

TRANSIT SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Summary
December 13, 2001

PRESENT: Mark Loflin, Chair, Charlotte
Jim Blank, Charlotte
Paul Edmunds, Davidson
Kelly Gallant, Charlotte
Raenice Goode, Mecklenburg County
Sherry Helms-Miller, Charlotte
Walter Horstman, Matthews

STAFF: Keith Parker, Dave Hines, Jon Downing, Dietrich Brown, Vida Covington,
Mason Martin, Ann Boggs

ABSENT: Jim Bensman, Cornelius
Laura Blue, Charlotte
Linette Fox, Charlotte
Bob Inskeep, Huntersville

MEETING TIME: 4:00-5:30 PM

I. Call to Order

Mr. Loflin called the meeting to order.

II. Approval of November 8, 2001 Meeting Summary

The November 8, 2001 Meeting Summary was approved as written.

III. Public Comment

None.

IV. Discussion Items

A. Bus Procurement: Mr. Downing provided a presentation on the FY2003-FY2007 Bus Procurement program. He told the members that for the first time, CATS has been authorized to procure new buses using a negotiated Request for Proposal process, which will allow the staff to consider factors other than cost, such as delivery time and quality of product, in choosing bus vendors. Mr. Downing told the members that the procurement program includes 235 new buses, and is one of the largest procurement programs in the country, which will help ensure competitive prices.

He noted that the program includes low floor 40' and 30' vehicles, as well as a new type of bus, the suburban high floor vehicle. This bus is constructed like a regular route type bus, but has an enhanced interior for greater rider comfort, and will be used

on express routes. The program also includes cutaway shuttle buses for use in hub and community services, although these buses will be procured via an existing City of Charlotte contract, rather than via RFP.

Mr. Downing briefed the members that 60% of the new buses will be used to expand the fleet, bringing it to something over 400 buses by FY2007, an increase of 70%. These additional buses will be used for expanded services as recommended by the Countywide Transit Services Study, and for feeder services for the South Corridor LRT line. The remaining 40% of the new buses, totaling 93 buses, will replace older buses which have outlived their service lives. Henceforth, buses will be replaced on a 12 year cycle. Mr. Downing told the members that the total procurement program amounts to \$73 million, of which 80% will be derived from Federal funding, 10% from State funding, and the balance from local funds.

Finally, Mr. Downing told the members that the RFP was scheduled to be released the week of December 17th, with responses due by January 22nd. Once the responses are received, they will be reviewed by the CATS staff and its consultants, and representatives of the disabled community and bus drivers and mechanics will be asked to provide input into the contract decision. CATS is scheduled to present the final contract to the City Council on February 25th, and hopes to have the first buses delivered by September 2002.

Mr. Parker noted that speed of delivery will be an important factor in choosing vendors; and that these will be the most technologically advanced buses available.

Mr. Edmunds asked whether the intent is to procure all the buses from a single vendor, and Mr. Downing told him that it is possible that three different vendors could be chosen. Mr. Edmunds asked whether there is a requirement to contract only with vendors who manufacture in the United States, and Mr. Parker and Mr. Miller explained that at least 60% of all components used must be made in the US, and the vehicles must be assembled in the US, which they noted increases the cost of the vehicles.

B. Transit Service Issues: Mr. Parker explained to the members that this agenda item had been included at the request of Mr. Inskeep, who wished to discuss certain service issues relating to route 77X, and to provide an opportunity for TSAC members to raise specific service issues on specific routes.

Mr. Parker explained that recent difficulties on route 77X had been the result of several one-time mechanical failures, which could not have been prevented and which had been rectified.

Ms. Goode commented that drivers are allowing riders to carry food and drinks onto the buses, which is supposed to be prohibited. Mr. Hines told her that the drivers are aware of the prohibition, but that it is difficult to enforce. He agreed to investigate

the possibility, raised by several members, of having the drivers check the buses for litter, spills, and left items after each run.

Ms. Goode asked why the new bus stop signs do not include schedule information, and Mr. Parker explained that the new poles are fitted for schedule information, which will be added in the spring and summer of 2002.

Ms. Goode asked Mr. Parker to respond to recent press reporting that CATS had overspent on the new signs. He explained that the press report had indicated that CDOT could have fabricated and installed the signs at less cost than the contractor, but that in fact, when approached, CDOT had advised CATS that it lacked the staffing and facilities to make the signs, and was therefore not a possible source for them. CATS was thus forced to accept bids from commercial firms, and did choose the low bidder. Mr. Parker also pointed out that the unit price for the signs was approximately \$300, not \$477 as reported. Mr. Miller briefed the members on the complexity of the sign project, and noted that comparisons to other cities are invalid, as those cities were not designing, fabricating, and installing all new signs and poles, as was done in Charlotte.

Mr. Horstman commented that the lighting in the CTC at night is insufficient, and that the schedule monitor there is not functional. Mr. Parker told him that the problem with the lighting is being rectified, and that the new AVL system will include new, real-time monitors in the CTC.

Ms. Goode commented that the route number of a given bus should not change when the bus leaves the CTC, and Mr. Miller explained that the passengers on that bus are actually transferring from one route to another, and that it is relatively rare that a passenger transfers between routes without actually changing buses.

Ms. Lisa McCarthy, an observer at the meeting, commented that weekend service is too limited, and Mr. Parker told the members that the FY03 budget will reflect significant expansion of Sunday service.

Mr. Loflin asked whether every individual complaint received by CATS is investigated, and Mr. Parker told him it is, and that CATS attempts to respond to complaints within one week.

C. Ridership Report: Mr. Brown provided the members with the monthly ridership report. He noted that ridership had increased by 4.8% in November, and by 4.3% year-to-date; that the Rock Hill Express service ridership had surpassed that of the Gastonia Express; and that STS demand was up 7% for the month. Mr. Brown told the members that the ridership loss on the community circulator services was slowing. He noted that higher unemployment rates and other circumstances since September 11th had resulted in transit ridership losses in most cities in the US, but that CATS has maintained its ridership levels.

Mr. Parker told the members that the Rock Hill service has been so successful that it could begin paying for itself within the next year. He noted that the Concord Express was also very successful, but that the current contract is expensive, making the service less profitable, and that the contract will be re-negotiated in 2002. He explained that the community circulator services have experienced problems, noting that the contractor for the North Mecklenburg Village Rider had allowed service on that route to degrade when its contract was not renewed, leading to a loss of ridership. He noted that a marketing campaign is currently underway to re-build ridership there. He also pointed out that neighborhood circulator services are rarely as successful as other services, and that those which experience poor performance could be terminated, as will be done with the North Mecklenburg connector service.

V. Chairman's Report

Mr. Loflin reminded the members that the TSAC will elect a new Chairman and Vice-Chairman at its January meeting.

V. Chief Operating Officer's Report

Mr. Parker briefed the members that CATS was scheduled to brief the MTC on the Bus Procurement program at its December meeting.

VI. Other Business

Ms. Goode thanked Mr. Loflin for his leadership of the TSAC during his tenure.

Ms. Goode also asked whether more Sunday service was to be provided on route 9, and Mr. Hines explained that increased Sunday service for that route was included in the FY03 Transit budget, but warned that more extensive service would result in less convenient transfers to other routes.

Mr. Edmunds suggested that time be allotted at every TSAC meeting for a discussion of specific service issues.

Mr. Loflin adjourned the meeting.

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2002 4:00 PM