

**TOMPKINS CONSOLIDATED AREA TRANSIT, INC.**  
**SPECIAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

Wednesday, October 7, 2015  
4:00 PM TCAT Conference Room  
737 Willow Avenue, Ithaca, NY

Attendees: F. Proto, B. Brady, J. Dotson, B. Gray, K. Page, P. Stein, D. Howe

S. Brock, A. Eccleston, R. Andrascik, N. Oltz, P. Poist,  
D. Tome, D. Swarts, M. Yarrow, T. Wright, and S. Persons Recording Secretary

Also Attended: M. Smith, S. Douglas, D. Mengel, F. de Aragón, G. Creemens, J. Maddison, K. Halton, S. Beckley

**Agenda**

**I. Call to Order**

F. Proto called the meeting to order at 4:04 PM, and welcomed everyone to the October 7, 2015 TCAT, Inc. Special Board of Directors Meeting.

**II. Chairperson's Report**

F. Proto reported that the HR Committee meeting will be postponed from tomorrow and will be rescheduled to another day and time.

**III. General Manager's Report**

**• Bus Operator / Mechanic / Equipment Shortage –**

A. Eccleston stated first and foremost she wanted to thank the board members for the quick request and willingness to come here this afternoon because this is a very important topic for us to talk about. She stated she also appreciates the public for being here as well as the staff. She stated she wanted to acknowledge specific staff who worked on a taskforce; we have been working on our proposal for a number of weeks. We have a very difficult time facing us here at TCAT, she stated she really appreciates all the hard work that all of these individuals have put forth, P. Poist, R. Andrascik, N. Oltz, D. Tome, D. Swarts, M. Yarrow, R. Davis all participated on the taskforce team and coming up with ideas, suggestions and recommendations. We also did a staff meeting early on and many of the staff put forth great ideas, J. Anderson, S. Persons, M. Smith, P. Smith, S. Douglas, E. Rabenstein, J. Jennings, I really truly appreciate all the time and effort that these individuals put into what you are going to hear today. Also special thanks to the UAW, I went to them and asked for their assistance, their help and they put together a team of bus operators to give me that bus operator perspective as well, I want to acknowledge Terry Sharpe Local 2300 President, bus operators Glenda Wright, Sara Cuddeback, Patrick Naughton, Shawn Kelley and Wayne Buisch, they provided a lot of good insight, good information with regard to what their thoughts and suggestions were.

A. Eccleston reported on the current state of TCAT, low staffing levels in bus operators and maintenance and equipment shortages, the options explored by staff and the employees, staff and employee recommendations and where do we go from here.

A. Eccleston stated that we are down 10 bus operator positions, 3 positions in maintenance and 2 positions in the administrative staff, and in August 2015 we had 37 missed trips due to driver and bus shortage and equipment failure. Our fall service that we put out in August requires 82 operators to operate that service, 67 actual work assignments and 15 assignments that are used for covering open work, such as people that are on vacation, calling out sick, personal time, we need those operators to cover the 7 days a week of service that we have. Where are we today, full time operators, we have 73 operators, of those only 66 are available right now, we can't even deliver the work assignments, let alone cover any open work. A. Eccleston reported on the number of bus operators vs. 12 month moving average ridership and the number of bus operators vs. revenue hours per driver. She reported on contributing factors including attrition because of retirements, relocations, taking other local jobs, don't like the hours. The average age of our workforce is 50 years, a large number of our drivers are in the 50 – 65 groups, and we're looking at a lot of retirements in the future. One of the reasons people are leaving is because of the hours they work, too many hours, if we look at their spread time, from the time they walk in the door until the time they go home, there are 30 assignments that the operators are here over and above what their work is, their days are long, it is because of the heavy commuter service that we provide the community and because of that these spreads are longer. This is one of the things that our operators are complaining about, the amount of hours they are sitting at TCAT and driving at TCAT, too long, they don't get to see their families, they spend too many hours here, and they need to be able to have a balance with their work/life.

A. Eccleston reported some of the other contributing factors include the length of the recruitment cycle is 21 to 23 weeks to fill a position from posting to getting out on their first assignment, we thought we were going to be well positioned this summer, we went through a couple recruitments and hired 8 people thinking we would be well positioned for fall, but the attrition outpaced the hiring and because it is so long of a cycle we can't play catch up. Low recruiting pools which is a local and nationwide issue, we've expanded our searches and are trying new options. Operators are working on their days off, they don't want to work on their days off they want their time off; we're mandating them to get the service covered so there is no balance of work life/personal life. We have built in overtime due to low staffing and limited ability to take time off from work. A. Eccleston reported that the fleet is the other issue, we have 49 12 year buses, 3 7 year buses and the average fleet age is 9.4 years. We have 16 replacements overdue now, 12 more buses due in 2018 and 3 more in 2019 and it takes 18 months to build a bus. Getting buses takes time; the estimated replacement cost right now is \$425,000. She reported on the current fleet status, including the number of miles traveled, replacement of engines and transmissions, winter corrosion, and the cost of maintaining an older fleet.

A. Eccleston stated options explored by staff/employees included reduction in service which requires public meetings and run cut and takes about 33 weeks. The second item talked about was discontinuing Sunday service and re-do bus operator work assignments, re-bid assignments and do media blitz. Third option was not to mandate the bus operators, just don't run that service, we feel that we have a 2 day lead time to let the community know. Fourth option was to team up with the school district to share resources and recruitment efforts, we had a meeting with them and there is a lot of enthusiasm and we talked about doing some shared recruitment also we talked about maybe using some drivers as casual drivers, it's not the silver bullet it's not going to help but it is an option. Fifth option was contract our subset of service, carve out some service and give it to contractors. We also talked about incentive package to increase candidate pool, how do we draw more people to TCAT; we talked about a sign on bonus to encourage CDL drivers to apply. We also talked about for those operators that have to work on their day off give them a premium pay, if they work the day off they get time and a half but maybe give them two times their pay just to recognize we appreciate them coming in to help out. We are talking about ramping up recruiting efforts, career fair, job fairs, we're doing that. Other options discussed were to use part time or casual drivers, or contract bus operators to get us over this hump until we can get replacement bus operators.

A. Eccleston stated of these options, we pared it down and came up with our recommendations to present to the board. One, discontinue Sunday service pros include bus operators get Sunday off, reduces the mandating and working on days off, saves us 4 full time equivalents, and opens up the ability to take time off. Cons include the community loses needed service; we know that, we know that Sunday service is important, we know it will impact those individuals. The other option, contract drivers, hire 8-10 drivers to supplement the workforce on a short term basis. Pros include it gives our bus operators relief, reduces mandating and not working on a day off, unless the operator signs up for extra work, opens up the ability to take time off, and quick onboarding of contract drivers, they do ramp up fairly quickly just because this is what they are used to. Cons include they are not TCAT bus operators and it is a costly thing for us to do.

A. Eccleston stated we are ramping up recruitment; we are doing a job fair at Green Street Station, we will be down there on October 15<sup>th</sup>, October 20<sup>th</sup>, and October 21<sup>st</sup> we are going to be there at different times of the day to try to catch people depending on their work schedules, we are increasing our advertisement and postings. We are recommending that we implement a sign on bonus; particularly we would like to see qualified CDL drivers, people with the proper endorsement, we're recommending \$2,500 paid out in 120 days, and for people with CDL without the proper endorsements or a class D license we are recommending \$1,000 paid out in 120 days. We are also recommending to pay the bus operators a premium for working on their days off during low staffing situations, we would need to build the criteria for this, but it would be recognizing the employees for the over and above that they have been doing. Discussion followed.

P. Stein asked so you're not suggesting that we do contract drivers at all correct.

A. Eccleston stated that is on the table, we have one of two choices, contract drivers or eliminate Sunday service; in addition to those these are what we are proposing. The recruitment cycle is way too long, we have a critical issue now, people are going to walk out the door, so we have to one take action and two recruit.

J. Dotson stated the only one of those that would be quicker is the premium pay for working on their day off.

A. Eccleston stated and with the frustration levels right now, I don't think that's going to help, it's beyond that, I don't know if money is the solution.

J. Dotson stated she wanted to ask one more question about the contract costs, I just want to understand what we would be paying based on this, so \$388,000 for the 3 month contract and if we could instantly hire 10 drivers that would be \$136,000, and if we were to fill the same number of hours with overtime it would be \$130,000 or is that fewer hours of overtime. I'm trying to figure out why hiring drivers and paying overtime look to be so close.

R. Andrascik stated I took the last 8 weeks of overtime to see how high it is, and then over and above the 141 hours we have built into the weekly schedule.

J. Dotson the \$130,000 that 3 months of overtime represents that doesn't cover our needs.

R. Andrascik stated that's what we paid in the last 8 weeks additional over budget.

K. Page stated it's covering our needs but it is not healthy.

A. Eccleston stated and people don't want to do it anymore. An operator came up to the window this morning was told he was mandated for Friday and said I'm done with this. That's what we have, and

I'm sad to see that we are at this critical place but the more people that say I'm done and walk; we can't put the service on the streets.

D. Howe stated I think there should be a retention solution as well, for people that have taken on the extra effort, at the end of the 3 months a sum that is awarded for helping be a part of this solution.

P. Stein stated so what are you recommending.

A. Eccleston stated we are recommending discontinue Sunday service or hire 10 contract drivers for immediate relief for our workforce now.

S. Brock stated so if you discontinue Sunday service you save 4 FTE's but you're down 10, you'll still be mandating people.

A. Eccleston stated yes it will not be 100% relief, but it gives the employee a day off, a weekend day off to be with family so there is some trade off there. Discussion followed.

B. Gray stated this is the year when we have flexibility, it means things in later years because the fund balance would not have grown by the money that we have projected, this money is the fuel savings basically this year, \$1.00 a gallon, 400,000 gallons, \$400,000. The only caveat I don't think three months is going to do it. The whole thing if this really is a national problem, certainly statewide, Syracuse is having this problem, the school districts are having this problem, Cornell in a smaller way is having a problem keeping its buses on the road, I can't imagine that even if you put all those things in place, society is going to respond within 3 months and all of a sudden you'll have a pool. This may be something you want to do, we can't do this to the drivers, you budgeted 140 hours in overtime and we're operating at six times that. For anybody there's a point at which money has no value, you're family has value, you're life has value money is what you get to live your life. In response to the three months you have to start somewhere, you have to give the drivers relief. This is a very unusual year and unusual activity like this we can do that, but within a month or a month and a half we have to have it projected out because I don't think it will be three months so you need to make the decision about Sunday, possibly cutting that, doing the run cut to change the service level. Like not having buses, if you can't get the drivers then whatever you offer this problem won't go away as fast as we'd like it to.

A. Eccleston stated we are looking at a really quick fix, to your point we have to look down the road, we have to make some hard decisions about what TCAT is and what TCAT will be knowing what challenges we have as an organization. What should TCAT service really look like, how do we develop a sustainable balance between the level of service we provide and the resources available. This is a longer term discussion.

B. Brady stated the three month contractors is a pressure valve, and I've experienced this with Campus to Campus, it's costly however if it will give us time to make the difficult decisions. Discussion followed.

S. Brock stated she wrote out a draft motion, this is my sense and you can take out pieces of it. Motion to approve a contract with National Tour to provide contract bus operators at a cost that does not exceed that quoted in National Tours October 6, 2015 draft proposal with an initial contract term of three months and an option or options exercisable by TCAT to extend the contract for up to three additional months.

D. Tome stated the quote that we received from National Tour is what we have received to this point; there are two other parties that are interested in providing the service to TCAT.

S. Brock stated maybe it is too soon to vote on any of them, you might want to see all of the proposals and then select one.

K. Page stated can we at least vote on doing contract drivers or cutting Sunday service.

D. Howe stated I think we can vote on doing contract drivers without a vendor.

S. Brock stated yes but you have no idea what the costs are, what the length of time it.

D. Howe stated we have the numbers from one of them.

D. Tome stated you can use National Tours as your benchmark.

S. Brock stated but if you do that, then the others will see that you have approved up to this amount of money and that might be disincentive for them to give you a better price. I don't know I just feel like it's not a very good idea.

F. Proto asked how about if we get a sense of the body that the preferred option is to hire contract drivers, is that possible to do without putting a number in there.

S. Brock stated sure, and this board can meet by telephone and you do not have to pull everyone together and you just need five, so once you get all the quotes in and evaluate which, the board can then select the vendor. The question is how fast you are going to get the quotes in.

B. Brady left the meeting.

D. Tome stated tomorrow, it's not a long drawn out process.

F. Proto stated what about the other pieces, like studying the premium.

S. Brock stated I was just trying to get this piece before Bridgette walked out the door, I didn't realize we had other vendors finally responding.

B. Gray stated in my contracting life I'd have adopted a budget and set a number, it does have the problem that Susan is talking about because they know that there is a dollar amount available but the advantage is they are still competing among themselves and you have the ability to go ahead, administrative staff can enter into a contract because it's within the budget you set. In this case, if we can meet by phone, I think you can let this go and my feeling is we should do this, the drivers need relief and they need to know we're doing something. I just have the feeling this is going to create its own set of problems but at least it will get the relief in place and if you can come back at our regularly scheduled meeting after the committee has had a chance to meet and HR committee can say this is what we'd like to implement know and in two weeks we can also start doing some of the other things. That should give us the breathing room to sit down and talk about what's sustainable. Discussion followed.

S. Brock stated it sounds like the board will need to reconvene by phone or in person again this week. Discussion followed. A Special Board Meeting was scheduled for Friday October 9, 2015 at 1:00pm.

F. Proto provided an update on the proposed revisions to the budget. He stated he wanted to be prepared to go to the City on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and present an alternative to them, knowing that the County and perhaps Cornell would be warm to a lesser dollar amount and assume that the \$51,000 looked

palatable to some of the County members, that's more or less what we wanted to go to the City with. Discussion followed.

#### **IV. Executive Session**

F. Proto asked for a motion to enter into executive session to discuss personnel matters. The motion was made by D. Howe; seconded by P. Stein. The motion passed. The Board entered into Executive Session at 5:32 PM. The Board arose from Executive Session at 5:52 PM. No action was taken.

#### **V. Adjournment**

The motion to recess the meeting until Friday October 9, 2015 at 1:00pm was made by D. Howe; and seconded by B. Gray. The meeting adjourned at 5:52 PM.