



Minutes

RTA Joint Partners Coordination and Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium

February 28, 2017

Kathleen Donodeo of Howard County Transportation served as Chairperson of the meeting. Stephanie Dittman, the RTA, Office Manager of Corporation, served as the Secretary and recorded the meeting proceedings.

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 1:07pm.

Review/Approval of January 31, 2017 Joint Partners and Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium Meeting Minutes (Kathleen Donodeo)

The January 31, 2017 Joint Partners and Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium Meeting Minutes were approved, with the addition of Ramond Robinson to the attendee list.

January Financial Report (Mark Pritchard)

Mark Pritchard reviewed the financial report focusing on expenses. For the year RTA was under budget by \$119,758. Fare Recovery and Advertising were under budget by \$132,000 showing a YTD over budget expense of \$12,991.00. Diesel fuel was also under budget, however the cost is increasing at the pumps. Maintenance YTD costs are under \$37,000. This amount represents the YTD cost for personnel and regular maintenance as under budget however, OT (over time) is over budget.

The YTD total expense for Administrative was under budget by \$119,000. Overall the numbers represent that financially RTA is in a better position this year than last.

Further discussion and explanations were held regarding overall maintenance costs. Mark stating the line item for batteries is contributing to the overall under budget amount of \$17,000. Tire expense was also under budget at \$21,000.

Two paid holidays occurred in January and are reflected under regular maintenance. Union employees received their PTO (paid time off) buyouts. Drivers are eligible for PTO of up to 80 hours to be paid in January and not carried over. The expense for PTO was \$41,000 for just the drivers. The FY18 budget will show \$50,000 as a more accurate pay out number.

D'Andrea Walker inquired as to why the cost of parts are down and how this is reflected in the higher cost of OT. Andrew Johnson replied, the OT in January reflected paid double time and a half for any employee working the Martin Luther King holiday. In addition, a maintenance technician is out of the

country, the International Eldorado's required fuel systems to be redone and there was extra training in January for drivers. All of these types of issues result in OT.

John Spencer commented that his greatest concern is fare recovery. Mark replied that nationally, transit ridership is down significantly in the 10% range. Contributing factors to the decline in ridership are the lower cost of gasoline and better economic times, pushing people into automobile driving. Unfortunately, RTA is part of the trend aggravated by unreliable service due to the condition of the fleet.

Kathleen Donodeo mentioned that KFH, consultant for the Transit Development Plan (TDP), has the first two drafts completed from the public comments and survey. Half of the comments tabulated were regarding unreliable service with buses breaking down and always late resulting in riders not able to get to work on time.

Ramond Robinson continued the discussion stating the duration of a trip forces the rider to look for alternative transportation. Ramond asked for the specifics contributing to the decline in ridership. Ron Skotz said, the biggest factor contributing to the decline was CMRT restructuring the Connect A Ride (CAR) route system. The routing system was restructured to balance the books on state grants, not for the rider. Maynard Nash and Andrew Johnson are currently working on the A and the G route to provide a more accurate headway. The TDP will provide the opportunity to refocus routes with efficiency. Kathleen Donodeo stated two cities (Houston and Seattle) have not experienced decreases in ridership and they have restructured all their routes. A TDP meeting will be held on March 8th regarding restructuring options.

Alan Cornell asked, are there any other jurisdictions besides Howard County contributing to the funding to purchase new buses? Kathleen said Howard County was the only jurisdiction to put in a budget request for funding for their portion of the purchase of 11 buses. Without the funding support from the other jurisdictions, Howard County will provide the funding to purchase 7 buses. For FY18, all of the jurisdictions will need to request funding for their portion of the cost to purchase 11 buses. The total number of vehicles needed for daily pullout is 33.

D'Andrea Walker asked if the RTA is purchasing a new on-time performance software system to replace Next Bus because the financial report shows Next Bus \$30,000.00 down? Mark shared that a new purchase is being made with Route Match.

Statistical Snapshot Report (Mark Pritchard)

Paratransit ridership continues to increase each month. Mark feels this is due in part to being a more reliable service with good operators, nice vehicles and the convenience of a pick up and drop off location. Alan Cornell inquired as to the cost to the customer for paratransit service and stated, why would a Rider pay \$2.00 to wait at a bus stop when they could pay \$2.50? Kathleen Donodeo said that the current age requirement is 60 years old to qualify however the TDP may show that the qualification age may need to rise in order to keep the service budgetarily sustainable. Efforts need to be made to rein in the high cost of operating the paratransit service. Previous discussions regarding a change to the current fare structure, included the option to stagger an increase to rider cost for paratransit service to \$4.00 each way.

GM Report/Staff Updates (Mark Pritchard)

Operator recruitment and retention for January illustrated a higher number of departures. Recruitment resulted in four new hires, however a total of seven existing operators either left or were terminated.

Andrew Johnson said that an average of 4.7 operators are leaving each month. There are currently 100 operators employed earning a starting pay rate of \$17.00 per hour for fixed route and \$16.00 per hour for paratransit. Fixed route service is experiencing a shortage of operators. The shortage of available operators results in overtime pay for the existing operators. To operate the fixed route service requires 115 full time operators. There is a staffing shortage of 14 operators currently. It is difficult to find operators to meet the hiring requirements. Although negotiated wages at RTA have been currently increased to \$17.00 an hour for a driver to start, that is not competitive with many of the the other transit providers in the region that start at closer to \$19.00 an hour. Mark Pritchard commented that a shortage of CDL drivers is a nationwide trend. Andrew Johnson answered questions explaining that RTA is paying to provide training to the operators at the cost of \$3,000 per operator. Unlike MTA, RTA does not assist the operator in obtaining their license. This training cost of \$400,000.00 for operators that do not remain employed with RTA is an extreme expense. For the FY18 budget, a line item has been added for front line training.

Allan Cornell offered his support for a campaign to identify, train and retain good drivers along with competitive wages.

Kathleen Donodeo shared the survey distributed for the TDP received very specific operator complaints and compliments. Providing the operators names confirms the relationships that are established between the operators with the riders is very strong. KFH will provide two technical drafts and present an update to the plan at an upcoming meeting.

Mark continued that to ensure the safety of the riders additional training was provided to the operators on the seven different types of wheelchair securement, resulting in fewer securement issues. There have not been any injuries or lawsuits for securing problems.

Sue Poole has begun an advertising and marketing campaign to combat the problems of ridership and CDL driver hiring. Locally targeted advertising will be provided by Baltimore Sun's five area papers and digitally on the web. A system map will be displayed in a light box at Columbia Mall. Laurel Mall and Arundel Mills Mall will be contacted regarding advertising of the system map also. Sue is looking at local movie theatres to provide public service announcements (PSAs) to lead people to the RTA website for information on services. J Davis suggested contacting the old Greenbelt movie theatres that allow PSAs. The cost for the advertising is included in the Advertising budget. Special funding is available for Fort Meade shuttle advertising. Advertising of the shuttle will need to be heavily targeted to announce Route 504, Fort Meade shuttle from Piney Orchard to Savage.

Route Match Program (Kathleen Donodeo)

The current system, Next Bus, has been in place for a long time. The hardware for the system is failing with no available funding for equipment replacement. The company was brought out to review the current system and does not provide the support required to maintain the system. Paratransit is

currently utilizing Route Match with tablets available in each vehicle. The fixed route service will be moving to Route Match also and will include tablets in each of the buses. This service will provide the rider with up to date information on the arrival of a bus reducing calls coming in to the customer service department. The target date for the system available in fixed route is March/April. Upon completion of a test period, the announcement of the Route Match system with the Route Shout APP will be provided to the public.

Action Item: Installation of Next Bus on fixed route buses, release of new system information to the public.

Howard County Bus Stop Improvement Plan (Kathleen Donodeo)

Howard County has an available budget of \$800,000 for bus stop improvements. An allocated \$100,000 will be needed to complete the RTA signage at all bus stops. Two contractors will be working on updating the shelters with the highest priority shelters to be completed first. Several shelters need to be refurbished with updated panels and new paint to reflect the RTA branding. Assessment of the shelters has revealed 15 shelters that are the highest rider stops or in the greatest need of repairs.

Cement pads will be installed to provide riders with a dry surface to stand avoiding standing in the mud. Short sidewalks, up to twenty feet will also be installed. Three sided stone walls will provide comfort to sit on without the need for the installation of a bench. The knee high stone walls will be built into existing hills. The breakdown of the cost for the shelters and pads are not currently available and will be provided at a future meeting.

Howard County plans to request funding in its FY19 budget to repair seventy additional bus shelters.

Action Item: Completion of the RTA signage at all bus stops, updating panels and painting of top priority shelters, installation of cement pads, short walkways and stone walls at several bus stops. Seventy additional shelters to be updated in FY19.

FY18 Budget Update (Kathleen Donodeo)

On March 6th voting will take place by the Howard County Council regarding the request for the lease purchase of seven buses. If approved the purchase lease will be signed on March 8th. The bus manufacturer is holding an order slot with the buses to be delivered in December of 2017. The annual cost is approximately \$40,000 per bus. The cost for the FY18 buses will be \$350,000.00 per bus, plus interest. Ron Skotz said that an RFP was put out by Ocean City for buses with 27 options and the procurement completed. The FY18 budget has been agreed upon and been provided to the jurisdictions with an allocation method.

Jai Saunders has a draft budget in the system and has been asked to further decrease the budget. The budget is at a point where a commitment for jurisdictional funding is needed.

Discussion was provided on the numbers for the total budget request and the allocated cost to be provided by each jurisdiction. Clive Graham provided a spreadsheet of the latest version of the budget to be included with a spreadsheet handout provided at the meeting by Ron Skotz with further

breakdowns for each jurisdiction. Jai Saunders explained that the base provided by Ron Skotz backs up the base previously provided by Clive Graham.

Questions were raised on where the respective county executives are on the budget. Kathleen Donodeo said that Clive Graham will need to provide the answer to this questions. It is a matter of getting the MOU signed. D’Andrea Walker commented that the variable for signing the MOU is the cost of the service. Kathleen stated, if the service currently provided to Prince George’s County needs to be cut for FY18, beginning July 1st, notice needs to be provided from Prince George’s County regarding the change in operating the service.

Adjournment: 3:25pm

Attendees:

John Spencer	Anne Arundel County
Ramond Robinson	Anne Arundel County
Kathleen Donodeo	Howard County Office of Transportation
Jai Saunders	Howard County Office of Transportation
Judith “J” Davis	Prince Georges County
Anthony Foster	Prince George’s County Office of Transportation
D’Andrea Walker	Prince George’s County Office of Transportation
Mark Pritchard	General Manager, RTA
Ron Skotz	CAO, RTA
Andrew Johnson	Assistant General Manager, RTA
Sue Poole	Communications and Marketing, RTA
Suzanne Brown	Finance Manager, RTA
Victor Jimenez	RTA
Maynard Nash	RTA
Stephanie Dittman	RTA