

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

OPERATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the October 1, 2008, Meeting
Southside Conference Room

MEMBERS PRESENT

Richard Munson, City of Spokane Valley*
Nancy McLaughlin, City of Spokane
Allan Gainer, City of Cheney
Rick Jacks, Citizen
Mike Brewer, Citizen
Ann Campeau, Citizen
David Driscoll, Citizen
Andrew Rolwes, Citizen
Dennis Antonellis, ATU 1015
Steve Pinkerton, AFSCME 3939
Dennis Tonhofer, ATU 1598

MEMBERS ABSENT

Nan Kelly, Citizen

* Chair

STAFF PRESENT

E. Susan Meyer, Chief Executive Officer
Steve Blaska, Director of Operations
Jim Plaster, Director of Finance and Administration
Jacque Tjards, Manager, Purchasing
George Hanrahan, Manager, Information Systems
Don Reimer, Manager, Facilities & Maintenance
Jim Richey, Financial Analyst
Jan Watson, Executive Assistant & Clerk of the Authority
Charlie Phillips, Maintenance Analyst
Karla Gibbons, Eligibility Specialist
Patty Talbott, Paratransit Quality Specialist
Sean Powers, Mobility Orientation Trainer

GUESTS

None

1. CALL TO ORDER

Acting Chairman Munson called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. A revised Agenda for the meeting was distributed at the start of the meeting.

2. INTRODUCTIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Introductions were made. Correspondence for the Committee's attention was distributed at the start of the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 3, 2008, COMMITTEE MEETING – CORRECTIONS OR APPROVAL

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

4. PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS

None.

5. AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR LEASING OF TRANSIT VEHICLE TIRE MILEAGE AND SERVICE – DISCUSSION

Mr. Blaska said the scope of work for the leasing of vehicle tire mileage was released in July. The current contract expires November 30, 2008. He thanked Mr. Brewer for serving on the evaluation committee that reviewed the proposals that were received. Two responsive proposals were received and the criteria for evaluation included billing rates, vendor contractual experience, capacity to perform, service and administration, and RFP compliance. Results of the bidding showed that Bridgestone/Firestone costs were significantly lower than the other bidder. This is a five-year fixed price with a 4.6% annual increase, but the contract is 42% over the last contract. Staff has evaluated the cost of this service to other transit properties and has confirmed that the price increase is due to logical inflationary factors and is consistent with what other properties are experiencing. Ms. Tjards also contacted Bridgestone/Firestone to see if it would be possible to negotiate better pricing, but was told that this was their best and final offer. As a result, staff also re-calculated the original buy vs. lease analysis and confirmed that leasing is a much better choice for this service because it would cost between \$1.9M and \$2.1M to do this in-house, not including the costs for storage, transportation, or disposal of the tires.

Mr. Driscoll moved to recommend the Board approve the award of contract for the leasing and service of tire vehicle mileage to Bridgestone/Firestone, Inc., for five years beginning December 1, 2008, for an estimated first year amount of \$349,888 based upon current levels of service, and an estimated cost of \$1,767,260 for the term of the contract. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

6. APPROVAL OF SCOPE OF WORK FOR MYSTERY SHOPPER PROGRAM – DISCUSSION

Mr. Blaska explained that one of STA's priorities is to provide excellent customer service. With this as a standard, it's important to ask, "How are we doing?" Currently, feedback is received from an annual survey, but this does not give a good measure on a continuing basis so staff wants to emulate a tool being used by many other service

organizations to evaluate our service from the customer's point of view. This is one of the outcomes of last year's Peer Review. The program will be organization-wide and will include administrative personnel as well as front-line operators and supervisors. Mr. Blaska said that as staff goes through interviews with prospective Shoppers, they will seek to determine if there is a better way to measure our performance by modifying the check lists.

Mr. Munson asked if this program was in the budget. Mr. Blaska responded that \$20K was budgeted for 2009 for this program. Mr. Jacks asked if local firms would be contacted. Mr. Blaska said they would and that the Better Business Bureau had provided some information. In the past, STA hired transit-specific "spotters" who did more technical, performance-based observations. This program is different in that it is a customer-based observation. Mr. Rolwes asked if this would include Customer Service and rider's experiences on buses and in the park and ride lots. Mr. Blaska said feedback would focus more on customers' interactions with employees.

Ms. McLaughlin arrived at 1:40 p.m.

Mr. Pinkerton asked how many administrative people would be involved in being shopped. Mr. Blaska responded that there are about 36 administrative people, but focus would be on those who interact routinely with the public. Mr. Pinkerton expressed concern regarding the number of occasions those employees working in Paratransit reservations might be shopped compared to administrative staff. He said that this might be "overkill" in trying to get a handle on quality control. Mr. Blaska agreed that Reservationists do interact with the public more than many other employees do, but the intent of the program is to provide another method of feedback for the organization to measure the quality of service being provided. Ms. Meyer commented that this is a way to check on all of us to see how we are doing from the customer's perspective. Mr. Pinkerton also expressed concern that comments from some Paratransit riders may not be completely accurate due to certain medical conditions they are experiencing.

Mr. Antonellis asked if this feedback would be used as a performance assessment tool, or if it could lead to disciplinary measures for employees. Mr. Blaska reiterated that this program is just another tool to measure how STA is doing at providing quality customer service. Ms. Meyer added that this program is not intended to be used to catch someone doing something wrong; it is to identify what a customer would experience when interacting with STA employees.

Mr. Brewer moved to approve the Scope of Work as presented and authorize staff to release a Request for Proposals for the Mystery Shopper program. The motion was seconded and passed 8:2 with one member abstaining.

Staff is also requesting a Committee member assist in evaluation of the proposals. Mr. Rolwes and Mr. Smith volunteered to assist with evaluation of the proposals.

7. MOBILITY ORIENTATION (TRAVEL TRAINING) PROGRAM - SECOND YEAR REVIEW – INFORMATION

A short video tape of a television ad regarding mobility training was shown. Mr. Blaska noted that this is the second year of STA's mobility program, and he thanked Susan Millbank, who was a strong advocate for bringing the program to STA, Denise Marchioro, who brought the program to fruition, Sean Powers, who actually teaches our customers how to ride the bus, and Patty Talbott, STA's quality specialist who currently oversees this contract.

Mr. Blaska explained that the program helps seniors and persons with disabilities gain more independence by assisting them in becoming fixed route bus riders. The program familiarizes customers with how the bus system works and training is tailored to each customer's specific needs. Mr. Blaska reviewed the definitions of Assessment, Basic Training, and Intensive Training as relates to the program. He added that there are community outreach programs to ensure the public is aware of this program, and group training is available. Measures include the "avoided trip," which includes those trips taken on fixed route service by customers who are eligible for Paratransit service, and the "deferred trip," which includes those trips taken on fixed route service by people who have applied but are not yet eligible for Paratransit service.

Mr. Blaska presented slides showing the number of assessments completed, basic training completed, intensive training completed, and community outreach/group trainings completed. He noted that those who complete the training process become certified to use the fixed route service to the extent of their abilities and are given a three-month pass at no charge. Staff can use these passes to track how often that individual actually does ride on fixed route. Mr. Blaska noted that using Paratransit service means you are dependent on the van showing up and there is a 30-minute window within which the van is considered "on time" for your pick-up. He said that using fixed route gives riders the freedom to choose what time they want to ride because the buses are on a fixed schedule.

Mr. Blaska briefly reviewed the highlights of the program to date, noting that 100% of the expenses for the program are covered by Special Needs grant monies. He said that lessons learned as we move into year three include:

- Deferred is best. Staff has learned that it is more effective for STA to prevent users from starting on the Paratransit system. They have not developed the habit and comfort of using Paratransit.
- Outreach and Marketing the program are key. The team spent a significant amount of time with educating the community and making contacts. It has paid off with additional training hours and referrals.
- SmartCard functionality is a complex fare instrument for trainees to understand.
- Retraining. Staff has found that having the option for retraining was an important marketing tool. As persons changed their routines and needed additional assistance, Mobility training was available to them.

Objectives for the future include:

- Continue the focus on prompting independent travel among individuals who are elderly and/or disabled.
- Improve follow up survey system.
- Expand marketing strategies to Paratransit riders and senior population.
- Continue cost savings to STA by reducing demand for costly Paratransit service.

Mr. Blaska concluded his presentation by reviewing slides which demonstrate the actual and projected cost avoidance for STA related to the travel training program. He added that this will be one of the programs that STA would like to sustain when it applies for the Special Needs grant next year.

8. JUNE AND JULY 2008 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS AND FINANCIAL FORECAST UPDATE – INFORMATION

Mr. Plaster presented to the Committee the briefing which was given to the Board on September 18, 2008.

He noted that there have been extreme unfavorable variances in our sales tax growth, but there are some favorable variances in the federal preventive maintenance funding and in our fare revenues. He said that staff is projecting that 2008 should be close to budget. The biggest challenge has been the cost of fuel. Mr. Plaster explained that projections for 2008, as presented to the Board last year, are no longer accurate, and he reviewed in detail information pertaining to the changes.

Mr. Plaster said that these types of budgeting challenges are consistent throughout the state, and noted that staff will be holding a financial planning workshop for STA's Board members following the Committee meeting to analyze current trends and discuss options.

9. DOWNTOWN TRANSIT CENTER OPTIONS - STAFF REPORT – INFORMATION

Mr. Blaska said that the purpose of this review was to validate guidance to staff prior to developing a final recommendation. Five service options were considered by the Board: the Downtown Grid, Dual Peripheral Centers, Transit Mall, Intermodal Center, and Enhanced Plaza. A workshop followed to focus on development of the Intermodal Center and enhancement of The Plaza. Since that time, there have been two principal developments which are consistent with this planning effort: DKS has done a downtown traffic study for the City of Spokane and the Downtown Plan has been completed by the Downtown Spokane Partnership.

Mr. Blaska said that key factors for consideration include Spokane's population, Spokane's growth and vision, and Spokane's geography. He explained in detail the reasons why the list of options was reduced to just two primary options: The Intermodal Center or the Enhanced Plaza.

Mr. Blaska concluded by reviewing the next steps to be taken including:

- 2020 Downtown Plan
 - October - Staff Recommendation
 - November - Public Hearing
 - December - Board Approval
- Service Planning Guidelines
 - December - Board Approval
- 2020 Short Range Plan
 - December - Draft Plan to Board
 - Jan-Apr - Public Process
 - May - Board Approval
- 2020 Long Range Plan
 - March - Draft Plan to Board
 - June - Board Approval

10. CEO REPORT – INFORMATION

- a. Ms. Meyer noted that preliminary numbers for September ridership suggested about a 20% increase, but there was actually about a 33.6% increase.
- b. Ms. Meyer said staff submitted a request for ten vanpool vans and was approved for five. In the next biennium, the expansion request will be for 25 more vans, the five which were not received this year, ten for next year, and ten for the year after.
- c. Ms. Meyer said that 2,340 rides were provided for ValleyFest and this is a 17% decrease in ridership compared to last year. More buses were provided for this event, and there were some challenges with fare collection. Ms. Meyer recognized Guy Smith as our lead Supervisor for the event.
- d. Ms. Meyer said that STA, in cooperation with Homeland Security and FEMA, participated in an anthrax simulation exercise. Participation in this exercise was coordinated by Andrew Overhauser (Superintendent of Transportation), Mike Toole (Safety Officer), and Ray Taylor (Fixed Route Supervisor) and Rodney Morgan (Coach Operator) were participants.
- e. Ms. Meyer said she has proposed that the Mission and Green Community Transit Center and Park and Ride Lot, which was estimated to cost \$5M+, be deferred until 2016 or later. The change in STA's economic and financial environment reduces the priority of this project. An alternate option to divide the project into two phases did not prove viable.

11. COMMITTEE INFORMATION

- a. June 2008 Financial Results Summary (*Jim Plaster*)
 - 1.) Second Quarter 2008 Capital Budget Status Report
 - 2.) Second Quarter 2008 Statement of Net Assets & Federal Grants Reports
- b. August 2008 Operating Indicators (*Steve Blaska*)
- c. Community Outreach and Involvement (*Molly Myers*)

12. OLD OR NEW BUSINESS

None.

13. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' EXPRESSIONS

None.

14. NEXT MEETING – WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2008, 1:30 P.M., SOUTHSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM, 1230 WEST BOONE AVENUE

15. ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Chairman Munson adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanette Van Dort, Executive Assistant