

Rural Transit Advisory Group

September 23, 2015

Committee Members Present: Alissa Dozier, Andrea Shaffer, Diane Drew, Jay Dunn, Leslie Stanberry, Emily Dobson

Others Present: SHOWBUS Representative – Laura Dick, Theresa Churchill – Herald & Review

Committee Members Absent: Becky Gillen, Gary Minich

Next meeting: Wednesday, December 16, 2015 at 2:30 p.m. in Room 514 County Board Room, County Office Building.

Leslie Stanberry made a motion to approve the minutes from the prior meeting (6/24/15), seconded by Diane Drew and the motion carried 6-0.

Public Comments: None

SHOWBUS Update –
Laura Dick distributed reports showing stats.

In terms of funding, no Rural Transit has received executed contracts yet. According to an email from a few days ago, they have decided to expedite it, but even with the contract, it will depend on whether the Comptroller decides to pay bills. There is a lawsuit because Transits are closing. Two have already suspended services. The lawsuit argues that since there is a continuing appropriation with them, we should be allowed to be paid. We don't know what will happen with that. Most are running on lines of credit and hoping they don't run out before something happens on the state level. Ms. Dick said they have not cut back any service. She is being slow to hire and hopes it will be resolved in the next month or two or you will see quite a few Transits on the brink of not being able to continue. The Urbans are in a little better shape because some of their money is federal. Federal money is flowing through the state somewhat. A lot of the attention right now is caught up in the State budget and the impact on services.

In looking at the patterns of service and balancing of service contracts in general public, it has been a concern of this group and Ms. Dick advised keeping an eye on that. The more service contracts you have, the more the general public grows. You never want to say it's a bad idea to have service contracts. They are always a good thing to have. Comparing Macon County with the rest of the system and then comparing it statewide, it is right about what would be seen in percent of general public versus special populations or sponsored rides. That would be something to watch. If the general public rides got down very low it would be a question of concern, but that is not true in Macon County. At the same time, pointing out how statistics can be a bit slippery, probably one of the most successful urban systems downstate has about 95% sponsored ridership and it has to do with the fact that 95% of their riders are all college students and are covered under universal access so they are considered sponsored. You need to look more deeply at that. Rural usually, the sponsored will have to do with special populations that we are required to put a priority on which would be seniors, folks with disabilities, and low income.

Right now, Macon County is just about even with the rest of the counties and right around what statewide, would be a good percent of general public versus sponsored. However, we have to get both of those numbers up. They do work together. They are synergistic.

We are still waiting to see what will or will not be funded in the Capital Program. It is a concern and we are a little worried in looking at surrounding systems and what they are going to do is that transportation comes down to the crunch.

The other thing we are seeing is a little change in service patterns because of a lawsuit that impacted folks with disabilities and their right to choose where they wish to go for services which will mean that they used to be restricted to having to go to the service closest to where they live, but that is no longer true by lawsuit. That is changing our pattern a little as is the breakdown with the Managed Care Organizations and transporting people a little more differently than before for medical services.

Ms. Stanberry said they had an issue come up last month at the Senior Center. She asked if someone has a walker, are they required to fold it away while on the bus. Ms. Shaffer said they do and they usually keep it in the front. It sits right by the stairs because the driver gets out and opens it back up for them. If it's just a cane, they take it with them, but walkers are usually folded up. Ms. Stanberry asked if there were any kind of rules pertaining to this. Ms. Dick said there were none for them. Overall for safety, it is wonderful if you can secure everything and it would be wonderful if everyone felt comfortable doing that. Drivers are told to be very sensitive that if someone does not want to give up something that is a mobility aid. If for some reason, the walker is handed to the driver, then the driver will make sure it is secured so it can't become a flying object. If they have a hold on it, we'll let it go. Ms. Shaffer said they run into people that bring the collapsible shopping carts. They don't take them into stores, but they want them for when they get back to their high rise so they can load their groceries into it. It stays on the bus until they get taken back home and then they put their groceries into it and wheel it into their high rise. Ms. Stanberry explained that it was a city bus incident, but one lady has a basket on her walker where she puts her groceries. In the past, they've let her on the bus and take it back to her seat, but now, all of a sudden, they announced they are not going to do that any longer. Ms. Stanberry was unsure if it was just the one bus or what, but the lady feels she can't ride it any more. Ms. Stanberry said she would call the city, but wanted to check here first and she wondered if there are any rules about it. Everyone felt it was a safety issue. Nobody knew of any requirements. Ms. Dick said that in general, federal terms, they are supposed to be as safe as possible, but if anything, the rules become looser and looser to cover all sorts of contingencies and then it comes down to the agency and what the agency wants to make as a policy. She said they have as few policies as possible, but unfortunately, that puts it on the back of the driver. Ms. Stanberry wondered if the insurance carrier might have something to say about it or if it might just be the one driver. Ms. Shaffer said it might be a time issue around how long it is taking her to get to the back of the bus if the aisles too narrow for the walker. She may be slowing things down and they're trying to stay on schedule. Ms. Stanberry said the lady had been doing it for awhile and this is new. She said she would call the city. She feels like it is a safety issue, but the lady is upset and says she can't ride the bus anymore.

Ms. Shaffer asked Ms. Dick about the service contracts and it that was something they, as members of the Rural Transit Advisory Group, should be soliciting for. Ms. Dick said the committee has talked a lot and all the partners on the committee who have a big potential for service contracts are not interested so she said she has started to go out beyond to see about

service contracts. It is everyone's responsibility in a certain way, but again, a service contract can be a doubled edge sword so you want to be careful. The first priority with service contracts is always to extend them to special populations which are folks with disabilities, seniors, and low income people. Once a solid no is received and it takes a long time to build trust, but if you are responsible for your clients the last thing you want to do is transfer them to another transit provider and then have something awful happen. You just don't want that. After that, we get creative. We do not tend to do service contracts with "for profits". We have done & will do them with hospitals, any kind of health, or governmental entity. Those are the next two big ones looked at. Schools are also a possibility. Then agencies that serve clients that live in this county, but have transportation needs outside of the county are looked at as well. There is a tier that is gone down. That is first serve rural, rural to rural, rural to urban, then urban to rural and urban rural out of county. We make sure always, always serve residents who are rural first. Ms. Drew asked if SHOWBUS has contracts with the MCO's. Ms. Dick confirmed that they do have Medicaid or First Transit and all the MCO's that she knows of. She said she thought Ms. Drew might have one that they don't. She said they have Molina Health Alliance and Medicaid. Ms. Drew said it is My Health Care Connection, but they are a different type of organization. Ms. Dobson added that their consumers are kept on regular Medicaid services, but they manage all the other aspects. Ms. Drew said they are now working with Health Alliance, but agreed that they are different. They (Ms. Drew's organization) actually provide contracts with service providers like Health Alliance and Molina but they do not contract. They do everything themselves. Ms. Dick said she had met with one out of Champaign that just came into the state and is supposed to be for the whole state of Illinois for case management. She said she got very confused. My Health Care is a very big group that includes the Mental Health Board, Heritage, Starting Point and their offices are located there. They cover the entire realm of services that are available, but they seem to focus on the mental health aspect. Ms. Dick said the priorities they look at first are mental health and substance abuse. Those are the two big ones, but it again, is a double edge sword. Once you get on their list they pressure us to serve within Decatur and they have to be reminded that it has to be incidental and cannot interfere with the rural oriented service. Ms. Dobson asked if it would change if a service contract was obtained with one of the mental health organizations such as Heritage. Ms. Dick said a lot of organizations that are already pushed that are in the urban area are not necessarily outreaching to rural because they have their hands full trying to meet urban needs. Usually, SHOWBUS tries to enter into a contract with the understanding that there will be more outreach to rural. They then enter into a contract that acknowledges that their service area will include all of the rural Macon County. That has been a successful way to bring in rural folks to their clinics. That would be the type of contracts that would be written.

Ms. Shaffer asked about schools and tech or vocational students that are out in the county that might participate in those programs. A lot of kids have cars, but there are probably kids that do not do that because they do not have access. Ms. Dick said absolutely and it has been done in other counties. Usually it will tend to be individuals who have a reason to use the bus. They are not able to drive. We can't compete with a car. Unless a designated route is done which is extraordinarily expensive unless you have the buy in from a city or school to do it and then you have to have volume. We will never compete with a yellow bus. We cannot ever have a designated school route. We can do a route that incorporates some amount of school traffic, but we never want to compete or appear to look like we are serving what the yellow bus serves. Ms. Shaffer said she was just wondering because a lot schools have been hit hard with their transportation budget and that could possibly be a run they'd like to get rid of if they are doing one. Ms. Dick said she would throw it to IDOT for a ruling to see if SHOWBUS would be allowed to do it since it's not regular school. We can do after school and there isn't a problem. We do

Boys & Girls Club and things like that, but when it comes to anything that comes close to possibly violating the yellow school bus, Ms. Dick said she would ask for a ruling. Ms. Dozier said she thought Piatt County was doing something similar to that with the school district and picking up some of the children. Ms. Dobson said they pick up the pre-kindergarten students and it's a separate program. Ms. Dick confirmed that that was a different thing. She said she signs a contract saying SHOWBUS will not in any way provide yellow school bus transportation. You can have a route that goes by a school with no problem, but it has to be open to the general public. The kids get on the bus, like in Chicago where they have a lot of public transit of school kids, and they have routes that go by the school. That is allowed. It's just you cannot compete with yellow school bus. Pre-school is a different category. Ms. Drew commented that she thought it would be a nightmare with children that small and safety issues. Ms. Dick said that it is a concern. They do the after school program, but it is not one of the popular routes and they try to be as flexible as possible. In the very rural areas, if SHOWBUS is the only game in town, they will look for some way to help. Macon County is different because it's a nice big city with a whole bunch of service agencies. It's not quite the same as a huge, totally rural county where people are going 30 miles for service. Chair Dunn addressed Ms. Dick saying he is on the Decatur Day Care Center Board and they had some recent issues where the Decatur Public Schools decided they were not going to bus the kids, so Decatur Day Care would take them to school, but then they didn't have any way to get home. He said he thought it had been worked out for this year, but the school is changing the way they're doing business so there is some concern about the kids. He asked if that was something she might be able to assist with. Ms. Dick said if the County's mandate out of the Rural Transit Advisory Group is for SHOWBUS to really look at it, because she agreed that transportation for schools will continue to be a huge problem, she thought that pre-school day care might be something they could look at if it is determined in Macon County that that is a huge need. It certainly came up in Ford County. It would mean that we would have to have different types of vehicles and that would have to be looked at. It opens up new safety issues and we would have to make very certain that we meet all the requirements there. Can it be done? Yes, absolutely. Should it be done? If it is a need that this county determines is one that is up and coming and very important, then it should be presented and looked at to see if it can be met. Every county is unique. Macon Resources does transportation for their clients. They are satisfied at this point to do it, so you don't have to worry about that special population. There might be another population that is coming up that will need to be served instead. Mr. Dunn said he just knew it was creating some issues, especially when the public schools go to some half days and the kids don't have any place to go or transportation to get there. He said he would put Ms. Dick in touch with the lady that runs the day care so she can better explain the situation.

Ms. Stanberry commented that the Mt. Zion numbers look good, but they seem to be up and down.

HSTP Update – Ms. Dobson reported that the Region 8 HSTP Plan that will be updated at the December meeting for the next 3 years is something that is being worked on. The Plan is available on the Region 8 HSTP website. The Statewide plan for independent living and those transportation needs is also being worked on. That plan does involve a lot of groups including HSTP. Some broader based goals are being looked at for the next 3 years for people living out in the community with disabilities.

The next Region 8 meeting is December 10 at 10 a.m. at Macon Resources. That is the meeting where the plan is reviewed and updated and it will be held right here in Decatur, IL. Last time the

meeting was in Decatur, there was a huge turnout. A lot of people that can't go out of town came. People interested in Veteran's Transportation were there. Everybody is welcome.

OTHER UPDATES – Chair Dunn asked if anyone had any information on the gray area. Ms. Dobson said they have heard nothing, but it still is an issue that needs to be addressed. Mr. Wicklund had been looking into it. Chair Dunn said he would contact Mr. Wicklund.

Since Mr. Paul McChancey retired, John Williams has been hired. Mr. Dunn said he would like to be sure Mr. Williams is aware of these meetings. Ms. Joselyn Stewart had previously sent his contact information to the County Board Office and he has already been added to the distribution list for the Rural Transit Group.

NEW BUSINESS –

Chair Dunn announced that the next meeting is scheduled for December 23rd and questioned the group about possibly adjusting the date because of the holiday. He commented that if the group does not meet in December, it will be 6 months between meetings. The meeting was changed to December 16th @ 2:30 p.m.

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

Minutes submitted by Jeannie Durham.