

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
September 25, 2019

The Transportation Advisory Committee met on September 25, 2019 at 12:00 pm in the Mass Transit Conference Room. The following were present:

Attendees:

Lawrence Campbell	Earl Reynolds, Deputy City Manager
Alexis Ehrhardt, Vice-Chairperson	Betty Adams, Southern VA Higher Education Ctr.
Anna Kautzman	Steven Hennessee, VA Dept. of Rail and Public Transp.
Judy Keesee	Marc Adelman, Transportation Services Director
John Moody	Brooks Jones, Mass Transit Division Director
Ralph Price, Chairperson	Lisa Bivens, Senior Administrative Assistant

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

Larry Campbell moved that the minutes of the June 26, 2019 be accepted as presented. Judy Keesee seconded the motion, 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 discussed actual expenses incurred for various budget line items and clarified factors that influenced insurance and overtime expense. Prior to FY18, the expense associated with insurance claims related to the transit system were allocated to all city divisions. However, since FY 2018 transit claims are now charged in full to the mass transit division's insurance budget line item. This procedural change contributed greatly to the significant increase in insurance expense for FY19. In addition, overtime expense was greatly impacted during FY19 due to employee turnover that included 28 employee separations. The transit system maintains less than 50 different full time and part-time positions. Overtime expense increased significantly to \$61,198 for FY19 compared to \$38,077 in FY18.

Total operating revenue for FY19 was also under budget by 8.6 percent or \$35,550 and operating expenses were over budget by 3.6 percent or \$91,939. Overtime expense and the increased allocation amount for general liability insurance expense contributed greatly to a higher than anticipated operating deficit level, which exceeded the FY19 federal operating aid allocation by \$37,931. An application can be made next spring to request additional federal aid to cover the shortfall. The transit system's local match contribution for operations is over budget for FY19 by \$29,895.

Review of Financial and Monthly Ridership Reports (continued)

The ridership report reflects that fixed route ridership activity decreased slightly by one percent year to date or 537 trips. Passenger activity for the Mainline Trolley service decreased forty-two percent for FY19 compared to FY18. The Reserve A Ride ridership decreased by one percent due to the service cap that was put in place in March 2019 that reduced the number of reservations that can be scheduled from 300 to 250. Handivan ridership increased twelve percent through June 2019 by 646 trips. Total reservation based ridership decreased by two percent and service hours decreased two percent.

Mainline Trolley Bus Service

Marc Adelman indicated that passenger demand for the Mainline Trolley service has been challenged since the trolley is also available to the public through the Reserve A Ride service operation that provides flexible point-to-point service at the same time. The Mainline trolley service is currently offered Friday and Saturday nights for a six-hour period from 6 pm until midnight.

The Mainline trolley ridership was reviewed with the Committee. From May 2019 through August 2019, the number of Mainline trolley trips completed per hour ranged from .50 trips per hour to 1.48 trips per hour. The other fixed routes provided by Danville Transit maintained 9.75 to 12.40 paid trips per hour during the same timeframe. Marc Adelman also identified other factors that might affect passenger demand for the trolley service such as plentiful available parking options in the River District and limited point-to-point access along the route path.

Marc Adelman recommended to the Committee to complete a promotion in November to improve awareness of the Mainline Trolley service and increase ridership by offering free service to the public. He added that a brochure could be developed and circulated to passengers, businesses and residential locations to advertise the promotion.

Alexis Ehrhardt commented that the low ridership of the Mainline trolley service was discussed about a year ago and questioned whether an effort should be made to offer a promotion. Adelman said he recommended previously that the service should be reviewed over a three-year window and the service is currently into the third year. He commented that he would like to exhaust all opportunities to bolster ridership before a decision would be made concerning the future of the service.

After discussion, a motion was made John Moody and seconded by Judy Keesee to approve moving forward with offering the Mainline Trolley promotion in November as discussed. All members in attendance were in favor of the motion.

Employment Activity Update and Drivers Wage Rate Information

Adelman provided updated employment activity information to the Committee for their review. Currently, the transit system employs twenty-six full time drivers and nine part-time drivers. He commented that in order to restore the reservation-based operations service level (300 versus 250 daily reservations) two to three additional full time drivers should be employed. Due to the driver shortage, performance indicators for the Reserve A Ride service including ridership, revenue miles and revenue hours have decreased significantly through August 2019 compared to the same timeframe last fiscal year. It was also discussed that performance data changes could eventually impact future state funding levels, which was confirmed by Steven Hennessee of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. In addition, to restore reservation based service levels and initiate the Regional bus service to Pittsylvania and Halifax counties an additional seven full time drivers, one new full time dispatcher and one new part-time dispatcher would be needed. However, according to the Human Resources office, no new driver applications have been received.

Marc Adelman identified that the City of Danville will be completing a pay study for all city positions by January 2020. Adelman provided wage rate comparison information for bus drivers for Danville Public Schools Transportation, Martinsville, Virginia's transit system and the Greater Roanoke Valley/City of Roanoke disabled transportation system (RADAR). Danville's starting wage rates for full time drivers is currently lower than the other transportation providers. Discussion continued.

Update on FY19 and FY20 Capital Projects

Marc Adelman updated the Committee on the status of current capital projects. The FY2019 parking lot expansion project for parking small buses is scheduled to begin in October. In regards to the FY2020 projects, the five replacement buses have been ordered by Sonny Merryman and could be delivered as early as December of this year. These buses can be retrofitted to use propane; however, Adelman prefers that the buses use only gas to contain operating cost. A purchase order has been issued to install the second propane dispenser unit at 522 Spring Street. In addition, a purchase order has also been issued to install the fuel management software at the Spring Street propane refueling station location that will link it to the city's fuel management system. Adelman discussed with the Committee conceptual plan options and issues for installing the propane station canopy this fiscal year.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:01 pm.