Union County Public Transit Advisory Council

A G E N D A

Call to Order / Roll Call
Consent Agenda
- Minutes from 2-19-2014
Ratify Amended By Laws
Consider Saturday La Grande Expansion
- Receive Public Comment
Consider 2014 Fare Study
Staff Reports
- Manager’s Report
- Alternative Modes Report
Old Business
New Business
Set Next Meeting
Adjournment

March 12, 2014
3:00 PM
Northeast Oregon Public Transit
Introductions and Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order at 3pm in the Conference Room at the Public Transit Hub in La Grande.

Union County Transit Manager, Frank Thomas began the meeting by asking for adoption of the initial governing recommendations by consensus. The Council agreed.

Consider Placeholder Appointments:
Frank explained that most everyone in the room (and a couple who were not able to attend) or persons who are materially similar had already been appointed by the Community Connection of Northeast Oregon Board of Directors. He referred to Staff Advisory Memo 14-2a for a detailed description of the people and seats that required formalization.

Frank asked the Council if they wished to discuss any of the recommended Councilors individually or collectively. There being no discussion he called for consensus to seat the Councilors described in Staff Advisory Memo 14-2a. The Council agreed.

Consider and Adopt By Laws:
Frank described the process by which Staff prepared the draft By Laws. He indicated that they provide the Council with broad authority to evolve over time. Before going through the Staff disclosures and recommendations in Advisory 14-2b he asked for concerns the Councilors may have about the draft By Laws. There being none the discussion continued to consider 14-2b in order.

Under Article V entitled Officers and Staffing, Councilors Bullock and Croucher felt that a third officer (as presented in Staff Advisory Member 14-2b) to form an Executive Committee had value. The Councilors agreed by consensus.

Frank said Staff would revise the By Laws to recognize a Secretary and the duties typically performed (or caused to be performed) by the office. He indicated that the revision would also frame in the Executive Committee.

There being no further areas of immediate concern with the draft By Laws, the Council adopted them, as amended, by consensus.
Adoption of Officers:
Frank introduced the topic by saying that Staff had intentionally not drawn up an Advisory Memo on it. He said that it felt a little premature. Many of us have just met and we don’t know what our collective strengths are yet. He indicated that no one who chooses to try on a leadership role will be in this alone. Staff will actively support our Officers and he suggested that as a Council we should do our best to remain flexible for the first year or so.

Shalem O’Rourke recommended taking a short break from the meeting to allow the Councilors to talk – sans Staff – and get to know each other a little better.

Councilor De Spain asked if the decision had to be made at this meeting. Frank indicated that it did not – it just has to be formalized before we can conduct formal business. Frank indicated that we could make it the first agenda item at our next meeting. The Council recessed at approximately 3:29 pm. The Council came back into session at approximately 3:40 pm. By consensus, Councilor Daniel Bullock was appointed Chairman, Councilor Yvonne Hill was appointed Vice Chairman and Councilor Nora Croucher was appointed Secretary.

Set Next Meeting Date:
The Council agreed to meet again on March 12, 2014 at 3:00 pm in the Conference Room at the Public Transit Hub in La Grande.

Frank indicated that at the next meeting he would be performing a public solicitation for comment on the Saturday Fixed Route and ADA Paratransit Expansion in La Grande. He said that if everything worked out he would also be presenting the 2014 Fare Study.

Councilor De Spain asked when the Council may expect to receive the Council Pack. Frank said he would email it out no later than close of business March 4, 2014. He indicated that he preferred for the Council to have information at least two weeks in advance but the back side of the schedule was getting compressed due to the Saturday launch (tentatively scheduled for March 22, 2014) and the need for a final public comment opportunity. He said that he would do everything he could to publish by February 28, 2014 but that March 4th was the worst case scenario.

Adjourn:
The Council adjourned at approximately 4:00 pm.
By the Numbers…

We finished last month down 3.67% relative to January 2013. However, we’re still up 51 (0.22%) rides on a year over year basis. This year’s budget is nearly $100,000 less than last year. After adjusting for capital, the operations loss comes to around $35,000 (or just under 6%). We’re very pleased to be flat in conditions where we would be justified to expect a decline commensurate with our fiscal constraints.

So much of what we are planning to do in the next 17 months is predicated upon a stable and predictable cost per ride. We know there is not likely to be any more money. Our underwriting partners – especially the Union County Commissioners – have done the best they can for us. From here on out it is all about squeezing more efficiency out of every dollar. If we’re fortunate enough to continue in the direction we’re going for the rest of the biennium, we think you’ll be very pleased with the fiscal and participant centered outcomes in Union County.

Special Transportation Fund:

Last month we told you about our proposal for additional resources to the STF Committee. Out of the $30,000 that was available to the County over the biennium, they allocated $20,000 to us. Admittedly, I didn’t have the best sales pitch. As we told you last month, we were in a position of having to make cuts no matter what. All the STF Committee could hope to do is soften the blow.

On the upside, we also received the Saturday grant which ended up containing a little more money than I thought it would. I think you’ll be very pleased with what we will be able to preserve. In the meantime, a long overdue opportunity has arisen to have a work session with the STF Committee. More to come. Stay tuned…

Future Framework Part Two of Three:

When this series is complete it may be useful to peruse all three installments as a set. Last month we talked about the evolution of transit and how happenstance placed me near the center. We explained the concepts that compelled an agency that is fiercely decentralized to establish Union County as the lead in a regional system. We mentioned shifts in funding and regulations that followed and an awkward relationship to the Coordinated Plan that resulted. We left off by foreshadowing a return to decentralization that is probably inevitable.
The Coordination Trap:
Coordination was a common sense idea. Minimize duplication, you minimize costs. Its Achilles heel was the tacit assumption of stasis. As long as everything remains constant, loss of redundancy isn’t a problem. When change eventually occurs, the unintended consequences resulting from the concentration of technical capacity are sobering.

Cross Pollination:
As fate would have it, I wasn’t too bad at transit. It made sense to apply the Coordinated Plan model to our other duplicative tasks. By the close of the last biennium I was personally responsible for almost all of the research, planning and innovative reporting techniques that met obligations to ODOT and FTA for the entire agency. While my team and I are proud that our work is often cited as an example for other rural providers to follow, there are dark clouds on the horizon…

MAP-21 and Beyond:
20 years ago it was enough to run a senior bus; 10 years ago formal written plans were unnecessary; 5 years ago a simple maintenance plan was sufficient to demonstrate compliant asset management. Every year transit becomes more technocratic and the rate of professionalization is accelerating.

When Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century went into effect on October 1, 2012 it ushered in a new era of required procedure, planning, data collection and reporting. There is broad agreement among industry insiders that whatever replaces MAP-21 in the fall will continue (even exaggerate) this trend. As dollars become scarce the difference between the winners and the losers will likely have a lot to do with compliance and technical proficiency.

Moving on and Moving Forward…
On May 21, 2012 I accepted a demotion. The details are unimportant save one. I’ve spent nearly two years working for one program in one county. Based on questions at your last meeting I am confident you understand the resulting limitations on Title VI, Asset Management and the Safety Management System Plan.

While Title VI, AMP and SMS are not casual documents, I’m confident your leaders are also working them through Baker, Wallowa and Admin. Thanks to the Union County Ad Council (seriously, THANK YOU!!) I anticipate no problems in meeting the June 30 adoption deadline. What has me gravely concerned is the regional Coordinated Plan. Historically, whatever gets prepared is emailed over for me to present with ours. The STF Committee that hears them (comprised of four La Grande residents and one from Cove) doesn’t know – or care – much about anything outside of Union County.

Put another way… Amendments generated with little local process will be presented to a committee that isn’t geographically interested in most of them by a guy who hasn’t studied anything outside of Union County in half a decade. These amendments will enter (or not)
the most important plan guiding funding in our region – and this is just one troubling aspect of the current “Coordinated” framework.

As we mentioned last month: we don’t own the plan, it isn’t our responsibility to maintain it, there isn’t any money to pay for our work on it, no one else is going to do it and if we don’t, the majority of our federal and state funding is at risk. The Coordinated Plan also faces significant challenges in terms of contributions by other providers. As broken as our procedure is, at least our agency is participating (no other potential recipient contributes). The way forward is complicated. As an agency I perceive no current capacity for complete decentralize (a Coordinated Plan and local process for each County) and zero appetite for complete coordination. Since we know a correction is coming and we’ve got some time, it makes sense to work within our communities proactively. If one or more of the STF Agencies does an unguided rethink, the rapidity of the change could be problematic. I’m confident everything will work out for the best. This challenge isn’t good, bad or even imminent. We just want you to keep it in the back of your head so you won’t be alarmed if you hear about it in another context.

To Summarize February…
Public Transit Coordination was a popular concept ten to fifteen years ago that initially paid large dividends. It worked so well, we regionalized a lot of important local processes. Agency changes coupled with the increasing complexity of program requirements have resulted in an unraveling of what Coordination was originally intended to address. With the deadline for MAP-21 planning requirements looming there are inconvenient local implications. Expiration of the Coordinated Plan at the end of this biennium may have larger regional consequences.

Next month we’ll wrap up this series with a discussion on the local strategies we’re developing to mitigate what may be coming.

Saturday Project:
As we mentioned on the front page, the Saturday Grant has arrived!! There’s a lot of stuff to do before we can actually do stuff. Thanks to Adept and SQL it now takes just a few minutes to pull analytics that used to take most of the day. For example the report on the next page runs in a few seconds and returns demand for Paratransit every fifteen minutes, on any day of the week for any given range of dates. By dividing the demand for service by the number of days in the record set we can determine with precision how many drivers and vehicles we need. This is a text book example of how we have used our technical proficiency to essentially freeze our cost per ride at FY 2011 levels or below.

We’ve completed our sketch budget, placed a staffing solicitation with The Observer and Worksource Oregon and started framing in our schedule. We were initially hoping to launch by Saturday March 1, 2014 but making that date appears doubtful. There is a public comment process to accommodate, drivers to be trained, a new schedule to work out and publish AND we’re thinking about tinkering with the route. Stay tuned. This may be one of the most important projects we launch this year.
Advisory Council Progress:

We’ve got members for our EOU and Bicycle-Pedestrian seats. We’re hoping to assemble and formalize the Ad Council during the week of February 17. It is entirely possible that our minutes will be part of your next Board Packet!! 😊

First Charter:

The first charter opportunity we mentioned last month was a bust. We actually had two but lost both. I’m pleased to report that the process worked as it should have. One of our requests (Grande Ronde Symphony) wasn’t the type of work we should do using federally funded equipment unless no one else is interested. The other presented us with a long term opportunity, just not one we could follow up on this year…
The second request was for motel to fairgrounds access for the upcoming Beer Festival in La Grande. While the nature of the trip is pretty consistent with what we normally do, we can’t just arbitrarily throw a one day, event driven service into our system without a process – and therefore lost the trip in a 49-CFR-604.9 compliant procedure. If the Beer Fest becomes an annual event at roughly the same time every year, at the same venue and generates public transit demand we can write it into our Annual Op’s Plan, put the whole thing to our local process and avoid the Charter discussion altogether. This is precisely how we handle the Union County Fair partnership with the County Commissioners.

**Staff Training Day:**

Public Transit in Union County will shut down on Monday March 17, 2014 for an all day staff training. Any of you who are interested are cordially invited to stop in for a session (or the day if you like). The draft agenda is on the following page (events and presenters are still being solidified).

We’ll start with a session on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The SWOT analysis will provide us a bottom up, 360 degree perspective on what is going well, where we may need to focus more attention and what may never be missed if we simply quit doing it. We’re hoping to generate a few action items that team members (irrespective of primary job function) will be invited to participate in improving and innovating over the next year.

Other items we’ll be working on include: Operation Lifesaver, a hands-on refresher course on wheelchair securement & passenger restraint, paper trail update and roundtable style discussions on customer service, action items from the Safety Committee and Asset Management. The final conversation will cover a range of topics including vehicle maintenance, procurement suggestions and feedback from operations staff, pretrip inspections and casual detailing, passenger and stop amenities, opportunities to consider investments in green technology and other capital related buzz concepts.

That’s all from Union County Public Transit where things just keep getting better all the time. Thank you again for allowing us to do this for a living.
8:00 am  Coffee, Snacks, Introductions, Welcome
8:15 am  Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
10:15 am  <<  Break  >>
10:30 am  Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (continued)
          •  UC Transit 5% Discussion
11:30 am  Operation Life Saver
Noon    <<  Working Lunch  >>
          •  Customer Service Round Table Discussion
1:00 pm  Vehicle Roundtable Discussion
1:45 pm  Safety Committee Roundtable
2:15 pm  Reporting Requirements Update and Review
3:00 pm  <<  Break  >>
3:15 pm  Hands on Refresher Course W/C and Passenger Securement
4:30 pm  Meeting Evaluation and Recap
5:00 pm  Adjourn