

The St. Cloud Metro Bus Rider Advisory Committee (RAC) held a meeting on Tuesday, March 21, 2017 at 9:00 a.m. at the Mobility Training Center, 700 W. St. Germain St, St. Cloud, MN

The following individuals were in attendance: Kim Hoff, Tom Cruikshank, Suzanne Driessen, David Williamsen, Brenda Severson, and Janice Sims.

Welcome. Kim welcomed everyone. She mentioned that Karen was unable to make and Debbie was on vacation.

Old Business.

- 1) RAC Email. There was nothing the past month.

New Business.

- 1) Overview of Metro Bus Funding/Fare Revenue. Tom started with an overview of how fares are determined. The Commission set a policy many years ago that the fares and contracts should cover 20% of operating expenses but that goal has not been met for quite a few years. The last fare increase was in May 2014 but since then the expenses have increased. Ridership has also changed since then with fewer cash riders and more discounted trips as well as lower ridership overall.

Our biggest financial partner is the State of Minnesota. The state is responsible for up to 80% of operating assistance for fixed route and 85% for paratransit service (Dial-a-Ride). Until last year we have never met these percentages, we have always been underfunded.

The Federal (FTA) share is less than 10% for operating, most of it is directed to Capital expenses. The last portion of our operating funds is generated locally through the property tax levy, fares, advertising contracts and service contracts.

Suzanne asked why we didn't get fully funded from MnDot? Tom explained that the state hasn't had the resources to do it. The larger urban systems needed more so we were shorted. The Legislature has allocated more so now we are fully funded. In the 2014 operating budget, the breakdown of funding was: State 55%, Federal 17.8%, tax levy 7.8% and fares and contracts were at 19.4%.

Fares: In May 2014 we changed from \$1.00 fare with a \$.25 transfer to \$1.25 fare with a free transfer. Tom listed the discounted fares: 1, 7, and 31-Day passes, 10-ride passes, tokens, Northstar Link, District 742, Senior discount, Reduced Fare for Disabled, Employee Transit Fare program, SCSU and SCTCC.

Retail fares are non-discounted, which include Cash fares for both Fixed route and DAR, and Agency Fares for DAR. He explained that under the ADA, we are allowed to charge a fare that is higher than a cash fare, for agencies that want to essentially get a "guaranteed" ride for their clients, so the client trips are booked by the agency on behalf of the client. Currently we have agency trips with Wacosa, Independence Center and the VA.

Free Rides are given to Service Connected Veterans, children 5 and under, U GO Free passes, transfers and PCA's. We have service contracts with SCSU, SCTCC, District 742, and the Northstar Link.

Tom mentioned they will begin working on a fare increase within the next few months and will need to include something in the 2018 budget for the Commission, which will be presented in July. He presented a graph which showed a comparison of other Minnesota transit systems at the time of the last fare increase in 2014. He mentioned that St. Cloud historically has had the cheapest overall fare structure but now Duluth has the cheapest.

- 2) Dial-a-Ride Ridership. Kim mentioned that she tracks a lot of statistics for DAR which include number of people that are approved, number of rides they've taken in the first two years of being on the service, number of people that have passed away and the number of times they rode the bus in a certain period of time. She presented a graph for Calendar Year 2014 which showed, by month, the number of people that were approved as well as the number of riders who didn't ride at all and the average number of rides per month. A second graph that was presented showed the total number of rides that were taken each month by new riders of a two year period. Tom stated they are always trying to project how many rides are going to be taken by all of the new riders that are given eligibility each month. One of the questions that is often asked is why is St. Cloud's Dial-a-Ride program so much bigger than the other transit systems in the state? Kim mentioned that one of the things she has noticed in the past 8-9 years since the Travel Training program has been implemented, is a huge decrease in applications from individuals that would be riding 5 days a week and going to places such as Wacosa. This decrease is due to the fact that the individuals are being travel trained to use the fixed route service and therefore not needing DAR. The applicants that she is seeing are people with severe illness, more mental health issues, and older individuals, especially those that have moved to the area from small towns and they are overwhelmed with the traffic and would never be able to navigate the fixed route system. The final table that Kim presented was the average age of people that were approved each month for the years 2014 and 2015. Overall for the year 2014 the average age was 67 and for 2015 it was 68.

Open Discussion. Suzanne asked if there will be another phase of route changes on the fixed routes? Tom stated he would like to say that there is another phase on the horizon but we have held off for a couple of reasons, one being that we need to be fully staffed first. When additional service was added last August, it created 10 driving positions but we haven't been able to fill all of them completely. Also there have been people who have left, been sick or retired, so we've been on a constant hiring stage. Two months ago, the State offered transit systems additional money for expansion of service but we turned it down. The other issue is we are short of buses. We have money budgeted for 2018 for bus expansion. Tom mentioned he had hoped to implement Phase II in August but we will probably hold off until we're caught up with hiring and get additional buses ordered. He did say that we may look at making some changes though that wouldn't add service hours such as restructuring Route #4, 10 and 31.

Janice asked if the new buses will be replacement buses? Tom said the two old blue buses need to be replaced but we have funding to purchase three so only one would be an expansion bus.

Kim handed out a flyer which talked about a Northstar Press conference on Saturday, April 8th at the Amtrak station. Tom explained the Governor has put in his budget, a demonstration project of commuter rail service to St. Cloud. The Legislature still has to approve it. Metro Bus has not been a part of the conversation, we just received information on it. We don't know how it will affect Northstar Link service, if and when the demonstration happens.

Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 10:04 a.m.