Union County Public Transit
Advisory Council

AGENDA

Call to Order / Roll Call

Consent Agenda
  - Minutes from 03-12-2014
  - Staff Reports

Community Comment from City of Union

Staff Reports
  - Manager’s Report
  - Alternative Modes Report

Old Business

New Business
  - EOU Marketing – Chairman Bullock
  - EOCCO Project
  - FY’15 Sneak Peek (it’s good 😊)

Set Next Meeting

Adjournment

April 9, 2014
3:00 PM
Union Family Health Clinic Conference Room
132 E. Dearborn
Union, OR
Voting Members in Attendance: Nora Croucher, Terry De Spain, Manny Elguera, Saira Siddiqui, Joe Kresse
Voting Members Absent: Daniel Bullock, Yvonne Hill, Deon Chandler
Non Voting Staff Members in Attendance: Roy Gomez, Frank Thomas
Non Voting Guests Present: None

Introductions and Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order by Secretary Croucher at 3:00 pm in the Conference Room of the Union Family Health Clinic in Union, Oregon.

Consent Agenda:
There being no corrections to the items in the Consent Agenda, Saira moved to accept the Consent Agenda, Terry seconded and it passed unanimously.

Community Input from Union:
Frank indicated that time had been set aside on the Agenda to entertain any public comment that may come from members of the community in Union. He indicated that the meeting had been advertised using fliers at the Post Office, at the Market and at Ramo Flats Apartments during the previous week.

There being no members of the public immediately present, the Council agreed to shuffle the agenda and make time to hear anyone who may later attend.
Frank asked the Council not to be discouraged. He said he felt that the more accustom people become to us coming out the more likely we will start getting meaningful feedback over time. We just have to be persistent.

Transit Manager’s Report:
Frank reported that staff had submitted an application for Section 5304 planning support. Community Connection not being an eligible direct recipient, he said that the Union County Board of Commissioners had agreed to sponsor the application. If funded, the project will provide for full development of the Asset Management Plan, Safety and Security Plan and the first round revision of Title VI.

A companion grant was also submitted for a Needs Assessment in Elgin and Union. Frank reported that Chairman Bullock (being unable to attend) asked him to give a brief update on the mobility marketing efforts at EOU. Daniel has managed to get us in the rotating banner at www.eou.edu. He’s making progress on having our materials posted to the bulletin boards on campus and is working with Roy on designs.
**Transit Options Report:**
Roy Gomez presented samples of the designs he is working on with Chairman Bullock for marketing at EOU. He said he is also working on a guided trolley tour for the International Program.

Roy reported that we had done a presentation for Cub Scout Pack 515 on how to safely use the fixed route system including how to load bicycles. He said he had printed out certificates for bicycle reflector and blinking lights from the Be Seen campaign. So far he has had two installs at the public transit office as a result.
Roy said he is working on a skate board customization campaign to help build local awareness of alternative modes of transportation.

**EOCCO Project:**
Frank reported that he has been working with the Executive Director on a grant for Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care. The basic idea is to coordinate and support mobility networks that already exist to produce rapid response for medical trips. In order to be considered meaningful, rapid response means within 30 minutes in La Grande and within an hour to Union and Elgin. He said they are also working on pharmacy alternatives. We should know if we have been funded before we meet in June.

**Fiscal Year 2015 Budget:**
Frank reported on a sneak peak version of the Fiscal Year 2015 budget provided with the April Council Packet. He said that budgets seldom come together this easily and that he is proud of the position we find ourselves in as the result of several years of very careful management. He said that we still need to add a few revenue line items but they were likely to come off of uncertain revenue sources such as Medicaid.

**New Business:**
Joe asked if we are participating in the Bike Friendly Business program. The lead team had not heard of the program. Joe explained that bicycle tourism is a large and mostly untapped service population. He said that in order to qualify business have to meet two or three of a dozen or so key amenities.
Joe provided follow up information. Frank committed to making application for the project and promoting it to allied merchants in the community.

**Set Next Meeting:**
The next meeting was set for Wednesday, May 21, 2014 at 3:00 pm at the Northeast Oregon Public Transit conference room in La Grande.

**Adjournment:**
There being no further business to come before the Council, Secretary Croucher adjourned the meeting at 3:58 PM.
Minutes Respectfully Prepared By,

Frank Thomas, Transit Manager

May 7, 2014

Minutes Accepted by:

Nora Croucher, Secretary and Acting Chair
A Very Good Month…

March was a very good month. It put us back in positive territory fiscal year to date – we finished Q3 up 104 rides. At the close of Q3 last fiscal year we had 5,744 Revenue Service Hours. This year we’re only at 5,613. Of course, the savings didn’t come from Fixed Route where schedules are inflexible, it came from Paratransit. Our scheduling software (Adept) has allowed us to become masters of forecasting capital and human resources with precision.

You may be saying to yourself (not unkindly but saying it all the same), “Big deal… 131 hours saved, 104 rides increased. Does that really justify three paragraphs on the front page of our report?” Actually… **It’s a very big deal.** By the end of the fiscal year our 131 hours saved will be close to zero. Why? We’re running Saturdays now. Carefully watching what and who we deploy has allowed us to put up 15 weeks of our cheapest and highest performing service on Saturdays by trimming it away from the most expensive thing we do. As a result that 104 rides of growth is about to explode with no offsetting service declines in our Paratransit system.

The future of Transit in Eastern Oregon is smart people making careful projections and difficult choices, each contributing just a little to the sum. I remember not so long ago when the mantra in Transit was bigger, better, faster, more. It was a really good time. However, the future isn’t big. It’s small. David is not the underdog everyone makes him out to be and Goliath is not nearly the giant he thinks. It took me longer than it should have to wrap my head around that but now the path forward is pretty clear.

The next few fiscal years hold a lot of promise for those who have learned to carve out a niche in the margins and I have some very good news to share with you. That’s us!!

**Advisory Council**

For those of you who are on the Ad Council and wondering why I’m talking about you in a report to you… This report also goes to the larger agency’s Board of Directors. Please bear with me. It’ll all make sense very soon. 😊

The Advisory Council approved the Fare Study at their meeting last month. The study broke a lot of new ground. As far as we can tell, bus fares were originally designed in an arbitrary way by people who weren’t particularly interested in Transit as a system. The conversation probably went something like, “our recommended donation at the meal site is $2 so if we make bus fare $0.50 an elder can participate for $3 a day”. Every fare revision we have made since has carried the seeds of this initial reckoning.
A lot of what the Council considered is academic. If you’re interested, the entire Fare Study is still linked on our website at www.neotransit.org. Here’s a quick recap of the things we think you might be most interested in:

**Enact an Exact Change Policy**  
Effective June 1

We started notifying passengers this month that we will be moving to an Exact Change model. Drivers will not carry cash after April 30. In reality, we’ll run a one month grace period (in May) and make our final switch on June 1st.

**Reduce Fixed Route and Paratransit Bus Fares**  
Effective April 1

Fixed Route is dropping from $1.50 to $1.00. Paratransit is dropping from $2.50 to $2.00.

**Raise Intercity Bus Fares to $3.50 per Boarding**  
Effective May 1

This effectively doubles our Intercity fare but it puts us in line with where market fundamentals and peer analysis indicate we should be.

**Discontinue Several Bus Passes**  
Effective April 1 to June 1

One of the findings of this study is that we were drowning in bus passes. We had 46% more options than a composite of similar sized providers and 38% more than an average of the seven similar delivery systems we compared ourselves to. Perhaps then it is not surprising that over a two month time period we studied, 93% of our Paratransit rides were paid for by something other than a cash fare.

In the Fixed Route system we ended the largely unused Youth Passes and Family Passes. We likewise ended the 10 Ride Punch Pass which simply doesn’t have much value in a system where rides only cost $1.

It was our recommendation to end bus passes in Paratransit altogether. This study was unable to find any Oregon providers of Paratransit services outside of our agency that offer discounted bus passes. However, after support from unexpected sources arose in our Public Comment process we revised the recommendation to keep our 20 Ride Punch Pass and our Unlimited Individual Pass (at $36 and $55, respectively).

The Fare Study will enter Union County’s triennial update rotation so that it will never get stale on us again. Unless a compelling reason causes us to reopen the Fare Study for amendment, it is due for its first rewrite in Fiscal Year 2017.

**STF Committee**

We held our first work session with the Union County STF Committee in March. Topics included Committee Composition, Short and Long Term Planning and the STF Application process. After meeting with them I am VERY encouraged.
I think we may be one or two meetings away from really having our collective heads wrapped around things. Given all the changes that we as a region have been a little slow to react to, I am pleased with how nimble our most important stakeholders have become. Within a biennium we will be the county people point to when they’re talking about best practices in rural mobility.

Section 5304

The Union County Board of Commissioners sponsored a grant application for us to receive some planning support next fiscal year (as a private nonprofit, we are not an eligible direct recipient). We submitted two applications.

The top priority was for MAP-21 Compliant Planning (Asset Management Plan, Safety Management Systems and the first Title VI revision) in Union County. TO BE CLEAR, we will comply on time whether we are funded to do so or not. Our AMP is pretty good but with a little more polish could be great. The SMS framework will be ready for the Ad Council to adopt in June but if we’re funded we could really flesh it out – meaning it won’t have to wait for its first triennial revisit to become useful. Finally, if we’re funded the Title VI Plan will be revised during the first year of the cycle, if not we’ll get to it in the second year (Fiscal Year 2016).

The second grant was for an honest to goodness, consultant and community driven Needs Assessment in Elgin and Union. I’m not as optimistic that this project will be funded. It comes to 2% of the State’s available resources for a population that is less than ½ of 1% which consumes statistically zero rides. However, it is an identified need in our Coordinated Plan AND it could help stop some of the fiscal hemorrhaging we’re experiencing as a lifeline service provider. I think we have some important contributions to make to the process but it is clearly time to bring in an outside expert. I think if we had the right answers it wouldn’t be costing us almost $52 per ride to deliver these services.

Will keep you posted!

EOCCO Grant

Margaret has had me assisting on a grant project through EOCCO. We’re exploring opportunities to leverage what we already do well into a new network of local providers that will be able to respond to same day needs for medical access and pharmaceutical deliveries in Union County. It’s really ambitious. If it works we could be saving our local health care partners hundreds of thousands of dollars annually while producing a meaningful service that becomes a rural model for improving patient care.

I’m excited about finally putting the power of Adept (our reservation software) to work in a Call Center model. It’s a little intimidating setting up for the first time. It will be similar to the challenges of our initial deployment without a support team from Statagen to assist us.
HOWEVER, what we will learn in the process will almost instantly inform how we develop coordination opportunities with Umatilla and Morrow Counties.

Due to the way we have built call taking, ride scheduling, dispatch and reporting around our other tasks, much of our core function has become almost incidental. I estimate that on our busiest day, when we are fully staffed, we may be operating at 20% to 25% of what we are truly capable of (at least in terms of those four fundamentals). The cool thing about the nature of this capacity is it is nonlinear. Adding additional burdens will not consume our capabilities at a one-to-one rate you may expect. If anything, the more we do the more we are able to do.

We’ll keep you posted as this project comes together…

First Charter

We delivered our very first Charter Report to Admin yesterday. Like our comments on the front page this may not sound like an earth shaking announcement. In fact, you may be unlikely to hear much more from us about Charter trips moving forward unless something large comes up. It’s deceptive like that.

I’m working on three other Charter gigs at the moment. One or all could turn into annual events of County Fair volume and community impact. In another biennium I see no reason why Charter trips can’t be responsible for between 3% and 5% of our annual income. Since it is a match eligible revenue stream we can exercise quite a bit of control over, it may quietly become one of the most compelling things we do. This is another excellent example of a carefully crafted niche that becomes a contributor to an annual sum that is itself greater than its constituent parts.

Greyhound

I feel I should tell you about a heartache of mine that is unresolved at the time of this draft. Donna Wilson, La Grande’s Greyhound franchisee will be retiring at the end of April. No heir apparent has yet been identified. If nothing changes, the Greyhound ticket office in our building will close April 30.

If that happens, the best I can hope for will be to convince Greyhound to continue stopping here. It is quite likely that they will seek to renew their partnership with Flying J Truck Plaza – which in my estimation is a tragedy. One of the key selling points that helped us develop the Multimodal Hub was bringing the Greyhound stop back into the community where people could use it (our passengers tend to be their passengers). I see no viable way for us to serve Flying J, meaning we’d be right back to where we were in 2007. A passenger disembarking from Greyhound in La Grande would face a 2+ mile hike into town if he or she was without transportation.
There are other implications with our Section 5311(f) – InterCity – programs. We’d have to find a way to time our stops with Greyhound at another location. Elgin (one such funded service) is a hard enough sell for passengers who want to access La Grande – not necessarily Greyhound – as it is. I have concerns about the future viability of these offerings if we can’t keep Greyhound at our facility. I am really hoping that a local entrepreneur considers stepping up to take on the business…

**FY ‘15 Budget**

Finally (and ending on a positive note), we delivered the preliminary draft of our Fiscal Year 2015 budget to the Administration Office this week. It is balanced and conservative without compromising excellence or ambition. While there may be some changes as funding sources like Travel Options firm up, I am confident we can meet them. It was probably the most satisfying budget I have worked on in 17 years. I’m pretty happy about the path we’re on and where it is leading us.

_Until next time, take care of yourselves and each other. Thank you again for allowing us to do this for a living._