

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

PLACE: Microsoft Teams Meeting

PRESENT: Arlene Washington – Vice Chair, Gerald Balezentis, David Buck, Grace Graves, Laurel Henschel, Marcia Perkins, Mae Wingo

ABSENT: Jim Bahneman - Chair, Annie Johnson, Nilima Mehra Jeanette Williams

GUESTS: Lauren Grudzinski, Kevin Meyers; Morgan Mc Clelland - First Transit; Tracy Harrington – Transit Express; Fran Musci, Paula Schultz, and Lisa Walters - Transit Plus

CALL TO ORDER:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: The minutes of the September 20, 2022 meeting were approved with a correction. The current van contract expires October 31, 2023.

COMMITTEES:

Driver/Reservationist Recognition Committee: no report.

Membership Committee: Grace Graves reported she spoke with Annie Johnson and that Annie wants to continue serving on TPAC.

Public Relations Committee: David Buck reported that a mask mandate has been reimposed for buses and vans. A public hearing was held last night regarding the 2023 Milwaukee County budget.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Milwaukee County Mask Mandate: Fran Musci reported that masks are still required on buses and vans until the County Executive lifts the requirement. Laurel Henschel asked that everyone remember that some people are exempt from wearing masks. Fran stated that if a driver has a question they should check with dispatch.

Van RFP: Fran Musci advised that bids for the van contract have been received and are in the process of being reviewed and scored by the panel. There will be a decision to award the contract made in the next few weeks so that the awardee has enough time to transition to a November 1, 2023 start.

2023 Milwaukee County Budget: Fran Musci reported that the Finance Committee met yesterday on the proposed budget. There is contention about the discontinuation of the taxi program. The current contract does not have wheelchair accessible vehicles and does not provide for drug testing of drivers as required by the FTA. MCDOT recommended discontinuation of the taxi program as of 5/1/2023. The taxi program would need to change if it were to be continued. An updated contract would have a significant increase in expense to

approximately \$40.00 for each wheelchair accessible same-day ride.

David Buck stated that Barbara Beckert of Disability Rights along with other groups has sent out a letter to oppose one van provider for the van RFP and the cancellation of the taxi program. David stated he was going to remain neutral on the topic of taxi.

In-Person TPAC Meetings: In-person TPAC meetings will resume on November 15, 2022. A lunch will be provided to Council Members at 1:00 p.m. on November 15, 2022. The general meeting will take place at 2:00 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS:

Nominating Committee: Arlene Washington, Grace Graves and Laurel Henschel joined the Committee. They will provide a slate of 2023 Officer candidates at November's meeting. Election of new officers will take place at the December meeting.

MOBILITY MANAGEMENT REPORT: Paula Schultz reported that 500 guests attended the Doors Open Milwaukee event. Guests toured the Fleet Maintenance facility, an electric bus, and could preview the new fare system. White Cane Safety Day took place last Friday with participants from the VA and Gaenslen School. Refresher training on ADA sensitivity and securement was provided to 171 Operators at Fond du Lac Station and 178 Operators at Kinnikinnick Station. Plans for the implementation of the new fare system are continuing. Twenty Transit Plus clients will be needed to test the system. The fare system roll out will be occurring in the Spring of 2023. Upcoming bus presentations in November and December will be provided to senior housing units and schools. Travel training has slowed down but will be given as much as possible.

CARRIER REPORTS:

American United: not present

Transit Express: Tracy Harrington reported that Transit Express is continuing to hire vigorously. They are seeing a little better follow through with candidates. They are providing enhanced securement device training. They are also making on air announcements about Transit Plus's policy that limits carry-ons to 2 parcels. It is difficult to accommodate passengers if they have too many packages.

First Transit: Morgen McClelland reported that hiring has slowed down a bit to a more manageable level. Things are going well. They are starting to talk about safe winter driving.

TRANSIT PLUS: Fran Musci reported that implementation of Service Infractions is still slow going. The software is not behaving and is under review by the software development team. We are continuing to warn riders about No-shows, Cancellations at the Door, and Late Cancels. Behaviors need to change to avoid suspensions. Van ridership was down in September to 29,449 trips which is 80% of the pre-COVID level. There were 13,000 taxi rides in the first half of September which is 50% of pre-COVID level.

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Lauren Grudzinski stated that she is aware of the County's financial issues but wanted to know what can be done about the taxis. She stated that if taxi is taken away, and if Transit Plus is going to one van provider, it is going to hurt and cage people with disabilities. She would like to be involved.

Gerald Balezentis stated that taxi fares may need to increase.

Fran Musci explained that when the current taxi contract ends the program as it is ends. The current taxi contract is not Federally compliant. The FTA will not allow us to have our same-day ride program the same way anymore. The FTA has indicated that same-day services must be wheelchair accessible and have the choice of two vendors to be exempt from drug testing. If we designed a new same day ride program that is wheelchair accessible there would not be enough WAV's available for it. Furthermore, the program cost would be about \$40.00 per same day ride, and cost \$800,000.00 to \$1 million annually in addition to the cost of our ADA required van service. The same day cost would be the same as it is for an ADA next day van ride. The fare would also need to be \$12.00 to \$16.00 per ride. We currently have empty seats on our vans for the people who currently use the taxi and having more riders on the van would bring down the cost of the van service. People are currently waiting an hour or more for the taxi. The next van contract will have a requirement for appointment times.

Kevin Meyers stated he could not concur that taxi wait times are one hour. Fran advised that Transit Plus has received reports of people being left hours waiting for a ride especially at night and on the weekends. Taxis are not as reliable as before.

Fran stated that the current taxi fare structure is based on metered taxi service. Uber & Lyft did not bid on the contract when it went out before. Uber & Lyft do not have wheelchair accessible vehicles and their drivers are not subject to drug testing.

Fran Musci also explained that a new same day ride contract must be competitively bid and would need to have two vendors. The fare structure will need to change in a new contract. The taxi program cost \$300,000.00 last year but will now cost more due to inflation and high gas prices. We would expect that the cost would now be double the cost of the current taxi contract. Milwaukee County will be facing a fiscal cliff in 2025.

Laurel Grudzinski stated that she was concerned about having a single van provider for people who are vulnerable. She stated that staff who are underpaid will take it out on vulnerable people. Fran Musci advised that the RFP bidding process will provide for driver starting wages that are appropriate and competitive. Protections have also been put in place with a surety bond. The contract has high performance measures. One vendor is more efficient as the one vendor will be able to more easily pick up and drop off people throughout the County not mainly just in a particular territory. One vendor will also provide Transit Plus with staff, recording keeping and reporting efficiencies and will make software enhancements easier and less costly. With two vendors, software is more expensive because you need to have double licensing and there is double work.

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