

**BATTLE CREEK CITY COMMISSION
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
TRANSIT BUILDING
March 2, 2016
4:00 PM**

Committee Members Present: Commissioners Faris, Flores, and Gray

Committee Members Absent: Commissioner Baldwin

City Staff Present: Rich Werner, Scott McKenzie, Larry Bowron, Marcel Stoetzel, and Victoria Houser

Call to Order: Comm. Gray called the meeting to order at 4:03 PM.

Organizational Issues

A. Approval of February 4, 2016 Public Transportation Committee meeting minutes

Comm. Gray asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes of February 4, 2016.

A motion was made by Comm. Faris, supported by Comm. Flores, to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2016 Public Transportation Committee meeting. All yes, none opposed. Motion carried.

Discussion Items

A. The ARC – Volunteer workers – Bus Fare

Committee members discussed a request from Mayor Walters to research grant opportunities to fund bus fares for persons who offer volunteer services to local non-profit organizations, noting the Mayor did not request the tickets be free, simply reduced. The Committee discussed the current availability for non-profit organizations to purchase bulk tickets at a reduced rate to assist their volunteers. Committee members expressed concern there were many volunteers throughout the City, expressing concern the free or reduced fares be available to all volunteers, suggesting local foundations who promote volunteerism may be willing to support a grant program to fund free or reduced fare tickets for volunteers. Committee members discussed the possibility of titling the non-profit volunteer fares differently so that volunteers would be aware they are receiving significantly reduced fare rates. Transit staff noted this request was similar to other requests they have received, stating enabling volunteerism was in line with the City's vision. Transit staff also noted current punch passes for seniors and persons with disabilities have a stamp indicating the reduced fare, stating they are initially required to present ID, but once they are known to the driver, ID may no longer be needed, stating they have never received complaints the stamped punch passes have caused any embarrassment. Transit staff agreed to have the Grants Administrator research possible grant opportunities, while also letting non-profits know they are eligible to purchase deeply discounted fares.

B. Student/Youth Bus Fare

Committee members discussed other Commissioners' concerns of Transit.

Mr. Werner discussed a survey of ridership at KCC and other local schools, which issued ID cards and when. Mr. Werner stated a grant would be needed to help some schools to get or provide ID cards to their students.

Committee members noted the initial reason for the request for free or reduced fare rates for students was brought up because of vulnerable students and the possible barrier to transportation. Committee members discussed the possibility free student transit may increase options for schools of choice, expressing concern this may cause unintended consequences. Committee members noted they should not segment out which students could receive discounts, and the reasons for the transportation, noting this could add unrealistic requirements on the Transit drivers. Transit staff discussed current Transit policies, noting Tele-Transit requires minors under the age of 12 be accompanied by an adult, noting Tele-Transit is not convenient for parents due to timing schedules. Transit staff noted drivers will usually watch over younger elementary children and notify the Transit office, noting younger children less than 41 inches currently ride for free, with the proposed height to be 52 inches. Transit staff clarified that the intent of the committee was to not provide free or reduced rates for at risk students on the Tele-Transit service.

Committee members discussed a trial period of a few months to track ridership to help to identify any issues that may come up, discussing an appropriate time to start the trial period. Committee members discussed a survey over the summer months may be necessary for summer school and college students, also expressing concern for reduced tickets for college students who are only taking one or two classes.

Transit staff reported only a few college students purchase passes, with Wright's Beauty Academy only recently making a request. Transit staff noted the regular fare rate is \$60 for 48 trips, while a student punch pass for 48 trips cost \$32, a \$.58 per trip discount, valid for student related activities, stating drivers inquire of students' purpose when riding at unusual times.

Committee members discussed alternatives for students who do not have a student ID, such as a signed school registration form, noting accepting anything indicating they are in school could pose a logistical problem for drivers, emphasizing the need to keep the route seamless and buses on time. Committee members discussed the possibility of partnering with another school to have student IDs produced. Committee members discussed a possible student pass, questioning the need for a pass if students have IDs, suggesting a special stamp to identify student pass packages, noting a need to keep passes secure to prevent fraud.

Committee members asked if the Transit staff was aware of other transit organizations that provided free bus passes to students. Transit staff reported there were no transit agencies in the state with line haul services that offered free student fares, stating they had talked with many peers at a conference in February, noting none of them provided free student fare. Committee members requested staff to research transit agencies nationwide for free student fare programs.

Transit staff stated students could purchase discounted fare passes at BC Transit, City Hall and Full Blast, noting they would need to provide their student IDs. Staff agreed to start a trial period in September, stating they would discuss the discounted passes and the need for student IDs with local schools, stating other school registration could be considered at a later date. Transit staff reported ridership for KCC, with 2 stops on Emmett, one on campus outbound, the other on North Avenue across from the college, noting only 143 people got off the bus for 12 days, with only 93 getting back on the bus. Staff reported the busiest time of day is 5:50 am and 7:50 am, with very few riders on Saturdays. Staff stated they only included sold student passes in the transit budget estimates, noting college students would be included as they can get student passes. Staff noted

they also stop at the hospital where students could catch the bus. Transit staff estimated \$9,500 per year of lost revenue at KCC, based upon 20 rides per day with reduced student fare pass rates.

Committee members agreed the trial program should only include middle and high school students, or alternative education such as the Calhoun Community High School, not college students. Committee members recommended staff contact local stake holders, or offer an on-line survey, asking if they would be willing to assist with student ID production. Committee members agreed the proposed free ridership would only be for school related activities, noting the primary purpose would be to ensure students can get their education, stating that if it was unrestricted, there may be a lot of abuse.

Staff noted it may be wise to track not only ridership, but the numbers of students using transit services outside of school hours. Staff also noted riders usually needed to make other bus connections, stating most cannot get to their destination without leaving early and going to the downtown location to make their transfers, stating they would need to show their student ID card.

Committee members agreed the pilot period would be September through December, unrestricted Monday through Saturday, for middle and high school related activities, agreeing they would evaluate the pilot in January 2017 for effectiveness and efficiency. Committee members requested staff research other national municipalities that offer free student transit fare, while also talking with local stakeholders regarding student IDs, and determining if schools are willing to assist other schools. Staff recommended a kick off meeting with stakeholders and citizens to promote the trial period. Committee members agreed to meet again in late April to discuss the stakeholder and national transit survey results, planning to have the pilot begin before school ends in June.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Member Comment

Committee members requested staff research other Southwest Michigan transit fare structures, noting fares have not changed since 1994. Staff noted multiple fare rates often occur with a transit authority that serves multiple municipalities. Staff also stated they review fares every year during the budget cycle, considering current state legislation, stating it may be more practical to consider an RFI proposal to do a comprehensive review of transit fare structures, noting the last study was done in 2009.

As a follow up, Mr. Bowron stated Emmett Township may consider a millage for road maintenance, working with Calhoun County for matching funds. Mr. Bowron noted there was a joint newspaper notice from local townships recommending township residents report pot holes to the County Road Department.

Mr. Werner stated there has not been a detour on the Main Street route, stating they are still going through the Main Street Market parking lot. Committee members suggested staff contact Emmett Township regarding a potential turnaround on a small piece of property across Columbia Avenue where Main Street and Beadle Lake Road split. Staff members noted this has now been blocked to restrict passage.

Adjournment

Comm. Gray adjourned the meeting at 5:13 PM.