

**METROPOLITAN TRANSIT COMMISSION**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**April 28, 2010**

**DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

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Presiding: Jennifer Roberts (Chairman, Mecklenburg County Commission)

Present: Curt Walton (Charlotte City Manager)  
Mayor Anthony Foxx (Charlotte)  
Tom Cox (CTAG Co-chair)  
Rick Sanderson (TSAC Acting Chair)  
Bobbie Shields (Mecklenburg Assistant County Manager)  
John Collett (NCDOT Representative)  
Sarah Nuckles (SCDOT Representative)  
Mayor Jeff Tarte (Cornelius)  
Anthony Roberts (Cornelius Town Manager)  
Mayor John Woods (Davidson)  
Leamon Brice (Davidson Town Manager)  
Mayor Jill Swain (Huntersville)  
Greg Ferguson (Huntersville Town Manager)  
Mayor Jim Taylor (Matthews)  
Ralph Messera (Matthews)  
Mayor Ted Biggers (Mint Hill)  
Brian Welch (Mint Hill Town Manager)  
Mike Rose (Pineville Town Administrator)

Chief Executive Officer: Carolyn Flowers

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**I. Call to Order**

The regular meeting of the Metropolitan Transit Commission was called to order at 5:45 pm by MTC's Chairperson, Commissioner Jennifer Roberts.

**II. Review of Meeting Summary**

The Meeting Summary of March 24, 2010 was approved as written.

**III. Transit Services Advisory Committee (TSAC) Chair's Report**

**Rick Sanderson**

Mr. Sanderson reported that TSAC met on April 8 and discussed the budget, proposed fare increase and Secret Shopper program. TSAC members asked numerous questions about the different fare increase scenarios. TSAC voted unanimously to support the budget option which includes a \$0.25 fare increase effective July 1, 2010.

**IV. Citizens Transit Advisory Group (CTAG) Chair's Report**

**Tom Cox**

Mr. Cox reported that CTAG discussed service reductions and fare increases at the April meeting. CTAG members voted 7-2 to recommend that MTC accept the budget option that includes the \$0.25 fare increase beginning on July 1. The dissenting members preferred a smaller fare increase beginning on October 1, although that would require more service

reductions. In addition, CTAG members recommended that DSS funding be reduced to approximately \$500,000 in FY2011 and phased out the following year. The two-year phase-out will give the County more time to find alternative sources of funding for this program. CTAG also discussed mobile applications (apps) for smart phones such as the iPhone and BlackBerry. CATS is researching an app to inform customers where the nearest bus stop or LYNX station is and when the next vehicle will arrive. CTAG recommends that CATS develop smart phone apps as an additional service for customers.

**V. Public Comment on General Items**

Charles Strickland stated that he has spoken with Council Member Carter about tweaking routes to accommodate shift workers. He cited the example of shift workers at CMC-Pineville whose shift ends at 7pm. The 7:05 bus comes too early for those workers to clock out and get to the bus. He also spoke in favor of redirecting routes for improved connections.

**VI. Action Items**

**a. FY2011 Transit Operating Program & FY2011-2015 CIP**

**Dymphna Pereira**

Ms. Pereira, CATS Division Manager of Finance, presented the highlights of the programs. Sales tax revenue through February 2010 is 15.1 percent lower than the comparable period last year. By year end, the total could be four percent below CATS' mid-year estimate of \$57.7 million. Although some economists believe that March and April may be recovery months, CATS has identified savings of \$1.8 million to anticipate lower than budgeted tax revenues. The FY2011 operating budget estimates sales tax at \$59.5 million, about equal to the FY2005 level. CATS seeks to maintain service close to the FY2010 level. The fare increase is anticipated to result in \$2.4 million in revenue. CATS proposes eliminating the Charlotte Trolley Weekend/Excursion service. CATS proposes reducing other non-core mass transportation programs to save \$3.10 million, reducing staff Full Time Equivalents (FTEs), and replacing eight CMPD officers with nine lower-cost private police. Personnel costs for benefits have increased.

The FY2011 operating program includes a \$0.25 fare increase for local routes beginning July 1 and reduced funding to the Department of Social Services (DSS) for its Elderly General Transportation Program. CATS will work with DSS to find grants and transition riders to fixed route services through travel training and other programs. CATS plans to propose to eliminate funding for the DSS program in the FY2012 budget.

The five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) includes funding to continue the design phases for the Blue Line Extension and North Corridor Red Line, as well as funding for bus and van purchases, planning the new STS facility at North Davidson and upgrading the Charlotte Transportation Center (CTC). The majority of vehicles purchased in the five-year program will replace aging vehicles. CATS was awarded \$3 million from a Transit Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction (TIGGER) stimulus grant. CATS will purchase up to six hybrid buses with the grant funds. CATS has transferred \$350,000 from a surplus in the Park and Ride account to cover expenses for the North Corridor Work Plan. Capital expenses will be incurred for corridor development for the Northeast and North Corridors, revenue vehicle procurement, facilities construction and renovation, and some other areas. MTC members have two budget resolutions to consider. One resolution adopts the budget including \$532,500 for the DSS Elderly General Transportation Program, and one adopts the budget while excluding funding for the program.

**Discussion:** Commissioner Roberts said she appreciated CATS working with the county on the DSS program. Many of the people who use the service are disabled and over 60. The service has about 713 clients, making 68,000 trips per year. Commissioner Roberts stated she supports the addition of this funding. Mayor Swain said that the resolution supporting funding does not mention eventual elimination of the program and hoped that the program could be re-evaluated later.

Mr. Messera asked why the fleet was being expanded if routes are reduced. Ms. Pereira replied that routes are not reduced under this budget. Olaf Kinard, CATS Director of Marketing & Communications, noted that CATS reduced the fleet last year following route reductions. Eric Hershberger, CATS Budget and Grants Manager, added that the bus fleet would be increased by a total of four at the end of the five-year CIP. Mayor Foxx motioned to recuse himself for conflict of interest reasons; the vote was unanimous in favor of his recusal. Ms. Flowers noted that CATS will follow the same recommendations as the City with regard to salary and benefits. Ms. Nuckles asked if the CTC and other facility renovations will be “green,” and Ms. Pereira affirmed that they will be, as the criteria of the City Council’s sustainability policy will apply. Staff will give a presentation next month on sustainability efforts.

**Resolution:** Commissioner Roberts asked for a motion on the budget resolution that includes DSS funding. The motion was made and seconded. The motion was passed; Mayor Tarte opposed. Mayor Foxx was recused from the vote due to potential conflicts of interest.

## VII. Information Items

### a. **Customer Service**

**Larry Kopf/Olaf Kinard**

Larry Kopf, CATS Chief Planning Officer and Interim Manager of Bus Operations, gave a presentation on the challenges of instilling a strong customer service culture in a mobile work force. A typical bus driver interacts with hundreds of customers throughout the day. CATS provides extensive customer service training for bus drivers beginning at orientation with regular refresher courses as part of their ongoing training. Team leaders in the Team of Professionals (TOP) program work with the drivers. With smaller teams, there is more face-to-face time and more positive interactions between employees and their team leaders. This program has resulted in measurable improvements in on-time performance and lower accident rates. The Spotlight Award recognizes drivers for providing excellent customer service.

Mr. Kinard discussed the ways CATS tracks and categorizes customer service complaints. Complaints are received through phone calls, e-mails and regular mail. 95 percent of customer complaints are acknowledged within two days and resolved within five days. CATS tracks the Call Center abandonment rate and how long it takes to answer calls. For FY2010, 94 percent of calls have been answered within 30 seconds, with an average answer time of 18 seconds. CATS also conducts Secret Shopper programs. Secret Shopper results in 2009 and 2010 reflected passenger relations as good to excellent 85 percent of the time. Past market survey reports have shown that bus drivers receive a good to excellent rating for courteousness 84-87 percent of the time. Drivers have received a good to excellent rating for driving safely 88-90 percent of the time.

**Discussion:** Mayor Swain asked if CATS performs market surveys every year. Mr. Kinard said that the budget situation has limited CATS ability to do that. CATS is trying to devise an economical survey that would be similar to past surveys. The most recent bus survey was performed in 2007; LYNX riders were surveyed in 2008. Secret Shopper campaigns are not performed frequently. Mr. Collett asked if CATS had fliers in the bus. Mr. Kinard affirmed that CATS has customer service placards on the buses. Their effectiveness is reduced over time. Mr. Kinard commented that he is interested in CATS developing a smart phone app so people can express customer service concerns while they are on a CATS vehicle.

Mayor Tarte asked if CATS had customer service figures from other transit agencies. Mr. Kinard replied that the types of questions asked may not be the same, and the quantifiers (good, excellent) may not be the same. He has heard from other transit officials that CATS has an extremely friendly service force. Ms. Flowers commented that the Los Angeles transit system performed frequent surveys and Secret Shoppers and had a higher percentage of rude and discourteous complaints, averaging approximately 700-1,000 complaints per month. LA's system also had lower scores for on-time service, and a higher level of pass-ups, but it is harder to maintain on-time performance in LA traffic. Mayor Tarte said that CATS' percentage of complaints per rider is 0.0008 of one percent. Mr. Kinard said that customer service is relative. Although CATS has a good system, customers expect a little more because they are accustomed to a high level of good customer service.

Mayor Taylor asked whether Secret Shoppers were frequent riders of the system. Mr. Kopf said the shoppers are from out of town, so bus drivers do not recognize them and they remain under the radar. Mr. Kinard added that express routes tended to have higher levels of complaints per rider. He commented that Google Transit has CATS data on it.

Commissioner Roberts asked about vehicle cleanliness. Mr. Kinard said that the "other" category includes cleanliness complaints. There was one cleanliness complaint last month; it is so rare that CATS does not list it separately. He said that CATS tends to break out complaints to a greater extent than other transit systems.

Mr. Collett asked if there was a way to increase the number of buses and level of service. He noted that growing service is a high priority; four additional buses in five years is not a lot. Commissioner Roberts said that as the economy improves, we can amend the capital budget yearly. Mr. Brice commented that the bus system has expanded greatly since the MTC began, with express services also expanding ridership. Mr. Kinard commented that CATS tries to make routes flexible, increasing service frequency when shifts change if necessary, to help build service in areas. Ms. Flowers observed that CATS will continue to evaluate demand as Charlotte grows and areas are annexed. As the City grows, CATS may need to shift the way it delivers services, and will periodically look at restructuring service. She noted that CATS has three service changes a year and examines demand each time.

Commissioner Roberts stated that she appreciates the drivers and supervisors. It is a tough job, and they do it well.

#### **VIII. Chief Executive Officer's Report**

**Carolyn Flowers**

Under the CEO's report, Ms. Flowers discussed the following:

- a. **Exterior Advertising Pilot Program:** Ms. Flowers reported that CATS received no adverse reaction to the advertising wraps on LYNX trains to support the Bobcats' playoff campaign. The June MTC meeting will include a more comprehensive discussion of advertising. The Bobcats worked with CATS to do a tasteful advertising campaign that did not dilute CATS branding or logo. Six light rail vehicles were wrapped for two weeks. Mr. Kinard added that the pilot program should generate about \$14,400 in revenue.
- b. **Legislative Efforts:** Ms. Flowers and John Muth, CATS Deputy Director for Development, will make a presentation to the Transportation Oversight Committee in Raleigh on April 29 on Mecklenburg County's needs for funding to build out the system. Ms. Flowers made a presentation on April 28 at the Piedmont Triad Livability Conference. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood also attended the conference. Ms. Flowers invited Secretary LaHood to visit Charlotte to see our successful transportation program, and will follow up with a written invitation. Ms. Flowers has been working with Mayor Foxx on a possible federal program for a comprehensive study of the area's transportation network and needs. She is planning a trip to Washington, DC, with MTC Chair Roberts and mayors from north Mecklenburg to discuss North Corridor transit needs.

**IX. Public Comment on Agenda Items**

Charles Strickland spoke on the need to reduce the length of time it takes riders to make a one-way trip. He urged CATS not to simply protect the core route structure, but to expand it.

**X. Other Business**

Commissioner Roberts suggested that CATS work with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) staff to fill the need to transport students to magnet schools. CMS' budget for next year proposes reductions in busing for magnet schools, with 13 shuttle stops at selected schools replacing neighborhood bus stops for magnet students. Under CMS' plan, parents would be responsible for transporting students to and from shuttle stops, which would be a hardship for some parents. Mr. Messera commented that there is no route that goes from Matthews to Butler High School. Mr. Kopf said that he met a few weeks ago with representatives from the Transportation Department of CMS, so collaboration is underway. Commissioner Roberts said that the county will support the collaboration effort, and she feels CATS buses may be a great opportunity for students. Mayors Woods, Swain, and Tarte also spoke in favor of collaboration.

**XI. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 pm by Commissioner Roberts.

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NEXT MTC MEETING: WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2010, 5:30 PM