

WINSTON-SALEM TRANSIT AUTHORITY BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Cark Campbell Transportation Center Training Room
100 W. Fifth Street, Winston-Salem, NC

MINUTES

THURSDAY; May 4, 2017

PRESENT:

Board Members

Robert Garcia, Chairman
Keith King, Vice Chairman
Regina Streed
Mrs. Ruth Carter
Jack Fleer

Art Barnes, General Manager
John M. Ashford, Asst. General Manger
Verylen Crawford, Operations Director
Robin Kirby, Finance Manager
Tina Carson-Wilkins, PR & Marketing
Tikiha Alston, ADA Coordinator &
Customer Service Manger
Erica Lowery, ADA Specialist
Teika Holloway, Admin. Assistant

WSTA Staff

Others

Toneq´ McCullough, Transportation
Director
Stephen M. Hawryluk, City Budget &
Evaluation Analyst
Brenda King, Transportation Finance Manager
Glenda Sears, Sr. Financial Analyst
Morgan, Simmons, City Planner
Clair Stone, CATS
Bobby Wilson, Human Inc.
Diane Fitzhugh, TRAC Member
Tina Taylor, TRAC Member

Meeting Opened: 4:00 pm

Chairman Robert Garcia bid everyone "good afternoon" and welcomed all to the May 4th, 2017 WSTA Board Meeting. He extended a welcome to fellow Board Members, Staff, City Officials, and the public.

Resolution Approving the Minutes for February 23, 2017 Board Meeting

Chairman Garcia announced there is a lot to discuss during this very important meeting. As always, he started the meeting with the action items. The first action item on the agenda was the

approval of the February 23rd WSTA Board Meeting Minutes. Dr. Fler pointed out a typo on page 6, in that the word “bowling” was misspelled.

Dr. Jack Fler motioned to approve the February 23rd Meeting minutes. His motion was followed by a “second” from Ms. Regina Streed. The minutes from WSTA’s February 23, 2017 Board Meeting Minutes were approved.

Approval of an Amendment to the Retirement Savings Plan

The Mr. Barnes stated that this is a formality and is an amendment to WSTA’s pension plan. Our trustee discovered that the name of the management company had not been changed from Veolia to Transdev.

The correct information needs to be listed on tax documents.

Ms. Streed motioned to approve this resolution and was followed by Vice-Chairman Keith King with a “second.” The Resolution to approve the Amendment to the Retirement Savings Plan was approved.

Resolution Recommending a Fare Increase; Elimination of the Discount Pass and Elimination of the Medicaid Fare Exemption for Trans-Aid

Mr. Barnes addressed Chairman Garcia and stated that the Board has been talking about this literally for years. It is a culmination of a lot of input from the Board and a lot of research and discussion. Basically this resolution reflects the proposed policy of the City Council. There are three things that they were proposing: (1) to institute a fare increase to \$1 for Trans-Aid from the current .50¢ (2) the elimination of the discount pass for Trans-Aid and (3) the elimination of the Medicaid fare exemption for Trans-Aid.

Mr. Barnes said, “Our charge as the staff of the Authority was to go out into the community and hold public meetings where comments were collected as part of our public participation policy. This has been completed and the Board has been provided with a summary of those comments. In addition the meetings have been professionally transcribed. The transcriptions are in WSTA’s possession and are being reviewed for accuracy.”

Mr. Barnes stated he would be glad to entertain any questions there may be regarding this resolution. Also, some commentary was received from Dr. Trae Cotton on the pending resolution. (Dr. Cotton was unable to attend the Board meeting.)

Chairman Garcia stated the commentary Mr. Barnes spoke about was from fellow board member Dr. Trae Cotton and it was sent to both Mr. Barnes and himself. Chairman Garcia also stated he believed there were a total of 12 public meetings held. This information was confirmed by Mr. Barnes. Chairman Garcia thanked the staff for conducting those meetings and summarizing everything.

Chairman Garcia said that he would like to start at the end of the table with Vice-Chairman Keith King by asking if he had any questions, comments, etc. for Mr. Barnes. Vice-Chairman King said that he didn’t have any at the time.

The same question was then addressed to Dr. Jack Fleer. He responded by saying, "When I looked at this proposed resolution, I think of why it is we should consider it." He stated that Trans-Aid ridership continues to increase rather significantly over recent years. Also the cost of rides has increased over these years; therefore, it is clear that one purpose to consider this would be WSTA's ability to recover some of the cost. Dr. Fleer said this seems to him to be a legitimate purpose. He went on to say secondly; that he came to the conclusion that there is some improper use of this benefit. He said it is very difficult to tell who is eligible for it even when they have the card that represents their authorization because the accuracy of the card is unknown. Dr. Fleer stated thirdly he thinks it is important to see if people will benefit from some public service. To Dr. Fleer it is reasonable to ask patrons to make a contribution to that public service. Not to pay for the public service but to make a contribution to it. In this case, public service is being provided that is estimated to run about \$20.00 per trip; and, this proposal asks for less than 1 percentage of that. Therefore; when deemed appropriate, Dr. Fleer stated, "For these 3 reasons I approve this proposal." Chairman Garcia thanked Dr. Fleer for his remarks.

The question was addressed to board member Carter. Ms. Carter stated she had no questions for Mr. Barnes at the present time. Chairman Garcia thanked her for her response.

Next to respond with questions and comments was Ms. Regina Streed. She began by saying she had no questions at the present time and Dr. Fleer addressed some of her feelings about the things being proposed. She went on to say she definitely hears from people for whom it is a hardship and she is sympathetic to their concern as well. Ms. Streed said she cannot say she has strong feelings in support of this proposal, but she does think it is reasonable. Chairman Garcia thanked Ms. Streed for her remarks and asked Mr. Barnes to share the commentary sent by Dr. Cotton.

Mr. Barnes stated that Dr. Cotton was unable to attend the Board Meeting; however he sent an email to Mr. Barnes with some comments. He requested that these comments be shared with the rest of the Board. He also requested information from Mr. Barnes. Mr. Barnes stated that he would read both the questions and his answers.

(1)The first question with respect to the elimination of Medicaid exemption, does WSTA receive support for Trans-Aid through Medicaid; if so, why is WSTA eliminating the exemption?

WSTA does have a contract with the Department of Social Services (DSS) which oversees Medicaid; however, the policy that is in place right now is that Medicaid recipients ride for free for trips in addition to those underwritten by Medicaid.

(2)Is it feasible to consider a 50% increase (form 50¢ to 75¢) now with an additional increase a year or two from now?

As a Board Member, Dr. Cotton is free to propose anything.

(3)If the Medicaid exemption is removed, can WSTA keep the current Medicaid riders at the same current rate and have the increase go forward for everyone meaning that, what they are now paying; but there is still some benefit for being on Medicaid. I am (Dr. Cotton) in favor of some sort of monthly card that can be purchased for somewhere around the \$18.00 to \$20.00 range.

Mr. Barnes's response for the first part of the questions was in regards to Medicaid, was that the (DSS) underwrites trips for their clients for medical trips only. All other trips for persons who are Medicaid recipients can ride for free. This constitutes a considerable number of trips. Trans-Aid farebox revenue other than contracts is about \$2,000.00 annually; about 206,000 trips are provided annually. Additionally, it is impossible to verify the authenticity of the Medicaid Cards for the following reasons: HIPPA prohibits the DSS from sharing information regarding who is a Medicaid recipient; Medicaid cards show the date of issuance, not the date of expiration. DSS tells WSTA the cards have a one year life span and are not issued prior to expiration. Passengers who qualify for Medicaid through Social Security do not receive a card.

Chairman Garcia noted that he wrote to Dr. Cotton and assured him that his questions and comments along with Mr. Barnes answers would be shared with each and every member in attendance.

Chairman Garcia thanked Board Members for their comments and said that he could not agree more with the comments that were made. He said certainly the due diligence has been done. He stated he has followed the staff and the cost has been researched around the state. WSTA still seems to be at the low end of that spectrum. WSTA has known for some time, the cost of a Trans-Aid ride. Chairman Garcia then told Dr. Flier he expressed himself well and he couldn't agree more. Chairman Garcia stated that by no stretch of the imagination does he ever feel that this recommendation is out-of-line; especially for the service that is provided.

In the resolutions there are some key words that Chairman Garcia said he would like to point out, because in many cases it is thought that the Board has the last say. However, this is not the case and this has been reiterated on several occasions. The Board defines and recommends (as stated in the first line of the resolution) with "recommends" being the key word; policies for the Winston Salem Transit Authority. Secondly the Board is cognizant of the fiscal requirements. He said "The Board knows that our goal is to sustain dependable and efficient transportation service." Chairman Garcia said that he applauds WSTA's staff for getting all this information together and presenting it. He directed everyone to the final paragraph of the resolution where it states "the Winston-Salem Transit Authority Board of Directors recommend that the Winston-Salem City Council institute the above recommendations". Again, there are the keywords, in my mind, that we define and then we recommend; so let it therefore be noted."

Chairman Garcia asked the Board if there was a motion to approve the resolution.

Dr. Fleer moved to approve the resolution. Mrs. Carter offered a “second.” The Resolution Recommending a Fare Increase; Elimination of the Discount Pass and Elimination of the Medicaid Fare Exemption for Paratransit Operations was passed.

Public Comment:

Chairman Garcia invited comments from the public and stated that comments are limited to 2 minutes. He asked that all stay within the 2 minutes allotted.

Mr. Bobby Wilson-Began with a greeting and said that he was a little bit concerned for the month the Board did not meet. He said he had not heard the excuse but know that it is forthcoming. He moved on to introduce himself and stated that he would like to bring to WSTA’s attention that Winston-Salem has been declared a Sanctuary City by the City Council. Mr. Wilson stated for those people in these instances who need the Trans-Aid services and this type of accommodation, the Federal Government of the United States did not give a cost of living increase to any of the people who are on Social Security. He said that he does not understand the rationale for the increase and that the money is not coming to them from the Federal Government to give you.

Mr. Wilson said WSTA has two recommendations: (1) He would like for WSTA to include current drivers on the Board at some point. (2) He would like to see some of the Board Members on the buses. He asked if any of the Board knew the color of the buses; what they looked like on the inside and have they met the people they are telling what to do? Mr. Wilson feels at some point it is important that you meet the ridership. It is important that it is understood there was no cost of living increase and that there is no more money for that person who now you want to give more than what they had to give in the first place.

He asked that the Board take time to look at the new study that was done by the Urban League. Mr. Wilson said that he can make it available to the Board. He said Mr. Perry (Urban League) and his organization has done something to bring information that all of us could benefit from. Mr. Wilson said he thinks that “All sitting in the room together in this unified concept should all work together to improve our transportation system, eliminate the problems and come to some unification that all of us can work with.”

Chairman Garcia informed Mr. Wilson that he had reached his two-minute limit.

Ms. Clair Stone then spoke. She thanked the Board for inviting the speakers to the floor; but vote that logic would dictate that public input should precede the vote. This is her recommendation for the future and her complaint to the Federal Transit Administration. She informed the Board that she did compose an email and it will be mailed to WSTA too.

Ms. Stone asked that WSTA please consider a 75¢ fare. She said that this is not the end of the Board’s influence. She gave an example of a Board Member calling City Council. She also asked the Board to consider Dr. Cotton’s suggestion regarding a monthly pass. Ms. Stone went over the Trans-Aid certification process and stated that these people are trying to determine if they can ride Fixed Route safely. If it is determined they cannot, they get to utilize Trans-Aid. Ms. Stone said that WSTA is going to recoup 3 to 4 percent of the cost of the ride before the increase and 3-4 percent after the increase.

Ms. Stone said the people who get that \$60 and up for all their needs can go from paying nothing with a Medicaid card to paying \$40-\$60. Ms. Stone closed by asking the Board to please consider calling City Council. She said "This is a small compromise."

Ms. Fitzhugh said that she agrees with Ms. Stone in that she is sorry the public comment comes after the vote. She stated that she does understand that due diligence has been done, WSTA made studies, WSTA held meetings, etc.; but she would ask that WSTA do as has been suggested; rethink the issue. She would like for WSTA to put a face on the people that are being impacted by this increase. Particularly, taking away the discount pass. Ms. Fitzhugh said that simply offering a flat fee rate pass with unlimited rides would make such a difference for individuals that have doctor appointments who need to go to the supermarket; who need to do those things that revolve around wellness.

She said the other thing she wanted to touch on was she believes WSTA must begin a new marketing campaign to restore the confidence of the ridership. Something must be done about the contention between the drivers and the riders; and even the administration to restore the relationship.

Ms. Fitzhugh stated that she loved riding the bus when the driver spoke to the riders and the riders spoke to the drivers. There was a time the riders would say to the drivers as they got off at the back door, "Thank you for the ride, thank you; have a good day." It was wonderful! That was a good environment. She said that she thought it reflected well upon the City and this administration. However, she feels it has been lost over these last three months with the confusion of the changes in the Fixed Route for the drivers and for the riders. She stated such hardship is being displayed now. It's being displayed through discontent. The drivers and the riders are not speaking to one another; and Ms. Fitzhugh said that she really would hope that WSTA would make a plan to have a marketing campaign in which WSTA would let the drivers know that we appreciate them and let the riders know that WSTA appreciates them. She said that she did not think that this was too much to ask, particularly as we go forward because we want to go forward in a very positive way.

Chairman Garcia thanked Ms. Fitzhugh for her very nice and well-spoken comments. He then asked were there comments from the Board.

Vice-Chairman Keith King commented on remark regarding the Board Members riding the bus. He shared that he is a driver; but he also rides the bus. He also stated that he has a business that is downtown; therefore he sees about every other person that does ride the bus. In addition, he has an aunt that is 91 years old that rides Trans-Aid about every day; so he understands the price may be an issue for some. With that being said, he also understands the analogy that you cannot get blood out of a turnip. He said that, "Somewhere along the line there has to be a give and take. Vice-Chairman King said he understands the need for an increase and he also understands the other side because of his 91year old aunt that uses Trans-Aid. He said that he has personally seen people abuse Trans-Aid which makes it bad for everyone.

Ms. Streed wanted to add to Vice-Chairman King's comments. She stated that she has lived in the City for over 20 years and has had a car for less than half of that time, resulting in her using the bus extensively. She said that for most of that time WSTA had been her primary transportation source. Ms. Streed said that she does get out and speak with the riders as well as ride the bus. She said, "Even before she moved to Winston-Salem she rode the bus." In closing, Ms. Streed added that at some point she would like to revisit the comment made about a "flat fee\ all you can ride," type of pass.

Mrs. Carter addressed Mr. Wilson regarding his comment about the Board Members riding the bus. She said that when the buses are purchased and received, the Board Members are the first to get on. The Members are informed of the height of the bus and the length of the bus; and the members are kept abreast of what type of condition the buses are in. She reiterated that the Board Members know about the buses. In her closing remarks, she said that she agrees with Ms. Streed regarding revisiting the unlimited ride pass.

Chairman Garcia wanted to let it be known that he really appreciated the comment regarding restoring the relationship. He said that he will pass that information on to Mrs. Tina Carson-Wilkins because he does believe that is a very important issue and it goes a long way.

Information Items:

Summary of Trans-Aid Public Meetings-Mr. Barnes informed that a summary of the four public meetings that were held this past month was put together by the Staff. It is included in the meeting packet. Meetings were held in every Ward and there were a couple of meetings held at the Transportation Center last Monday. There was also a meeting held at City Hall.

The summary contains about 144 comments that were divided up into several categories. The general category contains comments that could not be specifically categorized because they did not address the proposed modifications. There were 37 responses not in favor of the fare increase and 12 that were in favor. There were about 15 comments on Medicaid and about 12 on Trans-Aid pass.

Mr. Barnes stated that if there are any questions on how to read the summary or any specific questions, they could be addressed now.

Chairman Garcia stated that the meeting held at the "Industries for your Blind" was one of the best places a public meeting was held. "There were a lot of people that came out, WSTA would have liked to have seen more; but certainly the opportunity was there." This goes to show WSTA's good intent to hear the voices of the general public.

PowerPoint Presentation to City Council-Mr. Barnes shared that WSTA gave a presentation before the City Council Public Works Committee regarding the modifications. This presentation is an overview of the new Fixed Route System.

The overview highlighted proposed changes, performance reports. It provided public comments categorized by type, route and ward. The presentation presented modifications to date and proposed modifications. A printed copy of the presentation was included in the meeting packet.

Chairman Garcia inquired about the effect the DOT construction would have on the new routes and modifications. Mr. Barnes said that all of the work put into these projects will have to be done again and it will be challenging.

Operations Report-Mr. Barnes stated there was a reduction in **Fixed Route ridership**. Year-to-date it's down about 11%. "Other than that, there isn't really a lot of significant information." Mr. Barnes noted that ridership for public transportation is down across the country and Mr. Barnes suspects this is due to low fuel prices. He said that he does not know how to factor that into WSTA's numbers in addition to reconfiguring the entire system; but Mr. Barnes is sure it had some effect.

When the new **Trans-Aid** data requirements began, one of the things WSTA was required to do was have the "count of passengers (versus "trips".) However the system was started in the middle of the year; so the 19,000 passengers for March 2017 and 2016 are legitimate numbers. Those two numbers are being added. Mr. Barnes stated he may redo the whole count and just start with when the system was put in. He also stated when he saw the numbers they didn't make a lot of sense to him either. Chairman Garcia commented he remembers Mr. Barnes saying the count went from being done manually to being done automated. Mr. Barnes confirmed this.

Mr. Barnes said there was nothing to discuss on the **Maintenance** report. Although he did mention that the major road calls were significantly down. They went from 243 to 113; also the minor road calls are down. Trans-Aid road calls are down across the board. Mr. Barnes noted, "With respect to maintenance of our vehicles; we are doing a pretty good job."

Finance Report-Mr. Barnes said that he made adjustments to the Financial Report as he usually does. For instance Greyhound is a contract; so the actual amount we have collected is \$4,000 less than what it should be; but that money will be collected. Adjustments were made for that. Mr. Barnes made adjustments on the state money because of what was budgeted. WSTA budget is \$139,000; but the actual received amount is \$189,000. This figure was adjusted down about \$49,000. The property tax transfer was adjusted. WSTA actually has \$50,000 more than what was projected. With respect to motor vehicle licenses, \$219,000 was added. Chairman Garcia asked about the Damage Settlement column. Mr. Barnes explained that this is money collected for accidents from other parties who are at fault. This money goes through Risk Management. The bottom line is there is a negative **(\$224,000)** with respect to revenue after adjustments.

One of the issues with the Trans-Aid revenues is the reduction in expected revenue from Medicaid trips. The report shows that \$100,000 was budgeted and only \$40,000 has been collected. The revenues are down \$64,000 and this affected WSTA significantly in reaching their goal. It also has a large impact on the bottom line. Dr. Fleer asked why this line item is down. Mr. Barnes stated, as he has mentioned before that the ADA rides are mandated and they have to be provided. As these rides increase, it leaves less room for Medicaid trips because capacity for Medicaid rides is decreased. If the trips are not executed, WSTA does not collect that revenue. Transit Operating expenses are \$264,000 to the good; also Trans-Aid expenses are \$41,000 to the good.

Mr. Barnes reported that according to his calculations WSTA is about **(\$49,000)** negative and this is the first time it has been this way in quite some time.

Marketing Report-Ms. Tina Carson-Wilkins presented the Marketing Report for March and April. The report was included in the meeting packet as well. There were 3 schools that participated in the "Try Transit Program"; (Cook Elementary, Carter High School, and Mt. Tabor).

There were 3 News Releases/Stories regarding the Trans-Aid Fare increase; two were published in the Winston-Salem Journal and the third one in the Winston-Salem Chronicle.

The WSTA TRAC meeting was cancelled for March and April. The Free Tax Program was held at the Transportation Center 3 days a week (there was a shortage of volunteers).

The main marketing and advertising has been and is the Trans-Aid Public Hearing and Proposed changes. Advertising was done via radio (Entercom Communications and The Light), social media (Facebook and Twitter) and Press (WS Chronicle and WS Journal). In addition to the Trans-Aid proposed changes there are some possible changes to Fixed Route.

Following the Marketing Report, Chairman Garcia adjourned the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:01 p.m.

Transcribed by: Teika Holloway
May 26, 2017