

CITIZENS TRANSIT ADVISORY GROUP (CTAG)
Meeting Summary
September 20, 2011
DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Present: Tom Cox, CTAG Co-Chair
Mary Barker, CTAG Co.-Chair
Todd Steiss, Town of Huntersville
Peter Larsen, Town of Mint Hill
C. Morgan Edwards, CMS
Henry Antshel, City of Charlotte
Rhonda Odom, Mecklenburg County
George Sottilo, Town of Matthews
John Phillips, Town of Davidson
Katherine (Kate) Payerle, City of Charlotte
Rob Watson, Mecklenburg County

Staff: John Trunk, Larry Kopf, Danny Rogers, Wanda Braswell, Carolyn Flowers, Brian Nadolny,
Dee Pereira, David McDonald, Alysia Osborne, Brian Horton

Meeting time 7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

I. Call to Order

Mary Barker, CTAG Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

II. Approval of June 21, 2011 meeting summary

The meeting summary was approved as written.

III. Information Items

A. Blue Line Extension Update

Danny Rogers

The update for the Blue Line Extension (BLE) consisted of the progress in the Environmental Impact Statement process, the submission of the New Start update to the FTA and the efforts CATS is making to move the project into final design that involves the risk measurement and the cost estimate update.

The submission of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) is a major part of moving into the final design stage. The FTA submits the statement to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA files the report and issues Notice of Availability. The Notice of Availability should be placed in the Federal Register on Friday, September 23. After the Notice is placed on the register, there is a 30 day period for public comments. A public hearing is scheduled for October 11, 2011 at the Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church for public comments. A Record of Decision (ROD) can be requested after the 30 day period. CATS' schedule for obtaining the ROD is December 15, 2011. When the ROD is received, CATS will start the Right of Way Acquisition process on December 16, 2011.

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The New Starts Update was submitted September 12, 2011 to FTA. A project has to be rated as a medium to continue moving forward in the funding process. In 2009 CATS cost effectiveness rating was a medium. The information recently submitted in 2011 CATS cost effectiveness is expected to range from medium to medium-high.

The FTA requires a risk assessment to be performed on the project, insuring that the project can be built within the scope presented. A risk assessment consists of the comments from an FTA consultant evaluating the project and identifying any project uncertainties that could affect the project's cost estimate. CATS uses the same information to determine scheduling and/or funding contingency amounts. The FTA will determine the project's budget and their participation amount in the project. The main goal is to have a project that CATS knows it can build. CATS hired consultants to help determine what needs to be done prior to starting the formal FTA process. Taking this step, CATS will be able to identify contingency areas prior FTA review and hopefully expedite FTA's process.

Relating to scope, CATS is looking at the railroad and their requirements, inflation, and availability of materials throughout the period of the construction, and scheduled items, railroad coordination and flagging.

In December 2010 and January 2011, the project was re-defined. CATS had a cost threshold to make the plan work; CATS had to determine how much sales tax would be available. CATS determined that some severe cuts needed to be made on the project, but the City of Charlotte felt some of the items should be kept. The city provided some funding through the city's infrastructure project NECI which is a project to create a complete transportation system that includes all modes of transportation, i.e. cars, trains, buses, bikes and in making the area comfortable to use. CATS also used city owned property to help reduce the cost of the project.

The BLE has received \$40 million in grant funding to support preliminary engineering design. The BLE is one of four projects mentioned in the President's budget that is ready to move toward final design. The North Carolina Board of Transportation and the Secretary supported the project with a unanimous vote to commit 25 percent of partnership and a letter of commitment to the project.

In September 2009, the BLE project's 30 percent cost estimate was \$1.18 billion based on a full project going to I-485. Jeff Parker & Associates reviewed the financial plan and determined that the cost needed to be reduced to approximately \$976,000,000.

To reduce the financial risk to CATS, the cost of finance charges and the value of city donated right-of-way were added to the BLE, about \$93 million, to bring the cost estimate to \$1.069 billion, the amount submitted for the New Start Update.

Discussion

Mr. Edwards asked if the right of way acquisition is to be in-house or a consultant. Mr. Rogers said the City is in charge of obtaining the right of way but hired a contractor to help. Mr. Edwards asked what type of agreement does CATS have with the railroad company regarding existing right of ways. Mr. Rogers said there is room on the current railroad right of way but in some locations the tracks will have to be relocated. Mr. Rogers said CATS separation is average 54 feet from

center line of track allowing for the placement of the high speed track line. Mr. Edwards asked if the Red Line and the Blue Line will intersect. Mr. Rogers said no. Mr. Cox asked has the sales tax revenue been as expected. Ms. Flowers said CATS met the mid-year adjustment. Mr. Cox asked if the finance charges of \$80 million were too steep. Ms. Flowers said that all state and federal grants are on a reimbursement basis. CATS must spend the money and will receive a reimbursement through the awarded grant. Ms. Pereira said that there will be a short term financing that covers the federal share of the project and the finance charges are an eligible expense and reimbursable. The short term financing will be retired by the time the full funding grant agreement is closed. A long term financing is to cover the local share of funding and the financing charges are eligible for reimbursement but only as long as the full funded grant agreement is open. Mr. Watson asked if there is a risk of losing funding after it was awarded. Ms. Flowers said that there is a commitment to the amount of the agreements but all are subject to appropriation. Mr. Watson asked if the BLE is being built in stages to reduce the risk of having funding reduced during the building of the project. Mr. Rogers said the project is in three segments, but could not be opened independently. Mr. Watson asked if the extension to the I-485 can be added in the future. Mr. Rogers said it is possible to add in the future.

B. Status of ULI Study on Independence Boulevard **Alysia Osborn/Brian Horton**

The Urban Land Institute-Daniel Rose Fellowship is an international, worldwide non-profit organization with the purpose of providing assistance to four selected cities each year to solve a problem area. The Daniel Rose Fellowship sends a panel of consultants to tour the problem area of the chosen cities and submits their recommendations and options.

In January 2011, the panel toured Charlotte's Independence Corridor along with the LYNX Blue Line, Central Avenue and Monroe Road and interviewed stakeholders within the area. Independence Boulevard was chosen because it is a highly functional road for many people in the Charlotte area, a regional highway to the mountains and the southern coastline, a proposed rapid bus or rail transit corridor, a high occupancy vehicle corridor, and connects with the Monroe bypass.

The ULI recommendations were to be specific about the difference in the regional and local challenges and build on what has worked. Three refinements the ULI suggested to Charlotte's current revitalization plan was to have HOT lanes for the bus rapid transit/Express buses, to have streetcars on Central Avenue and Monroe Road and to promote retail business on Independence Boulevard and the surrounding areas.

Discussion

Mr. Cox asked if there are crossovers at the Briar Creek Road, Sharon Amity, Albemarle Road, Idlewild Road, Eastway Drive, Sardis Road and WT Harris intersections. Ms. Osborne said yes, there will be bridges at the major intersections connecting Independence Boulevard. Ms. Payerle asked if there would be bus stops on the boulevard. Ms. Osborne said there would be stations. Ms. Payerle asked if there would be safe bicycle access across Independence Boulevard. Mr. Horton said yes there would be bicycle lanes on the overpasses. There was discussion about whether bike lanes on overpasses would be adequate.

The panel gave three assignments; have an area plan, share the ideas and plan with the surrounding communities and elected officials, and to form a task force representing the communities, businesses and public sectors. The Independence Task Force has met three times with the guiding principles of keeping on track with the improvement on the corridor, balancing local and region transportation and how decisions made would influence and effect land use and the quality of life within the neighborhoods.

A window of opportunity is the NCDOT additional two mile extension of the express road at the new Wal-mart. A new study on the remaining six mile from Conference Drive to I-485 is being done. The NCDOT has ranked the six mile gap as 2nd to the Yadkin River Bridge making the project a candidate for state wide funds. Independence Boulevard is reported as having the highest occupancy vehicle demand of any corridor.

High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes would be implemented into the plan. The strategy of the HOT lanes is drivers can pay a toll to enter into the lanes; the heavier the traffic, the higher the toll. The purpose is to keep the traffic moving.

Discussion

Ms. Payerle asked if the HOT lane had the option of waiving the toll by carpooling. Mr. Horton said yes. A single occupancy vehicle would pay the toll. Mr. Sottilo asked how the toll road is going to impact the traffic if implemented before the six mile gap is ready. Mr. Horton said that is why the gap is a priority.

Independence Boulevard has a vital role as the spine to express services on the south side of Charlotte and to continue servicing the inner and outer regions; its importance cannot be ignored. The ULI suggested the use of a combination transit system; using the bus way in conjunction with the HOT lanes.

The ULI recommends that the area elements continue to be implemented in the project plans and that the transit policy modified release median of Independence, continue to move toward building the Southeast Corridor rail project, and maintain a good association with the political community. In moving forward with the project, continue to work toward implementing the Southeast Corridor rail project, HOT lanes usage by the express buses and develop an investment plan for streetcar corridors.

C. Red Line Task Force Update

Brian Nadolny

The Red Line project is a proposed 25 mile from Charlotte Gateway Station to Mount Mourne and will have 10 stations. The service planned is 16 to 28 daily trains depending on the implementation of reverse commuter, 30 minute headway for rush hour and one hour for off peak hours. The commuter rail's top speed is 60 mph.

The 2009 cost estimate was \$357.5 million and the 2018 cost estimate is \$456 million.

In 2010 a work plan was created and a task force was established. In September 2010, the task force became a sub-committee to the MTC.

The work plan tasks are to look at cost reduction measures and ways of phasing the project work, doing a new market study to update the development potentials, looking at a new station location in Charlotte, and a possible move of the Mount Mourne station. Mount Mourne's current station location is strained to provide adequate parking. Mooresville and Lowes suggested moving the station a mile closer to an area with more land availability and more development potential. The Task Force went to Raleigh and spoke with Secretary Conti who provided Paul Morris with Greenleaf Strategies as a resource for RLTF. Paul Morris worked with the towns and cities to identify areas of local revenues sources. A report, Value Capture Report, shows the mechanisms, practices and prospects for encouraging economic development and for providing commuter rail funding.

The Red Line Task Force reviewed the proposed policy recommendations and will be presented to MTC on Wednesday, September 28.

- Red Line is seen as an economic development project,
- Dual-benefit strategy,
- To establish a unified district,
- State to take the lead on the project.

CATS staff will continue to work with developers and stakeholders, to seek further negotiations with Norfolk Southern and work to develop an overall financial and business plan.

Discussion

Mr. Cox asked if the Red Line will become a separate entity from CATS operated by the State. Mr. Nadolny said it has not been determined who would operate the line, and the mechanisms used to collect the funds for the rail will be separate mechanisms but it has not been determined.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 a.m.

NEXT CTAG MEETING: OCTOBER 18, 2011 7:30 A.M.