

Spokane Transit Authority
1230 West Boone Avenue
Spokane, Washington 99201-2686
(509) 325-6000

OPERATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the April 6, 2011, Meeting
Southside Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT

Nancy McLaughlin, City of Spokane *
Gary Schimmels, City of Spokane Valley
Mike Brewer, Citizen
Ann Campeau, Citizen
David Driscoll, Citizen
Tim Dompier, ATU 1015
Dennis Tonhofer, ATU 1598
Mike Kunder, AFSCME 3939

MEMBERS ABSENT

Amber Waldref, City of Spokane
Rick Jacks, Citizen
Andrew Rolwes, Citizen
Nan Kelly, Citizen

* Chair

STAFF PRESENT

E. Susan Meyer, CEO
Steve Blaska, Director of Operations
Jim Plaster, Director of Finance and Administration
Karl Otterstrom, Director of Planning
Lynn Holmes, Assistant Director of Finance
Andrew Overhauser, Superintendent of Transportation
Denise Marchioro, Manager, Paratransit Services
Molly Myers, Manager, Communications
Robert "Butch" Slaughter, Manager, Capital Projects
Todd Griffith, Assistant Maintenance Manager
Charlie Phillips, Maintenance Analyst

GUESTS

None

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair McLaughlin called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

2. **INTRODUCTIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE**

Introductions were made. Ms. Meyer introduced Lynn Holmes, STA's new Assistant Director of Finance. There was no correspondence requiring the Committee's attention.

3. **MINUTES OF THE MARCH 2, 2011, COMMITTEE MEETING - CORRECTIONS OR APPROVAL**

Mr. Brewer moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

4. **PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS**

None.

5. **AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR FIFTEEN (15) PARATRANSIT VANS – ACTION REQUESTED**

Mr. Blaska explained that fifteen Paratransit vans have exceeded the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) minimum service life guidelines of four years or 100K miles. Vans are available through the Washington State Purchasing Cooperative Contract, and these replacement vehicles are funded in the Capital Improvement Plan and the 2011 Budget.

Mr. Blaska said that a decision was needed on whether to purchase diesel or gas vehicles. Decision criteria included capital cost, employee and customer feedback, fuel costs, environmental considerations, and parts and labor costs. While a diesel vehicle would cost approximately \$6K more than a gas vehicle, after careful evaluation, staff is recommending the purchase of Chevrolet Duramax diesel vehicles because new diesel technology would provide a quality customer and employee experience while realizing significant fuel cost savings (through increased miles per gallon) and environmental benefits, and these advantages far outweigh the marginal increase in capital and maintenance costs. Those costs are expected to be more than recovered over the life of the fleet.

Mr. Brewer moved to recommend the Board: 1) approve the purchase of fifteen (15) Eldorado cutaway vans from Schetky Northwest Sales Inc., Portland, Oregon, through the Washington State Purchasing Cooperative Contract; 2) approve disposal of fifteen (15) surplus Paratransit vehicles; and 3) forward to the consent agenda. Total project cost will not exceed the budgeted amount of \$1,398,000. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Mr. Blaska thanked Mr. Reimer [Manager, Maintenance and Facilities], Mr. Griffith, Mr. Phillips, and Ms. Marchioro for their extensive evaluation to determine whether diesel or gas vehicles would be the best option for STA.

6. SUMMER DETOUR PLAN – INFORMATION

Mr. Blaska explained that planning detours during summer construction was a collaborative effort by Mr. Otterstrom and the Planning Department, the Service Improvement Committee, and Mr. Overhauser. When staff knows what construction projects will take place, a comprehensive list is developed so riders on affected routes can receive needed information about the upcoming detours. Rider Alerts are disseminated on buses and various locations in the community to inform riders about planned routing changes. Stops are tagged and information is placed on STA's website so riders know where to go to catch their bus. For those individuals who want to sign up, text messages can be sent to cell phones on the most current detour information. Mr. Blaska noted that the biggest challenge for this coming season involves construction on Mission because there are not a lot of alternative routes available. Route changes are not expected to significantly affect reliability of scheduled pick-up times.

Mr. Schimmels arrived at 1:55 p.m.

7. PLAZA OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS – INFORMATION

Mr. Otterstrom explained that there are two main goals to the project: to convert Wall Street to two-way traffic between Riverside and Sprague, and to improve pedestrian circulation on the sidewalks bordering The Plaza. Recommended improvements include:

- the creation of a new stop location on the east side of Wall Street with a bulb-out and a canopy in front of Bank of America;
- extending the existing curb and sidewalk on the west side of Wall Street out twenty feet and installing weather canopies;
- the removal or relocation of trees that impede pedestrian circulation; and
- installation of a new traffic signal at Sprague and Wall for southbound traffic.

Staff has already met with Bank of America's property manager and the City of Spokane regarding these changes. Ms. Meyer asked Mr. Otterstrom to address the modifications to the smoking section currently located on the Wall Street side of the building. Mr. Otterstrom said that due to the addition of weather canopies and in light of the law which prohibits smoking within 25-feet of structures, the smoking section would be eliminated. People needing to smoke would most likely disperse to areas nearby.

8. DRAFT 2010 ROUTE PERFORMANCE REPORT – INFORMATION

Mr. Otterstrom explained that this report is required by the Service Design Guidelines to help guide future planning. There are three Performance Standards used to evaluate route performance: Ridership Productivity (measured by number of boardings per revenue hour), Energy Consumption (measured by average load factor, based on vehicle size), and Farebox Recovery (measured by farebox recovery ratio).

Two routes fail all three of these standards: Rt. 41-Latah, and Rt. 46-Altamont. Five routes failed two of the three standards: Rt. 2-Southside/Medical Shuttle, Rt. 62-Medical Lake Hospitals, Rt. 72-Liberty Lake Express, Rt. 97-South Valley, and Rt. 124-North Express. Seven routes failed only the Energy Consumption standard: Rt. 1-Arena Shuttle, Rt. 23-Maple/Ash, Rt. 30-Francis, Rt. 31-Garland, Rt. 33-Wellesley, Rt. 95-Millwood, and Rt. 96-Pines. Two routes failed only the Ridership standard: Rt. 74-Valley Limited, and Rt. 91-Mission. No routes failed only the Farebox Recovery standard. Two routes were exempt from the report because they did not operate for a full two-year period: Rt. 60-Airport/Browne's Addition, and Rt. 67-Medical Lake/Geiger.

Mr. Otterstrom said that routes that failed to meet two of three standards will undergo remedial action within 18 months. Possible remediation strategies may include: routing modifications, frequency adjustments, stop changes, capital improvements, continued analysis, and/or route elimination. Most remediation will be implemented as part of the September 2011 Service Reduction Plan, following approval of the Plan by the Board of Directors.

9. BUS STOP CONSOLIDATION - PHASE II – INFORMATION

Mr. Otterstrom explained the rationale behind bus stop consolidation. He said that per the Board-adopted Fixed Route Service Design Guidelines [Policy P-5.0 *Stop Spacing and Placement*], stops should be no closer than 800 feet, no further than 1,500 feet, and, on average, be a quarter mile apart. Benefits of stop consolidation include: improved travel speeds for fixed route buses, reduced travel times for bus passengers, it allows a greater proportion of customers to access stops adjacent to crosswalks and signalized intersections, and it reduces maintenance costs attributed to frequent stopping/starting of buses. Routes proposed for bus stop consolidation include Rt. 26-Addison, Rt. 43-Lincoln/37th Avenue, and Rt. 94-East Fifth.

Next steps include posting a draft plan on the STA website for public review and comment, review of public comments by STA's Service Improvement Committee and the Planning Department, the posting of Rider Alerts at those stops which are proposed to be closed, a final review of all public comments, the placement of Rider Alerts at stops to be eliminated and/or retained, an update to internal software programs and to Google Transit, and the removal of stops from service.

Ms. Meyer commented that when people call in to say that they are unable to walk to the bus stops since the consolidation, they are told to apply for Paratransit service to assist them. She added that based on staff's experience, most people are able to walk farther than they think they can.

10. TRANSIT SERVICE TO AIRPORTS - A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION – INFORMATION

Mr. Otterstrom said that Planning Intern Steven Hopkins recently completed his Master's thesis on transit service to small airports. His report identified characteristics of high-quality transit service to airports, inventoried service provided by seventeen transit agencies including STA to airports similar in size to Spokane International Airport, and provided recommendations for improving service to airports. The report noted that small airports are generally in locations not conducive to transit and have limited ridership potential due to the low number of airline passengers. Additionally, small airports experience peak periods very early in the morning and late in the evening, generally beyond the service span of the transit agencies which serve them. This limits the usefulness of the service for both passengers and airport employees.

Research shows that ridership is maximized when transit service to airports is convenient, competitive with other modes of transportation, and useful to airport employees. Service should be fast, frequent, inexpensive, and operate daily as early in the morning and late into the evening as possible. Clear rider information is also important.

The design of STA's airport service compared extremely well to that provided elsewhere. Route 60's 17-minute trip to the airport is only about 20% longer than a similar trip by private vehicle due to its relatively direct routing. No other transit agency studied provides such a competitive trip. With nearly 30 roundtrips per weekday, STA also provides more frequent service than all but two other agencies. Additionally, STA joins a small group of agencies providing service on Sunday, an essential service to weekend travelers and employees alike.

The span of service (how early it begins and how late it ends) is relatively average when compared with other cities; however, it is a major deterrent to ridership. Passengers on flights departing Spokane International Airport before 8:00 a.m. or arriving after 10:00 p.m. (as well as the employees serving them) are unable to use Route 60 due to its limited span, and this problem is exacerbated on Sundays when service ends at 6:25 p.m.

Mr. Otterstrom added that the information and amenities provided to transit users by STA and Spokane International Airport are poor compared with other agencies and airports. STA signage along Route 60 lacks both the word "airport" and the international airport symbol. Buses do not have luggage racks and no shelter is provided for passengers at Concourse C. The airport website provides almost no information regarding transit service and its map fails to identify STA stops. Signage within the airport is either non-existent (Concourse C) or circuitous (Concourse A/B).

The study concluded that the addition of early morning and late evening trips to the airport, as well as improvements to the information provided to passengers, could result in ridership increases.

Ms. Campeau commented that many people do not have computers or internet access, and they are out of the loop on finding out what services STA offers. She asked if there was some way for these people to get needed information on route changes or other transit-related service changes. Ms. Myers said that rider alerts are distributed throughout the community placed on buses, and STA runs television, newspaper, and radio ads prior to service changes. She added that staff has discussed the problem of lack of transit information with Airport management, but no improvements have been made available.

11. CEO REPORT – INFORMATION

- a. Ms. Meyer said that at the last Board meeting, a decision was to have been made on the 2011 Service Reduction. However, two Board members were in Washington, D.C., one had a personal commitment, and one gave birth, so only five members were present. Therefore, it was decided that a vote on the service reduction would be deferred to the April 20, 2011, Board meeting. Staff has offered to have conversations with Board members to answer any remaining questions about the service reductions.
- b. Ms. Meyer said that ridership was up in March 1.8%, and 0.4% year to date. Fare increases did not appear to affect ridership. Paratransit ridership is still down, and it is possible that the fare increase may have had an effect on that ridership as people edit their trips or go to stores closer to home rather than across town.

12. COMMITTEE INFORMATION

- a. February 2011 Operating Indicators - as presented.
- b. Community Outreach and Involvement - as presented.

13. OLD OR NEW BUSINESS

None.

14. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' EXPRESSIONS

None.

15. NEXT MEETING – WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 2011, 1:30 P.M., SOUTHSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM, 1230 WEST BOONE AVENUE

16. ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Chair McLaughlin adjourned the meeting at 2:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanette Van Dort, Executive Assistant