

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

**OPERATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the September 7, 2011, Meeting  
Southside Conference Room

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Gary Schimmels, City of Spokane Valley\*\*  
Rick Jacks, Citizen  
Mike Brewer, Citizen  
Nan Kelly, Citizen  
Andrew Rolwes, Citizen  
Tim Dompier, ATU 1015  
Dennis Tonhofer, ATU 1598  
Judy Cassell, AFSCME 3939

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Nancy McLaughlin, City of Spokane\*  
Amber Waldref, City of Spokane  
David Driscoll, Citizen  
Ann Campeau, Citizen

\* Chair \*\* Acting Chair

**STAFF PRESENT**

E. Susan Meyer, CEO  
Steve Blaska, Director of Operations  
Jim Plaster, Director of Finance and Administration  
Lynda Warren, Director of Finance and Administration  
Karl Otterstrom, Director of Planning  
Lynn Holmes, Assistant Director of Finance  
Molly Myers, Manager, Communications  
Teresa Overhauser, Manager, Technical Projects  
Jacque Tjards, Manager, Purchasing  
Denise Marchioro, Manager, Paratransit Services  
Mike Toole, Assistant Manager, Safety & Security

**GUESTS**

Mike Kunder, AFSCME 3939

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Acting Chair Schimmels called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m.

2. **INTRODUCTIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE**

Introductions were made. There was no correspondence requiring the Committee's attention.

Ms. Meyer noted that this is the last Committee meeting that Mr. Plaster would be attending due to his imminent retirement. She said losing Mr. Plaster after 30 years of service to STA is emotional and difficult, but he has more time to spend with his wife visiting their children and grandchildren.

Ms. Meyer introduced Mr. Plaster's replacement, Lynda Warren. She said Ms. Warren came to STA from Grants Pass, Oregon, where she served as Chief Financial Officer at Rogue Community College.

Mr. Blaska requested that item #5 be covered first because there was indication that some Committee members might need to leave early, and a vote would be needed prior to their departure.

5. **APPROVAL OF SCOPE OF WORK FOR COMPUTER-AIDED DISPATCH/AUTOMATED VEHICLE LOCATION (CAD/AVL) AND COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ('SMART BUS') – ACTION REQUESTED**

Mr. Blaska explained that staff is asking the Committee to approve the scope of work for a CAD/AVL and communications system as part of the implementation of "smart bus" technology. Core capabilities of the system include: proactive fixed-route dispatch operations, tangible real-time information for the customer, automated stop announcements for fulfillment of ADA requirements, and the ability to build an infrastructure to meet critical communications needs.

There are three components of the project:

- Group 1: Core Infrastructure - CAD/AVL and Communications: a central dispatch system (supervisor terminals, mobile data terminals), and onboard computer/vehicle logic units;
- Group 2: Priority Customer Enhancements: real-time customer information and automated stop announcements (prediction module, web/mobile system, interactive voice response, plaza customer information);
- Group 3: Opportunistic Enhancements: core enhancements (automated passenger counters, next bus arrival signs), and other deployments (traveler information system enhancements, transit signal priority, park and ride security, center-to-center interface with the Spokane Regional Transportation Management Center).

Mr. Blaska gave an overview of staffing requirements and software licensing costs for the project, reviewed procurement costs estimates, and gave an overview of the associated cost analysis:

- CAD/AVL and infrastructure to integrate legacy systems, enable schedule and route adherence, data sharing, proactive service management and communications. \$6.65M
- audio and visual stop enunciation, enhanced real time customer information systems \$1.5M
- fiber optic communications connections \$300K
- automated passenger counters, expanded traveler wayside signage, cooperative traffic signal prioritization, and interface with SRTMC (will be accomplished when additional resources are identified) Unfunded

STA received a \$1.5M Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant for partial funding of Phase 1 of the project, and staff has applied for additional grant funding under the Livable Communities Program. Mr. Blaska reviewed the preparations and implementation steps leading to the request to release the RFP for CAD/AVL, and added that the timeline for the overall project is seven to ten years. CAD/AVL will serve as the foundation for all future work, and other elements and sub-elements will be bid as priced options, allowing STA to proceed with installation as timing and funding allows.

Staff is also requesting two Committee members to assist with evaluation of proposals submitted.

**Mr. Jacks moved to approve the Scope of Work for CAD/AVL and Data Communications System for release of a Request for Proposals. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Mr. Jacks, Mr. Brewer, and Mr. Rolwes volunteered to assist with evaluation of the proposals submitted.**

3. MINUTES OF THE JULY 6, 2011, COMMITTEE MEETING - CORRECTIONS OR APPROVAL

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

4. PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS

None.

6. SOLICITATION OF 2012 OPERATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE MEMBERS – ACTION REQUESTED

Mr. Blaska said that the terms of four current Committee members are due to expire in December 2011. Under STA bylaws, an unspecified number of citizen members are appointed to the Committee. Terms are one or two years in duration to stagger future appointments. Mr. Dompier asked how citizens can apply to become Committee members. Mr. Blaska said they could contact Jan Watson, Clerk of the Authority, and she would send out application forms and information about the Committee. Mr. Schimmels asked if there was a limit to the number of terms a citizen member could serve. Mr. Blaska responded that no limit has yet been set by the Board.

**By consensus, the Committee approved that should staff solicit interest from current citizen members whose term of service will expire in December, or from the community, for any open positions on the Operations and Customer Service Committee, with a list of potential appointees to be forwarded to the Board for action in December.**

7. DRAFT CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN – INFORMATION

Mr. Otterstrom explained that the Capital Improvement Plan is part of mid-range planning required by STA's Comprehensive Plan for Public Transportation. A public hearing was scheduled in July, but it was postponed until September to give STA's Board of Directors time to review the revised draft Plan. Mr. Otterstrom reviewed the Hierarchy of STA Plans and noted that there are five groups of projects and programs: revenue vehicles, non-revenue vehicles, maintenance and facilities, technology and customer facilities, and planning. All programs combined amount to approximately \$44.4M over a six-year period, and this includes \$7.5M in state and federal grants. Major programs include: vehicle replacement, Plaza renovation, smart bus implementation, the Boone facility master plan, business systems replacement, and the Central City High Performance Transit preliminary engineering. All other projects are vetted by the Board of Directors or are integral to maintaining existing facilities and services in a state of good repair.

Mr. Otterstrom reviewed a summary of major 2012 projects, including cost outlay estimates:

- Fixed Route coaches (6) \$3.9M
- Paratransit vans (12) \$1.2M
- Smart Bus \$2.1M (\$1.5M grant awarded)
- Business Systems replacement \$191K (1.4M grant awarded; timing change reduced 2012 expenses by \$1.55M)

- Central City Line STA portion (20% match) \$375K (pursuing grant opportunities/expenses contingent on grants)
- Plaza renovation \$2.2M (\$1.3M grant awarded)
- Facility master plan \$2.3M
- Other capital projects \$2.94M (\$150K increase due to timing)

Mr. Otterstrom reviewed the timeline, noting that action by the Board will be requested at their October 19, 2011, meeting.

#### 8. SERVICE CHANGE IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW – INFORMATION

Mr. Otterstrom said this item is to update the Committee on the Fixed Route service changes which will take place on September 18<sup>th</sup>. He reviewed a graph of the sales tax revenue gap, noting that the estimated decrease in forecasted sales tax revenue between 2007 and 2015 is \$97.3M. Phase 1 of this project included a 3% service reduction in 2010. Phase 2 includes a 7% service reduction effective September 18, 2011. Phase 3 includes another 7% service reduction in 2013. Reduction of the Paratransit boundary has impacted less than 20 customers. As a result of the service changes, a 4-6% reduction in fixed route ridership is anticipated. Mr. Otterstrom also reviewed customer outreach efforts which included service change notices, online schedules and Google trip planner, printed schedules on buses, stop closure notices, and various rider assistance efforts.

Mr. Blaska commented that many other transit properties took an “easy” approach to cutting service by eliminating service on certain days or on certain routes, but STA’s Planning Department looked at every route and made minor changes. This method retained system integrity by continuing to provide some level of service every day of the week with the least amount of negative impact to riders. Mr. Blaska added that he is impressed with the way the Fixed Route drivers have accepted and embraced the new service changes as they go through the mark-up process.

Ms. Myers said that some agencies have even contemplated a 10% reduction in service across all routes, regardless of productivity. With the service cuts that STA made, riders are noticing improved connectivity and better service.

#### 9. FIXED ROUTE SYSTEM RIDERSHIP ANALYSIS - SIX MONTH ASSESSMENT – INFORMATION

Mr. Blaska explained that a ridership assessment of the first six months of 2011 provides staff with an opportunity to analyze ridership trends which support agency decision making. Passengers per revenue hour are up, the cost per passenger is down, and the farebox return is up. Even with a 3% reduction in service last September, Fixed Route ridership has increased 2.2% through June. This indicates that after the 2010 reduction, remaining service is actually more productive.

Significant trends include: a decrease in cash riders (which is offset by a migration of those riders to use of 31-day passes), youth ridership is recovering from a decline in 2010, growth in reduced fare ridership, and growth in ridership to post-secondary education sites and on commuter routes. These trends validate the success of the service changes that were made so far, as well as decisions that have been made regarding which routes will undergo changes in 2011. Mr. Blaska reviewed average weekday ridership numbers, as well as January through June weekday boardings per revenue hour. He added that the prognosis is dynamic, and the goal is to retain as many riders as possible while reducing service.

#### 10. CEO REPORT – INFORMATION

a. Ms. Meyer said STA underwent a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) triennial audit, and there were three findings:

- The last Paratransit trip of the day is not being calculated correctly. Currently, the last scheduled pick-up is at 11:00 p.m., and allowing for a 30-minute pick-up window and any traffic routing problems, it was expected this would coincide with fixed route service. However, the FTA auditors reported that an 11:00 p.m. cutoff is too early. Staff will work to make necessary adjustments to bring STA into compliance.
- No half-price fare is offered to reduced-fare eligible riders on STA’s shuttle service. The cost to ride the shuttle is currently 75-cents (which is half the normal bus fare), but FTA auditors recommended raising the fare to \$1.50 or lowering the fare for reduced-fare riders to 35-cents. Staff will meet to discuss how to bring this into compliance.
- STA’s Transit Enhancement Plan fell short of FTA auditors’ expectations. Staff needs to submit a more specific plan on how funding from the FTA for transit enhancements (e.g., improvements to shelters or passengers stops) will be used by STA.

Ms. Meyer added that overall it was a very good report.

- b. Ms. Meyer said that the second meeting of the Connecting Washington Task Force is scheduled for Friday, September 9, 2011. The objective of the Task Force is to develop a revenue package for a new gas tax measure which will go to the voters in November 2012. The goal of the Task Force is to develop principles for projects, but not give the Legislature actual projects. The Task Force will eventually need to develop a revenue package to fund those projects the Legislature decides to pursue. A recommendation is anticipated for the State to play a more robust role in funding transit. Further information will be forthcoming at future meetings.
- c. Ms. Meyer commented that Governor Gregoire has appointed Joe Tortorelli, Executive Director of The Good Roads Association, to the Washington State Transportation Commission. Ms. Meyer added that she has offered her assistance to Mr. Tortorelli in an effort to focus on overall transportation issues and not only the state's roadways.
- d. Ms. Meyer said an extension of the federal gas tax must be approved by Congress by September 30, 2011. Discussions are ongoing as to whether or not the federal portion of the gas tax could be removed. Until Congress moves forward, the impact of the gas tax on transit is unknown.
- e. Ms. Meyer asked if anyone had seen the news regarding atheist ads running on STA buses. She said the United Coalition for Reason is running ads which say, "Are you good without God? Millions are." STA is obligated to carry any advertising which is not prohibited by policy. The attorney for the United Coalition for Reason has requested copies of any contentious feedback that STA receives from their ads. Some local newspapers have applauded STA for carrying the ads, as required by the First Amendment.
- f. Ms. Meyer gave kudos to Mr. Plaster's finance and accounting team. She said they are professionals and she knows they will continue to do an excellent job following his retirement. She added that Mr. Plaster's hard work and dedication are responsible in large measure for the organization's financial stability over the past 30 years. Mr. Plaster thanked Ms. Meyer, said that he will miss everyone at STA and added that he and his wife plan to stay in the community in the coming years, so he hopes to see everyone again. Applause followed.

11. COMMITTEE INFORMATION

- a. Second Quarter 2011 Operating Indicators - as presented.
- b. Second Quarter 2011 Safety & Loss Summary Report - as presented.
- c. June 2011 Operating Indicators - as presented.
- d. July 2011 Operating Indicators - as presented.
- e. Community Outreach and Involvement - as presented.
- f. Second Quarter 2011 Performance Measures - as presented.

12. OLD OR NEW BUSINESS

None.

13. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' EXPRESSIONS

Mr. Jacks said he wanted to personally thank Mr. Plaster for his years of service to STA.

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

15. ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Acting Chair Schimmels adjourned the meeting at 2:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Jeanette Van Dort, Executive Assistant