

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
March 19, 2019

The Transportation Advisory Committee met on March 19, 2019 at 12:00 pm in the Mass Transit Conference Room. The following were present:

Attendees:

Lawrence Campbell	Ralph Price, Chairman
Alexis Ehrhardt, Vice-Chairperson	Earl Reynolds, Deputy City Manager
Anna Kautzman	Marc Adelman, Transportation Services Director
Judy Keesee	Brooks Jones, Mass Transit Division Director
John Moody	Lisa Bivens, Senior Administrative Assistant

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

Alexis Ehrhardt moved that the minutes of the December 5, 2018 meeting be amended on page 4 to indicate; it is anticipated that these buses will be delivered in January 2019. Larry Campbell seconded the motion and all members present were in favor and the motion passed.

Review of Financial and Monthly Ridership Reports

Marc Adelman reviewed the monthly ridership and financial status report data with the Committee. He identified that total operating revenue is under budget by 8 percent or \$21,882 year to date. This is primarily due to the decrease in fixed route ridership. Tokens sold this fiscal year have increased by 15 percent year to date. Operating expenses are also under budget by 2.6 percent or \$21,434. Overtime expense is comparable to the FY2017 level of \$61,000 for the year. Last year overtime charges were over budget by \$38,077. Total operating expenses are under budget by 1.1 percent or \$18,283. The operating deficit is over budget by \$3,299. Based on this information, the transit system's local match contribution for all operations is over budget for FY19 by \$20,444. He added that a significant item that will influence the local match for FY19 is the receipt of additional Federal operating assistance for FY17 since the transit system's eligibility for aid exceeded the FY17 federal allocation by \$76,548 and these funds were received this year. Factoring in the additional federal aid, Adelman projected that the local match for FY19 could be under budget by approximately \$50,000.

The ridership report reflects that the fixed route ridership has decreased by two percent year to date. The Reserve A Ride ridership has increased four percent, likewise the Handivan ridership has increased twenty-nine percent year to date. The reason for this increase is in part due to the cap placed on reservations for the Reserve A Ride and Senior service and disabled seniors are using the Handivan service if their trip request is rejected to ride as a senior. Recently, due to the driver shortage, the cap was reduced from 300 to 250 trips per day.

Employment Activity Update

Adelman updated the Committee on efforts to address the employment situation and very high turnover. He identified that year to date, 15 total staff members have been lost. Currently, the transit system employs 26 full time drivers and 11 part time drivers. Since July 2018, 10 new full time drivers were hired however of those hired, five persons no longer work for Mass Transit. Discussion continued. Of significance, the regional bus service requires a minimum of 33 full-time drivers or additional part-time drivers to be able to provide the service. Adelman said the transit system would not be able to provide the service if employment conditions are the same this time next year.

One of the things the transit system is pursuing to try to improve driver flexibility, support service expansion and reduce overtime is to increase the level of cross training of reservation-based drivers who would also operate fixed route buses. Last week, Brooks Jones, a supervisor and Marc Adelman met with all drivers that maintain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) who presently provide reservation-based service. Unfortunately, the majority of these drivers were resistant to this potential change. The differences in the fixed route and demand response services were discussed. A CDL is not required to operate the reservation-based service and the vast majority of all drivers being interviewed and hired do not have a CDL, which is required for fixed route service. Adelman said that we need to cross train drivers and it may be necessary to break up fixed-route runs into three or four hour periods to keep from losing more drivers. Discussion continued.

Update on Demonstration Grant and Regional Bus Service

Adelman said the Demonstration grant to provide regional bus service was submitted on February 1, 2019. Of great significance, the grant provides funding for an additional 24 hours of daily service, which will require at least three additional full time drivers. Adelman said with the inability to fill the vacant positions he is concerned that it will be difficult to meet project goals for the regional bus service. Adelman said his focus at a recent meeting with the Tobacco Commission staff and representatives from the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center was to discuss the ability to carry forward surplus funds to next year since this project is likely to be delayed due to staffing issues. Staff from the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center indicated there is flexibility with funds and the startup of the project. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation also indicated that the timetable could be adjusted to change the start and end dates of the project, if needed.

The Committee reviewed the finalized service schedules for both Halifax and Pittsylvania Counties. Of significance, the Halifax schedule was significantly altered requiring a third bus to be placed in service each day. The third bus that was supposed to be a spare bus will be required to complete service for Halifax County. This allows the schedule to support the shift times of the major employers that will be served. Adelman added that with current staff levels there is a minimal chance that this service will start in the late summer of this year. He mentioned that the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center was made aware of staffing challenges a few years ago during planning meetings that could impact the transit system's ability to offer service. Discussion continued.

Proposed Revision to Bus Advertising Policy

Adelman reviewed proposed changes to the Bus Advertising Policy with the Committee. This revision would allow the transit system to use buses to promote transit services. The current policy does not allow for this type of advertisement. An example of a bus ad to promote the Mainline Trolley service was provided for review. The bus advertising company that is under contract to coordinate the placement and production of ads has approved this policy change to allow the transit system to use four buses to promote service objectives. ***A motion was made by Alexis Ehrhardt and seconded by Anna Kautzman to change the wording in the Advertising Policy as proposed. All members in attendance were in favor of the motion.***

Adelman said he and staff from the Economic Development office prepared a draft bus wrap advertisement to promote the Mainline Trolley. He plans to have a local company that uses a drone to complete aerial photography to generate high resolution shots for the proposed bus wrap. It was discussed to include the trolley in the image and for the text of the ad to be in a different color. Adelman said that a revised draft will be sent to the Committee for approval.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.