

The St. Cloud Metro Bus Rider Advisory Committee (RAC) held a meeting on Tuesday, February 19, 2019 at 9:00 am at the Mobility Training Center, 700 W St Germain, Cloud, MN.

The following individuals were present: Ryan Daniel, Doug Diedrichsen, Jill Justin, Berta Hartig, Bruce Benner, David Williamsen, Jenny Svihel and Aisha Bah. Absent: Alexis Lutgen. Visitor: Vicki Williams--St Cloud APO.

Welcome. Ryan welcomed everyone and read the purpose of the RAC.

Public Open Forum. Open Discussion.

The committee observed a moment of silence in honor of member Brenda Severson, who recently passed away unexpectedly.

Vicky stated that the St Cloud APO is updating their long-range plans regarding all aspects of transportation in the St Cloud area out until the year 2045. They are required to have a minimum 20-year forecast in place, which is updated every five years. The long-range plan contains the big ideas, which become more specific as time passes. Input from Metro Bus is critical to these plans, so meetings between the APO and Metro Bus occur in the near future.

Old Business.

ConneX Performance—Doug Diedrichson. The ridership on the ConneX has been growing since the service started. The weekday ridership of 20 to 35 riders per day is much higher than weekend ridership. When comparing route 31 and 32 from 2018 to route 31 and ConneX for 2019, the total ridership is down, but this is to be expected since the service has changed considerably.

Jenny mentioned that the main door of bus 205 tends to pop open while the bus is in service. She also mentioned that the ranger keeps repeating the same information. Ryan explained that there have been some technical challenges since the service began, and the Operations team has been working out the bugs as they have come up. Jenny mentioned that when she called for a ride, she waited on the phone for 30 minutes, and then waited an additional hour before her ride arrived. Ryan stated that the hold time may have been due to high call volume, and the wait for the ride can happen since this is a shared ride service. He also mentioned that the Call Center dispatchers are taking all the normal Dial-a-Ride calls and all the calls for ConneX service. Extra staff has been added at peak times, while a permanent staffing solution will be decided in the future. Meetings between all involved staff have been ongoing so that we can continue to tweak and improve the service. Vicky asked if there have been any meetings to hear feedback from the public. Doug stated that there is a Sartell Community Showcase on March 2nd, and Metro Bus will be there. Doug will be specifically interacting with the public in order to collect feedback on the service. Currently, Fixed Route operators are providing the ConneX service, however, if the service becomes permanent, Dial-a-Ride operators will take over due to the union contract currently in place. Ryan took this opportunity to encourage committee members to ride the service, and to be sure to talk to the public regarding the benefits of this service.

New Business.

- 1) RAC email. There was none.

- 2) Update—Ryan Daniel. Ryan introduced Berta Hartig as the interim Dial-a-Ride Operations Manager. She has replaced Nicky Lahr, and will hold this position for the next six months. Berta was the Metro Bus Marketing Manager and has been replaced in that role by Nate Ramacher for the interim period. Berta will be attending some future RAC meetings. Ryan encouraged the committee to reach out to Berta with questions by email bhartig@stcloudmtc.com, or by phone 320.529.4494. Ryan also gave an administrative snapshot of 2018. As an organization, two goals were identified—1) Increase ridership and 2) Update policies (internal). The policies were in need of updating so that current practices and written policies were in sync, and to make Metro Bus consistent with other government agencies in the area. All departments had many policies to update, as some had not changed for several years. Overall, these policies are 95% complete. Each department also had specific goals. For example, Marketing had a goal of improving the on-line trip planner experience: this goal is 85% complete. Information Technology is currently working on transitioning from the currently used MetroNet program to a more efficient and compatible program: this is expected to be complete in approximately 10 to 12 months. Human Resources is updating the 'Rules of the Road' employee handbook: this is 80% complete. Finance has developed and streamlined their processes, including reviewing and reassigning job duties as needed: this is 90% complete. The Training Department has reduced the incidence of preventable accidents by keeping safety at the forefront of everything we do. There was a record streak of 42 consecutive days without an accident in 2018. Ryan just wanted to share the behind the scenes work accomplished by the Operations and Administrative team to give excellent service to the public. Aisha asked how often we update these policies. Ryan stated that this is the first time in at least six years. Union contracts are negotiated every three years, and a timeline for the Administrative policies has not been specifically established, but Ryan would expect at least every five years.
- Ridership—Doug Diedrichson. Dial-a-Ride ridership is up in all areas, with the exception of Sundays, which is down very slightly. This may be due to the availability of the curb to curb ConneX service. For Fixed Route, route 91 has the highest ridership at 72 riders per hour. The top performers in the core routes continues to be routes 8, 1 and 2. The lowest performer was the new ConneX service, which is to be expected, but Doug also pointed out that it is an improved and growing service. Routes 33 and 10 are the other two lowest performing routes. Metro Bus will be looking at other route enhancements on these low performing routes for next year. In some areas, low population accounts for low ridership.

Open discussion:

Bruce mentioned that he rode route 33 to Crossroads and planned to continue on the route back to Coborns, but when the bus arrived at Crossroads, the operator went on break. The operator did not announce this, so as a result, Bruce missed transferring onto the route 33 that was taking over. Ryan will communicate to operators of route 33 that they should make announcements regarding their next run at Crossroads just as they do at the Transit Center. Going forward, our new trapeze system may switch our drivers instead of vehicles. Jenny asked whether operators could call for transfers from the ConneX bus. Doug advised that riders need to plan their rides, and be aware that they may be as much as 30 minutes wait at WalMart for a bus.

Bruce asked who was responsible for clearing snow at the transfer area at the Sartell WalMart. Ryan stated that is WalMart's responsibility, but Metro Bus has cleared the snow in the past if it is not done in a timely manner. Clearing snow has become more efficient recently with the acquisition of a new plow truck.

Bruce stated that last week, several Dial-a-Ride operators were hoping for better windshield wipers. Ryan stated that the Maintenance department has addressed this issue.

Ryan stated that we now have three open positions on the RAC committee. He again asked that current members encourage applicants in the community. Application forms are available on the Metro Bus website.

Ryan mentioned that Metro Bus has been contacted by MNDOT regarding testing a 40 foot automated bus in our area. Although automated, the bus would have an operator on-board. The Met Council tested a bus of this type in the metro area during the Super Bowl in 2017, and testing is now being moved outstate. This would be funded by grant money. Metro Bus has not made a decision regarding this opportunity, but Ryan will keep the committee informed.

Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:57 am.