.org](http://metro council.org) or [metromobility.org](http://metromobility.org).

## 2. Metro Mobility Monthly Statistics

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. Right now they are projecting the monthly ridership for August. Right now it is 165,595. That is up from last year. Last year there were 158,000 rides in August. If you look from January 1 through the end of August there is a 5.1 percent increase this year over last year. October, November and December tend to be the highest ridership months. Ridership increases more in these three months than the rest of the year. They are projecting that they will be 7½ to 8 percent increase this year over last year.

The one thing that Andrew was more concerned about last month was the startup in the south zone. They had a significant spike in the number of complaints primarily related to on time performance, some scheduling issues. They have been monitoring that very closely. What they look at is anything over one complaint per 5,000 rides is unacceptable to them. That has come back down. So last month in July that spiked. This month it is back to 0.86 complaints. That has been the traditional average. Part of that is that the on time performance is coming back up. Some of the mistakes that the southern contractor has been making has been alleviated. The performance is still not as good as they would like to see it but it is coming closer.

This year has been about redesigning the service to provide some efficiencies. The focus for the next year is customer service. They brought in someone who is going over past call recordings. They have created a score sheet for reservationists. They are finding that a lot of the issues the drivers are having go back to that original telephone call or reservation where the reservationist is not confirming the information that they are supposed to be confirming. They are making a big push with the contractors to say back the information to the rider before hanging up. They should say the destination address, the time and the other information related to the trip.

## 3. Metro Mobility Feedback Forum Recap & TAAC Feedback Lists from Last Meeting

Andrew Krueger spoke to the TAAC committee. There is what the ADA requires and then what the TAAC would like to recommend. He asked for a discussion on preferences on mobility. Like ramps instead of stairs and elevators. A discussion on what kind of broad recommendations would they want to recommend to the Council and the transit providers.

### Discussion

Wheelchair manufacturers now put on these tie downs but those tie downs are not to be used when the chair is occupied. It is only for when the chair is unoccupied can they use those tie downs. The tie downs are on the bottom instead of across the chair. It is not safe. Maybe they can look at this from a legislative standpoint.

Chairs are built to be home bound when in use. That is probably why the manufacturers make the tie downs the way they do.

The seat belts are for positioning, not security. The seat belts in the vehicles go across the body. The buses with the ramp have a two part seat belt. That is much safer.

The buses with a ramp have the top of the ramp too steep. When you reach the top you have to make a left turn and it is dangerous to do this. When the ramp has to stop at the ground level instead of a curb it is also too steep to do this safely.

Pam Steffen suggested that Rick Cardenas meet with her at one of the Metro Transit facilities and they can see what he is talking about regarding the ramps.

Sometimes the bus drivers have to push or pull the person in a wheelchair because of the slope on the ramp.

In as many cases as possible to put bus stops where there is a platform or create raised platforms and/or curb if needed for ramps to come down on instead of the street.

There are set standards on how steep a ramp can be.

Since there are multiple routes that stop at the bus stops, every bus could have a beacon that announces what the bus route is when it arrives at a bus stop.

Steffen said that the buses that have that announcement only make that announcement when the bus stops.

Some buses have enunciators but you cannot understand what it is saying. They need quality control. Some buses stop and the door opens but the driver doesn't say anything and there is no announcement. A blind person could not know where the door is or what bus it is.

Metro Mobility riders receive a phone call 10 minutes before the scheduled arrival time. They would like to have a call to take place 10 minutes before actual arrival time.

There is federal funding for things that go above and beyond the minimal requirements of the ADA. It is called MAP-21. Those funds have been rolled together with JARC funds. Sometimes they are a 50 percent match, sometimes they are 80/20 match where the entity only has to provide 20 percent of the funds. It is something to check into. Some cities plan for this and they are able to obtain accessible pedestrian signals and other projects. They are used for going above and beyond for extra features.

Anoka County is not covered by Metro Mobility. Part of it is covered by the Anoka County Traveler and TransitLink. The Metro Mobility service area is the federally mandated transit levy communities. That is the statute that defines the Metro Mobility service area.

Rick Cardenas asked if it was possible to add a leg to the Route 67 on Minnehaha between Fairview and Prior Avenue. Interact Theater is located at a warehouse there. There are a lot of people from the disability community that participate in the programs there.

Pam Steffen will pass this on to the service development department. She will have them get back to Cardenas. When these issues are brought to the Metro Transit staff it takes a while to make the adjustments. They make adjustments to the schedules four times a year. The changes in the schedules on August 22 are made in March. They are six months ahead of each change. Sometimes they can do mid-pick changes. It depends on if it works out or not. They have to decide if they have enough funding to make the change among other things they have to look at before a change can be made.

Andrew Krueger spoke about the Olmstead Public Forum that took place a couple of weeks ago. There were a couple of things that came out of that. The Metropolitan Council is going to change how they do public forums, especially for Metro Mobility. They are going to do some targeted mailings. They will be a targeted outreach for Metro Mobility riders. There will be a public forum coming up in October. Rather than doing a big open mike, they are going to set four to five people at tables with a staff member and get a conversation started in order to get feedback and engagement from everybody that is there. There will be someone there to record them. He asked the TAAC committee members if they had some suggestions as to where they would like to get together. Are there places they have used in the past that they would like to use or is there somewhere they would rather not go? They will do one every three to four months. They will try to do some localized sessions.

Brooklyn Park has a community center that might work.

The Saint Paul library has a room that might work.

Some high density buildings have a room that could be used. People from the area can also come to that location. Food and beverages can also be offered for the meeting.

One of the problems that they have is getting information out to people. They have tried newsletters and email. Another suggestion was to have an option on the phone system to hear the changes that are being made. Metro Mobility is doing that. It should take about 60 days. Anything that goes out in print or email from Metro Mobility will also go out on the phone system. They will say something like "press 5 for changes" and that will be updated regularly.

The other suggestion that came is that for new employees, both drivers and reservationists, should be introduced to the riders. The most important ride of the day is the one you are on right now. The most important call of the day is the call that you are on right now. The Communications Department is putting together a script to do a video for all new people coming into Metro Mobility. If anyone is interested in participating in that video (I am Metro Mobility video), let Andrew know. It will be coming up this fall. They want to do some video shooting before the snow starts falling.

Under ADA regulations if your ride is in that federally mandated service area Metro Mobility has to give you a time at the time that you call. If you are outside of the ADA service area where Metro Mobility exceeds ADA they are still going to do the ride but they have to guarantee the space for all the ADA rides first. That is why people who are outside the ADA service area are placed on standby. Every leg of the trip is considered an individual trip.

Some of the feedback came back regarding the drivers and reservationists that they need some additional training. They are also working with the department at the Metropolitan Council. They are talking about equity with their drivers. Metro Transit has been leading the way on that for over a year. Equitable does not mean equal. Metro Mobility is following suit. Metro Mobility is going to provide door through door service for everyone that is equal. But the level of service is not equal. Some people need more assistance than others. Some additional driver training is coming up.

It was suggested to create a best practices list that would exceed ADA guidelines. An example is to have a ramp and an elevator in one location to better serve the needs of those who cannot walk that far. Or arm rests on the side of benches.

The goal is to have a working document that can be used by Metro Transit.

#### **MEMBER COMMENT**

None.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:32 p.m.

Alison Coleman  
Recording Secretary