

**WINSTON-SALEM TRANSIT AUTHORITY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Clark Campbell Transportation Conference Room
100 W. Fifth Street, Winston-Salem, NC**

MINUTES

THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2016

PRESENT:

Board Members

Robert Garcia, Chairman
Keith King, Vice Chairman
Regina Streed
Dr. Jack Fleeer

WSTA Staff

Art Barnes, General Manager
Verylen Crawford, Operations Director
Tina Carson-Wilkins
Tikiha Alston
Erica Lowery
Teika Holloway

OTHERS:

Dewey Williard, City Transportation
Finance Manager
Kenneth Baker, City Transportation
Project Planner
Fred Haith,
Glenda Sears, Sr. Financial Analyst

Dr. Linda Murphy
Cedric Gill
Dorlis Miller

ABSENT:

Dr. Trae Cotton
Ruth Carter
John M. Ashford
Toneq' McCullough

Meeting Opened: 3:59 pm

The March 31, 2016 WSTA Board Meeting was called to order by Chairman Robert Garcia.

Approval of the Minutes:

Board members were allowed a moment to review the minutes from the January 28, 2016 board meeting for approval. There were two errors to be corrected. The corrected minutes were sent out to the Board members.



A motion was made to accept the minutes by Dr. Jack Flear and seconded by Vice Chairman Keith King. The Board approved the minutes by common consent.

Public Comment:

There were no public comments.

Information Items:

ADA/NTI Conference-Mr. Barnes commented on the National Transit Institute Conference held at WSTA in February. There were 50 attendees from a five state area. The conference covered ADA policies and procedures, management functions, scheduling, operations, billing and customer service. Mr. Barnes felt that the lively discussion and interchange was beneficial to WSTA's staff.

ADA Review Response-The final ADA Review Report was received in February. WSTA is finalizing its response. The report is due April 16, 2016.

Mr. Barnes introduced Dr. Linda Murphy who has been contracted to oversee WSTA's response to the ADA. Dr. Murphy's is a specialist in Organizational Management and holds a Ph.D. She is also addressing other areas with respect to WSTA's processes.

As a result of directives and recommendations, WSTA has composed an entirely new Riders' Guide for Trans-Aid riders. It will be presented at two public meetings on April 7, 2016. Any issues that the riders have will be addressed. Trans-Aid will provide transportation for the riders to attend the meetings.

WSTA has already addressed the following issues: Scheduling, eligibility determinations, Personal Care Assistants (PCA) and companions, Notification of available accessible formats, presumptive eligibility (the provision of rides if certification is not finalized in 21 days), modification of eligibility letters and written policies for out of service area visitors. Pickup windows have been changed to 15 minutes before and after the scheduled pickup time instead of 20 mins before and after the scheduled pickup time. Recently, an additional customer service representative (CSR) was added to assist with telephone capacity. There is also an additional CSR included in the budget starting in July 2016.

WSTA will be utilizing interns from Winston-Salem State University to assist with a number of Trans-Aid issues and administrative tasks including documenting missed trips. The interview process has started; only 3 interns are needed.

Subscription trips were also an issue. A subscription trip is defined as a recurring trip that is automatically scheduled. A demand trip is defined as a trip that is scheduled by the passenger. Federal Transit Administration regulations prohibit subscription trips from exceeding 50% of demand trip. WSTA met with the Dialysis Centers and the IFB

regarding a strategy that has been approved by the consultants that conducted the FTA review. WSTA is currently working with Winston-Salem Industries for the Blind (IFB) to come up with a strategy to manage their subscription trips.

An agreement was finalized to install Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) in Trans-Aid vehicles. This will provide for the collection of reliable information required by the ADA Review. This will also provide a number of instruments for dispatchers to use to deal with the traffic they have to contend with. Once the MDTs are installed and running, WSTA will have the ability to document drop-off and pick-up times, no shows, track vehicles in real-time, communicate with drivers via computer, update manifests and provide drivers with driving directions.

The complaint process and suspension policies have also been modified. Additionally, the Riders' Guide will be distributed to the public on April 7, 2016.

Chairman Garcia said that he is anxious to look at the Riders Guide. Mr. Barnes shared there is a draft copy available. Chairman Garcia then asked if the guide would be published in braille. Mr. Barnes responded only if requested. Having the Riders' Guide completed in braille would be a very expensive process.

Mr. Fred Haith asked if a presentation could be given at the May 19, 2016 transportation advisory meeting. Mr. Barnes acknowledged knowing about this meeting and assured him that something would be prepared. Mr. Barnes stated that by the time of the meeting WSTA will have submitted its response to the final report making it easier to assimilate. Mr. Haith asked if it was possible for both Mr. Barnes and Dr. Murphy to be in attendance to present the information. Mr. Barnes responded that he could not speak for Dr. Murphy in that knowledge of this meeting is somewhat of a surprise to her. Mr. Barnes stated that he would definitely be there to give the presentation.

Trans-Aid Van Delivery-All other issues that came up during the review revolve around capacity. Regarding capacity, WSTA has taken delivery of six new Trans-Aid vehicles and another 18 have been budgeted. It may take a year to receive the additional 18 vehicles because flex funds are being used to make the purchase. There is an application process to get the funds from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that takes approximately six months. Once the funds are awarded and approval is received from the Board and City Council, WSTA will exercise its options with respect to the contract that is already in place from the previous purchase.

In addition, WSTA has added a net of 3 Trans-Aid operators. The operators came out of training approximately a week and a half ago. Another training class will start on Monday. The training process can take as long as 8 weeks.

Dr. Flier stated that Mr. Barnes mentioned receiving 6 new vans and 3 new operators; and then asked if the vans were replacement vans. Mr. Barnes responded yes; however, the old vans are still in service because they are needed. Mr. Barnes said that

having the new vans allows the time needed to make repairs on the old ones. The reviewers' final report requires that WSTA come up with a plan to address capacity. WSTA was not given a deadline to have this done. There are 2 basic factors driving the issue with capacity; they are the number of vehicles WSTA has and manpower. A plan will be submitted with a timeline to increase manpower and address the procurement of vehicles.

Dr. Fler stated that there is another factor to be considered that relates to capacity; and that is paratransit being a free service to an undetermined amount of people. Mr. Barnes agreed and stated that last week the operators were instructed to monitor and provide data with respect to the number of people who ride for free. Mr. Barnes examined the data and it did not match the revenue numbers. Therefore, the data isn't reliable and Mr. Barnes does not want to present to the Board until he has more solid data. One of the things the interns will do is help with providing this information. Once the MTDs are received in 4 months or so, the hope is that information will be very reliable.

Dr. Fler asked Mr. Barnes if he was able to determine whether other transit systems were charging for paratransit services; and, if so how much. Mr. Barnes stated that he did and forgot to bring the information; however, from memory he reported Greensboro Transit Authority (GTA) charges \$1.50, Charlotte charges \$3.50, High Point is \$2.00 and Wilmington charges \$4.00. This averages out to being approximately \$2 per trip for paratransit services in surrounding cities. WSTA's paratransit service is pretty much free and this contributes substantially to the demand and will continue to drive demand as long as there is no fare in place. Dr. Fler asked if the Board should be considering putting a fare in place. Mr. Barnes responded it had been considered in the past and can be reconsidered. Mr. Barnes also stated that in his opinion, this is something that needs to be addressed. Dr. Fler asked Mr. Barnes if he felt that there would be an adversity if a fare was implemented. Mr. Barnes responded by saying no one is going to want to pay; however, the Board can only make a suggestion to City Council.

Dr. Fler recalled from the last meeting, the difficulty with determining the validity of Medicaid eligibility. This is due to the Medicaid cards not having an expiration date; only an issue date. Mr. Barnes' recommendation to the Board is to end the 'for free' policy. Chair Garcia asked what is the general consensus of our peers in other cities around us? Mrs. Tikiha Alston said that WSTA has not been able to find a Transit System in surrounding cities that allow Medicaid eligible people to ride paratransit for free. The Medicaid policy was implemented approximately 10 years ago in 2006 or 2007. Following more discussion about the free trips being provided to Medicaid recipients and their companions, Dr. Fler asked if anyone knew the percentage of riders that are Medicaid eligible. Ms. Alston's response was that it is over 50% and probably more than 75%. Dr. Fler asked if the riders that are not Medicaid eligible were paying. Mr. Barnes stated yes; however, based on the revenues it is not very many.

Ms. Alston explained that paratransit is supposed to be comparable to fixed route services. What WSTA is doing is not comparable to fixed route services. On fixed route, everyone has to pay and everyone does not have to pay on paratransit. She added that WSTA can charge up to 2 times more for paratransit than fixed route per the Federal Transit Administration.

Mr. Barnes shared that one of the strategies suggested by the consultants is that free transportation be provided on the fixed-route system to those that are ADA certified and institute a fare for Trans-Aid Clients on Trans-Aid. Doing so would shift a number of riders. Dr. Flear asked Mr. Barnes what he thought of the suggestion. Mr. Barnes responded saying this suggestion has been done at other transit systems and he thinks it makes sense. Basically, WSTA would be shifting ADA certified passengers to regular routes that are less expensive and higher capacity.

Dr. Flear stated that he thinks WSTA has to do something and it sounds like WSTA is not addressing the capacity issue very much. In addition, capacity issues will not be addressed thoroughly for at least a year due to it taking at least a year to get additional vehicles and train new drivers. Mr. Barnes reiterated it takes up to 8 weeks to train a new driver when it should only take 6. WSTA is working on getting the training process shortened. The process of advertising new positions, interviewing, drug testing and getting a medical physical takes an additional 5 weeks. Beyond procurement of vehicles and driver training, attrition has to be handled. Dr. Flear asked if it was difficult to attract candidates for operator positions. Mr. Barnes stated it is not difficult; however, WSTA is pretty particular with respect to the people it hires.

One of the things WSTA has not had is major accidents. Mr. Barnes shared that WSTA's main emphasis is on safety. This is why the training process is so long. In addition to general attrition, there is attrition during the training process. It is not unusual to lose about a third of the class before the training process is complete. WSTA use to hire candidates that did not have CDLs and train them to get CDLs prior to going into the regular training. WSTA has stopped that process to cut down on the amount of time it takes to train and get operators out on the road. After further discussion about ways to combat Trans-Aid capacity issues, Dr. Flear; with Chairman Garcia in agreement; asked if due diligence could be done and information collected to be presented prior to the May Board meeting. This information will then be tweaked and edited into something formal to be presented to City Council. Mr. Barnes agreed to get this to the Board prior to the May Board meeting.

Fixed Route Bus Delivery-The first of the new Fixed Route buses should arrive next week or the week after and continue until June 30th. In all it will be 12 hybrid, electric 30 feet buses.

State Match Grant for Vehicles-Although the topic indicates a state match grant for vehicles, Mr. Barnes announced that per a meeting held this morning, the state match grant will be for bus shelters. Mr. Haith responded that the City DOT was informed by

the FTA that shelters were not eligible for state match. The city of Winston-Salem is continuing to explore other bus shelter options. Mr. Barnes then stated the state match grant will be for vehicles as originally planned.

Cook Elementary Partnership-Mr. Barnes shared that Cook Elementary is WSTA's adopted school. He stated that he didn't know whether or not if meeting attendees were keeping up with the issues Cook Elementary is facing. This school is one of the lowest, if not the lowest performing school in North Carolina. WSTA has decided to intensify the relationship with Cook Elementary in regards to providing services for them. WSTA already provides transportation to field trips and is looking into providing transportation for parents to get to parent-teacher meetings. Parent participation is critical to a child's education and is very low at Cook Elementary. WSTA is going to come up with a route that will go through the neighborhood and pick up parents for school meetings. Mr. Barnes shared that he has spoken to other agencies about providing some services for the school as well. Mr. Barnes is a member of the Kiwanis Club and they provide funding for a number of different projects and they are looking at providing funding to Cook Elementary.

Sears A&E RFP-WSTA has put out a Request for Proposal (RFP) for architectural and engineering services to design the bus stop at Sears. It is a three-week process before responses are received. Once responses are received they will be evaluated based on qualifications. An award contract will be issued and drawings will be made by the architectural and engineering firm. This process will probably be an additional three weeks and afterwards construction can begin.

Chairman Garcia inquired about the location of the stop. Mr. Barnes informed that instead of the bus stop being located on the east side as originally planned it will be constructed on the north side of the building. This will allow for more space and address any congregation in front of the building. A bus shelter will be erected and eventually some real-time bus signs will be posted. Shrubbery will have to be removed and lighting installed. Also the shelter will have to be accessible for the ADA community.

Operations Report-There was an approximate 8% decrease in the number of **Fixed Route** passengers. There is a correlation between the number passengers and gas prices. Low gas prices equal low ridership. Both vehicle and preventable vehicle accidents are down; as well as employee accidents. Chargeable complaints are up from 12 to 29. Chairman Garcia asked if there was anything that stood out regarding the chargeable complaints. Mr. Verylen Crawford responded, saying this could be due to passengers waiting for the bus and it arriving too late. Mr. Barnes advised that WSTA will look into this and report back to the Board. **Trans-Aid** passenger trips are up from 120,000 to 136,000. The count of passengers is a new tracking indicator. It's a bit different from the count of trips in that the count of trips is defined by the transport of a passenger(s) from one destination to another (one trip) and transporting back (an additional trip.) The count of passengers is driven by the number of passengers, their companions and/or their PCAs. Preventable accidents are down from 6 to 3. Complaints

are up from 142 to 210. Chargeable complaints are also up from 10 to 17 for the month of February. The average wait time for telephone performance is currently at a one-minute average wait time. It is down by about two minutes as a result of (Mr. Barnes believes) the additional personnel put into place. An additional CSR is budgeted to be hired and will take effect in July. The only significant change in **Maintenance** is road calls have gone down for Fixed Route; but, have gone up for Trans-Aid.

Financial Report-Mr. Barnes stated that WSTA's finances look really good. After all the adjustments were made to the revenue accounts, the total came to \$9,402,000 which is what the projections were. **Trans-Aid** revenues did increase due to SMAP money from the state; Medicaid revenues are behind as a result of capacity issues and the mandate to address ADA trips. The provision Medicaid trips have gone down.

Chairman Garcia inquired about damage settlements. Mr. Barnes explained this when a bus gets into an accident and the other party is at fault. This constitutes revenue when collected.

Marketing Report-Mrs. Tina Carson-Wilkins went over the Marketing Report which was included in the meeting packet.

Cook Elementary School and Quality Education Institute both utilized WSTA's Try Transit Program.

On March 7, 2016, there was an article written by Mr. Scott Sexton published in the Winston-Salem Journal titled "*Feds poke transit authority of ADA regulations.*"

For the months of February and March 2016 WSTA participated in several coalition building activities.

There were two Special events held on March 24, 2016—WSSU Connex Community Resource Fair and WS/FC Schools Career Fair for Students with Disabilities.

Other topics covered in the Marketing Report are: Segment Marketing, Service Design and Coordination, Advertising and Upcoming Events. Please refer to the report for further details.

The meeting adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

Transcribed by: Teika Holloway

April 7, 2016