

MINUTES
STARTRAN ADVISORY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING & MEETING
City Council Chambers
August 3, 2010

Members Present: Beatty Brasch, Steve Speicher, Mitch Paine, Kory George, John Baylor

Members Absent: Debby Brehm, Kim Phelps

Staff Present: Larry Worth, Mike Weston, Scott Tharnish, Brian Praeuner, Glenn Knust, Kitty Elliott, Greg MacLean, Connie Thoreson

PUBLIC HEARING

A. Ms. Brasch opened the public hearing regarding the proposed discontinuance of Neighborhood Routes North (#57) and South (#56). Board members introduced themselves, and Ms. Brasch presented the “ground rules”, and welcomed all attendees.

- Sharon Johnson voiced opposition to the route eliminations, and suggested that the cost of the Low Income pass be increased to \$10/month.
- Lois Newman was opposed to the route cuts.
- Pat Schreurs was opposed to eliminating the two routes.
- Kenny Nelson, a HandiVan patron, was opposed to changing the HandiVan reservation lines to a “hold queue” procedure.
- Jeff Altman, an orientation mobility instructor, voiced opposition to the proposed route cuts, as the routes are near the training center and are used to train individuals. He suggested to extend the service to Saturdays, and reminded that public transit is a public service, and defended as such. Representing the National Federation of the Blind, Mr. Altman emphasized the need for these routes for employment.
- Alex Anderson, a student, was opposed to the elimination of both routes, noting the need for service to WalMart, two hospitals, and several schools.
- Mike Wiese, ATU President and bus operator, acknowledged the very low ridership on both routes, but noted that the routes are integral to the total system as recommended in the TDP. In response to a question, Mr. Wiese noted that he observed passengers traveling to a variety of destinations - school, shopping, employment – with up to 12-15 passengers at times. He also responded that the routes cross several other routes, reducing the need to transfer downtown.

Mr. Baylor asked as to what promotions of these routes had taken place. Kitty Elliott responded that several system-wide promotions had been used, including free monthly passes to introduce the revised routes two years ago, reduced fares, and seniors promotions. Promotion of just the two neighborhood routes took place for several weeks, with free fares, prizes, advertisements, etc. Ms. Elliott noted that ridership on the routes has remained generally constant at 3.5 passengers/hour even during the various promotions.

Mr. Paine thought the neighborhood routes were important to the entire route network, as they effectively created a second, more centralized, mini hub which can be expanded in the future.

Ms. Brasch closed the public hearing.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING

A. Review of May 27, 2010 Advisory Board meeting minutes

The minutes of the May 27, 2010 Advisory Board were accepted as submitted.

B. Patrons to be Heard

No patrons spoke.

C. Action on Discontinuance of Neighborhood Routes North (#57) and South (#56)

Discussion by the Board members took place as follows...

Mr. George felt that this issue could be addressed by comparison with budgets of other departments or by review of the of the StarTran budget priorities, including reducing other services or increasing revenues. It was suggested that the Low Income Pass could be increased to \$10, which was opposed by Ms. Brasch as placing a financial burden on many low-income persons.

Several other ideas were discussed, including shorter routes, raising fares, smaller buses, and increased revenues from other sources. It was acknowledged that the smaller buses recently received will be assigned onto lower-ridership routes, but considering the operator costs, the difference in mileage isn't significantly different from larger buses.

Mr. Worth reminded that these service cuts are being considered in response to the City's need to address budget issues. However, he indicted that considering the very low utilization of these two routes, he likely would have asked the Board to consider alternate services (i.e., evening service, weekend services, etc) for the cost of the two routes – even without the budget constraints. The TDP has plans for future services, which may more effectively utilize the funds.

It was acknowledged that the Board members are committed to StarTran, but realize the need to address the budget issues. Concern was expressed as to the decreased perception if routes are cut, and if efforts are needed to determine what would attract more riders.

Mr. Baylor moved to eliminate the #56, Neighborhood South and #57, Neighborhood North routes. The motion was seconded by Mr. George. Motion was passed, 3-2 (Baylor, George, and Brasch voting 'aye' and Speicher and Paine voting 'nay').

D. Other

Mr. Paine asked that a subcommittee of the StarTran Advisory Board be formed to work with a committee of the Mayor's Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee to promote the utilization of on-bus bicycle racks, to be installed next spring. It was agreed to initiate such a subcommittee, and Mr. Paine and Mr. Speicher agreed to be members.

E. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.