



Riders' Advisory and Accessibility Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 10, 2021

ATTENDEES: Bruce Babcock, Kerry Barnes, Jeff Boles, Suzanne Burnham, Patty Poist (TCAT), Ed Swayze, Carlene (Jett) Swick, Scot Vanderpool (TCAT), Theodora Weatherby, Julie Weaver, Kristen Wells (Gadabout), Matt Yarrow (TCAT)

APOLOGIES: Jenn Jennings (TCAT)

MEETING HANDOUTS: None

Meeting called to order by Patty Poist at 4:35 pm

Minutes: Minutes approved.

GM Report / February System report – Scot Vanderpool

Ridership: Ridership increased 18.7% from February to March. TCAT carried 111,000 riders in February and just over 132,000 riders in March. Comparing February ridership with October 2020 numbers, Ridership has grown nearly 20% since the Fall of 2020. There are many unknown factors and it is difficult to determine where we are heading or how quickly we will return to 2019 ridership when we had over 4 million rides.

Operations: On March 10, there were 3 missed trips on route 10.

Maintenance: PM (preventative maintenance) service is currently at 100%. There were 8 road calls in February and 14 in March. TCAT is going to start analyzing on-time performance because it is important. Less than 5 minutes late or less than 1 minute early is considered on-time. The bus should never leave early and beyond 5 minutes is considered late.

Safety: There were 4 collisions in February and 1 in March. The collision in March was determined to be non-preventable and involved a dog, but happily the dog was unharmed. The number of collisions this year is comparable to last year; there were 12 collisions through March of 2020 and 11 this year.

A primary focus for the safety department has been training. Especially with new battery electric buses, there was First Responder Training on March 25 & 26. The training prepares Police, fire, and rescue agencies in the county to respond if something happened with the charging units in the garage. In total, 21 agencies have participated in the training at TCAT.

TCAT has designated and trained 6 individuals at TCAT to provide training to everyone else at TCAT. Each trainer underwent 16 hours of training on March 30 & 31. All but a few bus operators have received the 4 hour training required to operate the new electric buses.

Human Resources: TCAT currently has 76 full-time operators. Overall, there are currently 134 total employees at TCAT. Last year at this time there were 141 total employees. Patty Poist added that those losses were due to attrition.

TCAT has switched over to Paycom, a new payroll system. HR has been handling the transition over the past 3-4 months, but everything is set up and it is working out fairly well so far.

Scot thanked Patty for her preparation and work on the Earth Day event.

Battery-Electric buses – Scot Vanderpool

People often ask how the electric buses handle the hills and the cold weather. According to Proterra, one of the biggest questions is, how far can an electric bus go on a charge? Proterra claims, that on optimal terrain, their bus can get up to 235 miles on a single charge. Because of the hills and the cold weather, our buses will probably get closer to 150 miles on a charge.

Another question we are asked is, what routes are the electric buses going to be put on? TCAT would like to try to get them on as many routes as possible. The dispatchers have been putting them randomly on various routes. TCAT has not taken into consideration the terrain of that route. TCAT has kept track of the bus and will bring it back to the garage when the charge gets down to about 30%.

Julie Weaver asked if TCAT was going to put signs on the electric buses telling people how to let the driver know they would like the bus to stop. The older buses have signs indicating that riders should pull the cord to request driver to stop. Suzanne Burnham and Jeff Boles agreed with this suggestion.

There are USB charging ports at all seat locations and wifi on all of the buses. Each bus costs about \$954K. Parts are about 30% less. The chargers cost \$60K. We are still trying to meet our goal of being an all-electric fleet by 2035. 7 of our current 53 buses are electric, making TCAT the transit system with the highest percentage (13%) of battery-electric buses in the state.

Scot is often asked if having a 100% electric fleet by 2035 is a realistic goal. Due to the changes in the federal administration and in New York State as well, there are many incentives and a lot of encouragement to move towards electricity. Scot believes that TCAT has a good chance of being able to hit this target. Suzanne Burnham said that TCAT should be very proud of this milestone.

Summer Service – Matt Yarrow

Rural service will remain much like it is now.

Detours: There are several impactful detours but instead of having detours to routes, the routing will just be changed for the summer. These detours include:

1. Aurora St / Restaurant Row: Affects routes 11 & 65, E
2. Dwyer Dam Rebuild on Hoy Road: Affects 32 & 82
3. College Avenue: Affects 10, 30 & 51

Route 31 /41: TCAT has decided to combine routes 31 & 41 this summer to see how it goes. The TDP consultants thought that route 41 could be run as a fixed route and since it shares a geographical similarity with route 31, they were combined. The route will terminate on campus, so those wanting to continue downtown will need to transfer. This will offer more service and clarity, especially in the 41 DAR zone. This is a dry run to see whether we want to continue with this configuration in the future or if it is lacking, either operationally or through rider feedback.

TCAT is working with the Tconnect Team to start a Gadabout-operated Tconnect service in Dryden starting in July. The service will interface with TCAT route 43, similar to route 77, but will be operated by Gadabout. TCAT will be putting out more information closer to the launch of the service.

The concept is that Tconnect is an on-demand service that is flexible enough to be operated by TCAT or others. The original concept was that if we could leverage Gadabout's resources to do this, it would keep the cost lower overall. Gadabout's vehicles are smaller, which is optimal for on-demand service. Riders within the service area can request a ride using an app or by calling into dispatch. They can get a ride to destinations within the service area or to connect with a TCAT bus. Tconnect route 77 is operated by TCAT buses and drivers.

Ed asked if this service was the same as route 41. Matt explained that this model leverages technology and operates in real-time, making it more of an on-demand service than demand-response. Jeff offered to relay information about Tconnect in the FLIC newsletter.

Route 22 Park Service is back. Weekday service will start on June 28. Weekday service is configured to help the Ithaca Youth Bureau camp. There is now a camp in Ulysses. In order to accommodate them, there are now 2 trips per day that go beyond Taughannock, past the Falls Overlook to Trumansburg. Matt is interested to see if people from Trumansburg will take advantage of this service to get to Taughannock Falls overlook and Park.

Bruce Babcock asked which road the bus will use to get from Taughannock Park to Trumansburg. The bus will take Taughannock Park Road (which turns into Rabbit Run Road on the other side of route 96) and then take route 96 to Trumansburg where it will turn around at the farmers market.

Saturday & Sunday trips start at the beginning of Summer Service and will also provide service to Buttermilk and Treman. An additional perk, is that by taking the bus to the park, you do not have to pay to enter the park, which makes taking the bus an inexpensive, fun, option.

Summer service is slightly slimmer than years past, with very little night service. Night service was cut in response to COVID so as not to encourage partying. TCAT is looking to restore late-night service in the fall.

TCAT to Trails

TCAT has been working with a group of Design Connect students from Cornell and Ithaca Trails Club to get information about taking TCAT to hiking trails. The goal is to get trailheads, and information about hiking and recreation on TCAT bus maps. The group would also like to add TCAT bus route information to the maps on the Ithaca Trails website. The group is also looking at getting wayfinding signs posted to help direct people from the bus stop to trailhead. These signs are temporary but if riders find this useful, TCAT may look into more permanent signage.

On Saturday and Sunday, the first outbound trip that goes to Enfield (route 20) now has a demand stop at the Upper Entrance to Treman State Park. This allows hikers to take a one-direction hike down through Treman, where they can catch the route 67 by the bridge over Enfield Creek. This is a great way to do a one-way, downhill hike, and to use the bus in both directions. This information is on the TCAT schedules.

Transit Development Plan (TDP) Phase 2

Phase 2 will be starting this month. TCAT expected to be in the middle of the spring public engagement by this point, but looking at the proposed recommendations on where routes go, the span and frequency of service, and how those routes interact together as a network takes time. The process involves going back and forth to make sure that everyone believes that what we are proposing is an improvement. This process has takes time, but TCAT is almost there.

On Wednesday, May 26th TCAT will kick off the second public engagement period with a virtual open house to unveil and discuss the proposed recommendations and system redesign. There will be 4 Transit Ambassadors who will participate in TCAT events and also network with people out in the real world.

The TDP proposals will be available online using a program called Remix. Remix displays the route maps and includes interactive features which allow the public to leave comments directly on the maps. Use this feature to let TCAT know what you do and do not like about the proposal. There will be more information about how to find these maps and how to use the features.

After the public engagement period is complete (late May through the end of June), the information gathered from the public will be reviewed and TCAT will try to accommodate requests and make changes in final plan. Sam Schwartz Consultants will draw up the final plan which will then go to the TCAT Board of Directors for approval.

Once approved, TCAT will begin to implement changes and make sure the public is aware of what changes are happening and when. Hopefully the changes will be seen as a net positive, because that is the intention.

Jeff added that TCAT should also make sure that the information is as accessible as possible. Matt responded that TCAT does not have much control over the Remix platform, but that the information would be available in other formats. Matt noted that infrastructure is also a

component of the TDP. TCAT is aware that much needs to be done in order to make all of the stops ADA accessible. This is something that we are working on by gathering information on stops and prioritizing them for receiving landing pads. Not every stop needs a shelter – they are important at high-ridership stops, but even stops with fairly low ridership should have a concrete pad to give people a safe place to board and disembark the bus.

Suzanne Burnham asked how TCAT will get the word out about the open houses. Patty affirmed that TCAT will be hanging signs on buses and at bus stops, posting information on social media and listserves, and making announcements through press releases and traditional media.

Free bus passes for committee members

Patty reminded that committee that all committee members are eligible for free bus passes in appreciation for giving your valuable time and helping us to get the word out. Let Patty know when your pass is expiring along with your card or fob number so that your passes can be kept current.

Meeting Adjourned at 5:25 PM