

The St. Cloud Metro Bus Rider Advisory Committee (RAC) held a meeting on Tuesday, November 19, 2019 at 10:00 am at the Mobility Training Center, 700 W St Germain, Cloud, MN.

The following individuals were present: Doug Diedrichsen, Ryan Daniel, Kim Hoff, Nate Ramacher, Lisa Sabyan, Bruce Benner, Jan Scott, Kelly Carlson, Jenny Svihel and David Williamsen. Absent: Paul Thomas, Alexis Lutgen, Aisha Bah. Visitor: Vicki Williams, St. Cloud APO.

Welcome. Ryan welcomed everyone and read the purpose of the RAC.

Public Open Forum.

- 1) Open Discussion. Vicki reported the St. Cloud APO Policy Board approved the Long Range Transportation Plan which includes transit and the Active Transportation Plan, which includes first and last mile connections. A small advisory group met for the first time and good feedback was received. They are now doing data gathering to find out where all the sidewalks are, bike paths, etc. as well as demographic data and will hopefully hold another small advisory group meeting in January. Ryan asked Vicki to explain in more depth what the first and last connection means. Every transit trip for a pedestrian involves getting to the bus stop somehow which is that first mile connection (which is from the origin of your trip to the bus stop) and then when the pedestrian gets off the bus at a transit stop, they are going to their destination (which could be your home or business) which is the last mile connection.

Old Business.

- 1) Bruce mentioned the light in the shelter by Grace McDowall apartments has still not been replaced and the schedule for Route 33 is not in the shelter. Nate mentioned they are working on it.
- 2) Jenny stated that there have been a couple of times recently when a bus driver hasn't stopped and picked her up. She was recently waiting for a bus on a Saturday and they didn't stop to pick her up. She called to file a complaint and was told they looked at the video and staff apologized for the mistake. Another time she had an interview out in the area of Country Manor by Gary's Pizza and she said it is really hard to cross County Rd 29 for Rt 21/22 because there is so much traffic and she tried waving the bus driver down but they kept moving. Ryan said if the operator sees you and sees that you're trying to get across the street, that is customer service that needs to be looked into. Kelly also mentioned that when she worked at AllTran, it is very difficult to cross the street and has missed the 21 or 22 so sometimes because she would just ride the route all the way around town to avoid the traffic. Doug suggested that this might be a good location for the Active Transportation Plan to look into because it's more of a pedestrian issue than a transit issue.
- 3) Bruce mentioned there needs to be a ramp/curb access across the street from Linden Grove apartments by the VA (on the Apollo High School side).

New Business.

- 1) RAC email. There was no email.

- 2) Ridership. Route 8 is again the top performing route in October with 24.84 rides per hour which is down a little bit compared to last year. Routes 1 and 2 are next highest with about 20 passengers per hour for both routes. The lowest performing route was again the ConneX service, then Routes 10 and 33. Overall there is still a considerable drop in ridership in the base system, down over 18,000 rides compared to last year and down over 20,000 rides in the total system. He mentioned that there is still a nationwide trend of ridership dropping. Doug also mentioned there is a nominal increase in Dial-a-Ride but seems to be tapering off.

Ryan asked if anyone had taken ConneX in the last thirty days and what was their experience like. Jenny said she had ridden and that it's improved a lot from when it first started in regard to calling in. In the past you could sometimes wait on the phone for almost an hour to get through and sometimes they didn't pick you up for one to two hours. The last time she called was about four days ago and she only had to wait 20 minutes versus an hour on the phone. They kept saying can you please hold, I'm on another call. Ryan asked Jenny once she had completed the phone call (after being on hold for 20 minutes), how long did it take for the bus to pick her up. Jenny said it varies between 30 minutes and an hour and it depends on how many pickups they have and where they're going. He asked Jenny if it was a weekend or weekday. She said it was a weekday around 9 am. Nate asked her specifically the trip she took four days ago – how long did it take for the bus to come and get her and she said it was close to an hour.

Bruce asked about the phones not working on the previous Sunday and people couldn't get through to Dial-a-Ride. Nate explained that there was an issue but it was fixed by Monday morning. Something similar had happened not long ago and it took some time to get it fixed but hopefully it is fixed now.

Jan brought up a concern about long hold times when calling Dial-a-Ride, sometimes up to twenty minutes. She said when she called to schedule her ride to the RAC meeting, that the dispatcher apologized but told her "we are so busy and we need more people. Right now I have five calls ahead of you and one woman has already been waiting fifteen to twenty minutes". She told the dispatcher that she would bring it up at the next RAC meeting. Ryan asked if the situation occurred on a weekday or weekend and Jan said it was a weekday.

David also brought up a concern about being picked up at 5pm and not getting home until 6:30 pm. Ryan stated they will look into the wait times and travel times and report back at the next meeting. Nate mentioned that we are now fully staffed in the dispatch office but it will take some time to get everyone trained. He is hoping the wait times will improve now that we are fully staffed.

Bruce brought up the on hold message which talks about canceling your rides within two hours of your pick up time so that someone else will have a chance to get a ride. He said that will never happen, you will never get a ride on the same day, but the recording gives that impression that if you cancel, someone may be able to get a ride.

David also brought up the long waits for a medical return.

Jan mentioned that she thought all of the Dial-a-Ride operators should have name badges. Ryan stated they do but she said very rarely do you ever see a name badge. She felt it should be mandatory that they have their badges visible. Bruce said he mentioned several years ago that the operators should have a magnetic name plate that they could put on the front of the bus at the beginning of their shift. Nate explained that the employee's badge is also their ID.

- 3) Upcoming Dial-a-Ride bus order. Doug asked if there are things we should keep or change on the new buses (besides the slippery seats). Bruce said the front seat on the passenger side leaves no room for your knees. Jan said if there are two wheelchairs on the bus at the same time, it feels so crowded. Ryan asked if there is a situation where the operator needs to back up the bus, is the operator exiting the bus and doing a walk around the bus before they back up. Everyone said yes, they are doing that. Jenny mentioned the fixed route operators do it all the time too. Ryan asked her where they would ever be needing to back up a bus. She said that sometimes on Routes 21/22 and Routes 6/7 they have to back up. On Routes 6/7, they sometimes have to back up in the loop area of Cedar Square Apartments, when there is a truck or vehicle parked there. She mentioned that an operator asked her to be a spotter and she said that wasn't her job, she needed to call a dispatcher or street supervisor to come. Jenny commented when she was on a Dial-a-Ride bus during the Open House, that the seat was folded up but it was really wobbly and it worried her that it would fall down and hurt someone. She also mentioned that the signage inside the buses that says be prepared for sudden stops isn't in all of the buses.
- 4) Marketing Update. Nate thanked everyone that came to the 50th Anniversary celebration. He mentioned there is a new system in place for filling the schedules in the buses so if anyone notices a problem with schedules not being filled or up to date, to let him know. There is also going to be a new Travel Training rack card available soon, so if anyone has questions about riding the bus, encourage them to take a card and contact the Mobility Center for training. On December 14th, Metro Bus will be participating in the Touch a Truck event at Lake George.
He mentioned they are also finalizing radio commercials that some of the RAC members helped with. Most of the radio stations will be playing the commercials. Nate introduced Lisa Sabyan, Marketing and Communications Specialist. She has been with Metro Bus since September. She has a lot of experience in design and marketing as well as lots of other skills. Nate also talked about the Jolly Trolley which will be held the week of December 2nd through the 6th. Anyone that is interested in volunteering for a 3 hour shift each evening, let Nate or Lisa know. Last year we raised over \$2,500 in cash and over 2,000 pounds of food was donated.
- 5) Respectful Workplace, Harassment and Confidentiality Policy Training. Doug mentioned the Training Manager and Human Resources have stated that in the future all new RAC members will be going through this training and that they want all current members to go through the training as well. It takes between 60 and 90 minutes to do the training and they would like to do it after the RAC meeting in January or February. It was decided to do it after the January meeting.

Open discussion: a) Kelly mentioned that Bob (fixed route operator) said the new Tech High School should be on Route 11 because it has more time. Route 12 is always late and they have to walk $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile so no one is riding. The bus should also go into the school parking lot similar to the Sauk Rapids High School. Doug explained that Tech isn't the same situation as Sauk Rapids because Metro Bus would be competing with the school buses in the parking lot. He mentioned it is very challenging going into the parking lot but they will be looking at timing of the route in the future.

Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.