

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, October 16, 2007
10 a.m. – Noon
Lane Transit District
3500 East 17th Avenue – Eugene, Oregon

MEMBERS PRESENT:

L.M. Reese, Chair	Mykal Taylor
Ann Angvick, Vice Chair	Bob Proctor
Mary Otten	Mark Phinney
Evan Sloan	Aline Goddard
Kristine Sirmans	

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES:

Dave Kleger	Ed Necker
Scott Whetham	

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kay Metzger	Tara Sue Salusso
Hugh Massengill	Jan Aho

OTHERS PRESENT:

Liz Fox	Anne Lauver
Jean-Marie Moore	Diana Gatchell
Connie Soper	Fred Stoffer
Beth Mulcahey	Liz Fox
	David Braunschweiger

STAFF:

Terry Parker	Susan Hekimoglu
Rand Stamm	

1. Introductions

Mr. Reese convened the meeting of the Accessible Transportation Committee (ATC) and introduced Mykal Taylor, the newest member of the Committee who represented Lane Transit District (LTD) bus operators. Others present introduced themselves.

2. Announcements and Agenda Review

There were no announcements.

3. Minutes Approval—July 17, 2007

Mr. Phinney said he was listed twice and only attended once.

A motion by Ms. Otten, seconded by Mr. Phinney, to adopt the minutes as corrected was approved by unanimous vote.

4. Action: Final Membership & Bylaws Recommendation

Ms. Hekimoglu went over the membership roster. She said Ed Necker and Scott Whetham had applied to be community representatives, and there were still two rural paratransit user representative vacancies on the committee. She would send a memorandum about the vacancies to rural providers to send to their riders, and to rural riders of RideSource and Easy Access, and an article would appear in the next issue of the Easy Access newsletter.

Ms. Angvick arrived.

Ms. Hekimoglu went over a bylaw revision in Article 3 resulting from a conversation with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) officials that required ATC members to be residents of Lane County. Another change in Article 3.2 allowed providers of any services, not just transportation services, that included people who were elderly or had a disability to serve on the committee.

Mr. Kleger said the word *council* should be corrected to *committee* in Article 4.1.

A motion by Ms. Otten, seconded by Ms. Angvick, to approve the bylaws as amended was approved by a unanimous vote.

5. Nelson/Nygaard Consultants—Coordinated Plan Update Presentation

Connie Soper of Nelson/Nygaard Consultants, Portland, said her firm had been hired by LTD to update the Lane County Coordinated Public Transit/Human Services Transportation Plan approved in January to comply with Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) guidelines that did not come out until May. She said the plan was required to qualify for three kinds of funding through FTA.

Ms. Soper walked members through the first memo that summarized the nine elements recommended in the update and reviewed the key findings that had emerged from the three elements Nelson/Nygaard had completed. She observed that the plan had a comprehensive, solid beginning.

Ms. Parker noted that LTD's plan had been the first in the region and wanted members to keep in mind that the update would aid the state discretionary grant process by identifying the gaps LTD would be trying to meet.

Ms. Goddard wanted to see Oakridge separated out, as Lane County, Cottage Grove, Eugene, Florence and Springfield had been. Ms. Soper said she would look into finding a resource for that. Ms. Parker noted that some other incorporated communities were not listed, including Junction City, Veneta, Creswell, and Mapleton. She thought Lane County of Governments (LCOG) might be a good resource.

Mr. Proctor said he worked with a volunteer transportation organization that was surveying volunteer driver programs serving clients of the Department of Human Services (DHS) or other low-income clients. He felt it would be good to share information.

Ms. Parker pointed out other resources, a needs assessment survey completed biennially by United Way of Lane County, and the Senior and Disabled Services Area Plan. She added that the biggest missing piece in the plan approved in January was a public engagement process.

Ms. Soper highlighted information gathered in the first three categories. Regarding county demographics, she said a few things jumped out, including the high percentage (38% of adults 65 or older) in Florence compared to other jurisdictions. She noted 21 percent of individuals below the poverty level in Eugene, compared to 9.8 percent families, which she attributed to high numbers of students. She also noted that the number of older adults in Lane County seemed to be peaking earlier than the rest of Oregon.

Ms. Soper said mapping would be done to see how key destination sites and employment sites and availability of public transit correlated. She shared highlights of information that had already been gathered and asked for suggestions about available data that could be plotted on the maps or particular locations members would like to see included in the analysis.

Mr. Proctor suggested contacting Lane Workforce Partnership and Lane Community College (LCC) regarding transportation issues for clients and thought contacts or focus groups might yield that information.

Ms. Otten wondered if Ms. Parker had any data in addition to RideSource data for people with disabilities to fill out the picture. Ms. Parker said the only data available for the fixed route system tracked how often the lift was used at certain bus stops.

Ms. Otten hoped that residential areas with pockets of low income or disabled people also would be mapped.

Other suggestions for resources or inclusion included the Easy Access database, LCC Disabled Student Services and Human Resource offices at LCC and University of Oregon, Bethel School District, and Department of Human Services' training sites for people with developmental disabilities.

Ms. Soper said the project would be taken to its next iteration, and the completed information would be brought back to the committee. Next steps would include developing strategies and criteria for implementing the strategies, along with a public input process.

6. UO—Graduate Studies on Wayfinding for People with Cognitive Disabilities

McKay Moore Sohlberg, director of the Communication Disorders and Sciences Masters Program, introduced a research team from the University of Oregon working to create strategies that would help people with cognitive impairments get out in the community. She said previous research showing that people with cognitive disabilities did not get out much had led to the current project of developing technologies that might be useful in helping people get out and about in the community. This study was funded by the Department of Transportation.

Dr. Sohlberg introduced team members Jason Trudeau and Pei Fang and presented the findings to date in a power point. The third team member, Steve Vickus, had been unable to attend. She said the team had developed an Activities of Community Transportation (ACTS) model to ground its work. She noted that simply getting out the door was one of the biggest barriers for people with cognitive impairments.

Dr. Sohlberg distributed a diagram showing ACTS wheels that divided types of transportation, including paratransit, bus/fixed route, taxi and pedestrian, into steps and listing different kinds of supports and skills needed for people taking each type. She explained how the lists could be used to see what supports were in place, and where work needed to be done. She said the group had run experimental investigations to learn what people did when they got lost and what types of prompts helped people with cognitive impairments; in a later phase the team would develop helping devices and technology.

Dr. Sohlberg gave an overview of the work the team had done in the first year to gain an understanding of transportation, including a literature review, focus groups of bus drivers and people with cognitive impairments and caregivers, and added that the group hoped to put transportation more in the forefront as an issue to be dealt with for this population.

Dr. Sohlberg said the team had found that people with cognitive disabilities did not have a lot of places to go in the community for social or leisure activities, and that people did not want to go places by themselves. The team was hoping to get a grant to develop ways to safely match people.

Dr. Sohlberg said the team's current experiments were helping people with navigation in Springfield. Mr. Trudeau introduced a prototype Smart Travel Bag that included everything people would need to have with them. He described a television reminder system that would take over from regular programming to remind people of appointments and other plans. Dr. Sohlberg added that research had shown people with cognitive impairments spent a lot of time watching television. Jean-Marie Moore said that the products could be helpful to people with serious ADD and autism as well.

Mr. Trudeau said the television reminder boxes, which were all connected to a centralized server at UO, had a button people could push that would give ideas of places to go and things to do. Ms. Parker noted that the team had been trying to keep the system simple and low-cost so that it could be used by anyone.

Ms. Angvick felt the technology would be helpful to care providers as well, since it would enable clients to be more self-reliant and provided backup for care providers.

Mr. Kleger wondered if the system had the flexibility to cope with people with a wide range of cognitive disabilities. Dr. Sohlberg said the research had been focused primarily on people with severe disabilities so that it could be used by a range of people with less severe disabilities as well. She added that Pei Fang had spent six months taking trips with people and observing them to learn what they did and what they needed as they traveled within the community.

7. EmX Accessibility Update

Ms. Parker went over a list of accessible features on the EmX being incorporated in response to committee suggestions and gave a progress report. She said LTD had been working on fixes, and it was taking a while to get some of the items built by the manufacturer.

Current features included changing securement in the forward facing bay behind the operator to eliminate a tripping hazard, shortening the backrest and adding a “scooter strap” and optional securement in the rear-facing accessibility bay; adding ramp request buttons that would be accessible when seats are down and replacing flooring in the wheelchair bays, adding racks and providing new stanchions and modesty panels in the bicycle area, adding a “door closing” announcement, and checking heating sensors in the HVAC system.

Mr. Necker said the new 6200 bus series included a space for walkers just behind one of the wheelchair bays, but many larger walkers would not fit through the aisle between the modesty panel and the adjacent seats. Ms. Parker said that already was on the list to address in the next vehicle purchase schedule for 2010. She added that the area might not work well for people who used large walkers, but it did work for people who usually used the preferred seating areas with service animals, strollers, and carts. Ms. Taylor said the area had been very useful for other things as well.

8. ATC Contract Review Committee

Ms. Parker said she had been aware that LTD contracts with providers had becoming increasingly complicated with the variety of grant financing that was being received. She shared that Senior and Disabled Services had a great program for ongoing monitoring of contractors, including site reviews. She asked if anyone were interested in doing site monitoring and contract reviews of service providers, including South Lane Wheels, River Cities Taxi in Florence, Diamond Express, and RideSource.

Mr. Reese and Mr. Kleger volunteered to participate.

Ms. Parker added that a staff group with representatives from Lane County Developmental Disability Services, RideSource, the Full Access Brokerage, and LTD had been organized to talk and problem solve issues for people with developmental disabilities and cognitive impairments who used RideSource. She had not yet scheduled a meeting. She thanked Mr. Phinney for the idea and said a report would be forthcoming.

9. Program Updates

a) RideSource Call Center - Mr. Stamm reported that LTD had established a partnership with LIPA, which had contact with physicians throughout Lane County, to build communication in providing human services transportation. He noted that one of the goals of the Call Center was to integrate Medicaid transportation with the other human services transportation. In the rollout with Oak Ridge, he said, one of the primary medical providers had left the area, leaving many clients without medical services. LIPA moved quickly to transition the OHP-Plus clients who had the Medicaid benefit to a clinic in Springfield, which would work through the Call Center. He said there also was a small group of clients who had Medicaid Standard, which did not include any transportation benefit, who still needed to get to medical services, yet the cost of using Diamond Express would be an economic hardship for them.

Mr. Stamm said working with LIPA, Diamond Express and LTD had developed a program to work together to provide transportation services for the Medicaid Standard clients that would include a round-trip Diamond Express pass and a day pass for LTD. He expressed excitement about the unique program and said it would be fully operational within a week.

Ms. Parker said LIPA would pick up the cost of the tickets for the 40 people involved; she thought something similar might be offered in Cottage Grove once that area was brought in to the Call Center. Mr. Stamm noted that LIPA would call the Call Center when clients needed the trips and to verify eligibility.

b) Lane Transit District. Ms. Parker said an Easy Access newsletter was being developed to be mailed out EZ Access cardholders and asked the Committee to recommend topics to be included. The newsletter would include information about the responsibilities of people who have service animals, such as following all licensing regulation. LTD had produced a statement about it being fraudulent for people to pretend to have a disability in order to gain certain rights, such as one-half fare and traveling with an animal. Ms. Otten applauded the idea.

Ms. Parker said an survey on EmX accessibility would be mailed out separately to EZ Access cardholders to determine whether seniors and people with disabilities were using EmX and if not, why, and if so, what had been their experiences.

Ms. Parker said the attendant ride free policy was being reviewed by LTD. LTD was not required by the ADA to allow attendants to ride free on the fixed-route system, but were required to on RideSource. Operators were reporting some possible abuses of the policy. Ms. Otten wondered how prevalent the problem was. Ms. Parker said some operators were seeing a lot of people not looking or acting like attendants, but operators had been cautioned not to make assumptions. Mr. Reese said sometimes his attendant would get off the bus on his way home, which Ms. Parker thought was a good reminder for operators.

Scott Whetham said that some people who applied for EZ Access cards were sent to his agency for eligibility assessments. He was not aware of anyone who had tried to scam the system, but he thought denying access would be one way to deal with anyone who did attempt to take advantage of the ADA or LTD policies around accessibility.

In response to a question by Ms. Moore, Ms. Parker said “attendant okay” was printed on EZ Access cards when people needed an attendant. She said attendants sometimes helped with other activities that were unrelated to transportation, such as interpreting doctor’s instructions on a trip to the doctor.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Reese adjourned the meeting at 12 p.m.

The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m., on Tuesday, December 18, 2007.

(Recorded by Susan Wulfekuhler – City of Eugene)