



Policy on Fare or Service Changes Affecting Regional Transportation Agency Service Area

The following policy sets forth the decision-making process, including public input requirements, for approving a fare or service change affecting the Regional Transportation Agency service area.

Preamble

1. Federal and State of Maryland regulations require that a Locally Operated Transit System (LOTS) have a policy for approval of fare or service changes affecting a transit system, including public comment.
2. Howard County has Memorandums of Understanding with Anne Arundel County, the City of Laurel, and Prince George's County (collectively, the Partners), to inter-alia: 1) establish a bus system in Central Maryland known as the Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland (RTA) and 2) create a Central Maryland Transit and Mobility Commission (Commission) to establish bylaws and operating procedures.
3. The Partners are in the process of creating the Commission.
4. Howard County manages an agreement with First Transit, Inc., (Contractor) to oversee Contractor's administration, operations, and maintenance of the RTA.
5. The Memorandums of Understanding acknowledge and agree that Howard County serves as contract manager until such time as an authority or other State-legislated organization is established. Until such changes occur, Howard County is the legal authority for approving fare or service changes affecting the RTA.

Policy

In the event the RTA seeks a change in fares or a major change in service, the Partners agree to: 1) provide opportunity for public comment on the proposed change, 2) make recommendations to Howard County on changes, including input from each jurisdiction's chief elected official, and, 3) accept Howard County's decision based on public and the Partner jurisdictions' comments on the change.

This policy will apply to a proposed change in fares or to a major change in service. A major change in service is defined as a change that impacts 25 percent or more of vehicle revenue hours of any route or demand-responsive service, including the deletion of a route or major alteration of a portion thereof. Minor changes in fares, such as temporary free fares are excluded from this policy.

Such fare and service changes as may be proposed shall not be implemented until after a public hearing and consideration of any comments received.

RTA staff shall provide support to the Partners for the public input process such as noticing, advertising, meeting scheduling, and accommodations for persons with special needs.

Procedures

The purpose of these procedures is to ensure adequate and reasonable opportunities for public input with regard to proposed changes.

Public Hearing

1. A minimum of one public hearing shall be conducted on the proposed change or changes. This shall be a regional public hearing, allowing input from the public from all Partner jurisdictions.
2. The Commission shall hold the hearing. The hearing shall be held in a regionally convenient location, accessible via transit. If a hearing is required prior to the creation of the Commission (see Preamble), the Howard County Public Transportation Board shall hold the hearing.
3. The Commission may hold additional public hearings in the Partner jurisdictions if warranted. Such hearings shall be held in timely manner so as to not unduly affect the decision-making process on the proposed change.
4. Notwithstanding the number of public hearings, each Partner jurisdiction's chief elected official shall convey their recommendation on the proposed change to Howard County.

Notice

1. Public notice of the proposed change shall be given at least 30 days in advance of the hearing. Such notices shall be distributed and/or posted as follows:
 - to the Howard, Anne Arundel, and Prince George's County, and Laurel public libraries for posting at branches in the service area
 - to any connecting transit services that may be impacted by the proposed changes (e.g., MTA, WMATA) for posting on its affected routes
 - to local and state elected officials whose districts that would be affected
 - to electronic and print media, in the form of press releases
 - on all transit vehicles operated by the RTA
 - on the RTA web site
 - on Partner jurisdictions' websites, as feasible
 - to each jurisdiction's public information officer or equivalent for dissemination to other interested parties
2. Public notices shall contain the following information:
 - a description of the proposed change in sufficient detail to understand the change, including, if applicable, the area(s) and route(s) to be affected
 - date and /or place where more details on the proposed change can be viewed
 - the proposed effective date of the change (s)
 - a telephone contact number to ask questions or register comments
 - e-mail and street addresses to which to submit questions and comments
 - the date, time, and location of the planned public hearing
 - information regarding how disabled persons may get information and register comments, including a text telephone (TTY) line

3. Howard County will notify the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) concurrently with announcing proposed fare changes or major service reductions to the public.
4. Partner jurisdictions shall make every effort to ensure they adhere to all notice requirements, but the lack of a specific notification shall not be cause to unreasonably delay the decision-making process on the proposed change.

Comments

1. A log of all comments shall be kept, made available to the public on the RTA website, and presented at the public hearing.
2. If public comment is received which would significantly affect the proposed change, the comment period may be extended for an additional period in order to solicit further public input. Notification of the extension will also be advertised and posted.

Recommendation

Following the hearing, the entity holding the hearing shall consider all public comments therein made, and transmit its recommendation on the proposed change to the County Executive of Howard County.

The recommendations shall be posted on the RTA website.

Decision

The County Executive of Howard County will make a final decision on the proposed service and/or fare changes. Before making a decision, the Executive shall consider all recommendations from the Partner Jurisdictions and the public.

The County Executive shall not approve a service or fare change that exclusively affects one or more jurisdictions other than Howard County without the concurrence of the affected jurisdiction(s)' chief elected official.



Lonnie R. Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer

7/13/16
Date