

MINUTES OF DIRECTORS MEETING

LANE TRANSIT DISTRICT

SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, November 2, 1995

~~Pursuant to notice given to *The Register-Guard* for publication on October 31, 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, November 2, 1995, at 12:00 p.m. in the LTD Board Room at 3500 East 17th Avenue, Eugene.~~

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

Absent: Thomas Montgomery, Secretary
(One vacancy, subdistrict #2)

Guest: John Lively (appointee for subdistrict #2)

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting began at 12:05 p.m.

DISCUSSION OF TRANSIT ISSUES WITH STATE REPRESENTATIVE LEE BEYER:
Board President Pat Hocken thanked State Representative Lee Beyer for attending and for his past help with issues before the legislature, such as high-speed rail.

Representative Beyer talked about efforts being made to implement local area gas taxes and a statewide gas tax increase. He said that the petroleum lobby was leading the efforts for a statewide gas tax but no local options for gas taxes. There was a concern that local gas taxes would undermine the statewide plan. Taking a somewhat different direction to looking for new ways to fund transit, Corvallis city staff last year had looked at imposing a monthly transportation fee on the utility bill. This option probably would not be restricted because it did not fall under the constitutional restrictions regarding vehicle registration fees.

Mr. Bennett described the Board's interest in a concept called bus rapid transit (BRT). He explained that the Board was very serious about the state and federal transportation rules and mandates, realizing that there were continuing discussions about implementation of the statewide transportation goals. The District's performance in a number of areas had been measured by an outside source, and Mr. Bennett said that, after having been on the Board for two years, his sense was that the District was getting good marks for performance and meeting its social obligations regarding school children, people with disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, seniors, and those who could not get around in the community by other means. LTD also was working with some of the larger companies in the area on group pass programs and

tion plan. However, there was no protocol for funding at the state level, and at least a portion of the federal money for transit would be disappearing--not just for LTD, but for transit in Oregon.

Ms. Loobey said that a BRT system would have the look and feel of light rail, especially in terms of shelters, stops, etc., but would use some form of bus until possibly using rail sometime in the future. The Board believed the District needed to begin soon, at least with the purchase of property, ~~because acquiring property would become more expensive as more building occurred over time.~~

Ms. Loobey told Representative Beyer that the District was planning to construct a Park and Ride at 58th and Main in Springfield. This would be at the urban end of a major corridor that already provided 44 riders per hour, which was very high in terms of productivity. Mr. Bennett explained that the idea was to have a bus coming often, possibly every five minutes, to the Park and Ride, so people would know that it would be convenient for them to travel this way. The vehicle may not look a lot like the current buses--they could be low-floor buses with automatic fare equipment and multiple doors, to increase efficiency and convenience and generate some interest in the "feel" of the service. Mr. Kleger added that, ideally, the BRT service would move faster than the adjacent traffic, to make up for time spent at bus stops. Representative Beyer said that he rode the bus for a couple of years, but when he needed to travel more during the day, the issue became how quickly and conveniently he could travel.

Mr. Bennett said he had seen studies showing that the gas tax could double and people still would choose to drive their cars. Representative Beyer added that even in Europe, where transit ridership was very high, ridership was decreasing as a percentage of the total trips. This also was occurring in Los Angeles, Eugene, and almost everywhere. Ms. Loobey commented that trips per person by private auto were growing twice as fast as the population of Oregon.

Mr. Bennett said that if LTD could get people places less expensively and in a lower amount of time, it could have a chance of competing with the private auto. Representative Beyer said that the mandated percentages for alternative modes were desirable, but may be unreachable.

Representative Beyer asked if the District had the right to exercise eminent domain. Ms. Hocken said that it did, but there were some quirks in the law about how LTD could use property. Mr. Pangborn displayed the current site design for the new Eugene Station, while Ms. Hocken explained the proposed uses for various areas of the site. On the southwest corner of the site, at 11th Avenue and Olive Street, there would be a triangular-shaped uneconomic remnant caused by the District's need to use almost all of that section. The Conditional Use Permit also required LTD to build a 20-foot-high sound barrier wall at that corner. The District's thinking was that a two-story building would be more aesthetic and useful, and would fit in with the downtown environment better. However, the District would not need all the space in a two-story building. Some of the building would be used for the bus operators' restrooms and lounge, and there would be some room for expansion. The Board would like to be able to use some of the other space in that building for retail uses that would be beneficial to the District's customers, such as places they could run quick errands on their way home. Those might include picking up prescriptions or a newspaper, or getting a cup of coffee.

Ms. Loobey explained that the eminent domain law said the District could condemn property for public purposes, but ORS 267, the District's enabling legislation, restricted that use to transit

other transportation-related programs. However, he said, LTD was still transporting only a small percentage of the trips in the community, and unless the District could do something very differently, it would have a difficult time improving its position. Basically, the District needed a better chance to compete with the private automobile.

For this reason, he said, the District was working very hard on the concept of BRT, a ~~system of rights-of-way on specific routes for buses only~~. The first step would be to select high-use routes and then acquire an exclusive right-of-way along that route in a phased effort, over a fairly long period of time. The idea first came up when the community was working on the Ferry Street Bridge issue; however, recent decisions for the bridge were for maintenance efforts only, which did not provide the opportunity for a dedicated right-of-way across the river.

Mr. Bennett said that the route from Thurston to Eugene, along Main Street and Franklin Boulevard, was the District's most productive route, so might be an appropriate route for BRT. Other issues to consider were whether the District could locate Park and Ride sites near the route, and what kind of vehicles might be used (rubber-tired vehicles for a long time, but possibly light-rail in the distant future). Mr. Bennett explained that BRT would provide a chance for the District to increase the convenience to the rider, to improve LTD's competitive edge. He said it would not be inexpensive to acquire the rights-of-way and find a way to get across the river, but it would be done over time rather than all at once.

Mr. Bennett stated that the District had taken a lot of heat for implementing the self-employment tax. Some people had considered it a surprise, although the Board and staff had spent a lot of time going out into the community to discuss the reasons for the tax, including efforts to reach transportation goals and regulations. He said he believed that the District got a lot of support in Eugene and Springfield, although some truck drivers were offended and came to the Board's public hearings.

Mr. Bennett stated that the Board was looking for any help it could get with BRT. He said that the District first needed to find a route that people would support, because it may involve some public and private land. The Board was not ready yet to present specific routes; the discussion was more of a general nature to see if there was support for the concept.

Representative Beyer asked if LTD had looked into the systems police and ambulance vehicles used to change the street lights. Ms. Loobey replied that because LTD's vehicles were not emergency vehicles, a change in the state law would be required to allow LTD to preempt traffic signals. Ms. Hocken added that the City of Eugene had just purchased the equipment that would allow signal preemption, and was amenable to allowing LTD to use it. Springfield already had the equipment, but LTD had not discussed this with Springfield yet.

Representative Beyer said that the success of LTD's goals and plans would be a test of the people's will to move toward the transportation goals that had been set. He said he thought the District was on the right track. He commented that he had attended the recent Oregon Transportation Conference and had seen a presentation about what had been accomplished in Florida. Ms. Loobey stated that going forward with BRT and some of the other ideas would mean positioning LTD as a leader, as Tri-Met had done ten years ago. The District would need to go to the Legislature and describe the actions that would make progress toward the region's transporta-

purposes. Ms. Hocken said that there was some question whether that additional space at the southwest corner could be used for retail, and the District's attorneys had not been able to give the Board the go-ahead based on the way ORS 267 was currently written.

Mr. Kleger said that the District had received a very clear message during the public input process that the public wanted this kind of retail associated with the new station.

Representative Beyer asked if the District could meet the needs of the station without acquiring the property, and whether Tri-Met had dealt with this issue. He noted that LTD had to build the sound wall, and the remnant of property that LTD did not need for transit use probably would not be good for much of anything. Mr. Bennett replied that the District could not. Ms. Loobey explained that she had asked for some background information from Tri-Met regarding some joint development projects Tri-Met had attempted. She added that she had just received a circular from the federal government supporting joint public/private projects.

Mr. Kleger stated that new language was needed in ORS 267 to allow some things that would make it practical for people to use transit. Mr. Beyer suggested language allowing transit districts to use space for related convenience of the passengers. Ms. Loobey also suggested language allowing the leasing of space to others for retail purposes. Representative Beyer said he did not think there would be a problem in changing the law if the changes were related to the convenience of the customers.

Representative Beyer said that a local option in Portland was a tax abatement for second-stories, to increase density, which would be helpful along the Tri-Met corridors. He said that probably was not a discussion in the local community, but it would test how much the local government officials believed in their transit goals.

Ms. Loobey commented that ORS 267 was written in 1969 and had never been changed, and that changes were needed to allow transit to move into the future. Representative Beyer said he would be happy to introduce the change for LTD if the Board would tell him what it wanted to say. He said it would be helpful to have Tri-Met back the change, also, and to have it fairly narrowly written.

Ms. Hocken asked Representative Beyer what he could tell the Board about high-speed rail. He replied that he thought the state had the money to continue. U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield had managed to allocate \$5 million for high-speed rail for the state in an appropriations bill. On November 15 and 16, the emergency board of the state legislature would consider accepting \$1 million from the Attorney General from the oil depletion allowances fund, which he said was not controversial. The emergency board also would consider a separate item for rail infrastructure improvements. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) also had an item to fund a position cooperatively with the State of Washington to oversee high-speed rail; he thought this item may be more controversial.

Representative Beyer stated that he did not think that high-speed rail was high on ODOT's priority list. If Susan Brody of Eugene were not on the Oregon Transportation Commission and pushing high-speed rail, it would not be as high a priority as it was. He said that the Governor thought it was a good project but could not figure out how to fund it, and the Governor did not believe that he had been lobbied about this issue. He added that

Union Pacific was beginning to believe that it was important to improve the crossings for freight in addition to passengers. Representative Beyer said that no one was opposed to funding for high-speed rail before the last vote, but it was an easy target because it was not high on anyone's list. Amtrak cut its I-84 route, so bus service was added to the package. The last he heard was that the high-speed rail project could continue with federal money, but there was no way to fund it with just state money. Also, this did not deal with what would happen in 1997. He said that ODOT did not present this program very well. The biggest criticism was that 79 miles per hour was not high-speed rail, especially when people have to ride the bus half of the way. Mr. Kleger stated that better education about the phases of the project was needed.

Representative Beyer said that his fear was that once Portland got light rail, they would not be interested in high-speed rail south of Portland. He said they would have light rail north, but would need to get across the river, and Washington would need Portland's participation in the high-speed rail project to make it work.

Ms. Loobey stated that it was too bad the proponents of high-speed rail had not been able to get the Governor's attention. Mr. Beyer said that the Governor did go to Senator Hatfield and work with him to get the money in the appropriations bill.

Mr. Lively asked if ODOT had to become more active in something besides roads. Ms. Loobey said that transit had tried for the last three years to work on financing measures with ODOT, but it had not really worked well. There had recently been some discussion about whether transit would split from ODOT for future efforts. She said that most of the money was going for preservation, not new roads. She said there needed to be more commitment to the combined package.

Representative Beyer said he did not think there was a problem with the commitment of the legislators from the southern end of the state; the lack of support was mostly from Albany north.

Ms. Loobey asked about an interim task force on taxation. Representative Beyer said he did not think they would be doing too much. The weight/mile tax issue was being handled by a separate committee.

Representative Beyer said that the philosophy of the current legislature was one of less government. He said that the Governor was developing a six-year plan. He did not know what would be in it yet. Greg Wolf on the Governor's staff had the lead for transit, and Representative Beyer had been trying to set up a meeting with him.

Ms. Loobey mentioned the Transportation Equity Fund. Apparently, in a conversation with Greg Walden at one of the meetings, it was stated that the money could be used for transit, but nothing to that effect had been written in the bill. Representative Beyer said that there had been a discussion that there would be no strings about how the money was used. The state received a lot of federal money, and if it chose to, the money could be used for transit instead of all for roads. The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) was not choosing to use it for transit, however. He said that the transit people in the

state should go to the OTC and say that the funding was not being used to meet the state's transportation goals.

Representative Beyer said the people who fought hardest for the goals in the original local transportation plan never went back to make sure they were carried out. He said there were a lot of tools that no one was using.

Representative Beyer stated that the projections for lottery funds were way too high. In 1997, the state would have less money on the table than it put into kindergarten through grade 12 education, without spending any money on economic development. Ms. Loobey mentioned the "kicker" or refund money from this year, as well. Representative Beyer said that if the federal budget passed with the block grants as written, Oregon would be looking at an 8 percent to 10 percent year annual reduction in the HR budget, for seven years, without even looking at the health plan and Medicare piece. He stated that Oregon was a model state for public assistance, in terms of moving people off public assistance to jobs, and would be punished by the block grant formula. Oregon had one of the least costly systems for seniors and keeping people out of institutionalized care, and would lose that. Mr. Kleger added that the same was true for services for people with disabilities.

Representative Beyer said that HB 2318 could have passed if it had applied to all public employers rather than just to LTD. He said it was not just a transit issue, and something like that could have kept Measure 8 off the table.

Mr. Beyer encouraged LTD to work with Susan Brody and encourage the Oregon Transportation Commission to take a stronger position regarding transit issues. He said he would let LTD know when the meeting had been scheduled with Greg Wolf. Ms. Loobey commented that at the moment there was no one on the ODOT staff or the OTC except Ms. Brody who could sell the concept, and there needed to be a persuasive, compelling message. Representative Beyer said that there didn't seem to be anyone on the emergency board legislative panel who was opposed to high-speed rail, and one person was just interested in how the state was going to pay for it. Ms. Loobey said she thought it was very important for the state's economic future. Representative Beyer said that high-speed rail would provide a good answer to Portland people who say there is no good access to engineering schools, etc., and it could help professors go back and forth between cities. When the route became fully developed, travel time from Portland to Eugene would take about an hour, with stops in Salem, Albany, and Eugene. Mr. Kleger commented that high-speed rail could be built so much more cheaply than more lanes on the freeway.

Representative Beyer commented that the transportation people in the state needed to deal with the issue of cars not paying their own way, making a comparison of the costs of cars and buses.

Mr. Bennett said he thought cars paid their own way. To the extent that 95 percent of people owned cars, and taxes were collected, 95 percent of people were paying the taxes. However, he agreed that there were indirect effects of pollution, etc., from automobile traffic. Mr. Kleger commented that every household was paying for street access, but not based on participation or usage. Representative Beyer thought that before

there could be a discussion on transit costs, there needed to be a baseline number for automobiles. Mr. Bennett said that people did not complain about road-building, so that was why he wanted to try to compete with the private auto.

Ms. Loobey stated that LTD would need the support of local units of government to buy rights-of-way. Mr. Bennett said he thought there was a lot of support from the local business community about the idea of trying to compete.

There was some discussion about the subsidy for MAX, Portland's light-rail system. Mr. Pangborn said that he would find out the annual subsidy and let Mr. Saydack know.

ADJOURNMENT: Ms. Hocken thanked Representative Beyer for meeting with the Board. The meeting adjourned at 1:35 p.m.


Board Secretary