

Rural Transit Advisory Group

March 25, 2015

Committee Members Present: Leslie Stanberry, Alissa Dozier, Emily Dobson, Andrea Shaffer, Diane Drew, Mark Wicklund

Others Present: SHOWBUS Representative – Laura Dick, Becky Gillen – Health Department, Theresa Churchill – Herald & Review

Visitors: Jack Smith, Macon, IL & Eugene Burns, Macon, IL

Committee Members

Absent: Gary Minich

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 24, 2015 at 2:30 p.m. in Room 514 County Board Room, County Office Building.

Emily Dobson made a motion to approve the minutes from the prior meeting (2/25/15), seconded by Leslie Stanberry and the motion carried 6-0.

Public Comments:

Jack Smith, Macon, IL, said he rides the SHOWBUS which is very nice because he is legally blind and can no longer drive. Once a month he uses it to go to SAIL and bring him home. He said it's a great deal for a person in rural areas. He said his wife would take him, but \$5 for a round trip is cheaper than gas would be and that's not taking the inconvenience of having to wait for him in consideration. He said he also uses it for doctor appointments. Rich Adams from SAIL asked him if there were any problems. He said the only thing was with scheduling, but he realized the bus was not a taxi and getting home when you want to is not always possible because they have other people to drop off or pick up. It has made him late to meetings a couple of times. One time he went to a doctor appointment and got there very early because of when they had to pick up someone else near him. The doctor's office was not busy and he was finished before his appointment time even arrived. He said he called SHOWBUS and eventually they came and got him, but he was stuck for the rest of the day because the driver didn't have time to take him back to Macon right then. That was a drawback. Another time they got him and another person from Macon and took them to SAIL. They got there at 10 a.m. and the meeting started at 1 p.m. There's nothing to do there. You can't walk to get a cup of coffee and it was a long wait. He said one of his neighbors was complaining about getting back and forth. She is an elderly lady that is diabetic who was picked up and during the trip needed to go to the restroom and needed to have a shot. She said they wouldn't stop for her. Mr. Smith said he understands that this is a service that is almost free, actually it is free if you can't afford it and if you have a person helping you, they are definitely free. He said he didn't really have a complaint, but the scheduling just seems odd sometimes. He said he was asked to give his comments and said that sometimes you have to wait longer or not get home right when you want to, but it's a way to get there and a way to get back. He said one time he called and was told they couldn't do what he was asking for the next day, but thought the girl might have just been having a hard day. He said sometimes when he calls, he asks if he can take his bicycle and the driver knew as soon as he gets to the house he opens the back door, puts up the seat and puts it in. After that he could do a lot of things in town and got a ride home from someone else later.

Eugene Burns, also of Macon, reported on a different experience with SHOWBUS. He said he has to go to Cancer Care and Wabash Association on North Water for doctor appointments. He said when he goes for blood work, most of the time it requires fasting. The appointments at Wabash are usually between 7 a.m & 9 a.m. One day, the bus got him there at 8:30 a.m. and he told the driver he'd only be a few minutes and he could take him right back home. The driver told him he couldn't sit and wait because his next appointment was at 10:30 a.m. He said he sat from the time the blood work was done until after 1 p.m. The nurses made comments about him being there so long that they should have shared their lunches with him. Another time when he went to Cancer Care, he was picked up, again after fasting, and he had to go all around town, to Maroa and a couple of other little towns and got home at 4:30 p.m. He said he was on the bus all day long. He said he really appreciates SHOWBUS because he can't get around any other way, but his experience with them makes it seem like they need . . . like the day he went for bloodwork and was out in 15 minutes and the driver's next appointment was at 10:30, he could have taken him back to Macon and still been back by 10:30 for his appointment. He said in February, they had to go to SAIL. They picked them up at 9 a.m., were finished at SAIL by 10 a.m. and there's nothing to do and no place to sit there, but the bus didn't come back until 1 p.m. He said he just doesn't seem to be able to get in, get done, and get back home without having to ride around all day on the bus.

Laura Dick responded by saying she totally sympathized, but didn't think there would be an answer to that until they can get more buses here. Ridership is gradually building. It has grown again this month, but unfortunately there is always a tipping point where you need more riders to justify another bus, but as you have more riders, it becomes more inconvenient for those who are on the bus. Service contracts help a lot. If volume is built up, more buses will be available. Service contracts also bring in revenue that will help pull down more state and federal money. It's basically a budget issue. The county is like a doughnut and routing can be a real challenge.

SHOWBUS Update –

Laura Dick reported that ridership has gone up again. Like everyone else in the state, they are a bit hamstrung in terms of looking at future growth simply because it is not clear what is going to happen with the state. She said they were asked to provide a doomsday budget. She said she has talked to both rural and urban services, and they are all looking at a worst case scenario being a 30% in budget resulting in cuts in service which is not tenable for any of them. She said she didn't think it would be that bad and she thought the legislature would understand that transit cannot be cut by 30% anywhere in the state without it being an extreme hardship. At the same time, it is understood that the state is in a world of hurt. It will be a real challenge for everyone this year to get through it with the least amount of inconvenience for everyone.

Diane Drew asked Laura about if they go to Macon in the morning and then back again in the afternoon and there is just one pick up time a day. Laura said it depends on who all calls in. There are two buses running, but working in the Macon County doughnut so it depends. If there are folks in the north, west, east and south like we do have, then we have to try to balance the needs of everyone in all the quadrants of the county. At this time, most of the time, unless it is close in town, it is a one pick up and a one drop just because we can't do much more than that with just 2 buses. We would have more buses if we got more service contracts. That is what causes the growth in a county. Clinton, which is smaller and more condensed than Macon has at least 3 buses available every day because of their service contracts that help support the 3 buses. Then you can be more convenient and more flexible.

Emily Dobson asked, of the 612 units on the report handed out by Ms. Dick, how many actually represent St. Mary's. Mark Wicklund added that it looks like the majority of them are Decatur area by the number listed as Decatur. Laura said the problem with the Decatur area number is that it includes anything that has a Decatur mailing address. So, it is not just within the city. She said she thought probably 300 or about half of the 612 would be St. Mary's.

Andrea Shaffer asked about the operation of SHOWBUS and wanted to know about when someone is finished with an appointment, do they call the driver or dispatch. Laura explained that they call dispatch. Another thing that makes it much more convenient in other counties is that they can go other places such as out to eat. They can have multiple stops within the city if they wish to go somewhere else while waiting to go home. Unfortunately, in order to do that, we have to have a bus that is able to get there to pick them up, but that is a way that people gain more flexibility. For example, if they get to the city early, they can be dropped at a restaurant and then picked up and taken to their appointment. Andrea wanted to know when they make the loop through the county if it is based on demand. Laura said that as ridership increases more of a firm timeframe can be set. Macon County has not reached that point where there is enough volume to say where we will be at a particular time. At this point, they take people's appointments and put it into a schedule and try to make it as convenient as possible for everyone. The most challenging counties are counties like yours where you've got a doughnut and you're really taking everybody pretty far into the urban area. Until there are more buses running in Macon County, keeping to a firm timeframe would defeat the purpose. Mark Wicklund asked if Laura had a particular number in mind that would get it close to that. Laura said 4 to 5. Four would be very good and would give availability of having 2 to 3 going out and one centered in Decatur to move people around. That is when it gets more convenient, but it still doesn't mean we can take people home long distances, but it does mean we can move people around within Decatur. That is what usually occurs in counties like this such as Kankakee and McLean where they are coming in to a central urban area. Most of the time you see people going to 3 or 4 stops and then going home. Emily Dobson asked how that translated in terms of units. Laura said that at this point, Macon is the smallest county, but it is totally understandable considering Macon is the newest county as well. DeWitt is twice your ridership. Emily asked if that was attributed to service contracts. Laura said yes. There are very large service contracts in DeWitt where they do almost all of the social service transportation. It makes a big difference. Iroquois County is much bigger. They do 150,000 trips a year. Putting that into context, it gives an idea as to how Macon measures up to the other counties. Andrea added that Decatur has Public Transit too where DeWitt does not so they are much more dependent on SHOWBUS whereas Decatur has more options. Laura agreed saying that in one way, it keeps ridership down, but in another way, it gives options. You have a richness of resources, so you have more agencies that are capable of maintaining transportation system which is not true in the other 4 counties. Laura did not think it can be attributed to word of mouth. When you have a concentration of social services in the city, people migrate into the city for services. If you are in a rural county, then the social services tend to move out into the rural area and people are used to being transported in by bus. Emily said that Macon County does have a lot of senior citizens and people who are physically unable or afraid to drive, but she questioned how many of them even know about SHOWBUS. Laura said that the more people see the bus, the more real it is. Advertising can be done, but it's really about seeing the bus every day that really makes the difference. Once you reach a certain visibility, you begin to grow exponentially. Emily said that it's a Catch 22. We aren't doing enough business to see the bus a lot, but if they don't see the bus it's not going to grow. Laura said that is why service contracts are so important. Emily asked if there were any possibilities of any new service contracts. Laura said she put the word out, but they take time to build trust. It can take a matter

of years. She said she just picked one up in another county that they had been doing concentrated talking for 2 years. She said she doesn't push real hard because the social services agencies have to trust that you will be there and treat their clients in an appropriate manner and meet all conditions of the contract. That is a lot of trust for a social service agency.

Andrea said, in taking the two gentlemen that attended the meeting today in consideration, if there were a way where if they finish up early and they know it's going to be a long wait before pickup, if there's a way to coordinate with local agencies such as DMCOOC to transport them somewhere in town like the senior center or a restaurant where the wait might be a little easier and more enjoyable. Laura said she would talk to dispatch. She said she thought they may need to be a little more proactive in reminding them that they can go to multiple stops. That may be a knowledge riders don't have. Leslie added that instead of waiting in a doctor's office or riding the bus around, he could come to the senior center and have lunch, play cards, & visit. Emily added that they could go to McDonalds. Laura agreed and said she was not sure what they were talking about as far as riding around. Leslie said if they could call DMCOOC to drop them off, that would help. Laura said that SHOWBUS can do that too. It is knowledge that is very well known within other counties, but it may be something that dispatch is careful to remind them of. As for riding around on the bus, that is absolutely not allowed. They don't ride the bus for any longer than it takes to get them home. That doesn't mean they'll go a straight route home because sometimes you deviate off to drop other riders off. Drivers are not allowed to pick up people just to have them ride on the bus. Andrea asked about the scheduling and whether it starts in the North and goes a certain way. Laura said there are always two buses so the routes are designed to have people spend the least amount of time on the bus. The route they take depends on the day. Until you get 4 buses, you still have to go with when the appointments are. Leslie asked if both buses are used for the service contract. Laura said both. The beauty of the service contracts is that most of them have set times for pick up and drop off. That leaves an enormous amount of time for the buses to be available for public transit. All service contracts do is begin to finance so we can afford more buses. St. Mary's is scheduled so we always know when we have to do that. There will always be 15 to 20 minutes where we know we cannot do anything except take the service contracts home. Leslie said that if we could get someone to St. Mary's, then we could get them on the bus and they wouldn't be waiting at another point in town. Laura reiterated that service contracts are always scheduled so we are only going to be there at a set time in the morning and a set time in the afternoon and the public transits all fit in in the middle. We run into trouble when people want to go right home, but we do have the option of picking them up at one place and taking them to another and that is on demand. Emily said she would take care of making sure the people that use the SAIL visual services become more aware of that. Laura said she would also have dispatch remind them. She said that once they get on the bus to go home, they always take the most accommodating route home for everybody on the bus getting them off as soon as possible. It can feel like they are on the bus for quite a while. Mark asked if local drivers were being utilized. Laura said there is one local driver and she has just gotten an application from another one. Mark said that seemed like it would be the most efficient because they would know the local routes and drop offs. Laura said they are also mapped out in dispatch. Mark said, as far as visibility of the bus, he always notices them on a daily basis. The problem is that who we are and what we do has limited visibility on the bus. There are so many white buses traveling in Macon County. Unless you know what SHOWBUS does, and it just says SHOWBUS on it, you're not too sure. Every time one is just sitting, it is good advertising, but it would be nice if it had a little bit better advertising on it. Laura said it says SHOWBUS, Public Transportation and has the phone number on it, but if you're not looking for a bus, you don't see it. One of the most successful promotions that happened out west is that they painted all their buses bright red.

That attracted ridership because it looked more like a trolley and more fun. Buses have a negative vibe anyway, but to repaint a bus is a lot of money.

HSTP Update – Emily Dobson reported that there was a meeting last week in Decatur at Macon Resources and it was very well attended. There were quite a few Macon County visitors that came out to see what it's all about.

Part of the news is that the vehicle procurement applications are out after being released last week. Region 8 will review and approve theirs at the Brookens Center in Urbana on May 21st. That is a pretty big meeting where anybody that is applying for vehicles gives their organization information about what they do, what kind of shape their vehicles are in, why they need them, how they coordinate with other groups, etc...

Laura applies through Region 6, but always gives a courtesy presentation to tell us what she is applying for in Region 8.

The next regularly scheduled meeting is on June 18th in Danville at Crosspoint Center. That is the annual meeting with the election of officers and approval of the new plan. They are working really hard in the groups and sub committees on making the plan for how they want to see rural transportation grow and increase, finding & training drivers and mechanics, etc...

Emily assured everyone that they are welcome to attend. All meetings start at 10 a.m.

OTHER UPDATES –

Leslie Stanberry announced that the Senior Center would be having an Older American's Expo on May 19 at the center from 9 a.m. to noon. Anyone interested in having a table since there will not be Senior Rama until September 11 should let her know. Susan Reel, the new Director of the Area Agency on Aging, will be their guest that day. CHEP from the Health Department are cosponsors.

Chair Wicklund announced that after reviewing the by laws and set up on this committee, there is no need for a vote on moving the meeting to quarterly as previously discussed. It was understood that the meetings would be monthly as it got started and then adjust its schedule as needed. He said he thought the plateau has arrived where it would be good to have a quarterly meeting. None of the members had an objection to meeting quarterly rather than monthly. He said he thought he may be able to make some headway on the gray area over the next 3 months. The next meeting was scheduled for June 24th @ 2:30 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS - none

Motion to adjourn was made by Andrea Shaffer, seconded by Emily Dobson, motion carried 6-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Jeannie Durham.