

METROPOLITAN TRANSIT COMMISSION

MEETING SUMMARY

December 15, 2010

Presiding: Jennifer Roberts (Chairman, Mecklenburg County Commission)
Mayor Anthony Foxx (Charlotte)

Present: Curt Walton (Charlotte City Manager)
Tom Cox (CTAG Co-chair)
Terry Lansdell (TSAC Co-chair)
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)
Brian Welch (Mint Hill Town Manager)

Chief Executive Officer: Carolyn Flowers

I. Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Metropolitan Transit Commission was called to order at 5:35 pm by MTC's Co-chair, Mayor John Woods. Commissioner Roberts joined the meeting shortly thereafter. MTC members introduced themselves.

II. Approval of the November 17 Workshop Summary

The workshop summary of November 17 was approved as written.

III. Transfer of MTC Chair

Jennifer Roberts

Commissioner Roberts relinquished the Chair to Mayor Foxx. Mayor Foxx stated that the November workshop was very productive and he looks forward to working with everyone.

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

Terry Lansdell

Mr. Lansdell reported that TSAC met on December 9 and re-elected the current chair and co-chair. TSAC members received reports on financial sustainability, upcoming February service changes and transit service policies. TSAC approved the proposed service policies with an 8-1 vote. TSAC also discussed how services will be frozen over the next few years, and whether there will be growth for Special Transportation Service (STS).

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

Tom Cox

Mr. Cox commented that five CTAG members attended the November 17 workshop. CTAG met on December 14 with guests from UNC Charlotte attending. Staff reviewed how potential changes to the Blue Line Extension (BLE) project might impact the university.

VI. Red Line Task Force Update John Woods

Mayor Woods reported that the Red Line Task Force met on December 15 and discussed the financial report received at the November 17 MTC workshop, with a special focus on the North Corridor Red Line and its close relationship to the Northeast Corridor BLE. The complexities of the report will require ongoing discussion so both corridors can continue.

VII. Public Comments

Mary Hopper, Executive Director of University City Partners (UCP), noted that her tax district encompasses four stops on the BLE. She offered her support on behalf of those who will be at the terminus of the BLE. UCP members were energized by what they heard at the workshop last month. The group assumed that cuts to the BLE would occur at their end of the line and feel it is an appropriate trade-off in order to have rail sooner rather than later. Ms. Hopper noted that CATS and Michael Barnes, City Council Representative for the University area, have kept UCP members updated and encouraged them to hold meetings with property owners who may be impacted by the re-design. Ms. Hopper concluded that UCP members view the trade-off as a chance to turn an opportunity into reality, hopefully by 2016.

VIII. Action Items

a. Selection of Vice Chair

Anthony Foxx

Mayor Tarte stated that MTC would benefit from continuity in the Vice Chair role and nominated Mayor Woods for Vice Chair. Commissioner Roberts seconded the motion.

Discussion: None.

Resolution: MTC members voted unanimously to select Mayor Woods as Vice Chair of MTC.

IX. Information Items

a. Service Policies

Larry Kopf

Mr. Kopf, CATS Chief Operations Planning Officer and Manager of Bus Operations, presented the Transit Service Guidelines Policy as an information item. The policy is up for three year review, and will be presented as an action item at an upcoming MTC meeting. The Transit Service Guidelines Policy provides a framework to guide staff for service planning and delivery. Several changes to the policy are recommended. Most of the proposed changes are minor wording changes. Significant changes entail the removal of references to the historic trolley service since that service is no longer operated by CATS and changing rail vehicle loading standards to 150 passengers per vehicle during standard service and 194 passengers per vehicle for special events.

Discussion: Mr. Lansdell asked Mr. Kopf to elaborate on how the change would affect the frequency of trains in the future. Mr. Kopf asked Danny Rogers, Senior Project Manager for Transit Corridors, to elaborate. Mr. Rogers said that BLE staff reviewed other systems' standards as well as the Transportation Research Board's report to determine appropriate loading standards. The new loading standards will align CATS' standards with appropriate loading standards followed by other rail transit systems and industry best practices.

b. Customer Survey Results

Olaf Kinard

Mr. Kinard, CATS Director of Marketing & Communications, presented the results from the first customer satisfaction survey in three years. This survey was the first time CATS surveyed both bus and rail passengers in one survey. Surveys were conducted based on the

proportion of ridership across service type and day part. Customers continue to rate highly the quality of service, value to community, management of the transit system and planning for the future. CATS' customer profile saw a shift toward a younger customer base from a 39 to 36 average age along with an increase in educational accomplishments. On key customer service elements, customers continued to rate the performance at a good to exceeds level across all elements. The ability to access schedules and maps through the website has jumped from 29th to 3rd place. The top ten important customer service elements were also the top ten performing items indicating that customers recognize that we focus on the most important items that attract and retain customers. This was illustrated in the percentage of customers riding more than a year, which increased to 72 percent from 57 percent in 2002. Customers feel CATS could improve in the areas of lighting and safety at stations and stops. CATS will continue to focus on the top ten items, as well as the safety areas where customers indicate room for improvement.

Discussion: Commissioner Roberts asked if CATS has completed an app for cell phones. Mr. Kinard replied that CATS is testing an app for rail and bus with every stop. CATS hopes to launch the iPhone app in January, with versions for Blackberrys and Droids coming later. Commissioner Roberts asked if higher high school student ridership might have affected the customer age category. Mr. Kinard replied that the survey took place over the entire day, not just in the morning and late afternoon when high school student ridership is highest. Ms. Flowers commented that there have been articles about younger people delaying getting automobiles and driver's licenses, and said that may be taking place in Charlotte also. Mayor Tarte asked about the areas customers noted for improvement. Mr. Kinard said that CATS uses survey results for continuous reviews. Some of the reviews may result in action and some may require continuing monitoring.

Commissioner Roberts remarked that Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is voting on January 25 about possible major transportation cuts. There may be a lot of discussion for high school students. She asked if CATS planned to speak with CMS and see how it can help. Mr. Kinard replied that there were discussions last year, and asked Mr. Kopf if CATS had recent contact with CMS. Mr. Kopf replied that the last contact was over the summer. He said that CATS could speak and work with them again, but must be careful with our budget also. Mayor Foxx said that staff should speak with CMS staff, as they are facing drastic budget cuts. Mr. Kinard said that media coverage indicates CMS is focusing on magnet school transportation. Mr. Kopf said that CATS has service to a number of those schools, and could provide education so people know what service CATS offers. Commissioner Roberts asked about service frequency near magnet schools. Mr. Kopf replied that CATS can adjust service, but must maintain consistent service. FTA will not allow public transit systems to transport students for a school system. Mr. Messera said that when school boundaries are designed, they should take into account CATS bus route possibilities and commented that his children took CATS daily when they attended high school.

Mayor Taylor asked whether the historical rankings were averages from prior years. Mr. Kinard replied that it was an average of the last two in-depth surveys. The top ten was consistent over the past ten years. Mr. Lansdell questioned the proportion of bus to rail ridership. Mr. Kinard replied that ridership was surveyed according to the proportion of ridership across service type and day part, based on last year's ridership.

c. BLE Affordable Alternative Concept

John Muth and Danny Rogers

Mr. Muth, CATS Deputy Director, introduced the presentation by reviewing staff's direction from MTC and the timeline for the process used to redefine the BLE project. CATS has scheduled public meetings on January 11 and 12, and will present the results to MTC members in January and for members to take action on the proposed changes. Staff's guide was to maintain the project's goals for land use, mobility, environmental protection and system integration while developing affordable, cost-effective transportation solutions, as well as maintaining flexibility for the future.

Mr. Rogers reviewed the project's design at the completion of the 30 percent level. He reviewed general categories considered for potential cost reductions, including the project's length, station parking, vehicle fleet costs, maintenance facility, right of way (ROW) requirements, and miscellaneous smaller items. He discussed project length considerations, the impact to ridership, whether there would be sufficient parking and how needs would change, whether the project would still meet its purpose and need, what other cost savings would be needed, and whether changes would preserve the option to extend the line in the future.

Changing the project's terminus to UNC Charlotte brings an estimated net savings of \$92 million. Revised ridership models indicate that 90 percent of the ridership will redistribute to other stations with the elimination of the I-485 parking deck and Mallard Creek Church station. Shortening the line reduces the required fleet size by 4 vehicles; adjusting service frequency also changes vehicle requirements. Maintaining 3-car trains on the BLE will require retrofitting of Blue Line stations in the future. CATS would start service with two-car trains since that is what the Blue Line will accommodate. There will be no parking at the UNC Charlotte station due to negative campus impacts. CATS is studying the possibility of decks rather than surface lots at the JW Clay and University City Boulevard (UCB) stations, to capture ridership before WT Harris Boulevard. Ridership models indicate that ridership will shift to these stations. The UCB station was planned to have three surface lots, so CATS will add a deck to one of those lots to maintain the same footprint. Eliminating the deck at Sugar Creek Station and using surface parking instead saves \$9 million and maintains the flexibility to add a deck in the future.

CATS has reexamined vehicle maintenance facility needs. Running vehicles from the current vehicle maintenance facility (VMF) all the way up the line to UNC Charlotte every day adds operating costs. Mr. Rogers reviewed the original plan for the BLE VMF, then the current plan for a few storage tracks and a small building for the operators to start from each day. The other option is to expand the current VMF, which would require purchasing the adjacent building. Either scenario saves about \$26 million in project cost.s

Mr. Rogers reviewed BLE ROW requirements, and the factors impacting ROW needs and costs. Reducing the North Tryon Street ROW would save \$45 million, but would not meet the intent of the Charlotte Urban Street Design Guidelines and is not consistent with US DOT's "Complete Streets" Policy. Staff has identified a way to leverage federal and state funds by using City of Charlotte bond funds to cover the needed ROW savings. CATS is also evaluating miscellaneous items such as moving TVMs, reducing the landscaping budget and reducing the Art in Transit budget commensurate with overall project reductions. Mr.

Rogers reviewed items considered but rejected for reduction, such as eliminating stations or building two-car platforms.

CATS has identified \$165 million in total estimated savings. Combined with the additional funds from the City, the redefined Affordable BLE project meets the needs of the financial plan developed by Jeffrey A. Parker & Associates (JPA).

Mr. Rogers reviewed how the changes in the project might impact the project under FTA's New Starts Process. Although ridership dips slightly, the lower cost improves cost effectiveness so the project's overall rating should remain at medium.

Mr. Rogers reviewed the immediate next steps. Staff will brief the Charlotte City Council on the proposed BLE changes at Council's dinner meeting on January 10, 2011. The traditional project delivery method has been design-bid-build. JPA suggested using a design-build model, which CATS is evaluating further. Mr. Rogers reviewed the project's planned activities for 2011.

Discussion: Mayor Foxx thanked staff for the work involved, and asked if MTC accepted the scope change options, would the opportunity to extend the line into Cabarrus County be preserved for the future. Mr. Rogers said that the main work would be to examine where to place the I-485 station. It was originally planned beyond I-485 but was pulled inside the loop to save money. If a future project crosses I-485, it may make sense to locate the station on the other side of I-485. Mr. Cox commented that there are 12 grade separations planned for the BLE, and asked about the likelihood of being required to add additional grade separations. Mr. Rogers replied that the BLE has worked closely with NCDOT and CDOT to identify locations best suited for grade separations. All the areas identified by NCDOT and CDOT are grade separated in this plan. Major intersections are grade separated.

Mr. Cox asked where the plan is most at risk from a cost viewpoint. Mr. Rogers replied that the plan is more conservative than before. JPA suggested that the plan be reduced to \$800 million. CATS used a more conservative cost escalation rate of 4 percent; the 30 percent cost estimate was at 3.25 percent escalation. Staff cut more than directed by the workshop, so that the base year estimate when escalated at 4 percent meets the JPA number. Mr. Rogers commented that the item that concerns him the most is the Intermodal Yard and its access. CATS is working with Norfolk Southern on the yard, which presents more of a schedule risk than a monetary one.

Mr. Walton stated that accomplishing the North Tryon vision is very important to the City of Charlotte, of which the "Complete Streets" concept and urban design guidelines are an important part. The city has identified \$30 million in bond funds, and he will recommend to Council that the city allocate \$11 million to the BLE. He asked if the full \$30 million was put in, how much of the cost could be leveraged and what costs would be ineligible for the Full Funding Grant Agreement. Mr. Rogers responded that staff will investigate grant eligibility.

Mr. Messera noted that if there is only a storage yard at the current Intermodal Yard site, CATS will not need the entire yard. He asked whether CATS would purchase the entire yard for expansion in the future, or only the part needed immediately. Mr. Rogers said that in order to attain the needed savings, CATS plans to purchase only the portion of the yard that we need. The remainder of it will remain "railroad use" either by Norfolk Southern, North

Carolina Railroad, or perhaps for NCDOT's high speed rail project. CATS will not have the \$6.5 million it would probably take to purchase the entire property. Bill Thunberg of Mooresville commented that expanding the South Tryon VMF instead of constructing on the Intermodal Yard site may be preferable, as it would cost less to maintain one facility than two. Mr. Rogers replied that the plan was for one maintenance facility with two storage yards and the ability to stage from both yards. All maintenance functions would take place at the current VMF, but inspections and overnight cleanings can occur anywhere.

X. Chief Executive Officer's Report

Carolyn Flowers

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

a. JPA Proposed Contract Amendment:

Dymphna Pereira, CATS Chief Financial Officer, gave the background for the current contract with JPA and the work JPA has performed to date on the Charlotte model to develop Affordable BLE and Red Line projects while maintaining financial viability for the system. In January 2011, staff will request that Charlotte's City Council amend the current JPA contract to allow them to develop a detailed financial plan for delivering the BLE project, and to provide options for advancing the Red Line commuter rail project and help CATS organize a framework of tasks and decisions on the project's unfunded components.

Discussion: None.

b. Work Efforts Resulting from November MTC Workshop:

Ms. Flowers reviewed MTC's direction to staff on the particulars of the work to be done for the BLE, Red Line commuter rail project, and the JPA project. The work plan in the next few months will continue these efforts. Staff will present a preliminary budget to MTC next month, which will be key in the financial plan.

Discussion: None.

XI. Other Business

Mayor Foxx noted that some meeting dates in 2011 will present conflicts for Commissioner Roberts and him. He cited the June 22 meeting, and noted that the November and December meetings may also present conflicts. Commissioner Roberts commented that there was usually no meeting in July. Perhaps MTC could forego a meeting in June next year instead of July. Mayor Foxx directed staff to draft a schedule for MTC meetings in 2011 for consideration.

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm by Mayor Foxx.

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