

## Rural Transportation Committee Notes for informal meeting

October 23, 2013

*Committee Members* Alissa Dozier, Andrea Shaffer, Gary Minich

*Present:*

*Committee Members* Mark Wicklund, Robert Brice, Leslie Stanberry, Julie Aubert

*Absent:*

*Others Present:* Laura Dick, Emily Dobson, Marilyn Piasecki, Theresa Churchill, Jay Dunn

*Next meeting:* November 27, 2013, 3:30 p.m. in Room 514 County Board Room,  
County Office Building

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Alissa Dozier began the discussion. A quorum was not present. A discussion session was held. Minutes from the previous meeting were not approved due to quorum not being present. For the record, these notes do not constitute minutes, but are simply notes of the discussion.

Update from Showbus: Laura Dick said that the Area Agency on Aging, right after the last Rural Transit meeting, scheduled a Macon Conversation. When it was first apparent that the Area Agency on Aging was going to terminate transportation funding, they had a funding shortfall and most of the transportation providers that they had understood that that was the reason for the cut. Since then, it has turned out to be not so clear. It would be worth it for people to remind Area Agency that if there are no unmet needs, it is because there is public transportation. If public transportation goes away, the unmet needs will rise significantly. Even though they cut transportation to seniors, they will be one of the top priority target populations that Showbus serves. Even though everyone is served, but top priorities are seniors, folks with disabilities and low income. When there is a significant funding cut, those three targets will never be targeted. We will try as much as we can to preserve our service for those particular populations, while continuing to serve all of the general public. Increased unmet need could not be proved because of cut funding because whatever is needed is done to preserve that service. Most of the transportation providers who responded to a survey said the same thing, no, they did not cut hours or require seniors to pay fares. One way of interpreting the survey is to say there is no unmet need and it has not harmed them to lose the money, but that is absolutely untrue. Unfortunately, they have interpreted that to mean that their funding is not important to public transportation. First there was the indication that they had to do it because of the sequester, but it turned out the cuts were not so much due to the sequester. Then they reserved the money for capital equipment purchases. Laura said she was not sure if this was true or not, but now they are looking at possibly funding a program called TRIP in Coles County. This is an excellent program, but they attempt to deal with very specialized needs of folks who are going to multiple counties or have very highly specialized transportation needs. It might be time to ask Area Agency to consider that senior transportation remains one of the top barriers for seniors. If rural public transportation suffers, that need is going to go up. Possibly, they should reconsider their priorities. The only way they would consider that is if we all attend these meetings and make it very clear that we are concerned about the cuts in transportation. Area Agency on Aging has

been directed by the Department on Aging to be very aware that public hearings are important and input from the public should be listened to. Laura strongly encouraged everyone to attend the meeting.

Andrea Shaffer stated that she had had a call last week too from Mike O'Donnell with questions about transportation. When units for the past month were discussed, he was surprised at how many riders there were. He asked about seniors versus non, how it was being funded, etc... He had no comments on what actions they might take, but Andrea agreed that it needs to be brought up.

Laura reiterated that she was in no way speaking against TRIP, but stressed the point that they are very specialized outreach that should be funded after most needs have been met. If public transit goes down or has to be cut back in all of these counties, the unmet need will go up.

Andrea asked if Coles County (Mattoon) has a public transit service and does this incorporate this and the county. Laura explained that Coles County public transportation does not cross county lines. They developed a program where they could have someone make one call to be able to go to multi counties. TRIP has been successful in Coles County because their people could not get out of the county. Most Public Transits cross county lines. She said that sometimes they help TRIP out if they have a need. She said they prefer not to have to transfer their residents to someone else, but would rather be responsible for the full trip. TRIP is important for areas where the service is border sensitive. The whole issue of transportation should be revisited because just because there is not a lot of unmet need currently, it does not mean there couldn't be. Nearly \$50,000 was lost, even though that is not a large percent of the budget, it is a lot of rides.

Marilyn asked how many Macon County was doing. Laura reported that the numbers are slowly going up. In September, they were up to 262 from 190 in August. Trips out of Mt. Zion and Forsyth are increasing also. Over the winter, two gas vehicles will be garaged on the border of DeWitt and Macon probably in Clinton where one bus is parked now. A crew of local drivers will be built up and as the buses come in, a move to having a shed will be made.

Laura reported that they had had their first denial for a special service which was bad, but good, because it shows demand. Alissa asked the reason for the denial. Laura explained that it came in as a request for a special trip from Macon on a day that a bus had already been assigned for a special trip. We couldn't have two buses do specials in one day. First, the regular routes are done, then special medical needs, then special non-medical trips that are community building.

Alissa asked if a PCOM had been hired yet. Laura said no, but she had presented the problem to their auditors and asked if they could look into the contract and explain how they can comply without violating their own audit requirements. Showbus will never be in violation. It is a question of whether the counties will be in violation because of how the contracts are written. A PCOM does not have to be in place until January. We have to know legally how to do it. In complying with the contract, you cannot do something that will cause you to be in violation of the audit. If you fail an audit, you are done.

Andrea asked if the bus that is garaged in Clinton is in a facility that they own and wondered if there was a way to team with the school districts or something like that. Laura said once they get to that point, she would be putting out some feelers because who you know that might know somebody that might have . . . is the only way to find a facility. She said that the Maroa school is

right on the highway and would be very convenient. Jay asked how late they run. Laura said they leave the county around 5. Through the New Freedom Grant, services have been expanded in other counties. IDOT still has not said whether they will have that grant available in the future. The feds changed the writing on the app. It went away as a separate pot, but is supposed to be rolled into the entire rural pot to encourage those kinds of projects. We are encouraging IDOT to keep that alive. We run it from 4 to 6 in one county because of JARC and New Freedom and in another county, we are beginning to run 2 evenings and ½ day on the week end. Jay said there might be room at the County Highway Department. It is fenced in. Laura said that would be great and as soon as the buses are confirmed as coming, we will start seriously looking. Right now the fleet is extremely aging. At the main shed, there is a mechanic keeping them afloat. When a new garage is opened, the buses need to be newer because there won't be a mechanic there.

Alissa asked if they were scheduled to get a bus in December or March. Laura said there should be 2 medium duties coming in March. Whenever new ones start coming, which could be November, even if they are mini-vans, we would begin looking at a shed. It may be more appropriate here to run with the light duties and minis until demand goes up. They are a lot more flexible in terms of special needs transportation. We just need vehicles. We could do without the buses, but we need at least two because the area is so big. That is two local and one to leave. If it has wheels, we can expand.

Emily asked if demand is increasing in the gray areas. Laura said yes, you just need a finger hold and then it starts expanding. October is in an upward swing.

Often the medical needs will build into a route. Once a month, a route goes from Pontiac to Kankakee because of the dental clinic. Lengthy discussion ensued pertaining to managed health care, Medicaid vendors and the confusion around the issues and who people need to call.

Alissa announced that the next meeting was scheduled for November 27 and dismissed the group.