

**Minutes of the
REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, February 6, 2013

Committee Members Present: Ron Biss, John Schatzlein, Kjensmo Walker, Margot Imdieke Cross, Wayne Wittman, Darrell Paulsen, John Lund, Chad McGuire and Nichole Villavicencio.

Committee Members Absent: James Williams and Bruce Lattu.

Committee Members Excused: Heidi Myhre and Jerolyn Pofahl.

Council Staff Present: Pam Steffen, Brooke Schablin and Doug Cook from Metro Transit, Paul Colton, David Russell, Mike Kuehn and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Kari Sheldon 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 12:37 p.m. on Wednesday, February 6, 2013.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

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

It was moved by McGuire, seconded by Villavicencio to approve the minutes of the December 5, 2012 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

BUSINESS

None

INFORMATION

1. Legislative Update

Mike Kuehn spoke to the TAAC committee. It is the first time in many years that there has been a governor and both branches of the legislature are of the same party. Sixty-two percent of the legislature is new. There are 22 of the 67 Senators that are new and 42 of the 134 members of the House are new. To date, Council staff have been reaching out to the new members and educating them about the importance of transit. They made presentations to the Transportation Committees. First an overview of transit operations and second they gave an overview of the Governor's budget recommendations late this morning.

The first deadline to get policy bills out of committee is March 15. The second committee deadline where all the policy bills have to be out of all of the policy committees in both houses is March 22. The Legislature should take a recess of eight or nine days for Easter and Passover time. The deadline to get the finance bills out of the divisions is April 19. They will bring the bills to the floors for their debates and amendment process on the floor. They will go into the conference committee about May 1. Then the Legislature is scheduled constitutionally to adjourn on May 20.

The Legislature is still in the gathering of information phase. Two weeks ago the Governor released his budget. He adopted one of the recommendations of a committee he set up that met last year called the Transportation Finance Advisory Committee. One of the recommendations they made was an increase in a metro wide sales tax of ½ percent for transit purposes. The Governor's recommendation reduced that to ¼ percent but it maintains that. He also purposes to lower the percentage of the sales tax but also to extend that to many other taxable potential areas mostly for service types of things.

Last biennium the Council received about \$130 million from the general fund. The Governor is proposing that the general fund money for transit be reduced by about \$46.8 million. The new sales tax is expected to generate over the two years about \$250 million for transit. This would be used to make up the reduction of the general fund dollars. It would be used to make up what was an operating deficiency going into the next biennium of \$18 million. Some of that would be for the operation starting up of the Central Corridor and for other operational costs. There was a deficit for light rail and regular bus.

Also to start building out the system. Using this other money for capital purposes that would fund the state match for the Southwest Light Rail. When you subtract the \$7 million the state has committed so far it would be \$118 million. That would take care of the funding for capital and operations. That ¼ percent would be about \$250 million a year. When you add that to what is expected to be the growth in the current ¼ percent sales tax that is controlled by CTIB. That is a voluntary sales tax that five counties in the metro area are participating in with the exception of Scott and Carver counties. That brings in the next two years about \$348 million in new dollars for transit purposes in the metro area.

One of the remaining portions of transit that would be funded with the general fund would be Metro Mobility. The governor's office feels that because this is a mandated service under federal ADA requirements that the service be there. It is continued to be an obligation directly of the state's budget process and not relying on some other taxes.

The Transportation Finance Advisory Committee, who recommended the sales tax increase also made other recommendations of how to raise money for highways. Including some increases in the gas tax. The governor's budget recommendations did not make those recommendations formally to the Legislature. The highway interests have documented about a \$4 billion need beyond what is now generated by revenue to meet the next 20 years of highway needs. They are going to ask for more money as well.

The budget committees will now begin to work on this process and ask for more details.

The Council has a couple of agency bills that deal with transportation issues. One is the annual request for regional bonding authorization to buy buses and transit vehicles and other capital projects that are identified in the Transportation Capital Plan. They are requesting \$35.8 million. They increase the request about four percent a year. They got approval today from the governor's office to release the bill. It should be introduced soon.

There is also a bill that would increase the penalties for assaults on transit vehicle operators. It would make physical assaults potentially a felony. Right now they are gross misdemeanors. This will be discussed in the Judiciary Finance Committee.

The new federal program is called MAP-21. This is the new name they gave the two-year Transportation Reauthorization Bill. Most of the federal money is for roads and highways.

High speed rail has run into a couple of issues. One is that Governor Walker of Wisconsin is not a proponent of high speed rail. Originally they wanted to build high speed rail from Chicago to Milwaukee and then to Madison. That was the first phase. But the governor did not do the steps at a state level that was necessary. There were different alignments that were considered. One was to go through Rochester into the Twin Cities. One alignment would go from Madison on I-90 into Rochester. The other alignment

would go from Madison through Eau Claire and I-94 into the Twin Cities. This could facilitate the Gateway Corridor transportation.

Many metro areas have between ½ cent and one cent sales tax that goes for transit in those regions, both for operations and development. One of the things that the governor proposes is to allow transit expansion.

2. Metro Mobility News and Forecast

Paul Colton spoke to the TAAC committee. From 2007 to 2008 there was a four percent increase in ridership. In 2009 it dropped to just under one percent. One of the reasons for that was the fare increase. Every time there is a fare increase there is a flattening of the Metro Mobility ridership from about a year to 18 months. In October of 2008 the fares were increased in the fixed route and Metro Mobility. In 2010 it rebounded back to the three to five percent level. Then in 2011 it was 6.68 percent. The ridership increase in 2012 was nine percent. Metro Mobility has new people entering the system at higher rates. The overall percentage increase is just under 30 percent over that period of time. So a snapshot of 2012 is they finished with 1.73 million rides. There are roughly 22,000 active riders. They are operating 384 vehicles throughout the system. There are 92 communities that make up the transit taxing district. They utilize six contractors to accomplish that on Metro Mobility.

Metro Mobility is public transportation for persons with disabilities. As part of the ADA it is not a medical transportation service as defined by the State of Minnesota. It is not a social service program offered by other agencies. It is part of the Metropolitan Council's public transit service.

The state says: "You will provide service within the 2006 taxing district as defined by the Legislature in March of that year." That is what they must provide according to the state. The state does not provide any guidelines as to how to provide that service. The feds say you have to have at least ¾ of a mile around the local fixed route network.

The state does not have any specific rules for hours of service. Metro Mobility established a base set of hours for the region. The feds say you have to be comparable to the fixed route local service. Metro Mobility follows the federal rules where it exceeds the base hours. Then they have the base hours to meet the state expectations. The state has no restrictions or guidance on the certification process. The federal government does. It is that Metro Mobility service should be available for folks who are unable to use fixed route. So that is the one that they apply for all persons that use Metro Mobility.

The state has specified through legislation that Metro Mobility is door through door. The feds do not. They say based on capacity and scheduling. Metro Mobility leans more to the state side. They need to fit every ride into the schedule. Under the federal laws they cannot have any capacity restrictions in the ADA area. Trip limits, waiting lists, untimely pick-ups (beyond a 30 minute pick-up) and excessive ride times (greater than 90 minutes). The feds say you can have reservations up to 14 days in advance. Metro Mobility has a four day advance reservations.

For scheduling, they can look at anything up to one hour before or after the requested pick-up. If you book a ride at 10:00 they can look at 9:00 or 11:00 to fit that ride in. The length of the ride cannot be unreasonable. The fares cannot be more than two times the local fixed route fare. Metro Mobility is under that. There is no restriction on trip purpose. A passenger can go anywhere within the service area as long as it has an address.

In 2012 the subsidy on Metro Mobility is between \$23.00 and \$24.00 per ride. It is a pre-scheduled ride. They average a little over two rides per hour. They expanded the sedan fleet from 20 to 40 in 2010 at the start of the new contracts. They continue to monitor the effectiveness of that.

Andy Streasick spoke to the TAAC committee. In order to be eligible for Metro Mobility a person needs to be incapable of taking the fixed route city bus at least some of the time because of the symptoms of disability. Under federal law you can apply that at least some of the time to every single ride that they want to take on paratransit. They don't do that now. So if a person is ever under any circumstances incapable of taking Metro Transit because of the symptoms of his or her disability they can always take any ride they want to within the service hours on Metro Mobility. They do not do conditional eligibility at this time. He discussed what conditional eligibility would mean to a Metro Mobility rider.

3. New Agenda and Minutes Format

The new format is ADA accessible. Chad McGuire will use his screen reader to see if it is accessible.

V. Member Comment

Kjensmo Walker informed the committee that the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota is having a Research Seminar on Accessibility Now and in the Future on Tuesday, February 19.

Nicole Villavicencio informed the committee about MNCCD's Tuesday's at the Capitol. It is in the basement of the State Office Building. There is a legislative update and they give help to the participants to write his/her story. Then they can go meet with their legislator and/or drop off their story.

VI. Public Comment

Pam Steffen spoke to the TAAC committee about the Metro Transit website. She showed how to find the Interchange and how it is going to look when it is done. She showed how to create an account and manage a GoTo card. They have a new Writers Almanac blog. It is under News and Events. Metro Transit is on Twitter and Facebook.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary