

## **Rural Transit Advisory Group**

*March 27, 2014*

*Committee Members Present:* Mark Wicklund, Diane Drew, Emily Dobson, Marilyn Piasecki, Gary Minich, Leslie Stanberry

*Others Present:* Joselyn Stewart, Eileen Sierra

*Committee Members Absent:* Alissa Dozier, Andrea Shaffer

*Next meeting:* April 23, 2014, 2:30 p.m. in Room 514 County Board Room, County Office Building

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Chair Mark Wicklund called the meeting to order.

Gary Minich made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 26, 2014 meeting, seconded by Emily Dobson and the motion carried 6-0.

There were no Public Comments.

### **SHOW BUS UPDATE**

Laura Dick could not be at the meeting, but sent notes via email along with the usual charts and graphs showing monthly ridership.

Emily Dobson presented Laura's material.

Weather concerns continued to impact ridership, although we did not miss any service days. It's been a challenging winter, and I hope we've seen the last of the snow and ice.

We are in the middle of submitting FY2015 operating grants to IDOT for both state (Downstate Operating Assistance Program (DOAP)) and federal funding (Section 5311). At this point, budgets are calculated at the FY2014 level, as there is pending legislation regarding state funds (DOAP), and federal funds have not changed for a number of years. We also still do not know if IDOT will allow continuing use of the remaining New Freedom and JARC (Job Access Reverse Commute) funds in FY2015. The contracts stipulated that the funds could be accessed for more than two years, but the official end date is June 30, 2014. I hope to get clarification at the upcoming conference and trainings next week.

St. Mary's Hospital has returned a service agreement; it is under review at this time, but this is very exciting! Emily reiterated that this is really good news and said she could see it having an impact on ridership in several different ways. First with the St. Mary's clients, but also as the clients know it's out there, they'll tell friends and neighbors. This could have a very positive outcome.

It appears that the medium duty vehicles (including the two that were funded by Macon County "start-up" funds) may be delivered by the end of the year-possibly beginning deliveries in June. If

that happens, along with the projected May deliveries of the super medium duty vehicles in May, we will be in much better shape. We still have not received a contract for the vehicles that were apparently awarded as part of the Downstate Transportation Improvement Fund (DTIF). In the meantime, the newest round of vehicle applications has begun, and I will be attending the orientation today (Wednesday, March 26, 2016). Emily added that she was sure that Laura would probably apply for at least one or two more for Macon County because originally we were supposed to get 3 and ended up only getting 2. They said we didn't have enough money banked for 3. We will need more in order to have a base located in Macon County and have vehicles here to improve service deliveries. The Region 8 group will be meeting in May to approve those vehicle applications and Emily said she could not see a reason why we would not be approved. It may take a year or two to get them, but we should be approved for it.

The graphs showed units (a unit is a ride, not a person). Each person who rides is entitled to up to 3 units per trip. They get two other stops besides their primary stop. Emily said she would like to see how many people using the service be added to the report. That would give us a better indication of the impact this service is having. The majority of the units for February were based out of Decatur. There was discussion that it would be nice to know whether those were out of the gray area. Mark said he was surprised by the number too. Gary Minich said that it looked like Blue Mound and Macon had pretty significant numbers. Marilyn Piasecki added that it shows that the ridership in Macon continues to rise. Emily Dobson said they have several very active consumers in their visual services program in both of those communities and they have been using the vehicles extensively and they have been telling their friends. That may have something to do with the increase there. However, they were not happy after the last low vision support group meeting because they had to wait over an hour for a pick up, but they still want to use it because they cannot drive and they still want to go places. It was requested that Laura be sent an email to find out if the 58 is from the gray area. Mark said he had a couple of other questions too. He said he wondered if the total number of people coming in could be taken care of by giving the driver a clicker to press the button each time a person comes on. Mark said he also wondered what the number of the most buses we've had in the county at one time was. He said if there are only 1 or 2 buses operating, might that be causing some of the delay. Emily said that if the contract with St. Mary's gets approved, it is going to require more than one. Part of that transportation is for adult daycare, so whoever drives that bus from Chenoa is going to have to leave at 4 a.m. That should be another incentive for locating vehicles in Macon County. We talked about possible sites such as the Highway Department on Woodford and the Maroa-Forsyth School District for that in past meetings.

#### Update from HSTP

Gary Minich has been attending the meetings. This was tabled until Eileen Sierra arrived.

#### Other Updates –

Gary Minich said he was hoping that Bruce would be able to be at today's meeting to elaborate on last month's conversation when Paul McChancy had come in to notify us that there was DOAP money available and indicated that the City is not going to do anything with the gray area and that it is kind of our baby. So, after an email from Emily and at Jay's request Bruce started looking into how we service the gray area. He sent out an email mid-month that basically talked about the services that were available through A-OK and Alpha Omega and said that he thought Paul & the City would be interested in administering it. Gary said he thought this probably did not mean the City would complete the application, but would administer the money if it were

approved. Emily said that Eileen had told her that there are other ways that we might be able to fund it without having to have the in-kind funding.

Emily stated that it is time to start looking at the numbers and seeing if there's anything that can be done as far as outreach processes and getting more information out to the people who would possibly use the service. Mark asked if SHOWBUS was still distributing their flyers. Marilyn said they pass a lot of them out through Starting Point at the Health Department. Emily thought more needed to be done and stated that she did not know that handing out brochures was the best way to go. She said the brochures need to be in all the libraries in all the rural areas as well as Decatur Public Library. She said the group needs to start thinking about getting the word out better. Now that the weather is improving, people will be wanting to get out more. Mark asked if the TV stations still do public service announcements. Marilyn asked about putting ads on the City of Decatur buses and their maps. Mark said the ads are run through an ad company and run around \$300. Emily said that SHOWBUS is not even in the phone book. There was discussion that many people no longer use phone books. Marilyn asked if SHOWBUS had a website. It was confirmed that they do. Mark asked Lesley if any of her clientele used the service. Lesley said yes and that she felt that the contract with St. Mary's will be very well received. Mark asked how many people in the rural areas use the Macon County senior center. Lesley said around several hundred. She said they had been advertising and putting things in their newsletter about SHOWBUS. She said they would start handing a SHOWBUS pamphlet to anyone coming in from the rural areas. Emily said a public service announcement in the small hometown papers could also help. Gary said that at one of the Region 8 meetings, Eileen had said that she had press releases available. Emily said that they might be able to duplicate what Lesley had put in their newsletter because it had the schedule and everything.

Eileen Sierra presented possible options to generate funding. Subscription services which would be if you have a job and you need, every single day, a ride to the same place at the same time, you can choose to pay in advance to utilize that service. The funding is 65/35, so 65% can be funded with State money, but would need a 35% local match. To generate the local match, several things can be done. Actual riders can pay what it would cost to generate that revenue. If the county or city was willing to donate the maintenance for the vehicle and/or the gas, that could be counted as local match. If there are certain employment programs that are willing to pay for transportation or job training could be considered local match. She asked who would be operating the service. She said it sounds like Laura Dick with SHOWBUS is not interested at this time in utilizing this funding. She asked if anyone knew if that was a correct or incorrect assumption. Gary Minich said his impression was that if SHOWBUS were to administer this, they would have to have separate vehicles and could not use the same vehicles they are using in the rural area. He said that the City had come in and said there was this money available, but that they were not interested in serving the gray area and were dropping it in our lap. But then, Bruce Bird's email said he had talked to Paul McChancey and Paul had said he was willing to administer the program. Eileen said the time Paul charges to 5307 to administer the grant can be counted also. You are allowed to pair the state and federal funds. She said that would be great if he would be willing. She said she would highly recommend the county putting in a 5310 Consolidated Vehicle Procurement Application for the urbanized area because one thing that is really nice about these vehicles is that they are not subject to the regulations that 5311 or 5307 vehicles are and they have much more flexibility to go between the two areas. The small urban 5310 has not been fully utilized in the last 2 years, so there is actually a buildup of funding to get the vehicles. She said if the group wanted to start small as a pilot project, she would suggest to go for two mini vans at a minimum. They are brawn lift mini vans that have the ramp and are fully

accessible. They are approximately \$55,000 each. What is nice about those vehicles is that they are a 80% federal / 20% match, but the state almost pays for them 100% so you guys would end up having that not come out of the money that is available for the gray areas. When it comes to operations, you don't have to do a van pull situation. You could do a purchase of service agreement. A van pull situation is a vehicle that operates on odd hours. You have a way to automatically get into the vehicle. You set up a system to get the key. You have to have a key pass system set up to identify the driver as not being intoxicated when driving. You have to train the driver, but it is like carpooling for adults who work odd hours or need to go long distances for a special medical trip or something. You can get those routes for the local match sponsored by hospital systems, major job employers or you can sell advertising on the vehicle to get that local match. There are a lot of options. Eileen Sierra said she thought that Easter Seals, who had 2 ladies present at the meeting, were looking at downsizing their vehicles. Neither of the ladies could confirm. Eileen Sierra said she also thought Macon Resources and the Decatur Park Foundation have a lot of vehicles and if they ever wanted to dispose of those vehicles, they could be transferred to the county and used to provide a service. You could also have a vehicle sharing program so that when one organization's vehicle is parked, the county could use it and vice versa. Then you would need to work out a schedule. With the operating money, you could cover a lot of maintenance costs and repairs. The Decatur Park District has an excellent maintenance program for their vehicles. They have kept some of their vehicles, such as the raised roof vans, on the road for at least 10 years. That is to their credit. Eileen said there are lots of options, but it would be up to the county as to whether they would want to start off small. This particular funding source is only available for a year starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014. You don't have to start on July 1. You could start on January 1 and if it is successful for 6 months, then apply for an entire year. This has not been legislatively dedicated yet, so we are not sure it will be funded, but it stands a good chance of being renewed at the current level or only being reduced by a smaller percentage. It is not on the cutting block the way a lot of other state programs because it is generated through a sales tax and not through property tax. It is not discretionary, so it is much more likely to be renewed. Payments are pretty slow. Each quarter you accrue your expenses and submit them and then you get reimbursed. Mark said the concern in getting this approved by the County Board would be if there were any out of pocket costs, who would administer it and if this is only a temporary, one year grant, is it worth the time and effort especially since the checks are slow in coming from the state. Eileen Sierra said she understood the argument, but the last go around lasted for 5 years. Then there was a 2 year. It has been getting consistently renewed because it has been so successful. Part of the reason they are shortening the timeframe is because of the Federal Transportation Bill which is due to be voted on. Marilyn asked what if instead of using the county, Macon Resources or Easter Seals would be used to do the pickup and delivery of clients. Eileen said that the only problem with that is that it would be client only and not necessarily open to the general public unless they were willing to open it up to the general public. Marilyn asked then if they were willing, how would that affect us. Eileen said that would be fine. It is a not for profit. They would probably want to take the administrative portion for themselves. They would not negatively impact you. There are more ways of creating local match if the county or city takes it on because they already have existing transportation programs, but they do operate vehicles and have drivers. So, if they are willing to take on something like that, it would be great. It is allowed. Marilyn said she just thought that if they were willing, it might be something to look at because they are already established in the community and it would help generate money for them also. Eileen said the only other cautionary note would be that an RFP would have to be done if you go the private route. Eileen said the sooner we can identify how the group / county wants to move forward, the sooner actual numbers such as potential ridership can be generated. There are a lot of different methodologies out there for plugging in numbers and

coming up with a budget. She asked how long the group thought it would take to settle that conversation with the county or the city. Mark said he would like to speak with Bruce about his conversation with Paul to see where they want to go with it. Eileen said the end of April, if at all possible, would be great. She said that if Decatur Public Transit is willing to administer it, they could have a purchase of services that goes to Macon Resources, the Decatur Park Foundation or Easter Seals. That does not really meet the most general public need. Hours of operation seem to be much more limited here. We don't know how much the grey areas are impacted. A follow up survey to see how many people are struggling day to day would be good. Mark said he would also like to see how many could use a late night or shift type ride. There are a lot of businesses in Macon County that operate more than just one shift. He said if we operated outside the normal operating hours, the ridership might go up some. A pilot or trial type thing to see the kind of response received would be good. Buses shut down and cabs are not always cost effective. Eileen suggested some one on one outreach with the businesses to see what the response is. If the businesses are willing to sign up for it, they could do something with their payroll. Mark asked if another round of surveys could be generated to get some general information from some of the employers in the county. Emily said she gets calls from people all the time where they tell her they got a job, but its 3 -11 and even though they can get there on the bus, it costs \$20 to get home in a cab. A beginning worker can't afford that so they end up quitting their job and the unemployment rate goes up. Diane Drew suggested using the small business expo that is coming up May 9 to do some outreach. Emily reminded them that they had talked about Senior Rama at the last meeting and the networking they planned to do there. Eileen said that they are starting to distribute HSTP brochures to the DMV's for people who lose their license. Gary Minich asked Mark if he was going to look into the possibilities with Bruce. Mark said he would. Emily said she had some information Eileen had asked her to send out, but she hadn't been able to get that done. She said she would send it to Jeannie as she got back to the office and requested it be sent out. There was discussion about local employers, such as McDonalds and the number of employees they had and whether they could benefit from the service.

Emily asked Eileen about the numbers Laura had sent for February and if she felt they were getting to the people they need to get to. Eileen said she would prefer a quarterly basis with a quarterly comparison. She asked if there had been a transportation need analysis done by SHOWBUS. She said it is very hard to tell if the numbers are higher than a year ago. A lot of the towns fall in the gray area and Laura says it hasn't been an issue because she has been serving them. Unaccommodated trips are not included and it would be nice to see that information as well. Emily asked that how many denials and how many unaccommodated trips be added to the email to Laura. Mark agreed that they should move to a quarterly report and add some more information to it. Eileen Sierra said the monthly is great too for figuring out where you want to market to. The actual population of the towns would be good information to add too. It would be nice to know how many units are serviced by a service contract. Mark wondered if there would be a possibility of getting the operator a small clicker to keep track of the number of people getting on and off the bus. Emily clarified that they are wanting to know how many people are using the service versus how many times they got off the bus. Eileen agreed that that would be great information. Figures for miles and hours for the vehicles is also not included. Emily asked how often the County is reported to. Mark said they may be utilizing this committee as a report to the county, but there is more information that we would like to see. Eileen said that in the quarterly requisitions to the state, there is a chart that breaks the miles, hours and service contract trip numbers out by county. They are already preparing that, so it could easily be shared here. Mark asked if they were reporting to McLean County. Eileen said yes. Mark said that might

be why Macon County does not get copied since McLean County is administering the grant. It would be nice to get a copy of that. Eileen said that McLean County is the pass through, but SHOWBUS is administering it. Eileen asked if the PCOM (Program Compliance Oversight Monitor) had reached out to them. She said there would be more service reports coming from that because IDOT is requiring the PCOMs to have quarterly reports. They should be coming to this meeting if there's a way to get them on the list.

Eileen asked if drivers were being hired from this area. Emily said no, they come from Chenoa. She reiterated some of the conversation about the St. Mary's contract and how they wondered how the Adult Day Care that starts very early in the morning could be handled. Eileen said that facilities could be rented. Emily said that in prior meetings, facilities that were willing to let them use free of charge were discussed. Mark said the main concern was access. The County facility on Woodford does not have their gates open at the time they would need to gain access. Eileen asked about Sears and Richland. These would be good locations. She said that IDOT may have some money to do an intern program where a mechanic could shadow and learn to do maintenance on the vehicles.

Meeting adjourned at 11:39 a.m.