



## MINUTES

### RTA Joint Partners Coordination and Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium

July 25, 2017

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

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 1:05pm.

#### **Review/Approval of June 27, 2017 Joint Partners and Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium Meeting Minutes (Clive Graham)**

The June 27, 2017 Joint Partners and Central Maryland Transportation & Mobility Consortium Meeting Minutes were approved.

#### **June 2017 Financial Report (Suzanne Brown)**

Suzanne Brown reviewed the financial reports with an explanation for preliminary final year end numbers for FY17; two vendor/service contractor expenses are in dispute.

Discussion ensued with Mark Pritchard noting that the accrued expenses for the year are under budget but operating income/fare recovery was under budget so the net the over budget amount for FY 2017 is \$88,757. Kathleen Donodeo commented that with better buses and higher ridership should in future years improve the fare recovery. Allan Cornell inquired as to the current fare box recovery percentage. Suzanne answered recovery is below by \$296,500 rounded off as \$300,000. Ron Skotz added about fourteen to fifteen percent. Sue Poole commented that the Advertising revenue for last year was only under by \$1,300.00.

#### **Statistical Snapshot Report (Mark Pritchard)**

Fixed route ridership for the last two fiscal years FY 16 and FY 17 remains down. Paratransit ridership is higher for FY17 continuing the trend experienced earlier in the year. This increase represents more people with disabilities eligible and riding in addition to likely increased paratransit demand due the service problems in fixed route. Paratransit offers a higher quality more reliable

service than fixed route with very little driver turnover compared to fixed route, which contributes to a better service with higher ridership. However, Paratransit is expensive to operate at a gross delivery cost of over \$50.00 per trip compared to fixed route at \$6.00 - \$7.00 per trip.

Missed trips on fixed route continue to increase with 525 missed hours reported for June.

Twelve new smaller buses designed for paratransit use are scheduled to be added to the fleet in July. Some of these buses will be utilized for fixed route service. Seven heavy duty buses designed for fixed route service are scheduled to arrive in December. Three battery powered electric buses were added to the fleet on Route 401/Green beginning on July 10<sup>th</sup>.

Discussion ensued regarding the route specific clarification on the utilization of the electric buses. Kathleen Donodeo advised the FTA grant specified that Route 401/Green be utilized at least initially due to a shorter route with the availability for a rapid charge every half-hour at the Mall in Columbia. Mark Pritchard noted that upon confirmation that the buses can provide service for longer distances, the electric buses may provide service on other routes.

Allan Cornell inquired as to the cost savings for electric versus diesel. Kevin Randall reported preliminarily the cost is \$.40 per mile for diesel, versus \$.01 per mile for electric. Kevin also provided information on the training required for the drivers, which includes additional safety training for electricity.

Sue Poole mentioned public information on the electric buses and how they operate is available on the RTA website, [www.transitRTA.com](http://www.transitRTA.com). An interactive feature allows readers to observe functional components of the bus and data is imported daily showing energy usage. Outreach events will be planned late summer for Howard Community College and Howard County General Hospital promoting the electric buses. Wi-Fi is free when riding the buses and Riders can also charge their mobile device using the installed USB ports.

Clive Graham requested that John Powell, former Howard County Office of Transportation Administrator, be recognized for his efforts and dedication to the electric bus research grant. John envisioned the electric bus project many years ago and deserves credit for developing the project helping secure the FTA research grant.

Nathan Grace asked if the route serviced by the electric bus would be required to be a fixed route that has a charging station within the route. Kevin Randall answered that utilization of the electric bus for a full shift without a charging station boost can provide transportation for approximately nine hours. Approximately 28 to 48 percent remains on the battery upon return to the operations facility after a full nine hour shift. Proper driver operation of the vehicle will result in more battery power retention and improved mileage. Kevin noted that the electric buses require one to two hours charging to replenish to a full one hundred percent charge.

### **GM Report/Staff Updates (Mark Pritchard)**

RTA worked with the Howard County Police to provide buses for the Laurel July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration as a barricade that remained inconspicuous to the public. This provided another partnership on behalf of RTA this time for public safety. The question was raised if there was an MOU to cover any damage

resulting from the use of buses for events like this. Mark Pritchard responded since this was a collaborative effort with the Howard County that there was no MOU for the service. There are events that RTA serves not sponsored by a unit of Howard County government and in those cases a MOU has been developed outlining roles and responsibilities. He further commented that in the event the other partner jurisdictions were interested in using RTA buses for public events, such feasibility can definitely be explored.

Sue Poole helped coordinate an informal ceremony for the electric buses on July 24<sup>th</sup> at The Mall in Columbia. Howard County Executive, Allan Kittleman provided positive comments for the launch of the electric buses. Promotional bags were provided to those in attendance and to riders.

July operator recruitment resulted in six new operators completing the training. Currently figures show a shortage of nine to ten drivers, including the drivers needed for new services such as Route 504 the Ft. Meade shuttle.

A lot of work went into the communications to notify the public of the public hearing to be held at 7:00 p.m. July 24<sup>th</sup>. Positive feedback has been received for the public notification. The tracking and recording of comments received from the public has reflected well on the agency. Mark Pritchard thanked Victor Jimenez for scheduling paratransit service for riders to attend the Public Hearing scheduled for later that evening.

Proposed service changes and enhancements were scheduled to go into effect on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Based on the results and decisions for the implementation of the proposed changes some time will be required to provide marketing and communication notifications. The RTA emended the implementation date to be changed to October 1<sup>st</sup>. Kathleen Donodeo noted that a Housing Commission site is scheduled to open in early August and is aware that there may be delays to the new route enhancements.

Speaking of Mark Pritchard's pending retirement, Clive Graham expressed his appreciation to Mark for his steady hand in keeping the RTA ship afloat. Kathleen Donodeo commented that Mark has shown his broad knowledge of transit and was very calm and even-keeled in addressing the many challenges that he has encountered.

### **FY18 Budgets/Allocations (Clive Graham)**

Anne Arundel County, Prince George's County and Howard County met recently and agreed on the parameters for the budget for the next three quarters beginning on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Clive Graham provided information on how each county can address expenses to start on October 1<sup>st</sup>. The information will need to be provided to RTA to agree to provide service for the jurisdictions based on their budgeted amount.

Clive commented that once the budget is approved for the remainder of FY18, final funding allocations will be provided for each jurisdiction. Anthony Foster asked if their jurisdictional allocation is too much can they discuss cuts in service to match their available budget. Clive answered yes.

## **Memorandum of Understanding/RTA Commission (Clive Graham)**

The signed MOU for the City of Laurel has been signed and sent in. Ramond Robinson indicated that he has the signed MOU for Anne Arundel County. Anthony Foster provided the update that the MOU is at the Office of Law for Prince George's County as the final step for signatures.

Commissioners and County staff will be meeting at RTA on August 15<sup>th</sup> at 1:00pm for an open discussion on the governance for the future. Adjustments may need to be made to the model from four to six years ago when the RTA was designed and created.

## **Service Changes/Public Hearing July 25 (Clive Graham)**

A public hearing will be held on July 25<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m., preceded by a Howard County PTB board meeting. The public hearing will be conducted by the PTB. Mark said the RTA had arranged to provide extended hours of transportation for riders after the meeting.

PTB will hold a work session on August 7<sup>th</sup> to review the comments received regarding the proposed changes and enhancements to the bus routes. The proposed changes/enhancements, with consideration to the received comments, will be presented to the Howard County Executive on August 9<sup>th</sup> for a final decision. The Howard County Executive cannot make a decision which pertains to another county without prior consultation with that county.

## **Route Match Software Demo (Maynard Nash)**

Route Match has been utilized for bus location and next arrival times since the middle of June for riders calling the RTA Customer Service department. The program is easy to read to show predicted arrival times. The information displayed exceeds the capabilities of what the Next Bus system previously provided. The program provides real time information utilizing a GPS on the bus that displays the speed of the bus and the predicted location arrival time. Positive feedback has been received from the drivers as a better method to record ridership. Mark Pritchard explained that approximately six to seven drivers are receiving special training and instructions on utilization of the new software program.

Route Match is expected to be available on all tablets sometime in September/October. Clive Graham requested that information be available on the RTA website to alert riders that changes are coming with Route Shout. Sue Poole commented that an announcement regarding Route Shout 2.0 was added to the proposed route change brochure and a note has been added to the RTA website.

Route Shout can do future scheduling changes, verify service revenue hours and provide accurate ridership data. Information is available ten minutes after the driver has recorded the data. Kathleen Donodeo added that information will be available on where the rider boarded, the method of payment and how many riders boarded compared to how many payments were received. The program will also provide information on the amount of transportation utilized per stop.

Maynard Nash noted that replacing the tally sheet and driver paddle with the tablet, effective August 1<sup>st</sup>, will allow the driver to focus on operating the bus. Mark Pritchard said that replacing the current

manual collection of riders from a tally sheet to a tablet may reflect in capturing a higher ridership figures based on the ease to collect and review data, but regardless, the ridership numbers are likely to be different because today they are being collected in a completely different manner.

Kathleen Donodeo indicated that the new program will not only provide more accountability for ridership data but will also display the route. Dispatch will be able to confirm that the driver is utilizing the tablet when the bus departs from the Operations facility.

Nathan Grace inquired if the data collected will illustrate the driver frequency for on time service. Maynard answered yes, stats will be available along with the ability to create custom reports. Information is provided in real time and will track if the driver is arriving too early at a bus stop.

Kathleen explained that the data received will analyze the individual routes in sections, to see if there is more time in the top half that may need to be moved to the bottom half. Maynard Nash will analyze the data to recommend future route changes.

### **TDP update (Clive Graham)**

Howard County is pleased with the information received for the Transit Development Plan and is ready to provide the plan concepts to the public.

After the July 25th public meeting, notification will be publicized regarding the first TDP meeting to be held on August 21<sup>st</sup>. A presentation on the TDP will be provided at the August 22<sup>nd</sup> partners meeting. Howard County's fixed route changes will be implemented in two phases. The first phase, if the funding is approved, could occur in FY 2019. Additional operating cost is estimated at \$1.3 million. Kathleen Donodeo noted that the TDP involves major changes, different from the September changes.

Clive Graham explained that the biggest hurdle for the improvement will be the increase in the Howard County budget, with funding to be requested in December 2017. The second phase provides for the addition of service to several locations including Maple Lawn, the Applied Physics Lab and Turf Valley as funding becomes available.

Ramond Robinson is reviewing what Anne Arundel County currently provides and looking to identify the gaps on the County's east side and north sides. He is reviewing how to provide connections to get riders to routes on the east side from Odenton to Annapolis providing variable, flexible services. Ramond said that the existing routes for the 201 and 202 have an issue with frequency; it is essential to establish how to add additional frequency to the two routes. Ramond commented that in the Glen Burnie area, certain parameters exist with activity but the challenge is how to provide riders with service to access the area.

Ramond is reviewing the means to establish the networks of transit alternative approaches without traditional 30 to 40- foot transit buses for better connections within Anne Arundel County but also to MTA and RTA services. He further commented that Annapolis Transit serves an area just beyond the

city limits but there are no connections to places like BWI and other MTA services. How do you fill the gaps to serve riders to those locations?

Anthony Foster is looking for an improved route to serve West Laurel and to establish how to make public transportation more appealing to riders in the northern Prince George's area. Anthony does not foresee changes to the current G route, established between Laurel and Greenbelt.

**Next meeting - August 22, 2017**  
**Commissioners' conversation scheduled for August 15th**

**Adjournment: 3:00pm**

Attendees:

Ramond Robinson	Anne Arundel County
Tabitha Ernst	Anne Arundel County
Mike Dwyer	City of Laurel
Nathan Grace	City of Laurel
Clive Graham	Howard County Office of Transportation
Kathleen Donodeo	Howard County Office of Transportation
Allison Calkins	Howard County Office of Transportation
Jai Saunders	Howard County Office of Transportation
Allen Cornell	Howard County
Judith "J" Davis	Prince George's County
Anthony Foster	Prince George's County Office of Transportation
Mark Pritchard	General Manager, RTA
Ron Skotz	CAO, RTA
Susan Poole	Director of Communications and Marketing, RTA
Suzanne Brown	Director of Finance, RTA
Kevin Randall	Assistant General Manager of Maintenance, RTA
Maynard Nash	Planning Manager, RTA
Stephanie Dittman	Office Manager, RTA