

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

August 20, 2019

LET IT BE REMEMBERED, the Public Transit Advisory Committee in and for the County of Collier, having conducted business herein, met on this date at 3:00 P.M. in REGULAR SESSION at Administrative Building “F”, Third Floor, Collier County Government Complex Naples, Florida with the following members present:

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman: Mr. John DiMarco
Vice-Chairman: Mr. Arthur Dobberstein
Mr. Cliff Donenfeld
Ms. Sonja Lee Samek
Mr. Harold Weeks

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. James Caton - Excused

ALSO PRESENT:

Ms. Michelle Arnold, Director, Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement
Mr. Omar DeLeon, Public Transit Manager
Mr. Zachary Karto, Senior Planner, Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement
Mr. Braian Morales, General Manager, MV Transportation, Inc.
Ms. Liz Soriano, Project Manager, Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement

I. Call to Order

Mr. DiMarco called the meeting to order at 3:00 P.M.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken, and a quorum established.

III. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Dobberstein suggested the addition to the agenda of a discussion of the recent Naples Daily News article which featured Collier Public Transit (Reports and Presentations, b.)

Mr. Donnenfeld entered a motion to approve the August 20, 2019 meeting agenda, with the noted addition. Mr. Dobberstein seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

a. July 16, 2019

Mr. Donnenfeld entered a motion to approve the July 16, 2019 meeting minutes. Mr. Dobberstein seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

V. Committee Action

a. Park and Ride Study Scope – Mr. Zach Karto

The Collier County Public Transit and Neighborhood Enhancement (PTNE) Division, in coordination with the Collier Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) has developed a scope of work for a Park-and-Ride Study. A Park-and-Ride Study was undertaken in 2005, which confirmed favorable conditions within the County at that time, however, due to the approximately 2% yearly population growth and associated increase in traffic congestion, this study is being done to reflect current conditions and will define standardized criteria for locating, operating, and maintaining potential park-and-ride sites within the County.

Mr. Donnenfeld requested clarification as to whether the parking lot at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church had previously been designated as a park-and-ride location as a condition for approval of expansion at that location. Ms. Arnold stated an understanding of expanded use of that property in terms of childcare, fitness center, and eating facility, and will investigate whether a park-and-ride designation was a condition of approval for expansion at that location. Mr. Dobberstein suggested that Staff explore the possibility of similar existing locations within the County. Ms. Arnold noted that the scope will be a comprehensive study, which will define criteria/methodology for identification and consideration of appropriate vacant parcels, as well as for the establishment of joint ventures at existing County wide locations.

The Park-and-Ride concept will provide greater access for the public and allow for the integration of various modes of transportation, including pedestrian, bicycles, paratransit, carpool/vanpool, and airport service. Mr. Weeks inquired as to the number and areas of locations presently under consideration for Park-and-Ride.

Ms. Arnold stated that no guidelines have been given and the entire County will be studied within the framework of the Transit system and current needs. Ms. Samek inquired as to how long the study will take to complete. Mr. DeLeon noted that the study would take approximately 12 months to complete, however Transit will seek to utilize existing MPO contracts in order to help facilitate the procurement process. Ms. Arnold stated that the Advisory Committee will be updated throughout the process in terms of timeline, costs, etc.

Mr. Weeks entered a motion to endorse the Park and Ride Study Scope as presented. Mr. Donnenfeld seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.

**b. Transportation Development Plan and Comprehensive Operating Analysis
Scope – Mr. Omar DeLeon**

A scope of the Transit Development Plan (TDP) Major Update and Comprehensive Operating Analysis (COA) was shared with the Advisory Committee. As a requirement for State Block Grant Funding for system operations, a TDP Major Update (ten-year planning document) must be submitted to the Florida Department of Transportation for approval every five years, in addition to an annual update/progress report for all other years. Specifically, the TDP details strategies to achieve stated goals and objectives, as well as identifies potential capital and operating projects. This process will include meetings with stakeholders, community feedback, as well as the identification of the role of Transit in future development in the county.

Mr. Dobberstein noted that the TDP annual update is conducted internally by Transit staff, but a consultant is utilized for the Major Update and inquired if that is the State norm. Ms. Arnold replied that the assistance of a consultant is sought for the Major Update due to the size and complexity of the project; however, funding for these studies has no impact on Transit operating funds, as the MPO receives planning dollars from the State through the Unified Planning Work Program.

Mr. Donnenfeld noted that budget and service goals based upon the approximate 2% annual growth of the County is misleading and insufficient. Mr. Dobberstein concurred and suggested the study highlight the higher percentage of financial contribution to Public Transportation done by other counties with similar demographics.

Mr. DeLeon stated that the COA is a thorough, but short-term analysis of the current fixed route system, which will be done concurrently with the TDP Major Update as a cost savings measure. The COA will seek to identify strengths and weaknesses of operations, with data used for business planning to improve productivity, as well as service efficiency in meeting consumer needs. Current operating budgets will be evaluated, identifying efficiency of budget expenditures, current areas of coverage, potential growth and modification of routes, route performance measures throughout the day, as well as potential realignments of the system to match county growth and development.

Mr. Dobberstein recommended the studies reference and build upon historical data. Ms. Arnold concurred that in addition to historical data review, innovative “out of the box” solutions would also be sought in order to incorporate new strategies and ideas to attract riders. For example, the consultant will be asked to explore ways to incorporate forms of bridging transportation to get riders to fixed route stops, such as from within a large housing community. The scope of the study will not be limited to the unincorporated portions of the county, but will also include exploring transportation needs and solutions to areas such as City of Naples, Marco Island, etc. Further, the proposals put forth within the TDP will be shared with these local municipalities. Mr. Dobberstein suggested incorporating a short ride, perhaps from Naples City Hall, for City Council members to experience the CAT bus for themselves, as part of the TDP discussion with them.

Mr. Dobberstein commented upon the impact of land use policies in relationship to other plans, recommending working to ensure there is a designated area in front of gated communities or independent elderly/assisted living communities for bus pull-off, as well as a parking area for autos, bicycles, mopeds, or golf carts.

Mr. Donnenfeld commented upon the buses traveling from Immokalee, which are standing room only, and inquired why this issue could not be addressed with greater bus frequency. Ms. Arnold concurred there is an identified need for increased frequency during high peak service hours on the Immokalee bus route, however noted the lack of available funding to provide the extra service. Mr. Donnenfeld suggested the larger picture of increasing ridership may be assisted by addressing areas of obvious need, such as the Immokalee routes. Mr. Dobberstein noted a possible “tag” bus solution of one bus following another, as well as purchasing larger diesel buses, which are able to better address capacity issues on high service routes and offer better depreciation value. Mr. DeLeon noted a current fleet of buses ranging from 30 feet to 40 feet, assigned as appropriate; for example, the larger buses for high capacity routes and the smaller buses for use in the City of Naples. Buses may be reassigned to different routes throughout the day, depending upon capacity/need, as well as are evaluated for need during times of bus replacement. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to whether the new Transfer Center in Immokalee will be able to accommodate buses of all sizes and/or multiple buses. Ms. Arnold confirmed that each bay of the new Transfer Center was designed to accommodate the largest size bus. Ms. Arnold stated that all service standards will be evaluated within the COA study, with appropriate recommendations made.

Mr. Dobberstein further recommended that the route overlay strategy suggested by Mr. John Jenkins, former Advisory Committee member, be shared with the consultant for review as well. Mr. DeLeon confirmed that the maps created by Mr. Jenkins had been imported into Transit software to better illustrate the demographics of the route design, which the consultant may analyze for efficiency as part of the COA study.

Mr. Dobberstein inquired whether a member of the Advisory Committee may be involved in the selection of the consultant.

Mr. DeLeon was uncertain if this would be allowable, however will pursue an answer through Procurement. Ms. Arnold stated that once bids for the consultant are solicited and proposals are received back, the short list of individuals will be shared with Advisory Committee members.

Ms. Arnold stated that an endorsement was being sought from the Advisory Committee for the scope of services for the TDP and COA as presented.

Mr. Donnenfeld entered a motion to endorse the scope of services for the Transit Development Plan Major Update and Comprehensive Operating Analysis as presented. Ms. Samek seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was approved.

VI. Reports and Presentations

a. Bus Shelters Update – Ms. Liz Soriano

Ms. Soriano addressed the Advisory Committee to provide an update on recently constructed, in progress, and pending bus stop improvements, including working to improve ADA accessibility. Ms. Soriano highlighted historical improvements made to bus stops over the years, as well as two current projects; one located at Airport Road and Hibiscus Road, working with the Shell gas station to modify the site to construct an easement. This project is scheduled to be completed September 9, 2019. The second project is on Fleischman Boulevard, currently out for bids and scheduled for BCC presentation on September 24, 2019 to award the construction contract to Coastal Concrete. This project includes four sites; two sites with bus pull-outs and double shelters, one site with a shelter, and the fourth site will be ADA improved with the addition of a bench. One site also involves replacement of an existing force main, done with approval from the City of Naples. Mr. DiMarco inquired as to whether improvements include the addition of solar lighting to the bus shelters. Solar lighting was noted to be included in all new bus shelter construction, as well as some existing shelters being retrofitted with solar lighting. Mr. DiMarco noted that well lit shelters would also improve visibility and Transit awareness within the community.

On August 15, 2019, Coastal Concrete was given notice to proceed with construction of two bus shelters on US 41north, located south of Wiggins Pass Road, one on the west side of the road and one on the east side. This location is part of the Link Connection partnership with LeeTran, who funded 50% of this project. Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to the general cost of construction of a bus shelter. Ms. Soriano noted unique challenges presented at each site, sometimes requiring modification such as swale work, however the general cost is 50K+.

Mr. DiMarco inquired as to the intention for bus shelters on route 13, specifically at Bayshore Boulevard and US 41, which is currently standing room only at the Gulf Gate Plaza bus stop, as well as the bus stop on route 14 downtown, across from the CVS at US 41 and 3rd Avenue S. Mr. DeLeon stated these two sites will be investigated to determine if they are on the list for improvement or if issues there require further attention.

Mr. DeLeon noted that improvements planned by the City of Naples along 8th Street also included input by Transit regarding improvements to bus stop sites, including the addition of bus stop pads. Evaluation by Transit Staff will subsequently be done at these locations to determine whether shelters will also need to be added. The City of Naples has been actively working with Transit on redevelopment projects at existing sites within city limits.

Improvements to bus stop signs were also highlighted, which will now include route numbers that stop at that location. Secondary signs are also planned which will feature information regarding mobile ticketing, as well as texting instructions to obtain the bus arrival time at that location. Mr. DiMarco inquired as to whether these signs will feature tactical sign language. Mr. DeLeon noted this feature will be explored for possible inclusion on the new signs.

Transit has also been working with other entities to incorporate upgraded bus stop facilities. For example, FDOT constructed four bus pads as part of a sidewalk improvement project along US 41 N, between Pine Ridge Road and Vanderbilt Beach Road, which will allow Transit to follow up with the construction of shelters at a later date.

Johnson Engineering has been awarded the design for the construction of 9 bus shelters, as well as for ADA improvements at locations throughout the rural areas of Golden Gate Estates and the City of Immokalee. The ADA compliance improvements involve the placement of a 5' x 8' boarding/alighting pad, allowing individuals with mobility devices to board the bus without issues. Further, the new shelter design incorporates the location of a mobility device within the frontage of the shelter. Funding for the project is being done through three FDOT grants. The design will be done in three phases due to the size of the project, with all design work completed by the end of 2019. Construction is anticipated to begin early 2020, with project completion in summer 2020.

Mr. Donnenfeld inquired as to whether ridership determines the locations for shelter placement. Ms. Arnold confirmed that locations selected for bus shelters have been identified to have high ridership.

Mr. Weeks inquired as to whether assistance in the construction of shelters has been received from the Boy Scouts of America, who had previously addressed the Advisory Committee in this regard. Ms. Arnold stated that attempts to reach the local Eagle Scouts Chapter have so far been unsuccessful, but the Transit Division remains open to working with them.

b. Naples Daily News Article Discussion

A group discussion was had regarding the recent article in the Naples Daily News which featured the Collier Transit Division. Ms. Arnold stated the article provided good exposure for the Transit Division and had received positive feedback in general.

Mr. DiMarco noted that the title of the article was somewhat negative, but that as a participant in the article, he had attempted to highlight the necessity for the program in Collier County, despite the national decline in ridership. Mr. Dobberstein stated that he had shared the Washington Post article detailing the national decline in ridership with the author of the article to illustrate that the decline in ridership numbers in Collier County was not unique. Overall, Ms. Arnold stated the Naples News article was comprehensive, providing information about Collier Transit, as well as national trends, and it provided a positive closing statement. Ms. Arnold restated the need to be proactive in looking ahead to provide good options to residents in view of continued population growth, future limitations in roadway expansion, and traffic congestion.

VII. Member Comments

Ms. Arnold noted that the next large project involves the Immokalee Transfer Station, which is currently undergoing the conditional use approval process. Staff is also seeking the ability to operate a food truck at that location as an accessory use in order to avoid having to build a brick and mortar facility for that purpose.

Mr. Dobberstein inquired as to whether any progress has been made for the modification of conditional use at the Radio Road Transfer Station to include out of town buses. Mr. DeLeon stated that this is being considered for the next fiscal year, to budget funding to hire a consultant to assist with that process. Mr. Weeks suggested consideration of adding the out of town buses conditional use to the Immokalee Transfer Station project as well, since it is currently underway.

VIII. Public Comments

There were no comments from members of the public.

IX. Next Meeting Date – TBD

X. Adjournment

There being no further business for the good of the County, the meeting was adjourned by order of the Chair.

Public Transit Advisory Committee

John DiMarco, Chairman

These minutes approved by the Committee on _____ as presented ___ or as amended___.