

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

CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting Minutes for November 10, 2010
Southside Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT

Fyrne Bemiller
Susanne Croft
Victor Frazier
Charles Hansen
Resa Hayes
Margaret Jones
Larry Luton
Philip Rudy
Brenda Smits, Chair

STAFF PRESENT

Steve Blaska, Director of Operations
Karl Otterstrom, Director of Planning

GUESTS PRESENT

None

MEMBERS ABSENT

Will Flanigan
Ted Horobiowski
Dean Lynch
Fran Papenleur

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Committee Member Frazier called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m. and conducted roll call.

2. MINUTES OF THE CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE - Corrections or Approval

a.) Mr. Frazier asked the Committee to address the meeting minutes of October 13, 2010.

The Committee approved the minutes as written by consensus.

3. PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS

There were no public expressions at this time.

4. CAC FEEDBACK ON 2011 SERVICE REDUCTION PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL

Ms. Smits arrived at 5:09 p.m. and Ms. Croft arrived at 5:26 p.m.

Mr. Otterstrom reminded the Committee of their discussion at the October meeting where they received the Proposed 2011 Service Reduction in preparation to provide feedback at this meeting. He stated the Public Input Summary Report: Update No. 1 is included in the November packet for the Committee's information. This is a compilation of all the comments received up to October 21, 2010. Another Public Input Summary Report will be issued in December 2010, and January 2011, just prior to the draft recommendation. This information will also be posted on the Spokane Transit website. Over 280 survey responses have been received, in addition to comment cards, and comments via the STA hotline.

Mr. Otterstrom reported the preliminary findings as: most say changes will negatively impact travel; many indicated there are both pros and cons in the proposal based on their travel today; most riders of Cheney service stated the proposed changes would benefit them; the majority prefer new local route 68 to serve Washington Street. There are major concerns about proposed elimination of service in Medical Lake. Route 72 Liberty Lake Express represents most ridden route of survey respondents with concerns about increased travel time of Route 74 Valley Limited; the capacity of Route 74; loss off mid-day service to Liberty Lake.

Mr. Otterstrom said more comments have been received since this report was prepared. Staff will continue to present to community groups. Update Report No. 2 will be prepared for December committee meeting. He added that the preliminary proposal was presented to the Board on September 15, 2010, to the Operations & Customer

Service Committee on October 6, 2010, and to the Citizen Advisory Committee October 13, 2010. Public/Customer outreach began on October 1st and will continue through December. The draft recommendation will be published in January 2011, with continued outreach and public input January –March. A public hearing will be held in February 2011. The final recommendation will be presented to the Operations and Customer Service Committee in March 2011 with Board action in the same month. If adopted, bus route service changes will be effective September 18, 2011, and Paratransit boundary changes will be effective March 2012.

Ms. Jones said that staff did not compare the percentage of Medical Lake riders vs. population to the percentage of Spokane riders vs. population, particularly for low income and Paratransit population.

Mr. Otterstrom replied that it was important for staff to hear directly from the Medical Lake community members. The data shows there are fifty Paratransit riders, however, the majority of those people ride less than a few times per month. This is an area that staff is looking to resolve.

Another area that was largely heard from was Liberty Lake, which also represented Coeur d'Alene, and areas in between.

Ms. Bemiller asked if there is a connection between Idaho and Liberty Lake.

Mr. Otterstrom replied there is not a connection, however, there is a significant population of Idaho residents that use the Liberty Lake Park and Ride.

Dr. Rudy asked if there could be a potential change in fares, perhaps zonal, to go along with a change in routes.

Mr. Blaska said that the CAC's former project was the Tariff Policy and zonal fares were discussed as a possibility, and were proposed for Express Routes. It received a negative response from the public and was removed from the proposal.

Ms. Jones made multiple comments regarding day service to Medical Lake.

Mr. Otterstrom received Ms. Jones' comments and added that staff is still reviewing service to Medical Lake and Fairchild Air Force Base.

Mr. Frazier suggested STA's Vanpool program as an alternate use for the Air Force Base.

Mr. Blaska said Fairchild AFB is a very good example of Vanpool use. There is not much demand for Fixed Route service because there are fifteen vanpools that run between Fairchild and various starting points. He added that cost recovery for Vanpool is 100% via the fee structure. This does not solve the Paratransit issues, nor does it solve Fixed Route non-commuting riders, however, part of the demand is met via Vanpool.

Ms. Hayes stated this proposal is devastating to the residents of Lakeland Village and Eastern State Hospital, who are currently Paratransit riders, and asked what staff has to share that she can pass on to the Paratransit groups in which she participates.

Mr. Otterstrom said staff is working to solve this issue the best they can. It is challenging to serve these residents with only Fixed Route as the actual time needed is limited. He added, between Lakeland Village and Eastern State Hospital, there are over 1,300 employees, three shifts per day, seven days per week. It is challenging as the employees live in sporadic areas all throughout the county. Even still, there are not many riding the bus. Perhaps if the bus could get them to the transit center in Medical Lake, and then they could drive the rest of the way via Vanpool. There may also be an opportunity for a Special Use Van at Lakeland Village. STA would pay for all van costs except for the driver. They could shuttle people to Fixed Route bus service. Mr. Otterstrom reminded that STA is cutting service, not enhancing it.

Mr. Blaska asked the Committee if they had any comments to share that they have heard from other members of the community.

Ms. Jones said she knows of a lady that moved to Medical Lake for a lower cost of living. If Paratransit and Fixed Route service is cut, she would have to move to an area where she could still use the service.

Mr. Hansen added that he attended a meeting in Hillyard and the attendees did not seem too worried about the proposed changes. Some people suggested increasing the sales tax in lieu of cutting service.

Mr. Frazier shared that the Mayor spoke at his neighborhood meeting regarding the city budget. There was an advance resignation that sales tax is down and hopefully there will be a change in the future.

Ms. Bemiller commented the communication regarding the bus stop on Francis at Five Mile was done in such a way that was confusing to the riders.

Mr. Otterstrom said when Route 35 was cut in September, it was the “Five Mile Park and Ride” route. The route was a shuttle that served the Northwest Terrace neighborhood. When it was broadcast on television, the report said the Five Mile Park and Ride was closing. This was incorrect, and has since been rectified.

Mr. Blaska said the people who generally use the system have not said very much because the service that they primarily use is not affected. He added that after seeing the financial forecast and the funding constraints, several audiences and the community in general are appreciative of the reduction in service instead of asking for more revenue. Those that do not ride the bus system are glad there is not an increase in sales tax. The community’s opinion may change as they begin to see exactly what a 7% reduction means.

Dr. Luton stated the frequency of the routes in combination with a long-term commitment to keep these routes is significant. Without this the tradeoff with the service cuts may not be as valuable.

Ms. Croft commented on Ms. Jones’ earlier statement regarding the woman with low-income who would need to move if service were cut in her area. She said eleven years ago she had worked on a website to help people streamline their lives who were trying to get off of welfare. She hopes the website will be published as it would be a tool that could support responsible land use planning and help facilitate life choices such as where to work, live, etc. based on the services that are needed. If no one will live in an area because there is no bus service, developers will pay attention to this and will not build. Ms. Croft agreed with Dr. Luton regarding the need to commit to routes long-term.

Mr. Blaska said STA could serve the community however it develops, however, to be an asset there has to be a determination how to best support the community. If the service were spread so thin to give everyone some type of service, this would not be a good investment of resources. As far as sustainability, running buses to carry a small amount of people would do nothing for the environment. This concept also supports “chasing riders” meaning, service is provided every time a new development or business is created. There are only so many resources to use, and service would need to be taken away from another route.

Ms. Croft said she used to live in a rural area as many people do. This is a choice and people should know what services they can count on prior to making the move.

Ms. Jones commented that Medical Lake has significantly developed over the last few years. There were buses that went through there, and now transit is proposed to being removed. How many other plans for development are now impacted due to this proposed change?

Mr. Blaska said it would be helpful to get a general consensus from the Committee.

Dr. Luton stated just because a community expects to have bus service, does not mean it can be committed to on a long-term basis.

Ms. Croft added she believes the times are changing and the current economic climate is more permanent than temporary. Transit is an essential part of living, however, this proposed reduction is a good demonstration that with sustainability one needs to think systemically. Transit is a system and the whole system needs to be reviewed and how it blends with the other services that the community relies upon.

Ms. Jones replied that the Medical Lake community should not have to pay for a benefit it is not receiving.

Dr. Rudy asked if staff has demographic information on riders.

Mr. Blaska replied that he has the results of a survey that he could share with the Committee.

Dr. Rudy asked if it is correct that the East Sprague Route #90 has as many passengers as projected ten years ago for mass transit.

Mr. Otterstrom verified that there are more people riding Route #90 than projected would be riding light rail for year 2025.

Dr. Rudy said this is a tremendous argument for quality of service and to have fifteen minute service on a major route. Frequency of service on North/South and East/West routes would condition people to using them, and if used consistently, people will ride long term. He added, once the major lines are in place then some of the others that are not so frequent could be added to the service.

Mr. Frazier commented if riders knew they only had to wait fifteen minutes for the next bus, it would be worth it to stand there or walk a few stops down and then catch it.

Mr. Otterstrom said the Sprague route is successful because it has a network of routes with decent frequency that network into those main routes. While maintaining quality, it is also important to have good coverage geographically of the region. Not everyone will have transit service, but enough of the area will be covered. He added that when his family moved to Spokane two years ago and purchased a home, one of the main criteria was if walking somewhere was attainable, he knew that bus service would be inside the city limits. He said the cost subsidy per rider in town is much lower than in Medical Lake.

Dr. Rudy asked how many routes run on fifteen minute service.

Mr. Otterstrom replied, Division, Monroe, Sprague, 29th Avenue, Browne's Addition/Sunset Hill, and Nevada/Hamilton.

The discussion ensued and Ms. Smits asked the Committee if they felt they could give Mr. Otterstrom and Mr. Blaska a general consensus on the proposed service reductions.

Mr. Hansen suggested changing the fifteen minute service routes to twenty minutes and perhaps that would save money.

Dr. Rudy asked if there is more to quality of service than frequency.

Mr. Blaska replied there are various fare media, i.e. the 2-hour pass and employer passes which make it easier for people to ride. Passenger amenities, shelters, at grade boarding, signal prioritization which speeds up the transit trip time, etc.

Mr. Otterstrom added there are things that are being maintained such as capital projects, signage, shelters, and the Smart Bus project that provides the signal prioritization and real-time data for arrival and departure.

Mr. Blaska said the Smart Bus project includes cameras on all of the buses which is a \$2M investment. Even during a time of cutting service, staff feels the safety and security of the passengers is an important investment and is worth doing even at a time of revenue challenges.

Mr. Hansen asked if when speaking of quality of service if the trade off is quality for density vs. the geographic spread of service.

Mr. Blaska said this is partially accurate. This does not mean that a new area will never have service, however, it would be a conscious decision from the general direction of the agency in order to sustain service.

By general consensus, all but one Committee member were in favor of the 2011 Service Reduction Preliminary Proposal.

5. GENERAL BUSINESS

There was no general business at this time.

6. SET AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Wednesday, December 8, 2010 – 5:00 p.m. (Regular Meeting) – Spokane Transit, Southside Conference Room.

7. ADJOURN

With there being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 6:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Naomi Zantello
Executive Assistant