

**Transit Plus Advisory Council
January 18, 2022 Minutes**

PLACE: Microsoft Teams Meeting

PRESENT: James Bahneman Chair, Arlene Washington Vice-Chair, Gerald Balezentis, David Buck, Grace Graves, Laurel Henschel, Danita Jackson, Marcia Perkins, Jeanette Williams Mae Wingo

ABSENT: Annie Johnson, Nilima Mehra

GUESTS: Kevin Meyers – guest, Morgan Mc Clelland - First Transit; Tracy Harrington – Transit Express, Fran Musci, Chris Fox, Paula Schultz, and Lisa Walters - Transit Plus, Isabel Sanchez – Public Ally

CALL TO ORDER:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of the December 21, 2021 meeting were approved.

COMMITTEES:

Driver/Reservationist Recognition Committee: no report.

Membership Committee: no report

Public Relations Committee: David Buck stated that he wanted to speak with Fran Musci and Lisa Walters about Microsoft Teams. He reported that the Federal Mask Mandate is in place until March 18th. The City of Milwaukee also has a mask mandate as of today. Everyone must wear a mask in public. This may not be enforceable however. He will be checking with Barbara Beckert of Disability Rights to see if the annual trip to Madison is still on.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Transit Plus Office Remodeling Project: Fran Musci reported that Transit Plus staff are out of the office and still displaced. We continue to wait for a contractor start date.

Vendor Staffing Mitigation Strategies: Fran reported that the mitigation strategies will be implemented March 1, 2022. She is working on a letter to go out at the end of this month. The MCTS Marketing Department is helping to work on it. Fran will share the draft of the letter with TPAC when it is ready. There are four changes that will take place. The reinstatement of the No-show Policy, the vehicle arrival window will change to 0/25 to 0/30, the reservation window will change to 7 days, and Reservations will close at 4:30 p.m. We are also developing a flyer on what riders can do to help make their and other's service better.

NEW BUSINESS:

Temporary Suspension of MCTS Freeway Flyer Service: Fran Musci reported that due to a MCTS driver shortage the freeway flyer commuter service will be suspended until March. This decision was made to improve regular fixed route service. MCTS hopes to hire more drivers to reinstate the freeway flyer service.

Summer Break: David Buck proposed that the Council take their summer break in August 2022. The Council voted in favor of the August break. All other meetings will be held on the third Tuesday of the month.

MOBILITY MANAGEMENT REPORT: Paula Schultz reported that the BRT is moving along. Platforms and shelters are being installed now. Construction information is available on the website. It is interesting to watch. The BRT is expected to begin service in late 2022. ADA sensitivity training for new bus drivers will be held on Thursday and will be ongoing in every month except July. We are getting a lot of requests for presentations. We will be busy this spring and summer.

CARRIER REPORTS:

American United: not present

Transit Express: Tracy Harrington reported that things have not gotten much better from a staffing standpoint. Transit Express lost two drivers. Tracy stated that she is concerned as a manager and is trying to find ways not to stress out remaining staff who are working too many hours. Many are working 50 to 70 hours per week which is not sustainable. There is no safety valve as they cannot reduce the level of service. They are hanging on day by day. Laurel Henschel asked why it is so difficult to hire. Tracy explained that people can get more money with other employers. People often do not want to work holiday, weekend, and late-night hours. Because Transit Express drivers are unionized, new employees draw the least desirable shifts. Schools are also opening and closing which makes it hard for single parents.

First Transit: Morgan McClelland reported it has been a tremendous challenge in the last two years. Drivers make close physical contact with many people every day. They may interact with as many as 20 people a day. The fear of COVID is considerable. Fast food jobs are now paying \$15-\$16 per hour and driving jobs are not paying much better. All businesses are having staffing trouble, but they can cut hours, we cannot cut hours. We rely on those who are left to pick up the slack and they are working more hours and trying to work faster. All transit agencies are dealing with this. Current CDC guidelines also indicate that employees must be off work for 5 to 10 days because of a positive test or an exposure to others with COVID.

TRANSIT PLUS: Fran Musci reported that Transit Plus has hired a new Eligibility Assessor. Ann Skaradzinski will start on January 31, 2022. She has an occupational therapy and project management background. Having her on board will help with Transit Plus applications. This month, 119 applications were submitted. We are still using a paper process. We are in the process of putting previously received applications into electronic files. Due to COVID-19 there are no in-person assessments being conducted at this time. We hope to get back to in-person assessments soon. Fran also advised that every three years MCTS is reviewed by the FTA in

all aspects of its operation. Documents are due to the FTA in the next week or so. A virtual interview is coming up. The FTA will then let us know how we are doing. We are testing and training in the Trapeze Service Infractions module to be able to reinstate the No-show Policy. December 2021 van ridership was 24,429 which is below 70% of pre-COVID levels. There were 269,581 total van rides in 2021, this is 62% below 2019 pre-COVID ridership. 2020 ridership was between 235,000 to 236,000 trips. There were 437,466 trips taken in 2019. Staffing is not coming back. Taxi ridership is also down. There were 1,600 taxi trips taken in December when in the past the usual number was about 5,000 per month

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Danita Jackson asked if drivers are required to be vaccinated. Fran Musci advised that drivers are not required to be vaccinated. If drivers were required to be vaccinated, approximately 30% of employees would leave. Paratransit drivers are required to wear masks but what kind is not specified. They can wear cloth or surgical masks. However, Milwaukee County employees must wear KN95 or surgical masks. Staffing has increased a little but while people are in training, they see the challenges of the job. People have more options now.

Morgen McClelland advised that drivers are not required to be vaccinated but that the majority are. OSHA requirements would need to change.

Tracy Harrington explained that we do not require passengers to be vaccinated and it is a shared ride service that is being provided. Transit Express encourages all employees to get vaccinated, but not everyone will do it. There are a lot of other job opportunities now where wages have been raised and someone does not have to have to be in close personal contact with others.

ADJOURNMENT