

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes for January 14, 2009
Southside Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT

Fyrne Bemiller
Victor Frazier
Elaine Hoskin
Margaret Jones
Dean Lynch
Brenda Smits
David Swalling

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Steve Blaska, Director of Operations
Naomi Dunning, Executive Assistant
Denise Marchioro, Paratransit Manager
Susan Millbank, Ombudsman
Molly Myers, Communications Manager
Jim Plaster, Director of Finance and Administration

GUESTS

Kathy Armstrong, East Central Community Center
Darlene Butler, The Artisans
Niki DeBoer, Skills'kin
Greg Falk, The Arc of Spokane
Ed Kennedy, CORD
Russell Smith, Lilac Services for the Blind
Nancy Surma, SL Start

1. Call to Order and Introductions (David Swalling, Chair)

Chairman Swalling called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

2. Minutes of the Citizen Advisory Committee – Corrections or Approval

a.) Mr. Swalling asked the Committee to address the meeting minutes of December 10, 2008.

The only change made was to note Mr. Swalling as absent for the December 10, 2008 meeting.

The Committee reviewed and approved the minutes, including the change, by consensus.

3. General Business

a.) Appoint Alternate Chairperson for February 11, 2009 Meeting

Mr. Swalling stated he will be out of town for the next meeting on February 11, 2009. He asked the Committee for a volunteer to Chair the next meeting. Mr. Frazier said he would be willing to volunteer.

4. Tariff Policy

a.) Presentation of the Draft Fare Increase Proposal to Social Services & Disabled Community Representatives

Note: For ease of reference, the Tariff Policy Project/Draft Fare Increase Proposal presentation is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Swalling thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He explained the background of the CAC, which was established in 2005 as an advisory body to the STA Board. In May 2007, the CAC elected to review the STA Tariff Policy. The Committee has used STA staff to provide the necessary resource and support for this in-depth study, during which time the fare structures of ten other transit agencies in the Northwest have been carefully reviewed, in addition to review of news articles regarding transits nationwide. All entities are facing the same issues as STA and most have implemented fare changes over the last year. The STA Tariff Policy was reviewed and the Board approved the CAC's recommended changes to the policy. Following these efforts, the CAC arrived at the conclusion that there may be a need for additional fare revenue. A detailed review of the STA fare structure has taken place and

the process for public input has been developed, which entails presentation of the CAC Tariff Policy Project/Draft Fare Increase Proposal for public comment.

Mr. Swalling continued by stating there is not a formal recommendation at this time and the presentation is for discussion purposes only with the intent to gain public input. This meeting marks the beginning of the public input process, and is the first of many meetings the CAC will hold in order to gather public feedback from as many sources and user groups as possible. Following this process, the CAC will regroup, assess all information received, and make a final recommendation to the STA Board at the Board meeting in March, 2009.

Both during and after the presentation, the following discussion took place:

A guest commented on not having had an increase since 2002.

Mr. Swalling replied that a regular review process will likely be made.

Mr. Blaska said different agencies approach their fare review in various ways. Some have a "trigger point" at which time they automatically review fares. STA's projections generally assume a fare increase about every five years. The trigger points generally end up in an environment such as this, it is a sensitive issue, therefore a lot of discussion goes into the development of the decision.

Ms. Hoskin added that the Committee still needs to have a discussion about making a recommendation to the Board regarding a periodic review of the fare structure and the Committee has yet to decide on an appropriate interval.

A guest asked where the target 20% farebox recovery comes from.

Mrs. Blaska stated there is not an industry published standard, but the common practice of peer agencies is to generally 20% as the user's share for the service. King County Metro has recently raised their standard to 25% and they're currently collecting about 19%.

Mr. Frazier added the Consumer Price Index and the Wage Index along with the cost of fuels, primarily diesel, also have a direct relation to the fares.

Mr. Frazier also commented that friends and citizens have told him they think the passenger should pay 100% of the fare. Mr. Frazier said these attitudes are different than most and he argues that public transit is a service that an urban area of its size should provide to the citizens to relieve congestion and to provide an economic stimulus. He agrees the 20% farebox recovery ratio is the average and is the goal to keep in mind.

Mr. Swalling underlined the increase in fares is as much as the Committee felt a rider could contribute at this time. Some may say this is too large or too small, however, the funding shortfall is large.

Ms. Hoskin asked Mr. Swalling if the fare increases are instituted as proposed, how much of the \$48M shortfall would this impact.

Mr. Swalling said he looked at the numbers and believed it to be \$10M - \$12M over a seven year time frame.

When presenting the Paratransit fare information, Mr. Swalling said it was a consensus of the Committee that the Paratransit fare should be equal to the Adult base fare for Fixed Route service. This is based on the high cost per Paratransit trip at \$21.49 per ride vs. \$3.95 for Fixed Route, which is about five times more expensive than Fixed Route. Mr. Swalling shared the Paratransit service is about 20% of STA's total budget cost, however the rides account for about 5% of the trips, therefore 20% of the budget is having to support 5% of the rides. He continued to say STA has a high Paratransit use compared to other transit agencies with STA being the highest of the urban systems in Washington State at 1.29 trips per capita.

Paratransit Proposal

Proposal: Paratransit service fare should be equal to Adult base fare for Fixed Route service.

- High cost
 - \$21.49 Paratransit vs. \$3.95 Fixed Route per trip
- High use compared to other communities
- The proposal complies with state and federal law

A guest asked if there was any insight as to why this is?

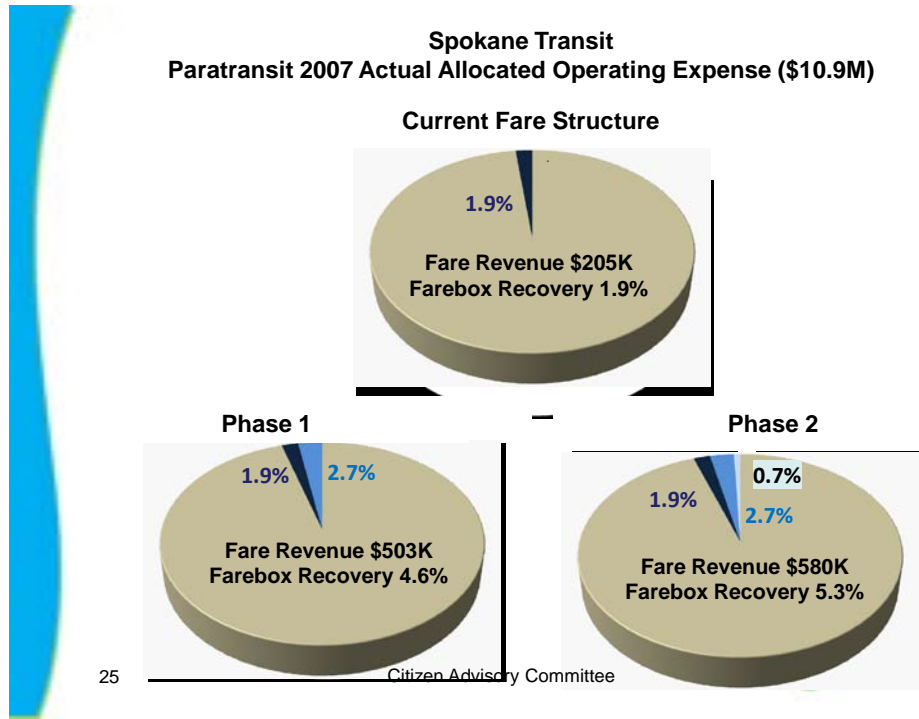
Mr. Blaska said Spokane is a regional center for many services (medical, retirement, etc.) making our demographic different than some of the other communities. Also, if you look at the density of the Seattle metro area, their bus service is likely more accessible to a larger share of the population, whereas, our system providing door-to-door service in less dense areas of our region is likely more necessary because the access to the fixed route system is more difficult.

Mr. Swalling outlined the proposed Paratransit fares as noted below.

Paratransit Proposal

Category	Current Price	09/01/09 Phase 1 Price	01/01/11 Phase 2 Price
Paratransit Cash	\$.50	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.50
Paratransit 2 HR Pass	\$.50	\$ 1.25	\$ 1.50
Paratransit Day Pass	\$ 2.50	\$ 3.00	\$ 3.50
Paratransit Monthly Pass	\$ 16.50	\$ 40.00	\$ 45.00

Mr. Swalling discussed the pie charts shown below and noted the figures are based on 2007 numbers. The current fare structure shows the revenue from Paratransit at \$205k, which covered 1.9% of operating cost. Phase 1 projects Paratransit revenue to increase to \$500k, an approximate \$300k increase, changing the farebox recovery ratio to 4.6%, and Phase 2 shows a farebox recovery ratio to approximately 5.3% with revenues at approximately \$580k.




Below is a comparison of the Paratransit fare structure for STA and other Northwest transits, which shows nine out of eleven charge approximately full fare, and six out of eleven charge a higher fare than STA's draft proposal.

PARATRANSIT/FIXED ROUTE
FARE STRUCTURE MATRIX COMPARISON
November 2008 Data

	Spokane Transit <i>PROPOSED 09/01/09 Phase 1</i>	Pierce (Tacoma)	Lane (Eugene)	Ben Franklin (Tri-Cities)	C-TRAN (Vancouver)	Community Snohomish	Valley Ride Boise	Kitsap Kitsap	Sound Puget Sound	Everett Everett	Tri-Met Portland	Metro King County
PARATRANSIT	1.25	.75	3.00 One Way	1.00	1.30	1.50	2.00	1.75	n/a	1.00 Round Trip	1.80	.75
FIXED ROUTE	1.25	1.50	\$1.50	1.00	1.30	1.50	1.00 / 2.00 Day Pass	1.50 (Includes Transfer)	n/a	.50	2 hr: \$2.30; 1-2 zones \$2.00	1.50 – 2.25 depending on zone

King County Metro & Pierce Transit retain Fixed Route reduced fare for Paratransit customers

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Mr. Swalling outlined the public outreach opportunities as shown below, and noted the public can go to any Board meeting between now and the Board action in May to make a public comment.

What is next:

- Targeted public process (Jan – March)
- Recommendation to Board (March)
- Final public process – Public Hearing (April)
- Board action (May)
- Implementation

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Citizen Advisory Committee



A guest asked what is fair and correct to ask riders to pay.

Mr. Swalling replied the CAC proposal for Fixed Route average increase is 19% overall for Phase 1, and Paratransit is much different.

Mr. Lynch added that the CAC reviewed historically STA in relationship to other agencies, has been undercharging for Paratransit. If STA had been charging the same rate as other agencies such a large increase would not be seen in a single phase. The Committee debated about people on a fixed income and the effects on Paratransit riders and the effects on those who regularly ride the bus who are also on a fixed income, who do not qualify for Paratransit. Mr. Lynch continued to say the Committee understands in no way will Paratransit ever get to a 20% farebox recovery ratio. Right now 4.6% is the proposed farebox recovery ratio for Phase 1.

A guest commented that their agency has about 80% Paratransit ridership, and if they were to explain the cost of the service to the clients, they may be able to make this fare increase work through other subsidy as they have to have this service.

Another guest commented that they would agree with that comment for the most part, however, the size of the increase is concerning. People with disabilities are losing services, programs are declining and rates are going up and such a large increase at one time is going to financially kill some people.

A guest commented that riders go to their jobs and depend on this service and may opt not to work because it is too expensive all at once and too drastic. A domino effect on the community from people not being able to get where they need to go.

Ms. Bemiller said she is a user of Paratransit and supports the increase. As a person physically challenged and on a limited income she wants the respect of those that have more abilities than she does. She understands that those in different situations can feel put upon because there are other things that are pressing upon them, which makes them

exactly like other people who do not have physical challenges. There is a national economic problem and Paratransit riders should not be isolated because they are "special". Ms. Bemiller thinks that she and every other Paratransit rider are special because of many positive things. Paratransit riders need to avoid saying "it is not possible", there will be some that will have harder times and some that will appreciate the value of door-to-door service. Other people who have lived in other cities and used their Paratransit services do not get it as good as with STA.

A guest commented that they do not question that the service is good, but when the person is struggling to make ends meet and over double their transportation cost, this is too much to handle.

Ms. Bemiller replied the \$.50 that she and other Paratransit riders pay now is embarrassing.

Ms. Hoskin stated any fare selected is going to impact riders and asked the guests to provide what would be affordable for public input to make final recommendation for consideration. Ms. Hoskin acknowledged this is a difficult balancing act, and invited the guests to challenge the Committee and not just say "no", but to provide feedback of what would be more affordable. There is a need for sustainable, ongoing service and a responsibility to fund it. The CAC is not trying to disadvantage anyone, however, there needs to be an accumulative effect and there needs to be contributions from everyone. There will always be someone who is disadvantaged.

A guest pointed out that the larger communities have lower Paratransit rates than the CAC proposed fares, and did not know the last time the other transit's rates were raised and said the comparison for Fixed Route fares is questionable.

Ms. Hoskin said the Committee has had the same concerns and is why this specific meeting with this group for feedback and input is taking place. Ms. Hoskin reiterated the request for help to find solutions.

Mr. Blaska, commented that STA staff appreciates the work the CAC has done and reiterated that this is the time for solicitation of input. This is going to be an emotional issue for the community, nevertheless, the CAC has decided to have this discussion.

Mr. Blaska added Lane Transit is higher because they are not under Washington State law. Spokane provides more Paratransit trips than Pierce Transit, and their service area is five times larger and STA provides half the amount of Paratransit rides as King County provides and their population is ten times larger. This will be the biggest issue and is why special invitations went out knowing the sensitivity of this issue.

Mr. Lynch reiterated Ms. Hoskin's question, and asked the guests what would be an appropriate increase.

A guest suggested to increase the fares so it is comparable to Fixed Route, but on a slower pace.

Ms. Millbank asked if the goal can be divided out over a longer period of time.

Ms. Myers reminded the best ways to provide feedback are: comments on the STA website; public outreach at the Plaza; STA Board meetings. Ms. Myers invited the attendees to feel free to call or email her for additional direct input and added all feedback will be forwarded to the CAC members for review.

Mr. Lynch asked the guests from their perspective why ridership might be higher in Spokane.

Many guests said the cost of living is better in Spokane and there are good medical services in the region.

One guest stated he didn't think that Spokane had a higher percentage than any other community.

Another guest said there are not a lot of people who may be able to ride the bus and are choosing not to just because they want the door to door service.

Mr. Lynch asked STA staff to clarify the circumstances regarding someone that qualifies for Paratransit but on good weather days in the summer could access a Fixed Route bus, do they lose their qualification for Paratransit if they use Fixed Route part time?

Ms. Marchioro reported there are different conditional eligibilities where riders can use the service based on different conditions. They do not lose their eligibility for Paratransit, rather, the riders are provided with the transportation service they need.

Ms. Millbank added that eligibility is individualized based on each applicant's abilities. Mobility training is also provided for instruction on how to ride the bus.

A guest commented that this is an interesting set of challenges. Paratransit is incredibly expensive from a use standpoint, however, from a quality of life standpoint it is necessary. The guest further stated twice as many trips are given by STA Paratransit as other transits with twice the population and shared the viewpoint that those in the developmentally disabled community of Spokane are getting around that much better.

Mr. Blaska mentioned a Paratransit users group was interviewed regarding the prospect of increased fares. This group arrived at an acceptable rate of about \$.75 to \$ 1.00.

Mr. Blaska stated this issue is a "head and heart" balance and STA, from a staff perspective, understands what tremendous advocates of public transportation the guests present at this meeting are.

A guest stated there is a lack of education and understanding. Perhaps, there could be a sponsorship by local businesses.

Another guest said that he actually rode Paratransit for a while, and said had he been asked, he could have paid more.

Mr. Lynch asked the guests how many people they work with at their agencies that they provide subsidies for, and what would be the effect on their agencies budgets.

A guest stated the Arc does not subsidize.

Another guest stated they have subsidized on a case by case basis, but did not have any numbers to share.

A guest submitted that East Central Community Center pays for the passes, and no one at the center is paying for their rides, either VIP or Paratransit.

Another guest suggested to check with a homeless coalition that meets monthly.

Ms. Marchioro stated that some Paratransit customers receive passes via Special Mobility Service, which is the Medicaid broker through DSHS.

Ms. Millbank stated through a state grant, STA is providing 100 bus passes per month to food sites.

A guest said their community center could pay for passes, and perhaps the rider could pay for the increase difference.

The guests thanked the Committee for their long term dedication to this project.

Mr. Swalling said that the dedication is to the local issues and to maintain the sustainability of the system. With the national budget issues, and significant local issues impacting STA, there has to be changes in revenue. This draft proposal will be worked on as the CAC moves forward and certainly the feedback provided will be of great help. Mr. Swalling reiterated the position of the CAC is to maintain the sustainability of service, and while the projected revenue of increased fares will help, it is not anywhere close to the projected decrease in cash over the next four years. The proposed fares are as much as the CAC felt the ridership population could contribute and said overall this is a very tough issue. Mr. Swalling added he appreciates the time taken by each guest to attend. He invited everyone to let the CAC know of any further feedback from their agencies.

7. Agenda for Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 11, 2009 – 5:00 p.m. in the Southside Boardroom. The focus for this meeting will be to discuss the proposed fare increase with Business & School Representatives.

8. Adjourn

Mr. Swalling asked if there were any additional questions or comments. With there being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Naomi Dunning

Executive Assistant