

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
December 5, 2017

The Transportation Advisory Committee met on December 5, 2017 at 12:00 pm in the Mass Transit Conference Room. The following were present:

Attendees:

Alexis Ehrhardt, Chairperson	Leon E. Towarnicki, City Manager Martinsville
Ralph Price, Vice-Chairperson	Chad Martin, Vice-Mayor Martinsville
John Moody	Marc Adelman, Transportation Services Director
Wade Key	Brooks Jones, Mass Transit Division Director
Earl Reynolds	Lisa Bivens, Senior Administrative Assistant
Betty Adams, Executive Director, Southern Virginia Higher Ed. Ctr.	Joe Bonanno, Regional Planner, West Piedmont Planning District Commission
Jim Halasz, Halifax County Administrator	

Approval of Minutes

John Moody moved that the minutes of the August 18, 2017 meeting be accepted as presented and Ralph Price seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Election of Officers

A motion was made by John Moody to nominate Ralph Price to serve as chairperson of the Transportation Committee for FY18. Alexis Ehrhardt seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed. John Moody nominated Alexis Ehrhardt to serve as vice-chairperson. Ralph Price seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Regional Transportation Initiative

Marc Adelman provided input from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation regarding the regional transportation initiative. The state indicated that the proposed reservation based arrangement to initiate service should not be implemented to avoid passenger confusion. The state also clarified that the Demonstration grant funding allocations are based on the number of grant applications received and funding levels could possibly be less than eighty percent of the net operating costs.

The state informed Adelman that Demonstration grant funds should only be used for leasing vehicles but confirmed that federal and state capital aid could subsidize the purchase of expansion vehicles for the regional bus service at 90%. In addition, the state confirmed that state operating aid would not be available for year two of the operation.

Regional Transportation Initiative (Continued)

State operating aid eligibility is based on prior year expenses and the grant application for year 2 would be submitted on February 1, 2019 when the operation would have completed only 7 months of service for the period July 2019 through January 2020. The state also confirmed that a Demonstration grant should not overlap into multiple fiscal years.

Due to the state's responses, Adelman said that the Tobacco Commission grant application that was originally prepared by the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center to fund the local cost of the service was modified and the budget was increased to offset the possible elimination of the state operating aid for year two and three of the service. A capital grant application will be submitted to the state in February 2018 to purchase three buses to provide the regional bus service contingent upon City Council's approval. In addition, a Demonstration grant application for operating assistance will be submitted in February 2019 for the period July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 if the state approves funding for the needed expansion buses. The state also clarified that if for any reason the Demonstration grant was not awarded that the expansion buses could be used by Danville Transit to replace buses in the fleet.

In November 2017 during a City Council Work Session members agreed to consider making application for federal and state funding to support the regional bus service at an upcoming Business meeting. Since the Work Session meeting, the City of Martinsville expressed interest to learn more about the regional bus service project. As a result, City Council delayed their consideration of a resolution to make application for regional bus funding until more information was received from Martinsville. Adelman indicated that it is his understanding that Martinsville would prefer for the counties to move forward with making application since they would first like to complete a feasibility study to evaluate the need for service from Martinsville to Danville. Leon Towarnicki, Martinsville City Manager confirmed that Adelman's statement concerning the City of Martinsville's interest was correct. Discussion continued.

A detailed line item operating budget for the regional bus service was provided for review to the Committee. Adelman said the budget was developed to assist the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center with addressing questions from the Tobacco Commission regarding the grant application. Adelman identified an updated timetable that addressed requirements to initiate regional bus service:

- January 2018 – Danville City Council will vote during a Business meeting to consider a resolution to make application for transit funding to support regional bus service
- February 2018 – A grant application would be submitted for capital funding only to acquire three expansion buses (estimated delivery - February 2019)
- February 2019 – A Demonstration grant application would be submitted to finance up to 80% of the net operating cost of service for FY19-20
- July/August 2019 – Subject to grant approvals, regional bus service would begin

If funding is approved to purchase expansion vehicles during FY2019 then the counties would then focus on preparing a detailed service plan.

Mainline Trolley Service Update

Adelman said that since the Mainline Trolley service started in August 2017 ridership activity for service that is provided on the first Friday of the month has fallen off significantly. Likewise, customer use of the service on Saturdays has not been strong with only two trips per hour completed on a regular basis. Passenger on/off counts and boarding and disembarking locations related to the service were discussed with the Committee. Currently, service is provided on the first Friday of the month from 4 pm to 11 pm and every Saturday from 10 am to 10 pm. Adelman said that a meeting is scheduled next Monday with the Mainline trolley service planning committee to discuss input received from the Transportation Advisory Committee regarding the status of the operation.

Adelman suggested to give the service at least three years to develop and to meet agreed upon performance goals. He also mentioned that he feels 5 to 6 completed trips per hour would be a conservative objective to try to achieve. In addition, Adelman said that he thinks more advertising funds should be included in the FY2019 operating budget to promote the service. Recent marketing efforts including radio advertising were discussed with the Committee.

Brooks Jones suggested possibly altering the route to include other areas in the city like the movie theatre and other restaurants outside the River District. After discussion, it was decided to give the Mainline Trolley committee an opportunity to make suggestions regarding proposed service changes and to revisit related issues when more ridership data is available to review.

Review of Financial and Monthly Ridership Reports

Marc Adelman reviewed the monthly ridership and financial status report data through October 2017 with the Committee. During FY2017 four additional full time drivers were hired which helped to decrease overtime expense by 57% compared to the same time period last fiscal year. This reduction in overtime expense was accomplished even though service hours increased this fiscal year due to startup of the Averett Cougar Express and the Mainline Trolley service. Of significance, fixed route ridership is continuing to decline but the Reserve A Ride ridership is remaining constant at a high level. A service cap on processed Reserve A Ride reservations has been in place since January 2017 and service requests are rejected regularly Wednesday through Friday. Currently the system is at budget.

Highlights from the ridership reports show that fixed route ridership has decreased by 11% year to date. Adelman said he still believes that the decrease is directly related to reduced fuel prices, which impacts passenger demand. Handivan ridership has decreased 15.2% year to date. Reserve A Ridership has decreased by .1% year this fiscal year due in part to the cap placed on reservations in January 2017. The new contract service with Averett University which began on August 23rd shows that ridership averages 4 -5 trips per hour on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and less than two trips per hour on Tuesday and Thursday. Of significance, Reserve A Ride and Senior ridership has increased approximately 50% over the past five years. Adelman said that he feels that capping senior ridership activity should also be considered due to the continued growth of the service and the reduction in the Aging grant funds. He mentioned that he will discuss this issue with the senior staff at Parks and Recreation.

FY18-19 Budget Review

Adelman said that since October 2012 a New Freedom grant application has been submitted annually to support the senior transportation merger. This grant provided additional federal and state funding to subsidize the operation significantly. While federal grant funding is currently available to reduce the local contribution requirement for the senior transportation merger, Adelman was informed after the FY18 budget was submitted that state operating aid would not be available. To offset this loss in state aid, senior transportation service would need to be reduced by more than fifty percent. Discussion continued.

Adelman said that staff is currently at the beginning stages of preparing the budget for FY 2019. The following items are significant issues for the budget submission;

- Fund four (4) additional full time drivers positions to further contain overtime
- Increase the advertising budget from \$2000 to \$10,000 to promote the Mainline Trolley Service
- Decrease anticipated State operating aid by 1.2%
- Reduce the budget amount for cash fares by \$22,000 due to fixed route ridership activity and the actual contracted service level for Averett University

FY18-19 Capital Projects Review

Additional information was shared with the Committee concerning potential capital projects to be considered for FY2019;

- Replace four (4) buses - \$560,000
- Replace AC recharging unit for vehicles - \$6000
- Replace hydraulic lift for large buses - \$30,000
- Expand parking lot with automatic gate to improve safety - \$124,000

Adelman said this could be the last year that capital projects are funded at 96% with federal and state capital aid due to state funding issues. The parking lot expansion project was discussed in further detail.

It was decided to meet in January 2018 to discuss and approve the FY2019 budget and grant applications that will be submitted by the February 1st deadline.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:14 pm.