

Rural Transportation Committee Meeting Minutes

August 21, 2013

Committee Members Present: Bruce Bird, Alissa Dozier, Laura Dick, Paul Rosenberger, Paul McChaney, Andrea Shaffer

Committee Members Absent: David Williams, Mark Wicklund, Eileen Sierra, Diane Drew, Julie Aubert, Robert Brice, Mark Smith, Emily Dobson

Others Present: Gary Minich

Next meeting: September 25, 2013, 3:30 p.m. in Room 514 County Board Room, County Office Building

Alissa Dozier called the meeting to order.

Update from Showbus: Laura Dick distributed a handout that showed mobility. She stated that they had not received any phone calls for the gray area that they are not able to provide service for. She said they are not aggressive in going after that gray area. There is still a question mark as to how much gray area is there. She said that this fall, as they slow down on the grant writing cycle, they will have a series of going out into the different communities and begin the cycle of presentations again. We do quite well with one town down south, but not much luck in Blue Mound. Specials are very important. We have been running a number of specials and will continue to run them. Anyone who knows of any type of group, senior groups especially or a group that especially targets folks with mobility barriers let us know. Be creative and think about what would be a fun time. One group was taken to Arthur and another to Springfield. That really gets the word out because it is word of mouth and that is the best type of advertising.

We, hopefully, will be getting more vehicles toward the end of this year. That is limiting our expansion somewhat. At least two vehicles are earmarked for Macon and they are part of the Macon Reserve Fund. That doesn't mean that you are limited to those two. You never want to do that. We hope to retire some of our older vehicles and get some newer ones on the road. The repair costs are getting to be a little difficult.

Paul Rosenberger asked if there was a replacement schedule. Laura said they do, but a lot of that is driven by IDOT and their chart which delineates by mileage and by year or what they feel is the useful lifespan of a vehicle. They are never able to replace all of them – ever. We do purchase a lot of vehicles by necessity. They are used vehicles because we cannot afford new ones. In theory, when we get a new bus, if it is a replacement bus, we should be able to retire one, but because our growth has been so high, we have not been able to do that. We try to keep the buses on the road for as long as we can until the repairs get beyond our ability to deal with. We have some buses that are close to 250,000 miles and some that we have trouble keeping on the road at 150,000. If we had Gilligs, we'd be in better shape, but those are beyond our cost abilities. Paul McChaney said he wondered if they shouldn't consider that though. He said that their Gilligs are 2001 models and getting to 12 years old and they all have 500,000 miles on them. Laura stated that IDOT has been extremely hesitant to let 5311 funds go out to spec their own buses. Just this last year for the first time in many years, we were allowed to piggyback off of Minnesota. That wasn't for a big bus, but it was a different design bus. Would they consider

it? I don't know. They keep a pretty tight fist on the 5311 vehicle money. It certainly has been something we've talked about because the buses just don't last as long as they should. Paul McChaney said that the Gilligs are extremely durable. We were fortunate to be able to replace some at 12 years, but I wouldn't have any problem keeping them on the road. Twelve years is the estimated lifetime for these buses, but I think we could easily have them for another 5 years. They are just in great shape. Laura said that they had had that conversation with IDOT with very limited success. Their argument is – well, don't you want to have more buses on the road versus quality. We try to explain that if they were to buy us buses that need tremendous amount of repair and we cannot keep them for very long, then in the long run we have fewer dollars to operate. Paul M. added they also have more maintenance expense. Laura agreed and said that the limited success with the hybrid has made them even more hesitant. They are even holding up money that I have had earmarked for 5 years for low rider buses. Paul M. said that IDOT had some grant money (tigger money) to use up and they were calling around to see who could use a bus. They called us and said they could get us a free bus. Of course, we said sure, but then we found out later what it was. These hybrid buses are configured to seat 12 which is what our smaller, cutaway vans are. It is a bigger sized Ford chase that gets a little better fuel economy but not by a whole lot. The cost of the usual cutaway buses are in the range of \$55,000, but this one bus cost us \$116,000. They wanted to know if we would buy another one. NO! Never. We can't afford a Hybrid. If they give it to you, that's ok, but we can't use our federal funds to buy a couple of those.

Paul Roseberger asked what the percentage of off the road / gravel road miles? Laura said that, overall, probably 15% to 20%, but it depends on the county. Paul said that's what tears down the tires and shakes the vehicle. Laura agreed that it takes a real toll. Sand is also bad. Luckily there's not so much of that in Macon County, but there is in other counties and it is bad.

Alissa asked if they were scheduled to get two new buses in October. Are we still looking at locations to house the buses? Laura said that when they reach the point where they can house at least 5, but it has to be a minimum of 5, then we will look at a shed. Right now, we don't have the capacity. At that point, we would be willing to look, probably for a shed that would only serve DeWitt and Macon. So, it would be stationed somewhere that would serve all of those counties so we would have a big enough crew and again, that has to be 3 or 4 drivers. Alissa asked if it would be 2 additional drivers for those 2 buses. Laura said that is the plan, but we don't have any grant money at this point. We are running on empty right now until we get our first allotment of money. The year started July 1 and we just turned in our contract and not contracts are signed. Alissa asked if any of the other drivers would be able to if they were willing to drive. Laura said they could apply. We will both have to work out some things. Like Paul, I'm sure, has certain standards for his drivers curb to curb and certain procedures and we would share some of them, but in other ways, we will be tremendously different. When you mix positions, it can be difficult and that would be my only hesitation. We do expect a lot more out of our drivers. They must get out of their seats and help with bags. They escort people from bus to door and I don't think yours do. Paul said they do. Laura said that most of her drivers are full time, but some sharing could possibly take place. Alissa said she thought that it could save on gas and time. Laura agreed, but stated that what they don't want to have happen is having to share 2 or 3 buses and end up having without backup. Our drivers for Macon check in to the shed with at least 10 buses. So, if there's a problem with one bus, they can help with the next. The most they are going to lose is 5 to 10 minutes versus a lot of time.

Paul Roseberger questioned the part on the chart about the 25% mobility limited to some degree and how that compares to other counties. Laura said it depends some on the county. When we go out for insurance, to protect ourselves, we say 50/50. That is 50% of our ridership need some sort of assistance. That does not take into consideration someone who is still ambulatory but still needs help in getting from their home to the bus. If you add that in, it is probably about 35%. When we go out, we assume everyone has a disability because it just makes it easier.

Paul McChaney asked what the walker L/C designation was. Laura said the definition is someone who may use a walker and probably should not be using the stairs of the bus. We use the lift for them. We always provide the lift chair for them.

Paul Rosenberger asked what the 229 mean relative to other months. Laura said it goes up and down and is slowly beginning to build back up again. It is low, but should be shooting up pretty fast in the next year or two. We start out slow because we depend on word of mouth. The startup is a little faster in counties where we have service contracts. We have not generated any service contracts here yet. That is not unusual as we have more of those in our 100% rural counties.

Paul R. commented on the oversized wheelchair and asked if they have the capacity to handle the oversize. Do they have to specify when they call because not every vehicle can handle that? Laura said the very newest buses have lifts that are capable of lifting 1000 pounds. The opening, however, is no bigger than the other buses. The ADA no longer defines this. What we look at is, if it is to the point that we are concerned that they are going to be at risk on the lift, then we tend to use a mini-van with a ramp and we only have one of those. There are two more on order specifically for people that we don't feel comfortable either with dimension or weight putting them up on the lift. ADA used to say 600 pounds. Most of our older buses have 800 pound lifts, When you look at a smaller bus, it will actually start tipping. Even if that is not unsafe, it's really scary for everyone especially the person going up. If it gets over 600 pounds, I seriously want to use the mini-van for everyone's comfort level. We are supposed to be getting that low rider. We have been approved for the money. IDOT says it is in the offing, but it's been years. That would be a phenomenal change. The opening is much wider and everyone can enter, even a manual wheelchair would be able to use that ramp without an escort. Even though the driver would help, it would give a great deal more independence.

Other than that, the only huge things we will be struggling with over the next few months include the study grant. We were able to hire a consultant to answer some questions about new guidelines from IDOT. They added new conditions to the contract, but didn't issue any rules about how to meet the conditions. This consultant is coming in to tell us how to meet those conditions and will generate a handbook that we'll be able to share with other rural entities. The other thing is looking at state funding for transportation and what we are going to do as the expenses way exceed the revenues in the next five years. We need to consider how we are going to deal with that and be proactive in the legislature.

We are still proceeding with some capital acquisition because of state money. Laura asked Paul McChaney if he had received a grant for that as well. Paul replied that there is a \$3 million grant awarded to Decatur for buses and some for shelter out of the DTIF State money. Laura said they received that as well and that is where they will get additional buses and a maintenance facility. This will hopefully cut down on operating expenses and get more money on the road.

Alissa stated that there were no updates from HSTP or from Mark Wicklund.

Bruce Bird said he didn't have any report but asked about the funding and if they had heard anything on how IDOT was going to be handling that funding. Laura said they were able to roll in Macon County into theirs – against IDOT's desire. Bruce asked if she would be billing IDOT directly. Laura said yes. The only other thing they've gotten a little progress on is that they have agreed that the concept of having a lead county will continue. If you break down the PCOM requirement and look at what a PCOM is required to do, it is a full time job. So, if you had to fund one for each county, it would use up all your federal money. They did agree you could have just one PCOM from the lead county. The problem is they haven't given us any further direction and that is why, hopefully, this consultant will be able to give us more direction. Bruce asked if there was no letter or document from IDOT stating this. Laura said it is in the contract, but it is really muddly. It says a PCOM must be assigned or one for an intergovernmental agreement or two counties can share a PCOM. It is a contract with no policy behind it. There are no rules. It hasn't gone through JCAR. As long as it is a contract, we have to be able to comply. At least that phrase is in it and the way we read it for our intergovernmental area, there will only be one PCOM. Each county has to have it's own set of statistics, but we keep those anyway. They also want to break down federal and DOPE allocations for the county which has never been done. Our requirement for that was that if they are going to break it down legislatively or in any other way, you've got to make a mechanism by which one county can still apply on behalf of the other counties. The problem is they want multi county entities to become Mass Transit Districts. There isn't the political will to do that. This is our question to the consultant. If IDOT is making it so impossible for multi county, but they don't want single county because you can't achieve economy of scale, that leaves us only with rural mass transits. If so, how can that occur? How do you sell something like that because we don't have one county board that would be in support of that. Bruce said that in the past they have not shown an interest to want to do that. Laura said that neither has Ford, McLean, or Iroquois. That is our question. Is IDOT supporting that and if so, what arguments would support that. If IDOT is not requiring it, then how can we continue on it with the intergovernmental agreement. Bruce asked for a copy of the contract and Laura said she would send it to him. Bruce said he could forward it to the auditor and let her know that here is a copy of the contract for this year that says we can use the intergovernmental agreement and there is no need to set up any internal lines. We are in budget process right now and if we were going to have to do that, I was going to have to change my budget or have a separate budget set up. Laura said that was our understanding and it appears that the wording in the contract supports it. We have the same problem with the separate transportation account. It has gone through 3 auditors now and no one can figure out how to do it and comply with audit standards. We hope that is what the consultant can tell us how to do, but we don't want to wish that on every county in our system. Paul Rosenberger asked if the consultant was coming out of IDOT. Laura said yes, if it is approved and that she had just sent in all the paperwork to get it approved. The consultant group that was the most highly rated just happened to be the consultant group that has done most of the work for IDOT. They have sort of an inside track which is a plus and a minus. At this point, since they have to get the study done within a month, they need an inside track. IDOT has not signed off on it yet.

Alissa announced that the next meeting will be on September 25, 2013 in the same location.

Paul McChaney asked Laura if she had gotten a copy of the circular on section 5310 changes. He passed out copies and said it was just an announcement that they are going to be doing this. They are rolling a couple of projects that are different programs together having to do with the

rural transportation, seniors and disabled. Laura said that the problem all of them would have is that 5310 has changed and unfortunately IDOT has always tended to use any 5310 money just to purchase vehicles. They have not been willing to say how they are going to approach these changes. They have that discretion to just say they don't care what program the feds have rolled into 5310, they are still going to use all the 5310 for vehicles. That has been their position which could hurt us. New Freedom has been rolled in and right now we have at least 3 New Freedom grants. If they refuse to go with the suggestion of the feds, then in theory, all New Freedom grants would go away. That's a problem. Paul Rosenberger asked if that was just a minor change to what they had been operating under all the time. Paul McChaney stated that he hasn't had any part in it. Laura said it's a pretty big change, but it does offer new opportunity for urban if they wanted to move into 5310. What they did, is that they had new programs under the old authorization called New Freedom which was money allocated for moving beyond ADA minimums and providing more assistance to folks with mobility barriers. Job access riders commute was job oriented and those were two independent funding streams and now they've been combined. The New Freedom went into 5310 and the JARC went into 5311. The states still have tremendous discretion on what they do. They can just let all those programs go away which is, at this point, what I assume IDOT will do.

Alissa adjourned the meeting.