



**PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION BOARD MINUTES
March 27, 2012 at 7:00 p.m.**

Members Present: Sharonlee Vogel, Chair; Barbara Kellner, Vice-Chair; Othella Rogers; Cynthia Dawson

Members Excused: None

Staff Present: Ben Pickar, Acting Executive Secretary; Carol Stirn, Acting Recording Secretary

The Public Transportation Board Meeting was opened at 7:00 p. m. by Ms. Vogel.

County Executive Ulman has officially selected John Powell as the **new Administrator for the County's Office of Transportation.**

1. Approval of the January 24, 2012 Minutes

The minutes of the January 24, 2012 meeting were unanimously approved by the Board.

2. Announcements

Ben Pickar handed out a sheet, for the Board's information, showing what each Staff member does in the Transportation Division. Mr. Pickar introduced Tyson Byrne who will give a presentation on the FY2013-18 State Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP).

Tyson Byrne is an MDOT representative, who is the Baltimore Regional Planner. Mr. Byrne is presenting Chapter 725, the development of the Maryland Department of Transportation's Annual Capital Budget which is part of the Governor's budget. Chapter 725 is legislation that was enacted in 2010 and was entered by Steve Lafferty. The legislation has asked for a process to make the priority letters more of a difference in development of the MDOT Capital Budget, the Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP). The CTP covers five years and is developed annually by the MDOT. The MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) Long-Range Transportation Plan is developed every 4 years. The new Chapter 725 legislation and related MDOT guidance encourages County Priority Letters to be developed for the Highway Needs Inventory, MPO long range plans, Modal Plans, MdTA Projects and WMATA Projects. A goal of the new Chapter 725 legislation is to make sure the priority letters are provided to MDOT "before" the creation of the draft CTP so that MDOT can review the priorities first. Mr. Byrne stated that a date of April 1 has been set for MDOT to receive the priority letters. MDOT is asking for a County Executive buy-in, as well as a legislative buy-in for this new priority letter process. Any Counties that have municipalities also need to get a buy-in, and also a County Council buy-in. The priorities letters provide critical input to the draft CTP, the Final CTP and then the TIPs (Transportation Improvement Programs). The CTPs and the TIPs all go into the STIP (State Transportation Improvement Program). Chapter 725 requires additional details on what the projects in each priority letter entail. This information is needed in order to make project comparisons and to justify reasons why one project is picked and funded over another. The major capital improvements in the priority letters should be over 10 million dollars, which would be mainly for the highway construction and maintenance type projects. The priority letters also cover transit needs. If there is an area to be designated as a TOD (Transit Oriented Development) this should also be stated in a priority letter. A meeting is generally held with each County to discuss which area should be a TOD. Mr. Byrne stated that development of the priority letters and the CTP is a yearly process, but this is the first year for a process based on the new Chapter 725 legislation. Multi-modal projects get higher ratings as they deal with a lot of State investment. All of the information received is analyzed by MDOT staff. It is then sent to the MDOT Secretary; then the Governor ultimately decides and approves which projects will be funded. Mr. Byrne stated there is a limited amount of State funding so MDOT is working with what funding they have.

Ms. Vogel stated that the County priorities basically come from the County Executive, and asked if the Executive receives any input from the County Council before submittal of the final priority letter. Mr. Byrne stated he is not sure whether any input is received from the Council but one of the requirements is to get the buy-in from the County Council. Signatures are required from the County Council as well as the County Delegation to Annapolis. However, if the letter is received without all signatures MDOT is not going to refuse to accept it. Mr. Byrne stated it is hard for the priority letters to focus on transit projects. Transit is a major part of Howard County, but the priority letter guidelines really focus more on highway preservation and make the process more difficult to push the priorities of transit. Ms. Kellner asked why it is more difficult. Mr. Byrne stated it is how the process was set up. It is more capital driven and not operations driven. Ms. Vogel thanked Mr. Byrne for coming and making a wonderful presentation.

3. Public Comment:

There were no public comments.

4. Capital Acquisitions

Mr. Pickar handed out a listing of project awards, which included the bikeway grant award. The listing is a mixture of projects within Public Works and the capital budget. Mr. Pickar stated a search is on for a bicycle share feasibility grant.

Mr. Pickar stated there are a number of capital projects which have been awarded and new capital projects are being initiated in the procurement process., The projects are hybrid sedans, paratransit buses and the swipe card for paratransit. Ms. Vogel asked for more information about the swipe card. Mr. Pickar stated that previously there was an interest into working with MTA on an automated fare card, similar to WMATA. The card ended up being too expensive and difficult to implement. The swipe card is a more simplified attempt to automate fares. The fare card can be given to seniors to use on paratransit, it helps identify the clientele, makes fares easier, and identifies who is riding and when. The concept is to have a fare card system on each paratransit vehicle and to obtain reports. Mr. Pickar stated an annunciator system is also in the works. The bus shelter construction and amenities is moving along due to an easy winter season with no snow. Ms. Vogel asked about the ADA update to the County plan. Mr. Pickar stated he did not know but would find out who is handling the information. Mr. Pickar stated an audit was recently done by the FTA for stimulus funds for shelters, and the audit went very well. The deal for the NextBus information system is nearly done and will be closed soon. Three medium duty hybrid buses arrived and are being scrutinized from front to back for contract compliance. Ms. Vogel asked if a count of how many bus stops do not have pads could be added to the list of projects. Candice Tan stated work is being done to check all the bus stops. Ms. Tan is working with the GIS group to completely update the entire Howard County bus stop system. GPS is being used to obtain all the information regarding the bus stops, and once the work is finished all the elements of every bus stop will be documented and updated. Ms. Tan also stated in regard to the bus shelter construction that 6 old bus shelters have been replaced and 8 new shelters have been installed so far.

5. Operations Report

The Operations Report is being presented by Michael Weinberger, who joined CMRT in February 2012 as the new Manager of Community Relations. Mr. Weinberger worked for PRTC in Woodbridge, Virginia, for 2 years in Transportation Planning, and has also worked for the Maryland Department of Planning. Mr. Weinberger oversees the Community Relations Division which is a new section under CMRT. He oversees the marketing activities and the travel training program, along with the 2 travel trainers who cover several Counties. Mr. Weinberger stated that a grant was received that will allow expansion of the data analysis and improve the way that CMRT works with human service agencies, and encourage the use of fixed route bus service by human service agency clients.

Mr. Weinberger announced that there is also a new planner starting in April who is relocating from Florida.

Mr. Weinberger presented the monthly Howard Transit Operations Report.

Total Fixed Route Monthly Ridership

For the total monthly ridership, there are dips that occur during the winter season which are the nominal winter drops. The range of drop from September to January is the same that occurred the year before, but since the winter was warmer this year, the ridership from January is already increasing.

Fixed Route Monthly Ridership – Weekday, Saturday, Sunday

The weekly ridership is on the same trend as the monthly. Saturday did have a drop in ridership, but this can also be attributed to the nominal winter drop. Sunday is the lowest ridership, but it is increasing.

Missed Trips

The missed trips numbers have been consistently very low.

System Revenue

The total revenue is a combination of ticket sales and farebox, and the revenue is continuing to rise from January with the warmer weather arriving.

Fixed Route Revenue per Passenger

The revenue for both the fixed route and paratransit showed a \$0.03 increase in February, but there has not been a significant increase since the fare change. John Powell commented that many people are purchasing tickets as the ticket prices were never increased when the fare increase was implemented. The tickets are a tremendous value for riders. The revenue increase or decrease can be affected by how many tickets are purchased each month.

Paratransit Ridership

The ridership had a significant dip beginning in July 2011 when the \$2.50 fare enforcement started. After stabilizing from the increase, the ridership has continued to increase over time. The paratransit history numbers do not include the taxi pilot program. The ridership for March is estimated to be around 7300, which is the projection, and is higher than last year of 6900. As the spring season arrives, the numbers are increasing.

Paratransit Trip Completion Ratio / Late Cancels & No Shows

The completed trips have increased. The late cancels/no shows have decreased and are under 2% for the last two months. Ms. Vogel asked if the same people are causing the late cancels and no shows. Nelson Rodriguez stated usually they are but on occasion someone else will forget the trips.

General and ADA Paratransit Passengers per Service Hour

Both the General and ADA paratransit has increased with the warmer weather. With the winter being so mild, there has not been the decrease in riders as there was in previous winters. The buses have been able to handle more riders and less people have canceled.

Paratransit Revenue per Trip (Farebox & Tickets)

The revenue for February has greatly increased. The more popular tickets to purchase online are for the HT ride. A large amount of tickets might be purchased in one month which increases the revenue, but the following month the revenue may be decreased. This is due to the purchasing, plus the overall revenue being both tickets and farebox. Ms. Vogel commented that so far this year looks as though more revenue is coming in compared to last year, even though there were 3 months that were slightly higher last year. Ms. Vogel would like to see the total for the year. Mr. Weinberger stated that once the end of the year gets closer, he will put together some information for the total of revenue received.

Vehicle Accidents

The number of accidents for the past 2 months is under the MTA standard. There were 2 accidents in January and 1 in February; all the accidents were classified as preventable. Jack Russell stated that in some months the non-preventables may be up and some months the preventables may be up. The significant point is to try and put some corrective actions in place in order to prevent the accidents from happening again. Some of the causes of the accidents are backing up, sideswiping and hitting curbs. The accidents are minor with little or no damage. Mr. Russell stated that the FTA requires that all companies under their jurisdiction have random drug testing done which is administered by a TPA (Third Party Administrator). The TPA, as an outside firm, will select 50% of all employees to be tested. This is done on a quarterly basis. First Transit tests on a monthly basis, so the selected names are sent to the corporate headquarters. The names of the individuals to be tested are then sent to Mr. Russell. The list is kept locked up and the individual will be notified on the test date. Mr. Russell stated that the drug testing applies to every employee of First Transit. Mr. Pickar stated there were some issues with FTA previously regarding the testing, so the selection is not only done by person but also by time of day. Ms. Vogel asked if anyone has ever failed the test. Mr. Russell stated that no one has failed the random testing, but there have been some that have failed the testing for 'reasonable suspicion' for accidents. Mr. Russell stated it is a good program and insures that everyone does not have any impairment which will interfere with their job.

Vehicle Breakdowns

Mr. Weinberger asked Marcus Moore of First Transit to explain the increased number of breakdowns showing for February. Mr. Moore stated even though the numbers shown state there were 12 breakdowns, the number is actually much lower. The number was showing higher because everything was being reported, even items that do not come under the purview of Howard County. Mr. Moore stated the maintenance manager is now no longer employed with First Transit. The actual number of breakdowns for February is 3 because many of the issues that came up were not considered breakdowns; some were fixed at the base and some were fixed on the road but no service time was lost. The breakdowns for February were actually equal to January. Mr. Weinberger stated the numbers for February will be corrected. Ms. Vogel asked for an updated chart to be sent to the Board. Mr. Weinberger stated the chart will be sent once corrected.

Customer Service Call Center Complaints

Mr. Weinberger has grouped the complaints into more general categories, especially the missed connections which is the largest complaint group. The on time performance is being worked on for improvement in order for riders to make their connections on time. The early bus and late bus category is another significant complaint area. The early bus complaints are larger than the late bus because riders are aware of when the bus is actually suppose to arrive; the late bus category also has numerous complaints as the riders are never sure when the bus will arrive if it has not already arrived at the scheduled time. Once the new planner starts and improvements are made in the service, there should be a noticeable change in the missed connections. Another category with complaints is the rude driver. The driver may be perceived as being rude because of the tone of voice used, but the driver may just be enforcing the rules.

John Powell made a presentation regarding the Red Route timetable. In regard to the on time performance system, CMRT, Howard Transit, or the people funding Connect-A-Ride are not pleased with the system. CMRT has enforced with First Transit the concept that the buses are not to run early. If the schedules are not accurate making the running times incorrect, then a problem can arise with an excess of running time. If the driver is forced not to run early without having enough running time between stops, then the bus can end up being late at the next stop. Mr. Powell stated this problem is showing throughout the system. By having First Transit not run early, the on time performance is worse than it was several months ago. The running times need to be corrected. Mr. Powell is using the Red Route as an example to explain how severe the problem has become. For example, the schedule states the amount of minutes the bus has to get from the Columbia Mall to Phelps Luck Drive & High Tor Hill should take 14 minutes, but in researching the same route on Google the directions state that a car can make the drive in 15 minutes, not a bus. The NextBus system is recording the run, and even if the bus leaves on time from the first point, the bus will already be late in arriving at the second point and beyond due to the lack of running time. Mr. Powell pointed out that the same run on the schedule for both Saturday and Sunday have different running times listed. This is an important issue for both Mr. Weinberger and the new planner to focus on in regard to the timetable changes. Mr. Powell stated a discussion will be held at the next meeting after Mr. Pickar and Howard County reviews some recommended changes for the Red Route in general, including an idea of perhaps stopping in front of Wegmans instead of down the road from it. Before any changes can be made on the Red Route, the running times need to be fixed. The Red Route running times are in poor shape, and based on the NextBus system, once the bus reaches the first destination basically 80% of the stops are arrived at late. Howard County has done a survey of riders and the number one issue is lateness and reliability. In looking at the Red Route schedule, the bus is continually running late 60% to 70% of the time.

Discussions have been held between CMRT and NextBus to develop a schedule optimizer. The idea is that a year's worth of data will be available for any bus and will state exactly how long each trip from point to point takes. NextBus has now provided CMRT with the module. With the information provided, CMRT knows with almost 100% accuracy what is happening on each route with regard to running times and other information. Any particular day/time can be pulled up to see exactly the details of the run. Barbara Kellner asked if the times are averages. Mr. Powell stated yes. A route should never be scheduled without physically going on the road and following the bus. In the event the running time shows up on the optimizer as more than it should be, then most likely the driver is doing something that should not be done, especially if nothing significant is happening on the road that would cause the trip to take longer. Ms. Kellner asked if the information is available for every day. Mr. Powell stated yes, the information covers all 365 days. Mr. Powell explained that with the existing timetable the bus will run its route for the day. At the end of the route if a difference in running time shows up on the optimizer report, which is different from the proposed time, then it is the driver doing something to cause the difference, not the operation and schedule.

For the Red Route, the next step is to make sure that the time changes are done correctly. Currently the outbound trip for the Red Route goes from Columbia Mall, through several areas and ends up at Snowden Square, at which time the inbound trip begins. In the new timetables, the end of the line will be changed to the Howard County Complex at Gateway. The inbound trip will then start from the Complex, go to Snowden Square with a slight layover and then continue the remainder of the trip. The proposed and revised schedules needed to be accurate with the adjustment of having the end of the line at the Howard County Complex. There was no difference in the running times between the proposed and revised schedules which meant the running times were now accurate. Ms. Kellner asked if CMRT has ridden Red Route to check times. Mr. Powell stated both he and Maynard Nash have already spent many hours checking the route.

The new timetable was handed out and Mr. Powell pointed out a few changes with the route and running times. Mr. Pickar stated the time periods are more equally spread out. Ms. Kellner commented the new schedule will be easier for riders to gauge when the bus should arrive. Mr. Powell pointed out on the CMRT Management Report that the percentages shown for departing early and arriving late are totally unacceptable. CMRT needs to focus on fixing the timetables and the Red Route is the test case. Ms. Vogel asked if the Red Route will be redone by June when Wegmans opens and put on the map. Mr. Weinberger stated the map has not been redone yet. The mapping contractor stated that once the timetable is approved, then Wegmans will be added to the map. Ms. Vogel asked why the Red Route bus is being sent down a road where there are no riders for pick up until the bus gets to Parkview. Mr. Powell stated the Red Route is one of the more effective routes in the HT system in terms of ridership. There is only one stop between Tamar and Columbia Crossing. Ms. Vogel asked how many riders are picked up at Parkview. Mr. Powell stated about 4 per day. The route is constructed from end to end in a way that to involve other areas will cause a problem with time constraints. Mr. Powell stated there is a report which Mr. Pickar will be receiving and one of the items to review is about sending the bus through an area with no riders and whether the route needs to be changed. Mr. Powell reiterated that the running times and the on time performance need to be completed first before looking into other issues on the route. Ms. Vogel does agree, but the riders need to be picked up where they are and not down a road where people do not live or work. This will not increase the ridership nor serve the public.

6. Board Reports, Discussions and Input to County / CMRT

Cynthia Dawson commented that CMRT is doing a great job and also welcomed Michael Weinberger.

There will be no PTB meeting held in April.

7. Adjournment

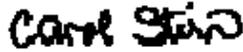
Ms. Vogel adjourned the meeting at 8:39 p.m. The next Public Transportation Board meeting is scheduled for **May 22, 2012 at 7:00 pm.**



Ben Pickar
Acting Executive Secretary

May 8, 2012

Date



Carol Stirn
Acting Recording Secretary

May 8, 2012

Date