



## **Riders' Advisory and Accessibility Committee**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, January 11, 2021**

**ATTENDEES:** Jeff Boles, Tom Clavel (TCAT), Roderick Cort, Blaine Friedlander, Jenn Jennings (TCAT), Dwight Mengel, Patty Poist (TCAT), Larry Roberts, Ed Swayze, Carlene (Jett) Swick, Denise Thompson (TCAT Board of Directors), Scot Vanderpool (TCAT), Theodora Weatherby, Julie Weaver, Kristen Wells (Exec. Director of Gadabout), Matt Yarrow (TCAT)

**APOLOGIES:** Bruce Babcock, Suzanne Burnham,

**MEETING HANDOUTS:** None

Meeting called to order by Patty Poist at 4:32 pm

### **GM Report – Scot Vanderpool**

**Ridership up through November 2020:** System report: In November TCAT carried 87,907 compared to 411,702 in November 2019. That is a decrease of 79%. Tom Clavel, data analyst compared 3 non-Thanksgiving weeks in November to 3 weeks in October and found that there was a 1% increase from October to November, which shows that ridership is holding steady. Non-Cornell ridership had stabilized at about 40% of what it was pre-pandemic, while Cornell ridership stabilized around 18% of what it was pre-COVID. The majority of ridership we are losing is from Cornell.

**Maintenance:** TCAT doing well in terms of PM Services. There were 9 road calls in October, and 11 in November, compared to 14 in September. TCAT has committed to working on rehabbing some of the older 2011 series buses. 2 have come back from service in Long Island, and 2 more are being worked on. This will allow TCAT to get some more time out of these buses and will save TCAT some money in the long run. It is uncertain if TCAT will have the money to purchase new buses and rehabbing some older buses will give TCAT some more time.

**Safety:** 27 collisions over the course of 2020 and 54 collisions in 2019. Fairly major accident in October and we are lucky that no one was injured despite extensive damage.

TCAT continues conversations with the Health Department about COVID19 protocols and remains diligent in the sanitizing of buses every night. TCAT continues to promote mask wearing, social distancing, and cleaning of work stations.

There have been some known cases on our buses and TCAT has done everything possible, including pulling drivers and buses from services, sanitizing buses, and doing everything possible to keep everyone safe.

Blaine Friedlander asked how much TCAT procedures have changed since the fall. Scot responded that procedures are basically the same. TCAT took preventative action and purchased sprayer units and began sanitizing buses early on in the pandemic. TCAT was one of the first agencies to begin using the disinfectant sprayers, which were very effective in cleaning the buses overnight. TCAT was also the first agency in NY state to stop collecting fares in order to protect riders and drivers. TCAT did a lot of good things early on so it did not have to be changed.

Scot said he is still concerned that people are boarding the bus without a mask. It is difficult. It is dangerous for the drivers and for riders. Even now we are still having discussions about it. It is a precarious position to put drivers in. We feel we should force people to wear masks on the bus. TCAT has put out strict messaging about “No Mask, No Ride”. The police have said that they will not forcibly remove someone from the bus if the rider refuses to comply. We do not want the drivers to be the enforcer.

MTA has a very strict policy, but the governor has given them the authority to enforce mask-wearing rules, whereas most transit agencies do not have the authority. It is a tricky situation to be in and TCAT is engaged in discussions about how to handle passengers who refuse to wear a mask.

Larry Roberts asked about ADA paratransit ridership on Gadabout. Kristen Wells responded that Gadabout is operating at about 60% of pre-COVID levels. There has been a 40% drop in ridership but ridership has started to rebound. There have been 2 incidences of a COVID positive person on the Gadabout bus where drivers had to be quarantined. Luckily, only 1 other rider was affected.

Gadabout is able to track who was on each bus and when they were on the bus, and how long they were on the bus for. For this reason, exposures do not need to be made public. Despite these positive cases, no one has contracted COVID from being on the Gadabout. A driver contracted COVID from an out-of-town family member who was visiting them.

Kristen added that because ridership is at 60% ridership, it gives older, more vulnerable drivers, the chance to stay home and avoid the risk. Kristen also implemented a 2 week on, 2 weeks off policy for office staff. Should an office member be exposed or test positive, it will not wipe out the entire office staff. 2 weeks in the office and 2 weeks at home allows continuation of operations, should there be an exposure.

**TCAT Employee Vaccination Timeline:** TCAT was told it would be about 5-6 weeks before transit drivers would be able to get vaccinated. TCAT has just been notified that transit drivers will be able to get the vaccine soon. Vaccination is done by appointment and there are no open spots right now, due to vaccine supply.

**Human Resources:** TCAT has not laid off anyone or let anyone go but TCAT has also not hired any new employees since last February. TCAT is down to 77 full-time operators and 7 part-time operators (last year we had 82 FT and 8 PT operators). TCAT has 12 mechanics, which is the most we have ever had. TCAT has 137 total employees, last year there were 140.

**Electric busses:** TCAT is working with NY power authority to try to get charging infrastructure in. Some infrastructure is in but there is a lot more to go. TCAT is getting 7 battery electric, 40-foot buses delivered in mid-March. The buses will not be out on the road in March, as there is training to be done. Electric buses may not be out on the road until April. TCAT may be getting some smaller buses as well. The decrease in ridership is causing TCAT to explore other, more creative ways, of providing service. Smaller buses can travel to some areas where larger buses cannot go.

### **Spring Service – Matt Yarrow**

Bid packets went out to drivers today. Spring service will begin on Sunday, February 8, which is just before Cornell's spring semester begins. Service is somewhere between winter service and last Fall. Many classes were online in the fall, even though students were in town. Our approach has been to provide the core service efficiently. Route 30 will go back to service every 15 minutes, but trips will take 1 hour rather than 75 minutes. This allows TCAT to run the same level of service with less buses. Spring service is 24% less than early spring of last year. TCAT does not want to encourage late-night partying, so there is no late-night service. Routes 10 and 82 are operating fewer trips but TCAT dispatch will be monitoring service and there are operators standing by in order to add in extra service if there is a demand.

### **TDP – Matt Yarrow**

TCAT held outreach activities in October and November. Matt is giving additional information to Sam Schwartz, TCAT's consultant regarding budget and the impact of COVID. They are also looking at ways of making transit more efficient, such as moving bus stop locations, transit signal priority, queue jumpers, etc. There will be a second round of public outreach to share the findings with riders. The second round will probably be in April.

### **Other discussion**

Julie Weaver works for the health department and relayed that the mall is the only vaccine site, as of now. The TC Health department has a link on their website to sign up for vaccination appointments. There is no cost to employees.

There was a question about bus operators stopping in between stops. TCAT cannot really stop in between designated stops. There are safety reasons why the stops are placed in the spots that they are. For people with disabilities, TCAT provides ADA paratransit service. Jett added that drivers could be a little more accommodating and be aware of other obstacles, like piled snow.

Larry Roberts recommended that TCAT have a more thorough discussion internally about reasonable accommodations. During triennial review, if the FTA asks why TCAT refused to make an accommodation, TCAT needs to be able to justify why they will not make a reasonable accommodation. Patty agreed that it does merit additional discussion.

Larry added that there are likely other things that could be done to address a rider's concerns. Scot agreed that TCAT will look at each case individually and will do what they can to make accommodations. Larry also recommended speaking with colleagues who have dealt with similar situations. Matt added that feedback about stops is looked at carefully and drivers are usually pretty good at making accommodations. TCAT aims to build infrastructure and amenities at designated stops to make them the best possible place to wait. Larry stressed the importance of being flexible and making adjustments if they are reasonable.

Meeting Adjourned at 5:16 PM