

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

OPERATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Draft Minutes of the January 9, 2008, Meeting
Southside Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT

Richard Munson, City of Spokane Valley*
Nancy McLaughlin, City of Spokane
Mike Brewer, Citizen
Ann Campeau, Citizen
David Driscoll, Citizen
Guy Smith, ATU 1598
Dennis Antonellis, ATU 1015
Steve Pinkerton, AFSCME 3939

MEMBERS ABSENT

Allan Gainer, Mayor, City of Cheney
Nan Kelly, Citizen

STAFF PRESENT

E. Susan Meyer, Chief Executive Officer
Steve Blaska, Director of Operations
Jim Plaster, Director of Finance & Administration
Jacque Tjards, Manager, Purchasing
Molly Myers, Communications Manager
Don Reimer, Manager, Maintenance & Facilities
Charlie Phillips, Maintenance Analyst
Jan Watson, Executive Assistant and Clerk of the Authority
Tom Hawkinson, Supervisor, Paratransit Services

GUESTS

None

* Chair

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Munson called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

2. **INTRODUCTIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE**

Introductions were made. Mr. Munson noted that he had just been elected to the position of Mayor of The City of Spokane Valley. Ms. Meyer presented Mr. Munson with a plant in honor of his achievement.

Mr. Pinkerton arrived at 1:32 p.m.

Mr. Blaska noted that Mr. Pinkerton was being honored for a second time as winner of the STA Outstanding Employee Award following nomination and selection by the Employee Recognition Program committee for his problem solving skills, good humor, and leadership skills. Applause followed.

There was no correspondence requiring the Committee's attention.

3. **MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 5, 2007, COMMITTEE MEETING – CORRECTIONS OR APPROVAL**

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

4. **PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS**

None. In reference to Mr. Brewer comment at the last meeting that there was a request about a year ago for a bus shelter at the corner of Wellesley and Haven near St. Peter's Church, Mr. Blaska confirmed that this location is still on the list of locations waiting for a shelter and an application packet should be sent by the end of the month. Several candidate locations higher on the list have not responded.

5. **AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR TWELVE (12) PARATRANSIT VANS – DISCUSSION**

Mr. Blaska said what would be considered routine, scheduled replacement of twelve paratransit vans requires two decisions: first, the decision regarding the type of vehicle, and second, the method of fueling those vehicles, diesel vs. gas. Staff is recommending purchase of EIDorado vans rather than StarTrans vans because of the superior quality of the vehicle body. The frame and engine is essentially the same, but the EIDorado van has an energy absorbing, steel reinforced composite body with a 5-year, 100,000 mile warranty, stainless steel step wells and door frames, and uses integrated circuit board technology with LED diagnostics.

Mr. Blaska explained the rationale behind the recommendation to purchase a gasoline rather than a diesel-fueled engine. He said that normally a decision would be to replace unleaded vehicles with the most cost effective alternative, but this is one where a recommendation is not being made strictly on data. A cost comparison was done indicating that it is cost effective to go with diesel over gas; the real savings is that vehicles use less fuel (i.e., 7.2 mpg for unleaded vs. 9.1 mpg for diesel fuel), despite the fact that the vehicle costs more and there is a higher maintenance cost over the life of the vehicle. However, even with that considered, the analysis indicates there would be a savings on fuel of approximately \$75K for the fleet over the seven year vehicle life expectancy.

Ms. McLaughlin asked if diesel costs more than gas. Mr. Blaska responded that today it did and over the last year it averaged \$0.14 less per gallon. He noted that that factor was taken out when the comparison was made. Mr. Brewer asked if biodiesel fuel had been considered. Mr. Blaska said that it had been, but it is more expensive, difficult to find suppliers, and you don't get the same type of energy savings. Mr. Driscoll asked if alternatives such as hybrids had been looked into. Mr. Blaska said that hybrids were under consideration, but the vehicles requested were available for purchase

under other intergovernmental contracts which made the cost less than if STA went out with its own contract. One vendor did come in with a hybrid vehicle, but the cost was approximately \$150K higher than the vehicles requested because of the technology of the engine. Mr. Plaster noted that there is no tax on Paratransit vehicles. Mr. Blaska also noted that the maintenance costs for diesel vehicles is higher than for gas vehicles and staff is concerned on where the trend is going for diesel vehicles, and that is why gas vehicles are now being recommended in this purchase. We will re-visit this analysis for the next purchase of twenty-four vans in the 2007-2010 timeframe. He added that there are also concerns about odor, engine noise, and the overall perception of diesel being a "dirtier" fuel with diesel vehicles. Discussion ensued regarding the use of hybrid and/or biodiesel vehicles in the future.

Mr. Brewer moved to recommend the Board approve the purchase of twelve (12) Eldorado cutaway vans from Schetky Northwest Sales, Inc., Portland, Oregon, through the Oregon State Purchasing Cooperative contract for a sum not to exceed \$816,000. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Ms. McLaughlin moved to approve the transfer of twelve surplus Paratransit vehicles to the Special Use Vanpool program. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Mr. Brewer moved that this item be forwarded to the consent agenda. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Mr. Pinkerton said he would like to recommend that when staff members attend pre-production meetings that operators be part of that staff whenever possible to provide input on small details such as how seat belts operate or the positions operators need to be in to assist passengers. Mr. Blaska said that would be a consideration in the future.

6. RECOMMENDATION OF NEW OPERATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE MEMBER FOR 2008 – DISCUSSION

Mr. Blaska said that everyone should have received a copy of Mr. Jacks' application via mail recently, and that staff is asking for a unified stance from this group for Mr. Jacks' inclusion on the Operations and Customer Service Committee.

Ms. McLaughlin moved to recommend the Board appoint Rick Jacks as a citizen member of the STA Operations and Customer Service Committee effective January 1, 2008, for a term of two (2) years. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

7. PLANNING FOR A REDUCED SERVICE SCENARIO – INFORMATION

Mr. Blaska explained that a decision will need to be made over the next few months regarding the reauthorization of the three-tenths of one percent sales tax funding. He said it is important to begin developing a scenario for operating in the event of this type of funding constraint. Staff is proposing to use the Reduced Service Plan that was developed and approved by the Board of Directors in 2004 as a basis for a new Reduced Service Plan. The structure for the Plan includes thousands of hours of work by staff, the Board-appointed task force, and community representatives. Part of the guidance and structure that went into the final recommendation was the concept that you don't just cut the service; you need to make certain that there is a core or basic level of service from which you work. Mr. Blaska showed slides indicating the service planning assumptions illustrating the 2004 reduced service plan, and how more resources allow additional revenue hours of service to be added to the core level. Mr. Blaska noted that at that time there were approximately 221K revenue hours of service available; currently there are approximately 402K.

Other assumptions included:

- o Paratransit service meets ADA guidance - comparable to fixed route service;
- o weekday service is only from 6:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.;
- o transit oriented patrons and current customers are given priority for sustained service;
- o the goal is to capture the most ridership with the resources available;
- o successful public transportation supports adopted community land use plans; and
- o maximum federal preventive maintenance funding available each year in planning horizon.

Mr. Blaska reviewed a slide of the demographics summary with proposed routes. In addition, he gave a summary of significant changes between the 2004 base plan and the current reduced service plan including:

- o service enhancements since 2004 would be discontinued;
- o basic service constraints including no weekday service after 7:00 p.m., very limited Saturday service, and no Sunday service;
- o curtailed service to communities in the PTBA (including Fairchild AFB, Medical Lake, Spokane Valley, Cheney, Millwood, and Liberty Lake); and
- o no special events.

Mr. Blaska reiterated that the 2004 Plan would be used as a basis for the new Plan since it was vetted and approved by the Board at that time and it provides a realistic, tangible view of service capability with reduced funding. He said that this will be the beginning of an extensive process which will include analysis of community changes since 2004, public input, Plan revision, and request for approval for the new, revised Plan. Mr. Blaska made the key point that Board decision on implementation timing will drive resource decisions, sustainable service levels, public impact, and credibility. He

reviewed two graphs explaining how timing of service cuts is important and how that will drive the final configuration of the Plan. He concluded with a review of the timeline for transition to the new Reduced Service Plan, adding that it is important that staff get a consensus that the Board agrees that it makes sense to use the 2004 Plan as a basis for the new Plan.

Mr. Munson asked the group if there was a consensus that using the 2004 Plan as a basis for the new Plan was a good idea. There was no opposition.

8. CEO REPORT – INFORMATION

- a. Ms. Meyer mentioned that she was off the last two weeks of the year and operations continued well in her absence. She said staff is excited about the new hybrid buses and she noted that service on the North Express will begin on January 21st, and the buses are branded differently to distinguish them from the regular buses.
- b. Mr. Meyer said that Assistant Fixed Route Manager Frank Bezemer was interviewed earlier that day regarding how well STA drivers are trained and what a great job they do in snowy conditions. She noted that winter driving allows our drivers to shine and that wintertime accidents generally involve other vehicles sliding into STA buses.
- c. Mr. Blaska commented that on First Night there were over 6,000 riders which is about a 30% increase over the previous year. He said that the circulator design from the parking areas contributed greatly to the success in achieving this ridership increase. He also congratulated Molly Myers and the Communications team for their efforts leading to this success.
- d. Mr. Blaska reported that annual ridership for fixed route service was over 9.4M riders. The goal for 2008 was 7.8M riders, so this was about a 25% increase over that goal. The 9.4M riders represents a 12.2% increase over 2007. Paratransit ridership was approximately 506K which is a 2.5% increase over 2007. Rideshare ridership was 166K which is a 2% increase over 2007. Mr. Blaska noted that this all adds up to over 10M rides across all three modes, or 10M trips that were not taken by people using automobiles.
- e. Mr. Blaska said the Board authorized staff to look to see if there were hybrid bus purchase opportunities available, and Mr. Tjards found six such opportunities in California. He said that the decision to purchase hybrid vehicles is important because the cost would be approximately \$1M more to go with hybrids. Staff is still deliberating whether or not to ask the Board to take advantage of this opportunity now or later. Ms. Meyer asked if the group could have a quick discussion about this, because she considered it a good idea to snap those buses up as soon as possible; however, it is a lot of money. She said that if all assumptions turn out to be correct, the maximum amount of opportunity funds available would be approximately \$2.5. If the Board decided not to fund one of the road projects, that money (approximately \$1.5M) could be added for a total of \$4M. She said that staff is also hesitant to jump into this purchase while the question of what to do about The Plaza remains unanswered. She noted that now that the opportunity to purchase the hybrid vehicles presented itself, there is a short decision timeframe because of the production schedule. Ms. Meyer said that another transit agency was ready immediately to take over STA's current order of six diesel vehicles from the Gillig Corporation, freeing STA to take advantage of this new opportunity. Extensive discussion ensued. Ms. Meyer said she would like to discuss with the Board at their January meeting about asking the federal government to assist with funding for the upgrade to hybrid vehicles. Further discussion ensued.

Mr. Munson asked if there was a consensus to ask the Board to consider the hybrid buses. There was no opposition.

9. COMMITTEE INFORMATION

- a. November 2007 Operating Indicators – as presented.
- b. Community Outreach and Involvement – as presented.

10. OLD OR NEW BUSINESS

- a. Mr. Blaska asked Committee members to please return their parking decal forms as soon as possible.

11. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' EXPRESSIONS – None.

12. NEXT MEETING – WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2008, 1:30 P.M., SOUTHSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM, 1230 WEST BOONE AVENUE

13. ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Chairman Munson adjourned the meeting at 2:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,