

**CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING**

Meeting Minutes for March 5, 2009  
Northside Conference Room

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**STAFF PRESENT**

Steve Blaska, Director of Operations  
Denise Marchioro, Paratransit Manager  
Susan Millbank, Ombudsman  
Molly Myers, Communications Manager  
Karl Otterstrom, Director of Planning  
Jim Plaster, Director of Finance and Administration

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

None

**GUESTS**

None

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL - (David Swalling, Chair)**

Chairman Swalling called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m. and conducted roll call.

**2. PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS**

None.

**3. TARIFF POLICY**

**a.) Review Compilation of Public Comments**

Ms. Myers provided results of three separate survey instruments to the Committee. The first being results of the scientific study/survey conducted by Robinson Research. Ms. Myers reviewed the study's Statement of Methodology and the Proposed Fare Increase Study results with Committee members. *For ease of reference, the study is attached to these minutes.*

Ms. Myers reported a total of 400 telephone interviews were completed. A 400-sample survey has a margin of error of +/- 4.9% percent, which means the results have a ninety-five percent (95%) chance of coming within +/- 4.9 percentage points of results that would have been obtained if all adults residing in STA's Public Transportation Benefit Area had been interviewed.

Two different questionnaires were used for this study. Throughout the report and the Detailed Database Report they are referred to as questionnaire A and questionnaire B. Questionnaire B contained an opening paragraph that stated the following:

"Currently, 15% of the cost of a fixed route transit trip is paid by the riders, while 85% is subsidized by taxpayers. While operating costs have increased significantly, the last fare increase was in 2002."

In no instances were the differences in responses from these two questionnaires statistically significant. This study was designed as a single 400-sample survey, with all data split by whether respondents were read the preconditioning statement. Wherever Robinson Research observed a noteworthy difference between the A and B subsets, it is noted in the Detailed Observations.

Of special note, Ms. Myers said 43% of the respondent profile reported riding an STA bus in the previous six months; the average age was 54.83, similar to the Community Perceptions Study; and half (50%) of those interviewed were female. A gender quota was used.

Ms. Myers said the percentage of respondents reported riding an STA bus in the last six months is very high, and to her recollection was considerably higher than the percentage last reported on the last Community Perceptions Survey.

Mr. Lynch asked what the Community Perceptions Survey is.

Ms. Myers stated it is an annual survey which has been conducted the last three years and surveys the Spokane community at large on a variety of performance perception measures relating to STA services.

Mr. Frazier noted a large percentage (24%) of the respondents are located in the 99208 and 99205 zip codes, and asked why that may be. He said overall, the north side respondents seemed to outweigh most other locations.

Ms. Myers replied the quotas are set for each zip code depending on the population. It is a weighted scale based specifically on population density in each area.

The second instrument presented by Ms. Myers was the same survey given to the public, however, the respondents were STA employees. Ms. Myers noted there was no preamble for the employee survey, rather, just straight questions were provided. ***For ease of reference, the study is attached to these minutes.***

Mr. Blaska added this survey was given to the employees due to the likelihood of the STA Board asking of the employee's opinion on this matter.

The STA Employee Fare Increase Survey rendered 206 respondents. Ms. Myers reviewed all questions and responses and surmised the strongest opinion by employees is while operating costs have significantly increased, STA has not raised fares in seven years.

Mr. Frazier said it was interesting to know that employees surveyed felt the Express Routes should cost the same as regular routes.

Ms. Myers added that an additional page of verbatim comments from employees submitted with the survey are captured on the back page.

The third instrument provided by Ms. Myers was the Citizen Advisory Committee Proposed Fare Increase Feedback received to date. ***For ease of reference, the spreadsheet is attached to these minutes.*** The numbers from the spreadsheet were recapped as follows: 174 total responses were received (65 Web; 10 Hotline; 96 Comment Card; 0 Public Testimony; 0 Other). In general, the overall response rendered 68 in favor of an increase and 102 not in favor of an increase. Ms. Myers stated this is not a scientific survey, rather this is representation of those who commented via one of the methods listed above. While at the public venues, many of the people that were in favor of an increase, more often than not did not take the time to complete a comment card, therefore their input was not captured on this spreadsheet.

Ms. Myers thanked the CAC for their dedication and hard work with the public outreach.

**b.) Discuss Recommendations and Presentation for the March 19, 2009 Board Meeting**

Mr. Blaska spoke about the final recommendation and presentation to be made to the Board on March 19, 2009. In doing so, he referred back to the initial proposal made to the Board in December, and noted all input received since that time via public outreach, feedback and surveys and suggested a review of these items in order for the CAC to determine if modification to the original proposal is necessary for a final recommendation to the Board. In order to guide this meeting's discussion and assist the CAC with completion of their final presentation, Mr. Blaska provided a rough outline presentation which incorporated the initial recommendation, all public outreach and all feedback received to date. The work completed at this meeting will be incorporated into this presentation for review and finalization at the next meeting on March 11, 2009.

Mr. Blaska noted there is an update on the sales tax revenue which will be presented at the next meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup>. He said essentially sales tax revenue continues to deteriorate.

Mr. Plaster said there is an 8.8% decline for January and February, which also includes the December retail activity in February's revenue. A negative growth of -3.5% was budgeted and actual revenues are well under this figure.

Mr. Blaska said the fare elasticity model and pie charts would be updated and Paratransit demographic of the income level, how many monthly passes vs. cash fare, and subsidies. A closure also needs to be made on the definition of Express Routes.

The Committee said they would like to see further detail on the Paratransit demographics.

Mr. Blaska shared one of the frequently asked questions is "What is the income level of Paratransit ridership?" Mr. Blaska said this is a very difficult question to answer as the data is not gathered by STA. An attempt to gather this information from any agency that would have a view of an income correlation to the Paratransit customers, i.e. DSHS, Special Mobility Service, however, no such data is available. An indirect perspective may be to ask what proportion of customers are 65 years or older who are in the STA database and are active customers. It is safe to conclude that these riders are on a fixed income. Of the STA pass holder population, 44% of the active customers are 65 years or older, however, only 20% of the rides are taken by this segment of population. They are a significant percentage of customers but not as active users of the system. Mr. Blaska continued to say 63% of the trips are by use of pass. Based on numbers, pass holders do not necessarily ride to the maximum break even value of the pass.

Ms. Smits asked if these monthly passes are distributed by social service agencies.

Mr. Blaska said this is correct in addition to distribution by many employers.

Mr. Blaska summarized most people probably have passes either purchased by DSHS or SMS, therefore, there is not much use for a monthly pass. These agencies pay \$16.50 for the pass, give it to the individual, and 80% of the individual monthly pass holders are taking fewer rides than the value of the pass. 20% of riders are taking 20 – 70 trips per month. When addressing the concern of an increased cost to use Paratransit services, Mr. Blaska said for those users in the 80% category who take an average of 13 trips per month, if they changed the product they buy from a monthly pass to cash for a single ride, their out of pocket cost would not increase as they would be spending \$16.25 for 13 rides at \$1.25 per ride.

Mr. Lynch asked if DSHS could provide something other than a monthly pass to customers.

Mr. Blaska said DSHS could distribute 2-Hour passes.

Ms. Marchioro shared if a Medicaid customer has two medical appointments in a one month time period, the customer may be given a monthly pass by Special Mobility Services (SMS). It is more cost effective for SMS to buy a monthly pass at \$16.50 than to pay a private broker to provide two rides for approximately \$100.

Ms. Hoskin said she found this information to be interesting, however, questioned why this information was being reviewed again as she is comfortable with the current proposal and the rationale behind it. She added that Mr. Blaska's explanation of the same or decreased out of pocket cost does not make sense to her when you compare the current fare at \$.50 per ride to \$1.25 per ride and maintained there is an increase it just depends on what it is that you are choosing to compare it to.

Mr. Lynch said it is a significant and relevant point of interest, especially to the STA Board to say 80% of the Paratransit monthly pass holders who currently ride on average 13 rides or less could maintain the same out of pocket expense if they purchased their rides on an individual basis at \$1.25 per ride.

The Committee moved forward by discussing other key points of their proposal.

Mrs. Jones said she heard many negative comments about the proposed Express Route fare.

Ms. Smits said of the feedback she has received, the proposed new Express Route fare category is not well supported, and motioned to eliminate the proposed Express Route fare.

Ms. Bemiller said she has not used the Express service here in Spokane, but has used it in other large cities which has accommodated a faster ride and had free parking, which was worth the fare. It also depends on where the bus is departing from and its destination. Express service to Ms. Bemiller means the bus is going to travel quite a few miles and questioned whether Spokane is really large enough to have this and reiterated an unclear definition of what Express really means to STA.

Ms. Smits reminded the Committee of maintaining simplicity throughout this process and does agree that there are benefits to having an Express fare. It has become clear to Ms. Smits, however, that there is limited support for the Express Fare. She repeated her motion to eliminate the proposed Express Route fare.

Ms. Hoskin said she still thinks it is a good idea and perhaps someday it will be implemented, however, having an Express fare goes against keeping things simple.

Mr. Lynch said he agrees with Ms. Hoskin and believes this type of fare could still be done in Spokane now. Mr. Lynch proposed to amend Ms. Smits' motion by stating "the CAC sees the value of an Express Fare, however, will not recommend an Express Fare at this time. As more Express Routes are established as the city grows, a review to reinstate this fare is recommended to take place."

Ms. Hoskin seconded Mr. Lynch's motion to amend.

Ms. Bemiller asked to hear a complete definition prior to a vote.

Mr. Blaska stated the definition of the Express Service according to the Tariff Policy "speeds longer trips, especially in major metropolitan areas during heavily patronized peak meeting hours by operating long distances without stopping. Examples include: park and ride routes between suburban parking lots and central business districts that operate on freeways and express buses on major streets that operate local service on the outlying portions of a route until a certain point, and then operate non-stop to the central business district."

Ms. Bemiller asked which of STA's seven Express Routes fall under this definition.

Mr. Blaska replied the 124 North Express, 65 Cheney/EWU, 66 EWU, 72 Liberty Lake, 73 Valley Transit Center, 74 Valley Limited, 62 Liberty Lake. The issue is STA's extended distances are relatively shorter than other transits including the number of stops on each end of the route, particularly Cheney.

Ms. Hoskin added the 124 is the only true Express Route as riders have a choice between "premium" service on the Express Route vs. "regular" service on the Division bus.

Ms. Smits said it depends on how you define the route and the CAC could change how it is defined. Based on the definition read by Mr. Blaska, all seven routes would qualify as Express. The definition does not mention parallel service as being necessary to qualify as an Express Route.

Mr. Lynch shared a rider he spoke with said if the Express Route fares were adopted, she would no longer take the 72, she would instead take the 71 which would take her five minutes longer. Mr. Lynch said this shows there are other alternatives for some of these routes even though the implication is that there is not.

Mr. Lynch also referred to what a driver said implying the bus has to stop at every blue sign once they enter the city and asked if this information is correct.

Mr. Blaska said for most of these routes, there are a limited number of blue signs once entering downtown, and if someone wants to get off prior to reaching The Plaza, they can get off the bus. Generally for people heading downtown, they may get off early inbound, but to catch the Express Bus, the rider would go to The Plaza.

Mr. Lynch asked if 72 arriving downtown from Liberty Lake would have to stop at a blue sign that is for other buses on the way to pick up riders.

Mr. Blaska replied an inbound bus would have to stop once they are in the downtown corridor and said there are very few stops prior to arriving at The Plaza and confirmed what the driver said is correct.

Ms. Hoskin stated STA does not have true Express Buses.

Mr. Frazier commented the free parking at remote park and rides might be another source of revenue in the future, and suggested the customers have an added benefit with security cameras, or live security personnel.

Mr. Swalling asked for a second on the motion to eliminate the Express Route fare category.

Ms. Hoskin seconded the motion.

Mr. Swalling asked for a vote on to incorporate the amended statement to the Express Route Fare category.

All seven members were in favor of the amendment.

Mr. Blaska asked the Committee if there were any other ideas in addition to the changes for Express Routes for Fixed Route category be incorporated to the presentation.

Mr. Lynch said he would like to see captured in the final presentation that many people were in favor of the Fixed Route increase but did not fill out comment cards.

The members of the Committee agreed.

Mr. Blaska reminded the Committee if they had any other suggestions they are welcome to send an email. A Board item will be drafted based on the input received at this meeting for the Committee's final approval at the next meeting on March 11, 2009.

Mr. Swalling announced the Paratransit Fare category is the next portion of the presentation and recommendation for the Committee to discuss.

Mr. Lynch said he heard numerous times the Paratransit proposal is "too much, too fast". Mr. Lynch proposed to modify the Paratransit proposal so the increase is spread out over three phases ultimately matching the Fixed Route fare in 2012.

Ms. Smits said the Paratransit increase does not necessarily need to go to \$45.00 for a monthly pass just to keep the fares the same and questioned why this would have to be, especially when Paratransit is now proposed at a three phase increase as opposed to a two phase increase.

Other Committee members responded collectively that the Paratransit and Fixed Route fares do need to be the same because this is what was previously decided by the Committee.

Mr. Lynch said he would like to get to the previously decided objective where both Fixed Route and Paratransit fares are the same. STA has confirmed with the CAC that because they know who the Paratransit users are, it would be feasible to communicate on an individual basis when there is a fare increase that effects only Paratransit. Because they are a captured audience, the structure exists for this to occur. If and when it is decided to change the fares again, Paratransit and Fixed Route would be on an equal basis at that time.

Mr. Frazier said the suggestion does have merit as it does ease the increase over the use of an additional phase and believes Paratransit should ultimately have parity with Fixed Route.

Ms. Bemiller believes a lot of Paratransit riders would be happy with stretching out the increase over an additional phase and asked about the title of the "VIP" fare.

Mr. Blaska replied if the fare increase takes place the title will change from "VIP" to "Reduced Fare" as other transits do.

Ms. Bemiller asked what the charges will be for Reduced Fare as a Paratransit rider on Fixed Route.

Ms. Millbank replied if a rider has Paratransit eligibility, they will have a Smart Card which says they have Paratransit and Reduced Fare ID. If a Paratransit rider is paying cash it would be \$1.50 for Paratransit and \$.75 for Fixed Route.

Ms. Bemiller asked why it would this not discourage riders from using Paratransit.

Ms. Millbank, said it may be discouraging, but if a rider has the ability to use the bus then they should.

Ms. Smits said she met people during the public outreach who said they would ride Fixed Route as an alternative to Paratransit upon an increase of fares.

Mr. Lynch said he was surprised at how many people he encountered during the public outreach who said they ride both Fixed Route and Paratransit.

Ms. Millbank reported this is very common. Some who ride in the winter may not even have eligibility in the summer.

Mr. Lynch asked if someone who is eligible for Paratransit and are also a VIP, could they use the VIP to have a Paratransit ride.

Mr. Blaska said a new fare media, the 2-Hour Paratransit pass would be applicable for Paratransit and Fixed Route, however, the VIP/Reduced Fare Pass for Fixed Route would no longer be applicable to Paratransit.

Mr. Lynch asked if the same would be true for the Youth Pass. If they qualify for PT, they wouldn't be able to ride Paratransit on a Youth Pass, but could do the reverse.

Mr. Blaska said this would need to be addressed in 2009 when the Youth Pass is the same price as the Paratransit Monthly Pass and while they are the same price they should be interchangeable, however, when the Youth Pass is raised to \$30.00 and Paratransit Pass is raised to \$45.00, this would no longer be applicable.

Ms. Millbank asked if it would be easier to say at the beginning, if a rider uses Paratransit, they need to have Paratransit fare media.

Ms. Jones asked how common it is for people in wheelchairs and scooters to ride the bus.

Ms. Millbank stated it is very common. It is difficult to accommodate for anything larger than what is defined as a "common wheelchair" which is 48" long and 30" wide. The interior of the buses and ramps are designed to accommodate for these measurements and up to 600 pounds.

Mr. Swalling asked the Committee for any additions to Mr. Lynch's motion.

Mr. Lynch said the economy may improve by 2011. In light of the current economic status, perhaps the first increase could be raised from \$.50 to \$.75 instead of \$.50 to \$1.00, and could remain this way through January 1, 2011 at which time the fare would increase to \$1.25, and again on January 1, 2012 increase to \$1.50 to achieve parity to the Fixed Route fares.

Ms. Bemiller said she thought \$1.00 would be an appropriate fare for the first increase.

Mr. Lynch said the only reason he would choose \$.75 as the first increase is because it is a shorter period of time and will allow for the agencies to come up with the money knowing they will have a longer period of time prior to the second increase in 2011.

Ms. Hoskin agreed with Mr. Lynch.

Ms. Hoskin asked Mr. Lynch to restate his recommendation.

Mr. Lynch restated his motion for the Paratransit fares as follows:

In keeping with the goal to reach parity with Fixed Route fares, the first Paratransit increase will be in 2009 at \$.75 cash and \$25.00 monthly; no increase in 2010; January 1, 2011 at \$1.25 cash and approximately \$37.00 monthly (CAC has deferred to Mr. Blaska who will provide a monthly number at the next meeting); January 1, 2012 at \$1.50 cash and \$45.00 monthly, achieving parity to the Fixed Route fares.

Ms. Jones seconded the motion.

The motion passed with all in favor.

Mr. Blaska recapped with the Committee their wishes for the general order and design of the presentation beginning with the original intent of simplicity, restate the original proposal as made in December 2008, public outreach efforts, "What We Heard" for Fixed Route, Express, Paratransit, including general comments and a CAC recommendation. Detailed information will be included in the speaker's notes.

In light of this presentation being televised, Mr. Lynch suggested to have more detail about what was heard and expand the presentation to include why the Committee continued with and/or changed the recommendations. He also noted the initial presentation in December was not televised due to change of venue during the winter storms. Mr. Lynch reminded the March presentation to the Board will be the first televised presentation and requested to retain additional information from the initial presentation in order to provide a complete picture.

Mr. Blaska said STA staff will also make a presentation prior to the public hearing at the April Board meeting.

Mr. Blaska mentioned Mr. Plaster is updating the financial forecast with year-end 2008 actual data. There is also approximately \$10M to be received in stimulus funding for use towards capital projects and the degree to which this effects the cash flow may be of interest to the CAC. Mr. Blaska said the fare elasticity model and revenue pie charts will be updated with 2008 data.

Mr. Lynch asked to have the fare elasticity model include a 5% reduction in ridership, as the Committee has it only with zero reduction.

Mr. Frazier said not necessarily a 5% reduction, but whatever the model suggests as a reduction with the proposed increases.

Mr. Blaska said the model is not set up as a linear equation.

Ms. Hoskin suggested to input the proposed fares and let the model project the percentage of reduction in ridership.

#### **4. SET AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday, March 11, 2009 – 5:00 p.m. (Regular Meeting) – Spokane Transit, Northside Conference Room  
The CAC will finalize their Tariff Policy recommendation and presentation for the March 19, 2009 Board meeting.

#### **7. ADJOURN**

With there being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Naomi Dunning  
Executive Assistant