

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, December 19, 2006
10 a.m. – Noon
Lane Transit District
3500 East 17th Avenue – Eugene, Oregon

MEMBERS PRESENT:

L. M. Reese, Vice Chair, Presiding	Kay Metzger
Jan Aho	Bob Proctor
Kay Christopher	Tara Sue Salusso
Aline Goddard	Evan Sloan
Hugh Massengill	Mark Phinney

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES:

Dave Kleger

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Ed Necker, Chair	Kristine Sirmans
Ann Angvick	Scott Whetham

OTHERS PRESENT:

David Braunschweiger	Beth Mulcahey
Ann Lauver	Ken Rivernider
Clark Cox	Sally Shaw
Kelly Brooks	Steve Pickett

STAFF:

Terry Parker	Susan Hekimoglu
Stefano Viggiano	Cosette Rees
Charlie Simmons	Angie Sifuentez

INTRODUCTIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS/AGENDA REVIEW

Mr. Reese called the meeting to order and announced he would be chairing the meeting in the absence of Mr. Necker. Those present introduced themselves.

Ms. Hekimoglu announced there would be a review of EmX vehicle accessibility features at noon with a ride along the corridor to the Eugene Station.

Ms. Parker related that Kathy Jenness was struck by a vehicle while waiting to cross the street. She said that Ms. Jenness was injured but was expected to fully recover.

Mr. Reese stated that approval of minutes would be delayed until after the presentation on LTD's legislative agenda.

LTD LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

LTD Assistant General Manager Stefano Viggiano, introduced Kelly Brooks of the Ulum Group, who was assisting LTD with lobbying efforts for the upcoming Legislative session. Mr. Viggiano said that priorities for LTD and transit statewide had been developed in anticipation of the upcoming session. He added that the top priority would be additional funding for elderly and disabled transportation. He said a cigarette tax was approved in 1985 to fund elderly and disabled transportation services at \$.01 per pack. It had been increased once since then to \$.02 per pack. He noted that when the tax was implemented, it paid for all of those services, but demand had increased significantly over the years, and the tax now covered only about a third of costs associated with elderly and disabled transportation, and LTD had been obliged to increase its general fund contribution substantially in order to provide those federally mandated services. He reviewed a chart of contributions from both the tobacco tax and LTD General Fund from 1986-87 to 2006-07. He said the proposal to the legislature would be to increase the tobacco tax to \$.05 per pack, which would generate about 2.5 times the current revenue received. He said the request also was for ongoing, stable funding for demand-response services, whether that came from an increase to the tobacco tax or other sources. He expected support for the proposal, but there would be other issues competing for funding.

Ms. Parker commented that it was increasingly difficult to fund other services that met the needs of at-risk clients as the transportation tax remained flat while demand for the federally required services increased, even though LTD had been aggressive in leveraging funds through cost-sharing agreements and grants.

Ms. Brooks remarked that the Governor's Healthy Kids initiative was competing for funding from the cigarette tax, and it had considerable support. She said the transportation tax could be an independent proposal or part of the larger proposal for a tax increase.

Mr. Viggiano observed that paratransit users were very persuasive advocates for those services, and their support would be helpful. In response to a question from Ms. Metzger, he said that LTD was a member of the statewide Oregon Transit Association (OTA) and the transportation tax was the association's top priority.

Mr. Kleger suggested emphasizing the connection between paratransit services and the improved health and well-being of users of those services.

Continuing, Mr. Viggiano said another priority was bus replacement, and he hoped that LTD would receive enough to purchase one or two buses from the \$4 million being proposed by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). Ms. Parker noted that the cost of a RideSource vehicle was about \$65,000 while the cost of a 40-foot Gillig was about \$360,000.

Mr. Viggiano said the third item on the legislative priorities list was ConnectOregon 2. This would be a continuation of ConnectOregon, legislation from the last session that was intended to fund transportation projects that could not be funded from the Highway Fund such as air, rail, marine and transit infrastructure. He said the governor was proposing \$100 million more in funding, and the OTA would suggest revisions to the legislation that would allow transit projects to compete more successfully for funding by including job access as an economic development factor.

Mr. Viggiano said the last major item on the list was Measure 39, addressing eminent domain and limiting the transfer of property to private parties as well as revising requirements for compensation of legal fees for private owners. He said the latter issue was of greater concern to all public entities, not just transit districts, and a coalition of organizations like League of Oregon Cities, Association of Oregon Counties, and ODOT would take the lead in proposing those revisions.

Ms. Parker said she would request permission from committee members and others on the email distribution list to provide their addresses to Ms. Brooks for purposes of distributing legislative activity information.

Ms. Metzger requested a report from staff following the session regarding the outcomes for legislative priorities.

Mr. Massengill asked if there were lobbying efforts at the federal level. Mr. Viggiano said that most of LTD's funding was federal and that was the focus of district's lobbying activities. Ms. Parker explained there was a local federal lobbying initiative facilitated by Lane County called United Front that combined and coordinated the efforts of the County, the cities, and other public entities.

Minutes Approval – October 17, 2006, and November 7, 2006

Ms. Salusso noted the following correction on page 4 of the October 17, 2006, minutes: "Ms. Salusso said that South Lane Wheels had a deviated-route transportation program *servicing that could be an asset to homeless youth that could be modified to include other groups.*"

Ms. Metzger noted that it was her and not Ms. Angvick who had offered corrections to the August 15 and September 29, 2006, minutes regarding her attendance at both meetings.

Mr. Proctor, seconded by Ms. Aho, moved to approve the October 17, 2006, and November 7, 2006, meeting minutes as amended.

LANE COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Ms. Parker stated that the *Lane Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan* had been available for public comment since November 29, 2006, and a public review open house and grant workshop was held on December 6. She said the plan responded to state and federal requirements for a coordinated plan in order for the district to qualify for several funding sources. She said the district was in the process of applying for some of those funds, and the plan represented an initial document that would be revised during a later phase. She said that few comments on the plan had been received and most people who attended the open house were interested in funding opportunities. She said the plan primarily was a description of programs and coordination activities and included a section on emerging developments. She reminded the committee of its previous review of project funding priorities: maintaining current service, supporting demands for that service, and considering new innovative projects. She asked committee members to email corrections, particularly of project descriptions, to Ms. Hekimoglu for inclusion in the document.

Ms. Aho commented that the Pearl Buck Center was not included in the list of nonprofit human service agencies but did provide access services through van transport. She would provide details to staff.

Public Hearing

Mr. Reese opened the public hearing and called for testimony.

Clark Winston Cox, Jr., 1086 Patterson Street, Eugene, commended the committee and the district for their efforts. He said he did not yet need paratransit services but appreciated their availability in the community. He said he was looking forward to the beginning of EmX service.

There being no further testimony, Mr. Reese closed the hearing.

Committee Discussion

Mr. Kleger commented that the district had been engaged in coordination activities on a less formal level for a long time and now that the federal government required a formal plan there would not be the same level of flexibility as in the past.

Ms. Parker remarked that developing the plan was a helpful process because it required documentation of the purpose and activities of the committee, which

was about making connections and building relationships in order to provide service to a great number of people. She thought the process actually had triggered some new services and partnership opportunities.

Ms. Salusso commended staff for their work on the plan and looked forward to learning how to work better with partner agencies. She was pleased that the plan would remain a dynamic document and be updated to reflect changes in the complex environment of coordination of services.

Ms. Metzger agreed that the process was helpful and educational and she found it worthwhile.

EMX IMPLEMENTATION

Facility Services Manager Charlie Simmons provided an update on the EmX project. He said construction of the first corridor was almost completed and it was working well. He said that five of the six EmX vehicles had been delivered and he anticipated the final vehicle to arrive in the next day or two. He described the process for training EmX vehicle operators and said there would be a group of 15 drivers for the route.

Mr. Simmons indicated that most problems, such as signal software, had been resolved and the biggest challenge was lack of experience in operating a system like EmX, and he added that the district was building in operational flexibility to accommodate change as adjustments to procedures were needed. He used ramps as an example of an operational procedure that was still being developed as the EmX ramp configuration was much different from that of the fixed route.

Ms. Parker added that it was important for users to give time to the system to work out those operational procedures. She asked committee members to evaluate the securement system during their review of the EmX vehicle.

In response to a question from Ms. Salusso, Mr. Simmons said the target gap between the vehicle and the loading platform at the mid-door was 8 inches with a drop of 2.5 inches, although that could present problems for passengers in wheelchairs or who were sight-impaired or had anxiety issues. The committee's feedback was sought on those questions.

Mr. Massengill asked if there would be training for community members on vehicle use. Mr. Simmons said a week prior to the official opening on January 14, members of the public could go to any EmX stop and board vehicles. Ms. Parker suggested publicizing that opportunity to half fare card holders, which included seniors and people with disabilities. She said there was a lengthy list of people with special needs who would be provided with training opportunities. She said that people should contact Alternative Work Concepts (AWC) to arrange for training.

Mr. Reese asked if the gap at the Springfield Station had been eliminated. Mr. Simmons said the gap would remain until the district had precision docking capabilities. He said that ramps could be deployed to bridge the gap.

2007-09 DISCRETIONARY GRANT

Ms. Parker explained that grant applications were due at 5:00 p.m., on December 22, 2006. She said a committee was needed to review applications and present recommendations to the Board of Directors at its January 2007 meeting. She said the review committee would likely meet on December 27 or 28, and gave an overview of the review process.

Appoint Grant Review Committee

Mr. Reese announced that he, Mr. Necker, and Jane Boren (a previous committee member) currently were on the review committee. He asked for two or three additional members.

Mr. Massengill, Mr. Kleger and Mr. Proctor volunteered to serve on the committee.

Ms. Parker provided an update on the discretionary grant process. She said projects to be considered included accessible stop improvements, coordination with senior and disabled services, coordination with consumer needs and available services, full service brokerage (not just Medicaid), scheduling software and systems integration, preschool transportation, volunteer escort program coordination, replacement vehicles, preventive maintenance, and new vehicles.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Ms. Parker stated that written reports were included in the agenda packet and asked if members had any additional information to report.

South Lane Wheels/Cottage Grove

Ms. Salusso said that South Lane Wheels would cut back the deviated route system hours on December 21. She said efforts would be made to solicit support from businesses to fund services on Saturday at no cost to riders. She said cutback of early and late hours was based on lack of ridership; people had not used the service to connect with LTD service. She said a public awareness campaign to educate the community about using the service to commute to work would be launched in January, as would a rate increase for the metro medical services, including life-sustaining services. She said the new rate would probably be \$30 and although that was more than twice the current rate, it was still less expensive than other services.

Diamond Express/Oakridge

Ms. Goddard reported that agencies were asking to buy blocks of tickets for their clients and she expected that demand to increase. She said that occasionally, the diesel-powered Diamond Express vehicle was having difficulty starting during cold weather, and they were finding innovative ways to keep it warmed up during the night.

RideSource/Eugene and Springfield

Mr. Braunschweiger reported that additional staff might be required when the brokerage was implemented, which could require changes to the RideSource facility. He said there would be a slowdown during the holidays but the last two weeks had been the busiest on record for RideSource to date. The number of operators had been increased over the last year to meet demand.

EMX STOP ANNOUNCEMENTS/VEHICLE ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Angie Sifuentez, LTD Marketing Representative, asked the committee for feedback on the timing of auditory announcements to ensure that passengers who were visually impaired could safely exit at their stops.

Ms. Parker noted that Ms. Sifuentez was responsible for the system that timed announcements and only key stops were announced, although stops could be added upon request.

Ms. Christopher said that some of the announcements were too low and were not completed soon enough for the particular stop on the inbound route.

Ms. Sifuentez explained how the timing of announcements was assigned and said that adjustments were made from input submitted by bus operators. She said that the adjustments were not an exact science and she attempted to reach a median for all drivers on a route. She said the system had been in place for two or three years and was established to assist operators with mandatory announcements. She said that some announcements were automatic and others could be triggered by an operator.

Ms. Aho commented that some announcements were difficult to understand and there was static on some speakers, making it hard to hear announcements.

Mr. Massengill said that female voices were often difficult to hear and had a conversational tone that was sometimes not recognized as an announcement. He suggested that announcements be consistently made in the same male voice that would get riders' attention.

Several committee members acknowledged the difficulty of managing the announcement system and thanked Ms. Sifuentez for her efforts.

Ms. Sifuentez said she was also working on EmX system announcements and asked committee members for feedback on those following their vehicle tour.

She said that EmX vehicle operators had requested no announcements when approaching a station; instead a chime will indicate exit to the left or right. She said that details of the announcements on the EmX system were still being worked on and welcomed input from the committee. She added that vehicles would automatically stop at all stations except the Glenwood Station, which would be a stop on request.

Ms. Parker asked if operators could hear riders ask for a particular stop if they did not use the bell. Ms. Christopher said she could hear requests, but most riders quickly learned to ring for a stop.

Ms. Sifuentez asked committee members to especially note the clarity of the announcements, content, volume, whether timing would allow a passenger to prepare to exit.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for January 18, 2007. The meeting adjourned at noon.

(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)