

TRANSIT COMMISSION MINUTES

Date and Time: The Transit Commission met on Thursday, June 18, 2015 at 1:30 P.M. at Metro Ride Office, 420 Plumer St., Wausau, WI.

Members Present: Sherri Abitz, Keene Winters and Robert Mielke

Members Excused: Txanj Hue Yang and Keith Draheim

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

Kathy Zoern stated that she had the opportunity to accompany a group of Hmong and Spanish members on the bus. She said that one of the group members asked why there are no signs in Spanish or Hmong. She asked that we consider the addition of multilingual signs to make the system more user-friendly. Also, she commented that if the Rothschild/Schofield proposal becomes a reality, she would like it to be for a longer term than previous contracts.

Approval of Minutes

Mielke moved to approve the minutes of the March 19, 2015 meeting. Winters seconded. Motion carried.

Financial Report

Seubert presented a Revenue & Expense Summary for the period ending May 31, 2015. With 42% of the budget year completed, both revenues and expenses are at about 37% of budget. He noted that revenue is down more than he predicted, but it only covers about 15% of total expenses.

WisDOT announced that our state/federal operating assistance allocation for 2015 would be set at 55.11% of expense. Seubert had assumed 55.25% in his budget.

Congress has only authorized transportation expenditures through a portion of the calendar year, so WisDOT had to estimate the federal amount and it is subject to change.

Winters requested a specialty report containing trend data, such as cost per ride over a 5 year period. He would like a breakdown of the revenue categories to see how it has changed. Winters would like to know how the City's contribution per rider has changed as the contribution from other sources has changed.

Abitz asked Tracy Pagryzinski if she has noticed an increase in Hmong or Hispanic riders. Pagryzinski stated that she has seen an increase in Hispanic ridership, but no difference in Hmong ridership. She said that elderly Hmong ride the bus with the assistance of younger family members.

Seubert mentioned that Marathon County Transportation Coordination committee is considering the creation of a Transit Ambassador Program. The program would seek volunteers, such as individuals or service groups, to train seniors to ride the bus. No action was taken.

2016 Capital Improvement Plan

Seubert presented the 2016 Metro Ride Capital Improvement Plan, which was submitted to the City of Wausau for consideration. He noted that some projects in the exhibit did not meet the City's minimum threshold of \$25,000, so they would have to be funded through the operating budget. Funds for used buses were previously allocated by the City, but adequate used buses have not yet been found. The largest project in the plan is the replacement of fare collection equipment, which is near the end of its design life. Seubert said that he hopes to find newer technologies that will reduce the cost of the project. He cited the use of web-based software used by the Metro Ride paratransit program as an example of a fairly inexpensive

solution for booking rides. That same software can be used with mobile devices such as iPads to collect real-time information and eliminate the re-entry of data gathered by the driver. No action was taken.

Transit Service Inquiry – Village of Rothschild

Seubert received a request from the Village of Rothschild for cost estimates for a bus route that would serve Rothschild and the City of Schofield. Seubert said that he planned to prepare a route and schedule proposal after submitting his initial budget in July.

Winters stated that we need to find out what Schofield's intentions are before we spend staff time drawing up proposals and making cost calculations. He suggested that representatives from Schofield and Rothschild appear at the next transit commission meeting to make their request and they should be required to commit to a 3 to 5 year contract.

Seubert stated that he would call Schofield to find out if they are interested, because without them, a route for Rothschild alone would not be possible. He noted that in the past we had sufficient resources available to serve them, but we would now have to acquire a bus and hire a driver. Without a longer term commitment, acquiring those resources may not be in the best interest of the City of Wausau.

Winters asked where Marathon County is with Metro Ride. He stated that current ridership is 25% below our ten-year average and the system will not exist past 2020 unless the County helps out.

Dave Mack stated that the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is assisting Metro Ride with planning resources, such as development of the transit improvement plan every five years. He said that the availability of city bus service in the urban area is important, but additional communities need to join the service to make it work. He suggested that Metropolitan Planning Commission, which is comprised of members from all municipalities in the urban area, begin a discussion about the transit service needs in the urban area.

Seubert stated that cost per rider has remained fairly stable, but system usability has diminished because of service cuts. Fewer hours of service are provided on fewer days and passengers have to walk further to get to a bus stop. Winters suggest that riders and groups such as NAOMI talk to the County and the United Way about getting all communities involved. No action was taken.

Criteria for Extension of Transit Services

Seubert stated that this item was already addressed in the previous discussion. He said he would place the service request item on the next transit commission agenda and invite representatives from Rothschild and Schofield to attend.

Winters asked Mack if the extension of transit services could be placed on a County agenda. Mack suggested that the Metropolitan Planning Commission may be the appropriate body to consider transit services in the urban area. He noted that Mayor Tipple is currently the chairperson. He agreed to place it on the agenda for the next regular meeting, which would be held on July 14, 2015. Winters urged Naomi and the United Way to provide input at the meeting.

Seubert added that in the future, he would prefer that the quality of Metro Ride services not be compromised in order to serve surrounding municipalities. He said that we had agreed to provide a very limited level of service for Schofield/Rothschild/Weston in order to be a good neighbor. He had warned at the time that the complex, intermittent schedule would confuse riders and may cause them to be stranded as a result. Metro Ride received 75-100 calls daily for that route alone and low ridership and customer complaints were cited as reasons to eliminate the service. No Action was taken.

Google Transit

Google transit is an offshoot of Google maps. It is an internet-based planning tool for transit riders. Transit systems can join Google Transit by providing information to Google in a specific format known as General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS). The Marathon County Conservation, planning and zoning Department (CPZ) is currently collecting and formatting Metro Ride system information, such as GPS locations for bus

stops, service hours, etc. They are also taking pictures of each bus stop location and they have produced a map showing all stops.

Customers will eventually be able to enter their origin and destination and Google Transit will provide them route and schedule information for their trip. Customers will also be able to click on bus stop locations to see a picture of the location.

Mack stated that translating the information gathered into GTFS format has been more time consuming than expected. Seubert stated that updating the information on an ongoing basis will be necessary to maintain its accuracy. No action was taken.

Transit Director's Report

Seubert stated that our Paratransit Coordinator resigned recently and our Utility Worker retired. Additionally, another member of the administrative staff was on medical leave for 6 weeks. He stated that the remaining staff did a great job handling the extra workload. He is mindful of the need for succession planning as he considers restructuring the staff. He is considering the recruitment of a second Operations Supervisor, rather than a Paratransit Coordinator.

Ridership is down 8% compared to the same period last year, mostly due to the elimination of service to Rothschild, Schofield and Weston. Seubert noted that the overall impact on system efficiency may be positive, because Route K was our least productive route.

We have not yet found used buses to purchase. We remain in contact with the transit system in St. Louis and several systems in Minnesota. The City set aside funding previously for this purpose, but the authorizing resolution listed Milwaukee County Transit as the vehicle seller. Since that purchase fell through, Seubert said he would go back to the finance committee to see if another resolution is necessary to purchase elsewhere.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abitz, Chairperson

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