

The St. Cloud Metro Bus Rider Advisory Committee (RAC) held a meeting on Tuesday, April 17, 2018 at 9:00 a.m. at the Mobility Training Center, 700 W. St. Germain St, St. Cloud, MN

The following individuals were in attendance: Kim Hoff, Ryan Daniel, Jim Perez, Dean Henkemeyer, Suzanne Driessen, David Williamsen, Bruce Benner, Jenny Svihel, Brenda Severson, Alexis Lutgen, Aisha Bah, and Michael Barner. Visitors: Jerry Schmitz, fixed route operator and Darrell Washington – Project Manager, MnDOT.

Welcome. Ryan welcomed everyone. Jim asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Old Business.

- 1) Jim stated the purpose of the RAC committee is to provide feedback and recommendations for improving operational or service issues affecting Metro Bus riders. He commented on a few items that were in the minutes from the March meeting. When someone brings up an observation while riding the buses, please write down the bus number on which the incident took place and the time of the day to ensure that staff can look into the situation properly.

In regard to route changes and the planning department, once we have received feedback from drivers and operational employees and have concrete information put together, it will be brought to the RAC committee for input. He reminded everyone this is “mass transit”. We want to provide service to as many people as possible and serve the whole community, not just a specific group or neighborhood.

Last month Jerry brought up later Saturday service. Jim mentioned that after looking at statistics for later night and weekend service, we have very low ridership on weekends and later in the evening. He stated that with the restructuring, we will look at the efficiency such as times, where we may have to eliminate service, where we can add new service.

Stop announcements. The route going by the Technical College has been fixed. He mentioned that sometimes they can have technical glitches. If a driver doesn't write it up as being a problem, we won't know, so thank you to the committee members for bringing it to our attention.

Bus cleaning. He again asked to get the bus number so we can look at the bus. If it's really bad, mention it to the driver or call customer service.

Title VI. He mentioned there was a concern reported by a customer that the posting for Title VI had a typo. The posters had been on the buses for about a month and weren't aware of it. This has now been updated on the website and new posters will be installed in the buses within the next week. MnDOT recommends (not required) to have this information posted on the buses.

Public Forum.

Michael asked if there will be new routes on 2nd Street because of the new businesses such as Costco. Jim stated we are looking at everything but it also involves looking at whether or not we can afford to make the changes. There will be some initial

restructuring done based on cost and then there may be a Phase 2 that will be done in May 2019.

Michael asked about having more bus shelters. Jim stated there are two in storage that can be installed. He stated we look at boarding numbers at a particular location, then look at whether we have the Right of Way to make the placement. Some home owners don't always come to us first but go above us and go to the City Council. Jim mentioned he would like to see a more modern shelter with benches and trash cans. He also stated they have recently looked into the cost of having solar panels, which are very expensive. The bare minimum for one shelter to have solar panels is \$2,000.

Ryan discussed bus stops/shelters on private property. He mentioned there is a bus stop sign close to a shelter on the SE side which is very nice but it is attracting vandalism, homelessness, trash and the property owner has gone to the Mayor and said he wants to tear it down.

Darrell mentioned that larger public transit systems are essentially real estate owners due to leasing or owning property for signage, shelters, etc. In smaller systems like St. Cloud, we try to work with the home owner.

New Business.

- 1) MnDOT update. Darrell stated he is a Project Manager for St. Cloud Metro Bus. He was in St. Cloud for a workshop where all of the Greater MN transit systems get together to learn what's going on in Minnesota and to prepare for the grant application that each system submits to MnDOT for their funding. The State of MN is very lucky. 80% of the transit cost is paid for by MnDOT for Greater MN which is very unique in the country. He reported there are funding issues because the legislature hasn't passed a transportation bill yet to fix roads and bridges which also impacts transit funding. He stated that in 3 to 4 years from now, they will need to look at how to fund what we currently have and there won't be any new projects.

His role at MnDOT is to oversee several larger transit systems in the state. He guides, listens and responds to feedback, takes complaints and conveys information from other systems on what is working well or not working well. He gave an example from Fargo, ND.

He works with grant management and receives monthly reports from each transit system in regard to how the money is being spent, ridership, etc. He mentioned the money we receive is called a grant. Suzanne asked if the grants are in addition to the funding? Darrell explained that funding is classified as a grant, instead of a contract. They provide grants for both operating and capital (such as purchasing buses and bus shelters).

- 2) Training Department update. Dean Henkemeyer introduced himself and gave a brief history of his background with Metro Bus. He stated he was a full-time fixed route operator for 25 years. He then started part-time in the training department for 4 to 4 ½ years, and has been full-time in the training department since January 2018. There are a total of three people in the training department. Josh Sachs is

also a Training Specialist and Scott Stark is the manager of the department. Josh and Scott both have Dial-a-Ride backgrounds.

He mentioned there are currently two fixed route operators on the street with operator trainers and one in the classroom.

Bruce asked about safety for the operator and gave an example of a person who got on a bus and maybe had a steak knife in their pocket and how would they want the operator to handle a situation like that.

Dean stated the primary responsibility of the operator is to take care of their customers and secure the area. They never want someone to confront anyone. There is a process to notify dispatch and this is covered in their training. In the classroom training, they try to cover as many possible situations as they can, using scenarios. They have had meetings with the police department and they know there are gang members on the buses with weapons, we just don't see them. A video is showed of a scenario of a knife fight on the bus and how to handle the situation.

Aisha asked if the staff is trained yearly or if they receive refresher training. Dean stated that Metro Bus has been short staffed for quite a while and as soon as we are fully staffed, we want to bring everyone in for refresher training. Training could be on customer service or how to handle the bus. Ryan stated they are in the process of launching a refresher training program which would include operator safety, driving safety and customer safety. Staff is finalizing the curriculum which is about 85% complete. Refresher training will be done yearly and will include a comprehensive program. Brenda asked if there would be any passenger training especially for the Dial-a-Ride riders where people are in vulnerable positions? Jim mentioned they would like passengers to try to stay out of any situation as much as they can. There are so many possible scenarios that could happen. Brenda wondered if they should make a phone call if the driver is unable to do anything. Dean stated he would hope that passengers would try to make a phone call, if the operator was unable to. Ryan discussed additional scenarios, situations that he had witnessed when he was a driver. Jim stated that some of the situations being discussed are going to be explored by the training department to see what avenue the operator can take and what avenue they should take. Dean mentioned they will probably contact other transit agencies and see what they do and how they handle situations.

- 3) New Members. Aisha introduced herself to the committee. She stated she works for CentraCare as an inpatient coder. Michael stated he is a veteran and rides the fixed route bus system a lot.
- 4) Jim welcomed the new members and thanked them for joining the committee. He stated the meetings are always held on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 9am. He mentioned if committee members observe something that they feel is important to the agency that could be corrected or improved upon, to write down the bus number, time of day and date.

Open Discussion.

Bruce mentioned that snow has caused problems with mobility aids, even on Dial-a-Ride. He wondered if we could get more maintenance workers to clear areas at the bus stops, particularly at Wal-Mart, anyone using a wheelchair would not have been able to use the bus. Jim mentioned there are maintenance people that focus their efforts on the Operations Center, as well as the Transit Center and Mobility Center, and when we get a lot of snow like recently, they are starting work at midnight and working for 12+ hours. They aren't able to always get to bus shelters but they do the best they can.

Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.