

Riders' Advisory and Accessibility Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 10, 2022

ATTENDEES: Jeff Boles, Suzanne Burnham, Blaine Friedlander, Vanessa Greenlee, Jenn Jennings (TCAT), Patty Poist (TCAT), Megan Pulver (TCAT), Ed Swayze, Carlene (Jett) Swick, Denise Thompson (TCAT Board of Directors), Scot Vanderpool (TCAT), Theodora Weatherby, Julie Weaver, Kristen Wells (Gadabout)

APOLOGIES: None

MEETING HANDOUTS: None – Virtual meeting via Zoom

Meeting called to order by Patty Poist at 4:34 pm

General Manager's Report (Scot Vanderpool):

Ridership: Ridership is sitting at around 75% of where we were at this time in 2020. Cornell having in-person learning has made a big difference. Campus circulators (routes 81, 82, 83, 90, and 92) have accounted for about 65% of our total service.

Operations and Maintenance: There were 8 road call in October. TCAT's preventative maintenance number are down slightly.

Missed Trips: The number of missed trips was down at the end of 2021 but there have been an unusually high number of missed trips due to a driver shortage and yesterday (January 9) 7-8 trips were missed due to poor road conditions.

The driver shortage is largely due to COVID. Several drivers have been out with symptoms, but that does not necessarily mean they tested positive. Getting tested and out waiting for COVID test results to come back can take days. On one particular day last week, there were nine drivers were out for that reason alone.

This is a problem for transit systems nationwide. Many transit agencies have had to severely cut their service. TCAT has not had to drastically reduce service and has come up with a plan B for days when there is a shortage of drivers. If and when we are forced to cut service due to a shortage of drivers, the marketing department will post the reduced service on the website to let riders know what to expect in advance.

We have identified some specific service that we think we are able to cut. It is not perfect but it allows us to have a plan in place in case we do not have the drivers or a way to let the public know what is going on with our service. We know that this is going on across the country and is something that we will inevitably face.

Safety: TCAT had seven collisions in October, two in November, and four in December. No injuries resulted from any of these collisions. Two of these were bus and deer related and both occurred in the same place on Route 96 at Jacksonville Road.

Phil Smith, Safety Manager reported to Scot that there were a total of 48 accidents and incidents in 2021. This is the lowest yearly total of accidents in TCAT history if we exclude 2020 when service was severely cut due to the pandemic.

Human Resources: As of October 31, TCAT has 74 full-time operators. The number of operators has remained fairly steady, largely due to TCAT's retention efforts. Again, the driver shortage is mainly to due to drivers being out due to COVID related issues.

HR is working on protocols including weekly testing for TCAT employees who are not vaccinated. This is mandated for places with over 100 employees. We are working with Cayuga Health Services to get these protocols in place and testing for employees will begin soon. CHS will have a courier service bring test kits to TCAT. TCAT is not going to require employees to buy their own test kits.

Vanessa Greenlee asked how many employees TCAT has. Patty Poist responded that TCAT has roughly 130 employees in total.

Swiftly

TCAT has also contracted with a company called Swiftly. Swiftly is a transit data platform that will provide TCAT with more accurate, reliable, data. For those who use apps to track their bus's location and estimated arrival / departure times, the predictions are about to get a lot more accurate. This will provide more accurate information and a better experience for our riders, which is very important.

Public Hearing: On January 27 TCAT will hold a public hearing as part of the TCAT Board of Directors meeting. The hearing was advertised in a legal ad and on signs in the buses. The public hearing will give the public the opportunity to respond to major service reductions that are part of the Transit Development Plan (TDP). Every time there is a substantial reduction in service, TCAT is required to hold a public hearing.

The hearing is regarding routes 36, 37, and 30. Route 36 will end at the Lansing Schools instead of going out to Ludlowville and the fire station #3. Route 37 will end at the Lansing Town Hall and will not continue to the North Lansing fire station #4. This has already happened due to COVID reductions but this will be a permanent reduction.

Route 30 will no longer serve Highland, The Parkway, and Northway in the Village of Cayuga Heights. TCAT is proposing that route 83 be rerouted to serve Highland, Lakeland apartments, and some fraternities and sororities along that stretch of road.

Matt Yarrow, TCAT Assistant GM, reached out to the Village of Cayuga Heights to let them know about the changes and some residents have responded with their concerns about buses traveling on White Park Road. TCAT has had issues with Cayuga Heights in the past about buses running through the village. During the last TDP residents did not want buses on Northway.

The TDP is finally wrapped up and the final recommendations have been posted on the TCAT website. The TDP will be implemented in phases and will not occur all at once. These changes have already been implemented on a temporary basis and TCAT is moving to make them permanent.

The hearing will be at the January 27th board meeting and TCAT hopes to finalize it with a vote at the February 24th BOD meeting. Patty reiterated that TDPs are something that transit agencies do every ten years to help grow and improve their service. While not required by the FTA, TDPs are a best practice and the FTA likes to see transit agencies review their systems in this way. Patty went on to say that the consultants, Sam Schwartz, did a thorough job and the report is well written.

Demand Response: Scot raised the issue of demand service. Demand service is something that TCAT is thinking about as another option in case of driver shortages. TCAT has been reaching out to other agencies who provide demand service to find out what the cost would be and what it would look like. The service provided might outweigh the cost. The cost covers driver wages and benefits, maintenance, fuel, and parts. TCAT is going to try to weigh out the true cost and benefits for TCAT.

Scot stressed the need to think outside of the box. When resources are lacking, we have to figure out how to provide service to the public so they have options to get them where they need to go. TCAT is trying to look ahead and think about all of the options.

Good News: Jeff Boles, TCAT Advisory member and Advocacy Specialist at Finger Lakes Independence Center, was recently featured in an article in Tompkins Weekly! Jeff is a longtime volunteer assistant baseball coach in Lansing. The Lansing Parks and Recreation Department recently honored Jeff by naming one of the baseball fields after him. In the article, former Lansing coach Stuart Dean is quoted as saying Jeff is “a Lansing treasure, and he’s inspirational not only to me as a coach but the players he interacts with,” Dean went on to say “He’s dedicated his life to athletics in Lansing, so it’s impressive that they named the field after him.” That is quite an honor, congratulations Jeff! Read the article here: <https://www.tompkinsweekly.com/articles/baseball-field-named-after-volunteer-coach-jeff-boles/>

Transportation Equity Task Force: Vanessa had asked about a program called the Transportation Equity Task Force, which is under the auspices of Cornell Cooperative Extension. Megan Pulver, TCAT Project Manager is instrumental in this group and joined the meeting to speak about it.

Megan explained that the task force, rebranded as the Transportation Equity Coalition, is relatively new and started out as a group of interested individuals working to develop something a bit more formalized. As such, there has not been much public information put out yet, but there will soon be a website with information about the group’s goals, initiatives, and how to get involved.

The coalition was formed by a group of people who work in or around transportation in the community, meeting to gather ideas and organize thoughts around how we can meaningfully address transportation inequities in the county and surrounding areas.

Currently there are representatives from TCAT, Gadabout, Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Way2Go Program, Bike Walk Tompkins, Center for Community Transportation (Ithaca Carshare), Downtown Ithaca Alliance, Go Ithaca, Tompkins County Department of Social Services, and Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council (ITCTC).

There will be more information coming out soon about what the coalition is up to and how to get involved. In early 2022 the coalition will focus on finding a consultant to help conduct a

community transportation needs assessment. This will include in-depth survey work, focus groups, and public outreach as well as assessing strengths and weaknesses of the current transportation system and surveying underserved communities. The coalition has defined underserved communities as: black, indigenous, people of color, people with limited income, seniors, youth, people with disabilities, those without access to a vehicle, people with limited English proficiencies, and those living in rural areas.

CCE and Way2Go are going to be taking the lead on the needs assessment portion of the process. They are working on putting out an RFP for a consultant and they are also working on putting together an informational website. Megan will share the web address once it is available.

Jeff expressed his interest in joining the coalition, stressing the importance of having FLIC represented on the coalition. Vanessa expressed interest in helping to get the word out, once it is time. Megan will let everyone know when more information is available.

Scot has been on the coalition since the beginning and added that the original intent was to get the right people in the room and to give people a voice to let us know what we can do to help. Once we identify what the need is, we can advocate for resources and funding to help these folks.

The coalition came out of a \$10,000 grant that TCAT received from the Park Foundation to do this research and build a website. It is great to meet and connect with all of the community members involved in this program. Megan affirmed that in the next few months there will be more information as things get formalized and posted on the web.

Patty pointed out that the coalition dovetails nicely with TCAT's transit development plan, whose aim is also to make sure that disadvantaged populations are well served. There are LES populations in our county and we need to make sure that those folks have access to our information in other languages.

Every three years TCAT is reviewed by the FTA for compliance. Civil Rights is one of the areas they look at to ensure that we are serving all populations with equity and equality in mind.

Dwight Mengel was going to speak about the civil rights program but was unable to attend the meeting. Bruce Babcock also had some issues to address but was also unable to attend. These items will be tabled until our next meeting.

Meeting Adjourned at 5:05 PM

Next meeting March 8, 2022 at 4:30pm