

**BATTLE CREEK CITY COMMISSION  
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

**September 28, 2009**

**FULL BLAST**

**35 HAMBLIN**

**4:00 P.M.**

**Committee Members Present:** Commissioners Susan Baldwin, Ryan Hersha, and Diane Thompson

**Committee Members Absent:** Vice Mayor Tony Walker

**Others Present:** Michelle Reen, Greg Zanotti, Jerry Hutchison, Rich Werner

**Call to Order:** Commissioner Baldwin called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

**Approval of Minutes:**

A motion was made by Comm. Thompson, supported by Comm. Hersha, to approve the minutes of the April 23, 2009 meeting. All yes. Motion carried.

**Public Comment:** There was none.

**Discussion Items:**

**a) Update on July 20, 2009 Service Changes**

Jerry Hutchison provided a written summary evaluating short term changes to the City's public transit service implemented after the last committee meeting. All changes were well received, except for changes made to service for Rolling Hills, which he said would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting. He said shortening the West Michigan route from 60 minutes to 30 minutes has resolved timing issues. He also said he has worked with Bedford Manor on complaints regarding scheduling. He updated the committee on changes made to the Emmett/East Ave. route.

Stops were removed from McKinley and added to East Street, and new service provided along Roosevelt to the Southwest Regional Health Center and to the Calhoun County Careers Center in response to requests. New service on North Ave, including more frequent service to Kellogg Community Center and Battle Creek Health Center, has also been popular. He mentioned increased service on Saturdays from every 60 minutes to every 30 minutes, as well as the Southwest Capital Route. In summary, he said the service changes have worked well.

Greg Zannotti mentioned that changes to Northeast Capital service were made because of safety and congestion concerns. Jerry Hutchison said the biggest improvement

is the ability for the drivers to run that route on schedule. Riders also have more choices because rides are scheduled every 30 minutes.

Comm. Hersha asked if there was feedback from Garrison Hills neighborhood. Jerry Hutchison said no. He said the most feedback, other than that from Bedford Manor residents, has come from Rolling Hills. He then discussed a written evaluation of data collected over nine weeks regarding ridership at Rolling Hills. On average there were two rides a day, compared to about seven rides a day when the West Michigan bus operated. About half the time, 53%, the bus is not picking up anyone. He asked Rolling Hills management if there were resident comments about the changes and was told there were none.

He said some of the Rolling Hills residents may be choosing Saturday service instead of the new weekday, because that service schedule hasn't changed. Over the nine weeks, there were about 85 rides over 45 days on the dedicated trips. Rich Werner explained that the reduced fare for the Tele-Transit van led to four people registering, including one person who has made 79 trips to the Veterans Administration facility. The other person made 23 trips and the third scheduled no trips, but plans to.

Ryan Hersha said based on his own experience using the transit system the van was often not available when he wanted it and this is why he favors dedicated trip service. He asked what the impact of requiring residents to schedule rides would be, for example, how busy would service be. Jerry Hutchison responded saying on the chart the 10:45 a.m. trip is by far the busiest time of day for ridership. If that dedicated time were eliminated, individuals would have flexibility to schedule rides because more vans are available at that time of day. Rich Werner said this depends somewhat on the destination. If the trip were further than the typical trip to the transit station, then it might impact availability because the vans would be occupied longer.

Ryan Hersha said that shuttle service is not the same as bus service. The sense he gets from these numbers is that they do not reflect people using transit services to get to a regularly scheduled job. Rich Werner agreed and said these individuals may be using the bus service to come home and finding other rides to get to work. He thinks the Tele-Transit service is working very well. Jerry Hutchison said he feels the resources used to provide dedicated service to Rolling Hills could be better used elsewhere. His recommendation, from a service standpoint, is to discontinue the dedicated trips. If it is the desire of the committee to subsidize Tele-Transit fares, then he recommended maintaining that reduced fare used in the test period.

Ryan Hersha said there is one time that is most popular and it doesn't seem wasteful to continue that one time as dedicated service. Jerry Hutchison suggested, given concern about possible impact of weather winter on ridership, that we continue the current services through December and continue data collection. He said operationally, the current service is not a problem. Continuing discussion after December would allow the committee to determine if and how winter weather increases ridership. Rich Werner suggested contacting Rolling Hills to discuss other morning times for dedicated service.

Ryan Hersha asked about winter weather's impact on other routes. Jerry Hutchison said historically winter ridership is higher across the system and for senior citizens, although this may not be true for Rolling Hills.

Diane Thompson supports continuing service through December. Rich Werner asked if the 8:45 a.m. trip should stay the same. Greg Zanotti said talking to Rolling Hills about times is a good idea, although Greg suspects management doesn't care much unless they hear complaints. He suggested getting feedback from residents with a direct survey. Jerry Hutchison said Rolling Hills has a newsletter and they were willing to put information in the newsletter prior to the July changes and would likely do so again.

**MOTION:** Susan Baldwin asked for a motion. Ryan Hersha moved to maintain the dedicated van service to Rolling Hills and meeting again until January. Diane Thompson supported. All yes. Motion carried.

### **b) Proposed Implementation of "Medium Term" Service Recommendations**

Jerry Hutchison said the City received notification that it has received a two-year grant, effective this October 1, for implementation of transportation recommendations identified as medium-term priorities in the planning study conducted by The Corradino Group. The City Commission authorized the City Manager to proceed with executing a contract with MDOT to design and implement services initially suggested in the planning study. In the study, in regards to southwest Capital, the consultants suggested an express shuttle service for Beckley Road. They also recommended improving bus service from Capital Ave, south of Beckley. Jerry Hutchison asked GIS to create maps showing options for an express service. The current 60-minute service on SW Capital Avenue would change to a 30-minute express route. The bus would begin just south of Beckley, at a super stop to be constructed. That bus would operate every 30 minutes from 5:15 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. He described the map showing an east and a west circulator route to be completed on an hourly basis from Capital Ave on the west to the Harper Village shopping complex on the east. This schedule would accommodate current budget resources. He recommends the 30-minute routes, which would raise convenience for residents significantly for the Capital Ave and Beckley Road area.

Greg Zanotti asked about starting the circulator at 9:15 a.m. Jerry Hutchison said the current Southwest Capital bus would operate on its current 60 minute schedule from 5:15 a.m. until 9:15 a.m., after which it would become the 30-minute express bus until 6:45 p.m. There is an option to have two separate routes, or one route that two buses would operate, running every 30 minutes to each stop. With the first option, each bus would cover an individual route. In the second option, two buses would operate the same route, 30-minutes apart. Whichever way the service is implemented, there would be expanded evening service until midnight. The main purpose of the grant funding is to assist people getting to work. This change would assist people getting off work after 9 p.m. The details of the evening service are not yet worked out. Susan Baldwin noted that no other bus

routes would be running that late. Jerry Hutchison said local cab services may be able to assist. There is flexibility to consider various approaches to this circulator service.

Greg Zanotti noted that the City owns property just north of Omni Community Credit Union on Capital Avenue that could be evaluated for use as a super stop. Diane Thompson asked if the grant would pay for all of this. Greg Zanotti said yes.

Susan Baldwin said she thinks two buses running the same route would be less confusing for residents. Diane Thompson asked if the trolley was more cost efficient for this type of route. Jerry Hutchison said 70% of the cost is in the driver. The trolley is an option, although it wasn't designed for regular route use and he'd have to look at maintenance implications for using it that way.

Greg Zanotti noted that until the City knows what the demand and ridership will be, he doesn't recommend looking for a specialty vehicle. Jerry Hutchison said the State did approve a smaller hybrid vehicle, but it is \$50,000 more than the comparable vehicles currently in use.

Susan asked if parking would be available at the super stop. Greg Zanotti said he hadn't looked at the topography, but that it is a large parcel and there would probably be room for parking. Ryan Hersha said he thinks the frontage is not large, but perhaps parking could be behind whatever facility is there. Greg Zanotti said the biggest question would be whether to include restroom facilities. Rich Werner mentioned this would be the first time in the City system's history that a route wouldn't include a stop at the Transportation Center.

Ryan Hersha asked about the economic impact on Emmett Township, considering it would bring a lot of residents to shopping in the township, and whether the Township would contribute revenue. Greg Zanotti said the City didn't look at geo-political boundaries when outlining this service. Rich Werner said the funding is provided by the state and not subsidized by the City. Jerry Hutchison said that the grant is guaranteed for two years and then requires a renewal; however MDOT has said renewal should be routine. Susan Baldwin said approaching the other townships for revenue sharing is a good idea, but it should happen at a higher level, for example city manager to township manager.

Ryan Hersha pointed out that as a former resident of the neighborhood, the super stop may increase the desire for more convenient access between the existing linear path, Capital Ave and the Willard library branch. He said perhaps improving this access involves other departments and this isn't anything for the committee to discuss right now. Greg Zanotti mentioned the Department of Public Works has looked at that area for salt storage and that a connecting sidewalk may make sense.

Greg Zanotti said City Manager Ken Tsuchiyama is waiting to move forward before authorizing the expenditure of the grant monies in order to give the committee a chance to review the medium-term recommendations. Jerry Hutchison reviewed the list of other

medium-term recommendations and clarified that the City only has funding to move forward on what was discussed today. He said the biggest question mark for him is the evening service for workers and how to put together the best service to meet the intent of the program.

**MOTION:** Susan Baldwin asked for a motion. Diane Thompson moved to direct Jerry Hutchison to prepare a resolution for the City Commission's October 20 business meeting outlining the plan and seeking permission to move forward. Ryan Hersha supported. All yes. Motion carried.

Ryan Hersha expressed excitement about the potential of this plan. Rich Werner said he is very excited about the ability to expand service for two years.

Jerry Hutchison said staff has already looked at potential applicants for the new driver positions. Greg Zanotti asked the committee to consider that it could be after the New Year before service is in place because there are a lot of things to ramp up. Rich Werner said hiring a driver is a 60-90 day process because of the thoroughness of the hiring process.

Diane Thompson left the meeting at 5:20 p.m. Susan Baldwin confirmed there is no need to schedule the next meeting until after the December data is ready.

Ryan Hersha asked about the possibility of putting a permanent bus shelter at Meijer's on Beckley. Rich Werner said Meijer's corporate management has put up some obstacles to doing this by asking the City to assume liability and reconstruct the parking lot to support more heavy duty traffic among other requests. He said he is working with bus drivers to determine how the traffic flow is going with the temporary stop. He said the local store manager has been cooperative, but has limited authority.

Jerry Hutchison said the City is working with Christ Community Church to put up a shelter right across from Omni Community Credit Union.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

MAR