

TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES

Date and Time: The Transit Commission met on Thursday, March 19, 2015 at 1:30 P.M. at Metro Ride Office, 420 Plumer St., Wausau, WI.

Members Present: Keene Winters, Sherri Abitz, Robert Mielke and Keith Draheim

Members Excused: Txanj Hue Yang

Also Present: Greg Seubert, Mary Foss

In accordance with Chapter 19, Wisconsin Statutes, notice of this meeting was posted and sent to the Wausau Daily Herald in the proper manner. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Abitz after noting a quorum was present.

Public Comment on Matters Appearing on the Agenda

Sharon Thompson stated that her daughter is a bus rider and has been employed in the Wausau area for 18 years. She is very independent and likes to do things on her own. Without transit service in Weston, she is unable to afford transportation alternatives to get to her job. She asked for more positive thinking throughout the community.

Kathy Zoern stated that people living in Weston are getting rides to the Eagles Nest Restaurant on Grand Avenue so they can catch the bus to get to their jobs in Wausau. She is concerned that disabled individuals are unable to get to doctor appointments.

Approval of Minutes

Winters moved to approve the minutes of the November 20, 2014 meeting. Mielke seconded. Motion carried.

Financial Report

Seubert presented a Revenue & Expense Summary for the period ending December 31, 2014. Expenses are at 95.6% of budget, while revenues are at 94.6%. Paratransit expenses are at 88%. The Wheels-to-Work program is included in the summary because we apply for the funds on their behalf. They finished the year about \$100,000 under budget. This is their first year they are using this funding source. They will continue to be in our financial statements moving forward. Since expenses were under budget, we are able to flex a higher percentage of state and federal funding, so long as the combined total does not exceed 60%. The additional state and federal funds made up for the shortfall in passenger revenue. No action was taken.

2014 Ridership Report

Seubert stated that we finished 2014 with a decline in bus ridership of about 2¼% compared to 2013. Revenue was also down by about 2.8%. School tripper routes are our most productive routes. They operate at peak times of the day when school is in session. Route K was the least productive route. Ridership by fare category was as follows: students - 45%; elderly/disabled - 28%; and adults - 25%.

Seubert presented a graph of bus ridership history. He stated that transit service cuts and fare increases have historically caused ridership to decline. In 2009, a bus route was eliminated. In 2012, two routes and Saturday service were eliminated; Monday through Friday service hours were shortened; and fares were increased significantly. In 2013, the restoration of a modified Route K resulted in a slight increase in ridership.

Abitz expressed concern about increased parking and vehicle congestion around Wausau schools. She asked if anyone has approached Metro Ride to request additional service for the schools. Seubert said that he has observed the problem, but has received no requests for additional service. He stated that without student ridership, we would have a very different transit system. Students comprise nearly 50% of total ridership. Seubert stated that is reluctant to promote additional service to the District, due to federal school bus regulations. He noted we don't have enough buses right now to provide any additional service.

Paratransit service was under budget in 2014 - at about 88%. Total trips were also under budget - at about 65%. Paratransit trips were provided in a timely fashion 99.9% of the time. Seubert provided an explanation for several ridership declines appearing on a graph of paratransit ridership history. In 2000, service levels were reduced from door-through-door to door-to-door. In 2003, service levels were reduced again from door-to-door to curb-to-curb.

No action was taken.

Vehicle Lift Procurement

Seubert included the replacement of vehicle lifts (hoists) in the 2015 Metro Ride capital plan. Existing lifts consist of two in-ground, telescoping pillars, one at each end of the bus. New models being considered are similar, but they require a shallower pit beneath the floor. The shallower pit may prevent corrosion problems caused by high ground water on the Metro Ride property. The project was included in the City of Wausau's 2015 budget. Seubert requested that the project be referred to the Board of Public Works.

Winters moved to refer the vehicle lift project to the Board of Public Works. Mielke seconded. Motion carried.

Legislative Update

Seubert stated that the Secretary of Transportation included several positive transit funding initiatives in his 2015-2017 budget proposal. They include a 2% increase in operating assistance; a new \$30 million capital program; and a new \$20.2 million fund to restore and expand transit services.

The Governor's budget proposal did not incorporate the Secretary's proposals. Instead, he proposed to fully fund a 4% increase in operating assistance for 2015, which had been adopted by the legislature in the last budget. Transit would continue to be funded from the segregated transportation fund. It is anticipated that the State budget will be finalized by June 1.

At the federal level, the current surface transportation act will expire on May 31, 2015. Congress will likely pass a short-term extension through the end of 2015. If a longer term bill is not adopted by then, they will probably pass yet another extension that will extend through the 2016 general election.

Request for Saturday Transit Service

The Wausau City Clerk received a citizen request for the restoration of Saturday transit services. Seubert stated that the same individual made the request in-person at a Metro Ride public hearing last fall.

Mielke stated that the budget is more challenging every year and restoring service would be very difficult.

Abitz asked if our fleet size was sufficient to provide Saturday service. Seubert stated that we don't have enough buses at peak times during the week, but it would not be a problem on Saturday.

Winters asked if it would be possible to run only the most productive routes on Saturday. Seubert said that existing route productivity may not be helpful in determining which routes to operate on Saturday, because passenger trip purpose is different on Saturday. There are no school trips on Saturday and fewer work trips. Seubert stated that service area coverage is very important even if some routes are less productive. He noted that people can only get where they want to go if we serve both their origin and destination and some of the origins are on less productive routes.

Seubert suggested that he calculate the cost of Saturday service in the development of his preliminary 2016 budget. No action was taken.

Transit Planning

Seubert stated that gaps in transit service have worsened since the loss of Route K and people continue to wonder aloud where Metro Ride will go from here. Both the United Way and Naomi have invited him to meetings to discuss the issue, so he thought the Transit Commission may want to discuss it.

Winters stated that he has proposed that Marathon County take ownership of Metro Ride and that the City of Wausau lease transit services from the County. The arrangement would enable the expansion of transit services across local boundaries. Additionally, the County already has the ability to collect sales tax, which could be a source of revenue for transit services. The proposal would essentially create a regional transit authority.

Abitz stated that there is a need for expanded services in the Wausau area. She cited the lack of service to Rib Mountain, Globe University and Rasmussen College as examples.

Seubert stated that travel needs are regional, but Metro Ride services are restricted by municipal boundaries. He said that we have access to considerable funding resources, but a portion of the cost must be paid locally. He said that the biggest challenge to Winter's proposal may gaining support from the county board. He thinks the County is likely to see increased demand for transportation as the population ages and Metro Ride may be able to access additional funds for their program.

Winters indicated that Wausau's portion of the urban area population is declining according to the 2010 census, yet we are the only municipality with transit service.

Abitz indicated that she will work with the County to see if they can come up with something.

The next regular meeting date is April 16, 2015, at 1:30 p.m. at Metro Ride.

Mielke moved to adjourn the meeting. Winters seconded. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abitz, Chairperson

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