

# Meeting Notes

## Regional Public Transit Advisory Committee

May 13, 2014

11:15am-1:15pm

Redmond Public Library, 827 SW Deschutes Ave Redmond OR 97756

**Attendees:** Mike Lovely (Bend), Angie Gilley (Prineville), Elaine Henderson (Madras), Scott Cooper (Redmond/Prineville), Anthony Allen (Bend), Molly Baker Ray (La Pine), Jordan Ohlde (Rider), Nikki Roemmer (Bend), Sara Thompson (Bend)

**Staff:** Karen Friend (COIC), Tami Geiger (COIC)

**Public Attendees:** K. Kessell (Retired Citizen), Sue Barker (Redmond Senior Center), Judy Bowden (Retired Citizen), Arlene Noble (Disabled Citizen), Kim Curley (Commute Options), Tom Granger (Provider for Rider in Prineville), Don Aljets (Representing Riders from Sisters and Redmond), Ruby Aljets (Representing Riders from Sisters and Redmond), Seth Johnson (OFCO).

### 1. **General Public Comment**

Scott Cooper called the meeting to order at 11:20am. He explained that the Regional Transit Advisory Committee (RPTAC) was required by state statute and was made up of representatives from the different communities Cascades East Transit (CET) serves.

He explained that COIC operates CET and only 7% of the service is covered by fares, the rest is state and federal funding/grants. The RPTAC had been instructed by the COIC Board to raise the farebox recovery rate, as fares had not increased since the service was started in 2008. The RPTAC's previous proposals had been reviewed and returned by the COIC Board, but this proposal represented the most modest increase. He added that the goal was to incrementally increase fares until farebox recovery reached 15%.

He opened the floor to public comment on the proposed fare policy.

*Question: Is the federal funding for CET going to change?* Karen explained that the federal fund was expected to run out this fall because the current mechanism was not sustainable. She anticipated that they would do something politically to extend funding to the transit systems and prevent them from shutting down.

*Question: Will Opportunity Foundation riders be affected?* Karen explained that CET provides a lot of rides to OFCO and they were concerned about the fare increase; however, they understood why the community had a general expectation that the riders pay more of the cost of the ride. Scott encouraged the attendees to write to their lawmakers and ask them to fund transit operations in rural communities where there are more transit dependent riders than they recognize.

*Question: What other rural areas/systems did you compare CET's fares to?* Karen explained it was a comprehensive study, but she did not remember specifically. They compared areas with similar populations; however, none of the systems was exactly the same in the services they provided and so it was hard to draw a direct comparison.

**Action Item:** Email a copy of the fare study to the public attendees.

*Question: How many people did you survey about the fare increase? What were the demographics of those people (rural vs. urban)?* Karen explained that the Bend system is always separate from the rural system because it is fixed route and rural. She explained that there were community meetings in each community CET serves during the last round of service cuts and COIC heard from riders that they would rather pay more than lose service. COIC also completed a random phone survey that was statistically significant for the region and those responders indicated that they would like riders to pay their appropriate share. She added that the Transit Funding Committee, a workgroup of leaders in the community seeking solutions for transit funding, found that riders needed to have more “skin in the game” to sell it to the general public and to pass a vote for a permanent tax base.

Tony Allen added that they had done service reductions since he had been on the RPTAC and there had been general cost cutting done by CET. It had been a painful process to develop a fare increase proposal but the current increase was nominal compared to previous proposals. Scott added that CET lost riders when they reduced service, and needed to have additional revenue to attract more riders.

*Comment: Cutting service left a lot of people without a way to get around and doesn't seem to have made any difference.* Scott responded that it made a big difference in the sense that CET was no longer losing so much money from providing rides at those times to those areas. Tony and Nikki Roemmer added that the runs that were cut were underutilized.

*Comment: Seth Johnson commented that he had gone to the City of Redmond and asked them to contribute because OFCO had serious concerns about the stability of the service for their clients. He encouraged the rest of the public attendees to take their concerns to the City of Redmond because it was up to them to contribute more money to the system and they had chosen not to.*

*Question: Where do your grants come from and what is your operating budget?* Karen responded that they receive state and federal grants and the rural service budget is about \$2 million/year.

*Question: It used to be required to reserve a ride on the community connector from Sisters-Redmond. Now that the reservation is not required, is there a noticeable difference in the number of riders?* Karen answered no. She added that there was a proposal to change the community connector from Sisters-Redmond to Sisters-Bend because it is so underutilized.

*Question: Are you looking to cut more routes?* Karen, no.

*Question: Why do you feel you are losing money on the monthly pass?* Karen explained that with the monthly pass, CET was not paid for every ride, even though every ride on a Dial A Ride system costs CET more money.

*Question: What is the difference in cost if I want to go from Prineville to Bend and ride the service in Bend?* Karen explained that the monthly pass in Bend is the same because it is fixed route. The only increase is the in-town ride in Prineville and the fare is increasing \$.25.

*Comment: I am grateful to OFCO who got the bus system going to get me out of Prineville. The riders are generally people who are not well to do financially, they are perhaps unemployed or receive government benefits.*

*Question: A rider has to pay \$1.25 each way to get to the Senior Center and back correct? Karen responded yes, correct.*

*Question: Any thought of not eliminating the monthly pass but just increasing the price? Karen responded that one of the challenges with the monthly pass was the expectation of service. Unfortunately CET cannot guarantee rides because they are based on availability and capacity. Nikki added that Dial-A-Ride is like a taxi service. The monthly pass on fixed route makes sense because the bus is running regardless of whether anyone is riding; however, each ride on the DAR service costs CET more money. By eliminating the monthly pass, hopefully the farebox recovery will become a bit more manageable.*

*Question: How many people on your admin staff and schedulers? Karen explained that besides her there were three on the admin staff, CET also had three dispatchers who scheduled rides for the entire region.*

*Question: Last I heard, Redmond was only short \$50-100k to get a fixed route system, which would be a drop in the bucket in the City budget. What would have been the impact to Redmond if it had fixed route? Karen explained that with fixed route they would have continued to offer the monthly pass.*

*Comment: The dollar amount to the City was relatively small to get fixed route in Redmond. Scott responded that the political challenge was bigger.*

*Comment: Redmond's unwillingness to contribute is actually causing these changes. If they had increase their contribution this could have been prevented. Scott responded that the RPTAC agreed that it would be good for Redmond; however, it currently didn't resonate with the entire City Council.*

*Comment: Kim Curley from Commute Options announced that they partner with ODOT to offer free real time carpool matching through Drive Less Connect. Jordan Ohlde asked why there wasn't a representative from Commute Options on the RPTAC. Karen explained that the committee was designed to represent communities, not organizations.*

*Question: Has CET/COIC ever looked at bonds? Karen explained that bonds usually funded capital, not operations and that was where CET was struggling. Scott added that they had looked at payroll tax, property tax, and city utility fee. He explained that the RPTAC believed that transit would be a growing issue confronting local government because the population is not getting younger and more people need service as the economy recovers and employment picks up. He encouraged the public to help provide some heat to their City governments and encourage them to support transit. He closed the public comment period.*

## **2. RPTAC Business**

- **March 18, 2014 Meeting Minutes**

Tony motioned to accept the minutes, Elaine Henderson seconded. Minutes were approved by consensus.

### **3. CET Fare Proposal**

Tony expressed that his only concern with approving the fare policy was the elimination of the monthly pass. The RPTAC agreed that they had done their due diligence explaining why it had to be eliminated. Scott suggested that if it was not eliminated then they needed to print on the pass "Does Not Guarantee A Ride." Karen explained that she met with OFCO and agreed to bill them their rides to minimize the hassle of eliminating the pass.

Tony motioned to accept the proposed fare policy and Jordan seconded. The proposal was approved by consensus.

### **4. Monthly Performance Report and Transportation Board Report**

Scott commented that all ridership was down, even Bend fixed route. Karen commented that student enrollment at COCC is down, which meant the economy was picking back up and people were going to work instead of school.

- **Discussion**

Scott asked about progress with OSU Cascades. Karen explained that Scott Aycock was representing CET/COIC on the transportation taskforce and they had recognized that they needed service, but were unsure how to pay for it. She added that they had submitted a letter of intent as a part of their site planning and were having discussions about the cost. Scott asked if there would be a direct route from Redmond to campus. Karen explained that the campus would affect demand for every route, especially Route 11 that currently serves that area but doesn't run all day.

Jordan Ohlde requested a shadow bus for Route 5 that always seemed to run 15 minutes late. Karen agreed to look into it and explained that CET was anticipating a service improvement that would alert them of midpoint on-time performance. He also commented that people were not happy when their permanent ride schedule was removed. Karen explained that the law only allowed 50% subscription rides so riders were now only allowed to book out two weeks in advance instead of a month. Jordan added that they were upset that they were not informed in advance. Nikki confirmed that no one was left without a ride. Karen explained that no, they were just upset that they couldn't book out farther in advance.

**Action Item:** Karen to request a shadow bus for Route 5.

Mike Lovely asked what would happen when funding from Bend's General Fund expired (2015). Karen explained that they have been verbally told they would get an extension. Nikki asked if that would require a City Council vote. Karen explained yes, and CET would have a Federal triennial review next summer that requires a three year plan for funding. The City understood that their vote would need to be in place in order to demonstrate the funding plan to the federal reviewers.

Nikki requested that they follow up on the action items from the March RPTAC meeting:

March 18 Action Item: Post RPTAC meeting notices at Hawthorne Station for additional public engagement.

A flyer was posted at Hawthorne and distributed in the buses announcing the RPTAC meeting and proposed fare changes.

March 18 Action Item: Reserve Redmond Library meeting room for May 20 (rescheduled for May 13th) and Bend DAR vans for July and September meetings.

The RPTAC met at the Redmond Library. The July 15<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held at 1:30pm in La Pine at the Parks and Rec building. Kim Curley offered to carpool with her van from Bend.

March 18 Action Item: Molly, Tami and Karen to set up a public meeting in La Pine for comment.

A meeting for additional public comment on the fare policy was held in La Pine on Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>.

March 18 Action Item: RPTAC to work on recruiting additional representatives from the other cities (missing Sisters, Metolius/Culver).

Nikki asked about inviting Seth Johnson (OFCO) or Sue Barker (Senior Center). The RPTAC agreed that both represented important populations that didn't want to lose service. They also discussed inviting a representative from Mosaic Medical or St. Charles, and agreed that St. Charles may be better because they are less strapped for staff.

**Action Item:** Contact Seth Johnson and Sue Barker and extend invitations to apply.

**Action Item:** Send Kim Curley an application for her contacts and make sure it is posted on the COIC website.

**Action Item:** Post a notice on the Culver/Metolius/Madras bus to recruit an RPTAC representative.

March 18 Action Item: Contact the City of Bend volunteer coordinator to start developing a "Friends of the Bus" program.

Jordan explained that he had helped one lady figure out how to take the bus and would continue helping people out. Karen explained that she had given Andrew Spreadborough two suggestions to bring to the City of Bend volunteer coordinator, one was to recruit volunteers as 'Friends of the Bus' (provide information, help new riders etc) and the other was to "Adopt a Stop" to keep them clean.

**Action Item:** Update on progress with volunteers at the July RPTAC meeting.

Karen announced that Warm Springs was considering bringing back CET service and may connect with Culver/Metolius/Madras, and possibly include a small fixed route in Madras. Mike asked why Warm Springs stopped participating. Karen explained that for a long time they thought they wanted to do it themselves, but they recognized how expensive it is. Tony added that there have been complaints, since they only have one bus, that they are unable to provide rides in Warm Springs while the bus is in Madras for shopping trips. Also, it is free to riders and very costly to provide the rides.

Kim Curley announced that there was a ribbon cutting for the new Klamath Falls- Chiloquin bus on Tuesday the 20<sup>th</sup> at 11am in Chiloquin and she could provide a ride to anyone who was interested.

Mike asked if there was a way to collect donations to subsidize fares for people who can't afford them.

Karen explained that COIC is a government entity and so the only way to collect donations was as pass through from charitable organizations. Kim suggested that Commute Options could set up a donation fund that coincides with their Drive Less Connect campaign in October.

**Action Item:** Karen and Kim to discuss a donation campaign.

Meeting adjourned at 12:45pm. The next RPTAC meeting will be Tuesday, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, 1:30pm-3:30pm in La Pine at the Parks and Recreation building. Carpool will leave from Hawthorne Station at 12:30pm.

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