

Passenger Transportation Plan - Regional Planning Affiliate 1, UERPC
Transportation Advisory Group Meeting Minutes
May 31st, 2019, 9:30 a.m. - 325 Washington Street, Decorah, Iowa

Present: Maura Jones (NEICAC Transit), Michelle Barness (UERPC), Spiff Slifka (Howard County Tourism)

1. Meeting called to order at 9:35 a.m.

2. EARL Public Transit Update:

- Jones explained that the Mobility Manager position has expired and Sam Castro is no longer with EARL Public Transit. Castro will have an ongoing vendor contract with for design services with transit for specific projects.
- Ongoing campaigns as EARL Public Transit include:
 - Behind the Mustache - Using social media to highlight transit staff. The effort has somewhat increased transit Facebook followers, which is good for marketing. Slifka suggested also considering picture opportunities on the buses with mustaches (would involved photo disclosures), and suggested looking at additional ways that drivers could interact with passengers. Picture opportunities would also be helpful with larger rider groups (E.g. Spectrum).
 - Perfect Pick Me Up – Campaign to talk to potential rider groups that have already or could benefit from transit, including six identified markets that could be further communicated with:
 - Under 16 and working
 - Airport travel
 - Job transportation
 - Sandwich Generation (helping with rides for aging parents)
 - Children getting to recreation
 - Older generation – medical transportation

Perfect Pick Me Up Campaign focuses on the benefits of using transit, including sustainability (reducing carbon footprint, etc.), getting more self-time while traveling, social benefits of using transit, safety benefits, etc.

- EARL Public Transit is looking to expand radio advertising in southern counties in region to help increase ridership there.
- Public transit is following DOT charter exception rules now, where they are able to do charters after meeting certain steps and criteria:
 - Transit gets information on needed trips, and they forward the information to a predefined list of non-public transit transportation servicers in the region.
 - Non-public transit servicers can then provide a quote for doing the charter, and the group can choose either public transit or the other servicers for the ride
 - Charter cost, if public transit is selected, is \$40/hr. and a destination charge, and possibly mileage. These fees are consistent with all groups.
- Public transit is looking at a potential Federal Transit Administration (FTA) mobility grant, and will meet with RPA transportation planning staff the week of June 10th to discuss. They are considering a project for

providing technology to increase on-vehicle payment options. Slifka questioned whether public transit could also consider other technology needs, such as providing wi-fi on buses. Jones explained that the FTA grant is focused on low-income (un-banked) demographics. Barness stated that technology improvements/updates is addressed in the most recent update to the Passenger Transportation Plan. Other details for the potential project include:

- Using an existing transit technology, “Route Match,” to provide more payment options. Route Match is a cloud based system that can track rider accounts and funds available/depleted for trips, etc.
 - The grant would be for a minimum of \$100,000.
 - Grant has an August deadline.
- Slifka provided some information on the history of the re-naming/re-imaging of EARL Public Transit. There was discussion around future marketing opportunities:
 - The group discussed the importance of marketing transit not just for people who don’t have transportation, but also for those that can choose to use transit and benefit from its safety, convenience, etc.
 - Slika, on behalf of Howard County Tourism, is looking at having public kiosks for either self-guided tours or to provide information on local services and amenities. Information on public transit would be important to provide with these.
 - Public transit contact and service information needs to be more visible in the communities – at public locations, and in print, electronic, etc. Jones explained that so far they have transit information available on the local tourism maps and on the buses for marketing purposes (in addition to print/radio advertising, etc.).
 - Slifka suggested EARL advertise on Visitiowa.org. Also, she suggested that Howard County Tourism get the EARL Logo/link on the tourism website, and she would follow-up to coordinate.
 - Public transit IT staff are working on updating and modernizing the website, so people can be directed right to transit when searching EARL (versus going to the Northeast Iowa Community Action site first).
 - Jones reviewed status of bus advertising. EARL Public Transit is seeking sources of income not solely tied to ridership – 50% of current income is now tied to Medicaid, which can pose challenges. They are doing, via the Iowa DOT, a contract with Midwest Truck Advertising, to start advertising on the transit buses. Transit reviews content for potential ads against certain standards. Midwest Trucks runs the process – they look at EARL-provided lists of potential ad sources then help select. There are currently two ads with Winneshiek Medical Center in Decorah and Maple Crest in Fayette. They are doing side and tail ads only. Midwest is also working on corporate level ads (e.g. Casey’s gas stations), with locations around the state, where a certain number of NE Iowa buses would then have the corporate ad (in addition to other buses around the state). Return to EARL for the ads is 50% of income for the ads.

3. TAG members discussed the transportation stakeholder analysis that RPA transportation planners would assist with:

- Jones would like to prepare information in preparation for a potential presentation at an NICC event for human resource managers in the region. She would like to present on how transit can help large employers with recruitment and retention by providing work routes for employees.
 - Work routes are especially helpful for certain industries and/or employees with specialized skills sets that require them traveling longer distances to jobs.
 - Transit may also be very important for near term business growth. Looking at certain industries, like production, trade, transportation, utilities, etc.: workers may have special skills but may also get paid less, may have to commute to work, and may or may not have their own transportation, transit may be essential for employers/new employees in making positions doable.

- Barnes will assist in an analysis prior to the next TAG meeting, which can be used for the human resource manager presentation, including:
 - Getting a list of large employers from county economic development directors in the region. Also, a description of the number of employees at the larger employers.
 - Looking at commute-in and commute-out relationships between specific communities (in and outside of the region) with known high levels of commuting movement, including 1) Oelwein and Waterloo, 2) Postville and Cresco, and 3) Elkader and Prairie du Chien.
 - Arrive at the number of commuters/jobs between these paired cities, and also break down the commuting/jobs by type, including 1) production, and 2) trade, transportation and utilities.
 - Send the county economic development directors the outcome of the paired-city commuting/job analysis, as well as their original list of major employers, and request information from them regarding which major employers in the paired cities in the 1) production, or 2) trade/transportation/utility industries might be the main draws for the observed commuting patterns.
 - Focus of analysis will be on a) industries with workers with specific skills sets, b) workers with potentially higher travel concerns/needs, c) industries where major employers can't easily find local employees with certain skill sets so will necessarily have employees commuting in to work, d) employers that may be looking to grow/expand in the future, and e) employers with possible employee recruitment or retention issues that could use the provision of better transportation options as a benefit.
 - Create a final summary of the paired-city commuting analysis, and provide suggestions for key employers in the paired-cities to focus on based on feedback from the county economic developers.
- Jones provided background and information on the successful work route service contract public transit currently has with Upper Iowa Beef.

4. Barnes will forward meeting notes and follow-up to meeting attendees with next steps.

5. Barnes will send list of current TAG members to meeting attendees for review and suggestions to further expand list and encourage meeting attendance.

6. Date of the next meeting will be set by poll at a later date. Possibly looking at August or September.