



Riders' Advisory and Accessibility Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 12, 2021

ATTENDEES: Bruce Babcock, Kerry Barnes, Jeff Boles, Tom Clavel (TCAT), Roderick Cort, Blaine Friedlander, Vanessa Greenlee, Jenn Jennings (TCAT), Patty Poist (TCAT), Ed Swayze, Carlene (Jet) Swick, Scot Vanderpool (TCAT), Theodora Weatherby, Julie Weaver, Matt Yarrow (TCAT)

APOLOGIES: None

MEETING HANDOUTS: None – Virtual meeting via Zoom

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

Introductions

Jeff Boles: Advocacy specialist at FLIC (Fingerlakes Independence Center). Member of the Gadabout Board of Directors and attends the TC public transportation meetings. Jeff's focus is on transportation for people with disabilities.

Kerry Barnes: Part of a one-car household and uses route 11 to get from home on South Hill to work at the TCP Library. Kerry used to work at Longview where she advocated for residents and helped them learn how to ride the bus. Kerry now works downtown for the Library Foundation.

Tom Clavel: TCAT Senior Analyst

Roderick Cort: Lives in Dryden and works at Cornell and mostly rides routes 43 and 82.

Blaine Friedlander: Writer who works for the news division at Cornell and rides TCAT. Strong advocate for routes 10, 30, 32, and 51, among others.

Vanessa Greenlee: Lives in Newfield and has had an interest in strategic plans for transportation in the county. Vanessa's focus is on both the environment, and on the needs of county residents to access services. Vanessa is also running for public office and has been hearing a lot about TCAT from community members and wants to learn more about what's going on at TCAT.

Jenn Jennings: TCAT Marketing Administrative Assistant and ADA paratransit Coordinator

Patty Poist: TCAT Marketing and Communications Manager

Ed Swayze: Does not have a car and advocates for alternative transportation. A long-time attendee of this committee, Ed lives at McGraw House and depends on the bus to get to places outside of the downtown area.

Carlene “Jet” Swick: Rider of route 21 from the Trumansburg Park & Ride. Carlene has been using TCAT for almost 7 years and enjoys the convenience of not having to park. Carlene’s interested in transportation started with Jet Planes and has moved on to buses.

Scot Vanderpool: TCAT General Manager. Scot worked in the transportation department at SU for 14 years. Prior to that he was a bus driver and later, Operations Manager, at CENTRO.

Theodora Weatherby: Works with Way2Go at CCE Tompkins and is also part of the Tconnect team.

Matt Yarrow: Assistant General Manager for Service Development at TCAT. Matt usually bikes around the flats but usually takes the bus up to Cornell where parking is challenging.

Minutes: Approved

GM Report / May system report – Scot Vanderpool

RIDERSHIP: Since 2020 was so unusual, statistics compare 2021 ridership to 2019 pre-pandemic normal. In May 2021 TCAT carried over 118K riders. In May 2019 TCAT carried 344K riders, a decrease in over 66%.

From January – May 2019 TCAT carried just over 2 million passengers but from January – May 2021 TCAT only carried 546, 576 passengers – a decrease of 72%. This reduction in ridership is really is about Cornell service. The campus circulators represent our biggest reduction in ridership, and are currently at 16% as compared to 2019.

Once Cornell starts up in the Fall to 100% in-person instruction, we expect it to have a big impact on our ridership. We are hoping for ridership to be back to 75-80% in the Fall.

There are some losses due to people now working remotely and losses due to fear over safety concerns. Working remotely has become a new trend and is a concern among transportation agencies across the country.

MISSED TRIPS: There was 1 missed trip in May on route 81 due to a driver shortage. That has not happened in a while.

MAINTENANCE: PM (Preventative Maintenance) Services are currently at 100% and have been there for a while. There were 8 road calls in April and 8 in May. We track these by road calls per 100K miles. In May there were 5.1 road calls per 100K miles, as compared to 6.75 in April, and 11.3 in March. We are doing better with road calls and there is a reason for this – TCAT has more drivers available. Extra drivers can be sent to swap out buses if a problem arises on the road rather than maintenance having to spend time going out to fix it.

PARTS: Cost of parts in May 2019 was \$31K and \$47K in April. These are not bad figures. Year to date parts cost is \$191K.

REVINUE, EXPENDITURES & FUEL: Unsurprisingly, the average cost of diesel fuel has gone up slightly since March 2021, from \$2.38/gal to \$2.30 in April up to \$2.47 in May. We assume June cost will be higher.

SAFETY: We have had 4 accidents in May 2021, 1 of which was preventable.

YTD there have been 21 collisions and incidents (13 preventable) through May, as compared with 17 (14 preventable) through May of last year.

HUMAN RESOURCES: Through May of 2021 we had 73 full-time bus operators, in April we had 74. Overall, at the end of May, TCAT had a total of 127 employees. TCAT HR has been busy recruiting. 5 new operators have started our July class today and the August class is starting to develop into a good-size class. Normally TCAT hires year-round, but in 2020 TCAT stopped recruiting due to the many unknowns and significant drop in ridership. In Spring of 2021 TCAT learned that Cornell planned to bring students back in person and began to ramp up recruiting efforts and marketing.

UPDATE: TCAT applied for but was not awarded the Low-No grant for Low-emission/no-emission battery electric buses. The grant was awarded to Broome County. Every year since 2016 a different agency has been awarded the grant. TCAT has 7 battery electric buses, 4 from the VW settlement and 3 from the Low-no grant that we were awarded in 2018.

TCAT also applied for the RAISE grant for eight battery electric buses: four 40-foot buses and four smaller buses. We would like to get some smaller buses into our fleet. Smaller buses allow us to serve some areas that a 40-foot bus can't go and would better suit areas of lower ridership. TCAT is also thinking about microtransit and first-mile, last-mile service. TCAT is currently piloting this kind of service in Lansing, called Tconnect. Part of this grant would be working with TC3 on a park and ride with electric charging stations.

Patty Poist added that TCAT is in the process of finalizing the Transit Development Plan (TDP), which is done every 10 years. TCAT has been working with consultants Sam Schwartz out of NYC.

TCONNECT: Vanessa asked some follow-up questions about the first-mile, last-mile service. What makes an area a good candidate for pilot such as this and what metrics are used to determine if the pilot was a success? Scot responded that Dryden was originally selected to start the pilot because there are many pockets of low-income people who live within 1-3 miles of a main bus route with fairly frequent service. Tconnect was supposed to start in Dryden but when the pandemic hit, TCAT had to change direction and the pilot began in Lansing instead.

Matt explained that the Lansing area was selected due to its unique combination of neighborhoods and also its proximity to Cornell and Downtown. The area that is now being served by Tconnect on the weekend is quite diverse in the types of neighborhoods it encompasses. There are neighborhoods of large, expensive, suburban-style homes and there are areas with mobile home parks, like Hanshaw Village. There are large apartment complexes that had limited weekend service like Village Solars or Milton Meadows, a low-income apartment complex that previously had no weekend service.

Matt added that the current service area is a bit of an experiment, but TCAT tried to include people who were low-income or who had the need to get to work on the weekend. It was also set up so that it would work for people who might want to get to services around the mall area or connect with other TCAT routes at the mall.

How do we measure success? Scot answered that when TCAT started thinking about this program, the original concept was to try to reach people without transportation options and to connect

them to essential services and jobs. There is an equity piece to this. The measure of success is not all about the numbers. Of course, the numbers matter but the larger measure of success is in getting people, who don't have options, to places they need to go.

Route 31/41

Rod Cort had asked for some metrics on the route 31/41. Routes 31 and 41 had previously been separate routes that were combined at the beginning of the summer. Patty reported that there are about 60-70 riders to day, which works out to about 5 riders per trip. TCAT expects to ridership to grow in the fall once staff and students return. Matt added that this is a new alignment and it is hard to know where it is headed in terms of ridership. The idea comes from the TDP process, which encouraged TCAT to create a route 31 that is similar to this alignment. TCAT is trying to take steps toward where we are going with the TDP process.

Other Issues

Julie Weaver reported that there was a bus stop sign that was falling apart, but it had been taken care of. Julie was happy to see the new shelter at Park by Uptown Village. A shelter has been needed for a long time as many people use that stop.

Julie asked if this committee will continue meeting over Zoom or if we will return to in-person once the pandemic settles down. Julie likes having the option to remain meeting on Zoom, as it is easier to attend meetings over Zoom, especially in the winter. Patty responded that a hybrid model might be an option. The TCAT conference room is going to be outfitted to have in person meetings with the option to attend virtually.

Ed added that staffing should be considered, as it might require more staff to conduct both in-person and virtual meetings. Blaine added that his office began using Zoom, long before COVID. It is not easy to get to the TCAT office and it require him to take a car. Blaine would prefer to Zoom and recommends a hybrid model. Jeff Boles suggested alternating between in-person and Zoom meetings. Julie finds that alternating might be confusing but a hybrid model would allow people to choose what is best for them. Scot will check with the IT department on the status of the conference room.

Julie observed that TCAT buses are having difficulty passing each other on College Avenue because it is so narrow and suggested that buses be more staggered. Matt agreed that it was problematic and responded that more buses have been moved from College Avenue to Stewart Avenue because of the congestion. In the fall, only route 30 will be running on College Ave. The City owns the right of way and it is really up to them to improve the road. Cornell and the City would like to see it improved as well. Unfortunately it is outside of the scope of what we do.

Matt went on to say that our consultants have been urging TCAT to establish corridors so going up one street and down another are problematic. Ideally, there would be paired stops across the street from each other. Julie also suggested routing buses from Stewart directly to Seneca, rather than turning right on State Street. Matt responded that this has been done in the past, but some of the residents on Seneca Street did not want the bus going down their street. Matt said that TCAT should run this suggestion by TCAT's operations and safety departments.

Patty reminded members of the committee that as a thank you for participating, TCAT gives bus passes to its committee members. If you need passes, just let Patty know. If you already have a Tcard, give Patty the last 7 digits on your Tcard and we will get the passes loaded for you.

Service change is coming up at the end of August and TCAT will be promoting our service to new students and staff. TCAT follows all of the safety protocols and has been limiting capacity on the bus but will go back to full capacity in the fall. Masks are still required on public transportation.
Meeting Adjourned at 5:40 PM