Union County Public Transit Advisory Council

AGENDA

Call to Order / Roll Call

Consent Agenda
- Minutes from 05-21-2014
- Board / Council Report
- Staff Advisory Memos
- Application for Membership

Entertain Local Input

Consider Application from Linda Hays

Staff Reports
- Manager’s Report
- Alternative Modes Report

Old Business

New Business

Set Next Meeting

Adjournment

June 16, 2014
3:00 PM
Elgin City Hall
Voting Members in Attendance:  Daniel Bullock, Nora Croucher, Yvonne Hill, Manny Elguera
Voting Members Absent: Saira Siddiqui, Terry De Spain, Joe Kresse
Non Voting Staff Members in Attendance: Roy Gomez, Frank Thomas
Non Voting Guests Present: Cheryl Abel

Introductions and Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bullock at 3:00 pm in the Conference Room at Northeast Oregon Public Transit in La Grande.

Consent Agenda:
There being no corrections to the items in the Consent Agenda, Daniel motioned to approve, Yvonne seconded and the motion passed unopposed.

Consider Paratransit Policy:
Frank introduced the Paratransit Policy update saying that it is a requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act. He said that it needs to be updated periodically because legal rulings and interpretations change over time. The policy being replaced was adopted by the agency Board of Directors in 2010 and it is already obsolete – in fact, several provisions were called out as being out of compliance during a recent site review conducted by ODOT.

Frank walked the Council through the update…

Scope: This update decouples Baker and Union County. Frank said he was reassigned a couple of years ago to do nothing but transit. It was a demotion of sorts and as a result he is no longer on a peer level with the Managers in the other counties. Consequently, he has no authority to study, perform public meetings or otherwise develop/promote policy for their stakeholders. This update was developed for (and publicly vetted in) Union County.

Housekeeping: Frank said county demographics, service schedules, bus fares and provider inventory were updated.

Title VI Compliance: Frank said that the new policy was heavily informed by the same Title VI policy that formed the Ad Council. For example, Fixed Route Service Standards defined by Title VI frame in the definition of service equivalence for Paratransit. The Public Participation mandates of the Title VI Plan were followed in the development of this update.

Scheduling and On-Time Performance: Frank said that one of the key places Title VI impacted this update was On-Time Performance. As a designated metric in the Fixed Route Standards part of the Title VI Plan, On-Time Performance in the Paratransit system must be equivalent. He also indicated that it is insufficient to track only On-Time Performance for the purposes of demonstrating equivalence. You also need to consider the amount of time a Paratransit rider is on the bus (i.e. if a fixed route takes 23 minutes from one end to the other, you had better not be subjecting Paratransit passengers to 45 minute bus rides).
Frank indicated that he had designed an SQL report using our trip reservation software’s database to track On-Time and Time On Board results in our Paratransit system. He said he was pleased to report an On-Time Performance rate of 96.61% and a Time On Board rating of 99.27%.

**Trip Purpose, Priority and Volume:** Frank said this is not a change but an enhancement of something that was already in the policy. Paratransit is a civil right. We may not prioritize one class of trips over another. A ride to the doctor receives no more or less priority than a trip to the liquor store. Moreover, we may not place a limit on the number of rides that a passenger may consume. This update spends a lot more space fleshing this concept out with examples rather than just making a statement that the reader may have to interpret for his or herself.

**Origin to Destination:** The ADA is intentionally vague when it says that Paratransit trips should be from *Origin to Destination*. They do NOT want providers imposing artificial limits with terms like Curb-to-Curb (which is precisely what our old policy used to say). The ADA finds it reasonable that Door-to-Door may be the standard for some riders and/or some trips. The ADA does not require us to fundamentally alter our service – for example escorting a passenger to his or her fourth floor apartment in the Foley Building.

It’s important to understand that when our last Paratransit Policy was written, Curb-to-Curb was generally considered to be an acceptable standard. However, since there has been new light (and our last policy atrophied into having this so wrong) we again spent a lot of space fleshing out the conversation in this update.

**Suspension:** Frank said that the ADA now requires context sensitive suspensions for systems that use them. We engage in suspensions very reluctantly (if at all) so it is overkill for us but it is required.

The classic example is a three-strikes-you’re-out policy. If you acquire three No-Show in a specific period of time you earn a suspension. Of course, the problem is context. Three No-Shows for someone who rides 10x each month is a big deal. Three No-Shows for someone who rides 200x is not a big deal at all. Even though we ignored it for the purpose of operations, we had something similar in the last version of our policy. As a result, we spent a lot of space fleshing out this concept as well.

Frank said he has developed an SQL report from our reservation software database that can pull Total Trips, Late Cancels and No-Shows for any rider over any period of time. At the same time it pulls the same results from the system as a whole – thus providing a baseline for the purposes of comparison.

**600 Pounds (Chair and Rider):** We are no longer able to stipulate a weight limit for our ADA equipment. In the last decade the technology has gotten much better. Most of our lifts are rated at 800 pounds now. Citing a weight limit is now considered discriminatory. Instead our new language states that we will load passengers who safely fit within the capacity of our ADA equipment. A passenger denied accommodation has the same rights of appeal that would be afforded to someone who was denied eligibility.
Comparison to ADA: We’ve included a new section in this update that states the basic paratransit requirements under the ADA and our operational response. It then evaluates if we have met our obligation. The updated policy meets them all – exceeds about half of them.

Public Participation: Frank said that this update was developed in compliance with the Public Participation section of the Title VI Plan. The Public Transit Advisory Council is featured prominently on the first page, making our Councilors a part of living history.

Manny asked if Wallowa County was required to have a Paratransit Plan. Frank said that it is not necessary in Wallowa County because they run a Deviated Fixed Route that will go off route for anyone who requests it.

Daniel asked if Pendleton had a Paratransit system. Frank said they have a tribal intercity service that makes incidental stops in populated areas. He said it was too bad because the most populous county in Eastern Oregon doesn’t have ADA Paratransit. He thinks it’s pretty thin cover and may not hold up to a compliance review. On the upside, he thinks there is an opportunity to coordinate and help them build something better moving forward.

Daniel asked how often passenger’s needs exceed our ADA equipment. Frank said it was pretty rare that weight would be an issue. Width and length of mobility devices are more common barriers. We have a classification for Extra Large Wheelchairs in our database so the software won’t try to schedule a rider on a bus that can’t accommodate him or her. Frank said he is worried about being able to find a wheelchair lift as wide as what we presently enjoy of vehicle 2013 when it goes up for replacement next year.

Daniel asked if a rear loading vehicle would solve the problem. Frank replied that it would probably solve the length issue but would likely pose another limitation on width – specifically between the wheel wells. Frank has been looking for other providers who use rear entry vans that he could potentially swap with for a week or two. He’d like to see how they work with our local needs before putting a lot of money into one (or more).

Daniel asked when the last time the Paratransit Policy was updated. Frank said that the Policy adopted by the Board in 2010 was the first one. This is the first update. Daniel asked how often it should be updated. Frank said that it could be opened for revision any time the need arises but it will be entered in our triennial update rotation to make sure we don’t end up this far behind again.

There being no further discussion, Manny move to adopt the Union County Paratransit Policy. Nora seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports
Frank reported that the Board of Directors has approved our proposal to become a Greyhound Ticket Agent in La Grande. He said he would completely the application for the Executive Director’s signature by the end of the week.

Frank reported that the Trolley would run for free on June 21st for the first day of summer. Frank reported that we’ll be running a dedicated shuttle and extended hours for SOLWest on June 27th and 28th.
Frank reported that staff is playing with test routes to connect Union and Elgin to the County Fair this year.

Roy reported that he had completed a site mock up for the proposed bus shelter that the Family Food grocery store on Fourth and Adams.

Roy reported that he met with several business in Baker City last month to promote Travel Options and DriveLess Connect. He plans to run another trip to Joseph and Enterprise soon.

Old Business
Manny asked how the Trolley was working out in the motel loop approved by the Council as a part of the Annual Operations Plan. Frank said that the schedules were tight but we were making our time marks. The streets are wide without parallel parking to artificially narrow them. It actually solves a problem of getting the Trolley out of traffic in the Walton Road bound half of the route when riders flag us down along Albany Street. On the downside, making the left hand turn on to East R Avenue (behind McDonalds) can be challenging in a long vehicle with a fixed wheel base. So far, so good.

New Business
Manny started a discussion about parking problems in La Grande’s downtown district. He said that he knows employees of local businesses who have to go out and move their cars every two hours to keep from getting a ticket.

Frank said that he isn’t convinced there is much of a parking problem. We have more of a walking problem, or worse, one of perception. You’ll walk further between the parking lot and the Electronics Department of a local box store than you ever would downtown but we don’t think of that as a problem.

Frank said there is an under utilized free parking area downtown on Jefferson Avenue that may be an interesting part of the solution if we could run a transit circulator during peak hours. He said we would put a survey up on our Facebook profile to get a feel for what other people think.

Next Meeting
The next meeting was set for Wednesday July 23, 2014 at 3:00 pm at the Elgin City Hall.

Adjourn
There being no further business to bring before the Council, Chairman Bullock adjourned the meeting at 4:18 pm.

Minutes Respectfully Prepared By,

[Signature]

Frank Thomas, Transit Manager

Minutes Accepted by:

[Signature]

Daniel Bullock, Chairman
Happy New Year!

We closed the books on FY 2014 last week. It was an incredible year. Consider:

- **July 2013:** First positive budget carryover in many years
- **October 2013:** Union County Title VI Plan adopted by the Board
- **January 2014:** Ad Council steering committee appointed by the Board
- **February 2014:** Ad Council meets for the first time, formalizes
- **March 2014:** Ad Council adopts Fare Study and Saturday Expansion
- **April 2014:** Ad Council meets outside of La Grande (Union) for first time
- **June 2014:** Ad Council adopts updated Union County Paratransit Policy, bringing us into compliance with the ADA

While we were doing all that, we managed to grow use of the public transit system by 3.5% while reducing our Cost per Ride for the fourth consecutive year. We’ve dramatically improved our automated procedures and started to consider coordination partnerships (Umatilla and Morrow Counties for example) that would’ve been unimaginable a few years ago.

New Partnerships:

On July 21, 2014 – if all goes well – we should be the new Greyhound Agent in La Grande. We recently entered into a Blanket Purchase Agreement with Mid Columbia Council of Governments to perform Non Emergency Medical Transports – a service for which we were previously contracted to Cascades East Ride Center. The new broker is not nearly as automated as the last but what they lack on the tech side the more than make up for in wanting to serve people. We’re pretty pleased with the direction this partnership is going.

SOLWest Fair:

We provided direct shuttle and extended hour access to the first annual SOLWest Fair in La Grande last month. We also experimented with a route loop that improves access to local motels. All services told, we delivered 80 rides which was a little disappointing. We suspect that miserable weather played a strong role – it rained heavily both days. On the upside, Governor Kitzhaber came out to the bus, shook hands with the driver and thanked us for the service. I think this will be a big local event in a few years. Perhaps next time Mother Nature will be more cooperative.

Other Summer Activities:

July is quickly becoming our busiest month of the year – it doesn’t help that it has just been Kate and I in the office for the last several days. We’re gearing up for Shrine Week. We run extra hours in order to accommodate around 80 players (plus families) during their practice week at EOU before the big game. Of course, this overlaps with the Union County Fair – which also required additional hours and routes.
We’re working on experimental routes for the County Fair this year that will connect Union and Elgin on August 1st and August 2nd (typically the busiest days of the fair). In August we’ll be taking on Grassroots Fest in Union, Cherry Fair in Cove and Highland Games at the Union County Fair Grounds.

Open Invitation:
Sorry this month’s memo is so short – we really do have our hands full at the moment. We’d like to formally invite any and all interested members of the Board of Directors to join us at a Transit Council meeting. The Council meets July 16, at 3:00 pm at Elgin City Hall.

Until next time, take care of yourselves and each other. Thanks for a remarkable fiscal year and for allowing us to do this for a living.