

MINUTES OF DIRECTORS MEETING

LANE TRANSIT DISTRICT

SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, September 21, 1995

Pursuant to notice given to *The Register-Guard* for publication on September 19, 1995, and distributed to persons on the mailing list of the District, a special meeting of the Board of Directors of the Lane Transit District was held on Thursday, September 21, 1995, at 12:00 p.m. in the LTD Board Room at 3500 East 17th Avenue, Eugene.

Present: Patricia Hocken, President, presiding
Dave Kleger, Treasurer
Roger Saydack
Phyllis Loobey, General Manager
Jo Sullivan, Recording Secretary

Absent: Kirk Bailey, Vice President
Rob Bennett
Thomas Montgomery, Secretary
(One vacancy, subdistrict #2)

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 12:15 p.m. by Board President Pat Hocken. There was not a quorum of the Board, so the members present held an informal discussion with State Representative Floyd Prozanski, who was present to discuss local and regional transportation issues with the Board.

DISCUSSION OF TRANSIT ISSUES: Ms. Loobey stated that the Board had met with State Representative Kitty Piercy two weeks before. They had discussed the Transportation Equity Fund and whether it could be used for transit purposes. Representative Piercy asked legislative counsel, and found out that in one meeting the question had been asked, and an affirmative response was written in the legislative record. However, the final result was that the cities and counties would determine the distribution of the funds, so transit could not anticipate receiving funding. LTD had talked with Ms. Piercy about a technical correction to the legislation.

Ms. Loobey explained that as President of the Oregon Transit Association she was concerned about two transit systems, Salem and Medford, that were in desperate need of funding. There was no consistent funding for transit in the state, and transit districts were facing a decline in federal contributions for operations. Mark Pangborn, LTD's Director of Administrative Services, added that LTD was receiving about \$400,000 per year less than at the peak of federal funding. LTD's federal operational funding had just been cut 20 percent, or approximately \$200,000. He believed that from a peak of \$1.2 million, the federal operating assistance would be completely eliminated in three to five years. On a larger scale, he said, was the federal capital funding, which had been used to purchase

buses, bus stations, the Glenwood maintenance and operating facility, etc. Those funds averaged \$4 million per year and were in danger of being lost. Mr. Kleger said that federal capital funds free up local money for operating the system. The loss of federal funding raised the question of whether the District could respond to the demand for expansion.

Representative Prozanski said he believed that in 1997 the legislature would start looking at an overall transportation package for the state. He believed the reason the broad wording of the Transportation Equity Fund bill was used was to give flexibility in the state. He said he would expect that there would be a table large enough for everyone with a vital role in the community. He also thought that a more visionary role was needed in the state in the next twenty years.

Mr. Prozanski said that the state needed to maintain the traditional roads and highways, but he thought there would be an upshot of growth in the state, and a plan to incorporate the state as a whole would be needed. He thought transit would play a vital role in urban areas and throughout the state. He hoped the legislature would address that, and said he assumed that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) would want to be the agency that is the overall keeper of the plan. Whoever that fell upon, he said, would need to have a very broad perspective.

Ms. Hocken asked Ms. Loobey if ODOT had a broad perspective but could not get funding, or if it still was committed to building roads as its first priority. Ms. Loobey replied that some members of the Oregon Transportation Commission were dedicated to a broad perspective. Susan Brody, a Commissioner from Eugene, had been very supportive of the Willamette Valley rail project. ODOT was large and changing, and did not always provide the linkage between roads and transit, especially with needs that were so different in different areas of the state. Ms. Loobey stated that LTD was talking about a bus rapid transit (BRT) system, in which transit would have dedicated rights of way, and some areas did not need that. She added that she did not have the perspective that ODOT had a strategic vision and supported the transit needs at a local level.

Since Mr. Bennett was not at the meeting, Ms. Hocken provided the Board's, and especially Mr. Bennett's, position about bus rapid transit. She said that in order for LTD to broaden its base of people who use the bus regularly, the District needed some kind of competitive advantage over the private auto, and needed to begin planning for that. She said that Mr. Bennett wanted to start talking about acquiring rights of way. The cost for light rail was very high, and the Eugene/Springfield metro area did not have the population base to support that kind of cost. However, at least some of the Board members saw BRT as a first step toward a future rail system. The first step would be to acquire rights of way and use rubber-tired vehicles in dedicated bus lanes along major corridors. Maybe 25 to 30 years in the future the area would be ready for light rail, and the District would have those rights of way that could be converted to rail lines.

Mr. Kleger stated that some of the proponents of rail supported building cheap rail, but he did not think that building the cheapest system would be reliable, nor would it keep people riding. He said he was very much opposed to spending money on something that is poorly done and would poison the future for a good rail system.

Mr. Saydack talked about how land use affects transit. He said that the automobile really drives land use and makes many areas incompatible with the environment and unattractive (such as a sea of parking around a building). He mentioned that LTD had been working with Hyundai representatives to reduce parking and the impact on wetlands for Hyundai's proposed project in west Eugene. He said that was just one example of the number of ways in which transit could assist with land use and development.

Representative Prozanski said he agreed that it was important to do those kinds of things. Speaking for himself, he said, he had found a livability and quality in the community that he really liked. Zoning helped, but if people perceived that transit was inconvenient, it caused them to have the philosophy that it was better to use their cars. He thought it was important that the system be attractive to users and that an information campaign show where the trade-offs were. He said that the Northwest was poised to be probably the next mass transit corridor if it did what it needed to do, including incorporate different types of transit together. He wanted an overall plan, not piecemeal. He thought it was important to do whatever was necessary, such as education and awareness, and being a strong advocate to stand up in the community with the facts and reasons about why and what needed to be done.

Ms. Loobey stated that the education campaign was necessary because the west coast did not have a tradition of public transit. The growth and urban sprawl and the interstate highway system after World War II increased reliance on private automobiles. She said that if the transit system went away tomorrow, it did not mean that taxes would be lower and transportation would be free; a community could not take away the transit component of the transportation infrastructure and have no cost to the community. She explained that the University of Oregon had not had to build a new parking garage in seven or eight years because of the group pass program for students, faculty, and staff. Mr. Kleger added that taking 5,200,000 trips off the transit system each year would clog the transportation infrastructure of the community. Ms. Loobey stated that the average daily ridership to downtown Eugene during the morning peak was 3,000 riders. Those 3,000 cars would have to be put somewhere, either on outlying surface lots or parking structures, and downtown would lose some of its density.

Mr. Saydack commented that the northwest was the area where a lot of environmental activities began, such as recycling. He thought that transit should be promoted as something environmental that people could do, along with land use planning. He suggested that maybe the state could offer tax credits for the use of transit.

Representative Prozanski said he had no problem with that; he thought it was a good approach. He said the Board was preaching to the converted; he agreed that people needed to be made aware that transit does benefit them. He thought that Portland and the Eugene/Springfield metro area, and possibly Salem, should be encouraging people who use the service to continue to use it, and to bring others along. He said that a tax incentive seemed great; it would be something people could put in their pockets as a direct benefit in addition to the indirect benefits, such as the environment.

Mr. Kleger said that with higher densities, more people would ride, and the convenience level was important, as well. However, if the District went from service twice and hour to four times an hour, it would double the operating budget.

Mr. Prozanski asked about the approach of other transit authorities, such as concentrating on one sector to increase ridership. He also asked what Eugene/Springfield could build upon to make transit better, or to substantiate the need for additional funding through the state or other means.

Ms. Loobey said that the industry was fairly small, but there was the trading of literature. LTD had its own annual assessments of what it was doing. LTD tried to improve service each year. An increase of about 2.5 to 3 percent was needed each year just to keep service on time and reliable. Other improvements were made to the span of service, time, routes, etc., in an effort to improve the service for customers. LTD had gone through two major service redesigns in its history, and currently was working with the Transportation Rule Implementation Program (TRIP). Ms. Loobey noted that Portland had just said that gated communities would not be allowed, which was good for transit, because gated communities made access to transit difficult. She informed Mr. Prozanski that LTD had been focusing its marketing dollars on customers and assessing how the community felt about LTD and why people were riding or not riding the bus. She added that sometimes the District had to put a product on the street before knowing for sure if it would meet productivity standards.

Ms. Loobey stated that transit was not looked at in the same way as fire and police services; people did not want to pay for transit because they did not use it, although they were willing to pay for police and fire protection.

Mr. Saydack said that there was nothing convenient about recycling, but people did it because it was the right thing to do. Ms. Hocken added that it was now convenient because everyone had a blue box, and Mr. Bergeron commented that the blue box had become an identifier of the houses where people recycled. Mr. Saydack said that this had to happen for transit; it needed to be as convenient as it could be, but people should also be going out of their way if they have to because it is the right thing to do.

Ms. Hocken then briefly discussed the self-employment tax and how it was implemented, and how that seemed to be the impetus for a bill to change from an appointed board to an elected board at LTD. Mr. Kleger expressed his concern that the LTD Board might be elected on name familiarity alone, since it was not a high-profile board. In the long run, he thought that the special interests that wanted to be on the LTD Board would be inclined to reduce taxes regardless of the service impact, and reduce wages regardless of the impact on employees. He did not think that service on such a low-profile board would occur on an informed basis, and was concerned about what would happen to the community's transit service if the elected representatives were out of touch with transit issues.

Mr. Saydack mentioned the very narrow range of issues the LTD Board dealt with. He thought that this kind of responsibility enabled the Governor, an elected official, to identify

persons in the community with expertise or interest in that range of issues for appointment to the Board.

Mr. Prozanski said he did not see the benefit from having an elected board, and that he thought LTD had had and still had a good Board. He agreed with Mr. Saydack's analysis, that the focus was on specific areas, and said he thought the LTD Board was accountable to the public. He stated that he had not seen any reason for change or that any proposals for change would be in the best interest of the community and the transit authority.

Mr. Kleger then shifted the discussion to the Eugene Station project. Looking at the preliminary schematic design, Mr. Prozanski said he thought it looked user friendly. He thought it would be important to have some kind of mix other than just a square block for the buses to come and go. Some mixed use would draw people and lend itself more to people wanting to be there and not being afraid to be there. He added that he hoped the buses did not go directly through Willamette Street for only a slight advantage to the District.

Ms. Loobey talked about possible legislation for the 1997 session. She explained that ORS 267 defined the duties and responsibilities of the transit district board of directors. The District had asked counsel to determine whether LTD could own buildings and be a landlord, especially if there would be incidental space at the corner of 11th and Willamette. She said the District may be proposing an amendment to ORS 267. Mr. Prozanski said he would be more than willing to introduce that or assist in it. He said he could see the transit district not becoming a large-scale landowner, but thought it would be sensible to have services such as a deli, bakery, flower shop, etc., where bus riders could grab and go on the way in or out of the station. Mr. Kleger thought this could provide some crossover between transit users and non-transit users. Retail operators could see that LTD's customers were potential customers for them, and more people might be encouraged to ride the bus.

Ms. Hocken explained that LTD had to build a 20-foot-high sound barrier along 11th Avenue for the Olive Plaza residents. The choice would be to just put up a wall, or to make a building a sound barrier, which made more sense to her. Mr. Prozanski said he would not have a problem supporting this, and he did not think that downtown businesses would object to that type of provision.

Ms. Loobey said that the transit community was pressing the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) for a strategic plan rather than an inventory of transit projects across the state. The Willamette Valley Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (VPACT) had done a lot of work, and there was a concern that those linkages to high-speed rail to the communities in the valley were not coordinated with a strategic vision. Mr. Prozanski suggested a couple of approaches. The Governor could initiate a plan, to bring the state on line as to growth over the next 20 years. Or a task force or commission could be set up for the 1997 session, but then it would take two to four years to wait for the legislature to enact something. He thought it would take long-term planning to bring something forward. He said he thought the Governor looking at the transportation needs of the state would be positive and would bring good feelings to his office by taking the lead and making it one of

his goals for the 1997 session. Mr. Prozanski suggested continuing the outreach to other transit groups such as Tri-Met, Amtrak, or any statewide player, maybe with the exception of ODOT at this point, in order to bring everyone together who could advocate for those needs. Ms. Loobey thought that a committee and staffing would require some funding. She said that the country had not fastened on the concept of linking all methods of public transportation together as in Montreal or Munich, for example.

Mr. Prozanski said that the Willamette Valley made up about 87 percent of the state population, and that the I-5 corridor would continue to experience growth. He also thought there would be growth along I-84. He thought those areas should be tied together; these issues were not exclusive to the valley, although most of the support probably would be from the valley. The rural areas at this point were concentrating on the need for good roads, but they would need to be brought into the decisions. Ms. Hocken said that the work of VPACT was the first step toward that. It did not have the staff support it needed, although it did have good representation from all areas, such as Corvallis, rural, freight, rail, etc. The individuals who represented some of those areas did not participate in all phases, and the core group basically was associated with local governments. She stated that it was in the interest of any local government officials in the Willamette Valley to work together on regional transportation goals.

Ms. Loobey stated that there could be challenging and exciting legislative work relative to transit in the next few sessions of the legislature. She thought that Tri-Met had made technical corrections to the ORS during the last several sessions in order to build the light rail line, but otherwise legislation had not kept pace with what transit was doing. Representative Prozanski suggested that it might be time for a major revamping of ORS 267. It would take a lot of players, and it may be premature at this point; possibly it could be done in conjunction with a statewide plan, similar to the way the criminal justice system had just been redone. Ms. Loobey said it would be good to have an assessment of ORS 267. Mr. Prozanski said that if LTD wanted a legislative opinion, someone should write him about what specifics needed to be asked, and he could ask legislative counsel what is or is not permitted, and what would need to be done to allow certain activities.

ADJOURNMENT: There was no further discussion, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.


Board Secretary