

# METROPOLITAN TRANSIT COMMISSION

## MEETING SUMMARY

March 26, 2014

---

**Presiding:** Trevor Fuller (Chairman, Mecklenburg County Commission)

**Present:**

Ron Carlee (Charlotte City Manager)

Rick Sanderson (TSAC Chair)

Rob Watson (CTAG Co-Chair)

Dena Diorio (Mecklenburg County Manager)

John Collett (NCDOT Representative)

Mayor John Woods (Davidson)

Bill Coxe (Huntersville Town Planner)

Mayor Jim Taylor (Matthews)

Ralph Messera (Matthews)

Brian Welch (Mint Hill Town Manager)

Bill Thunberg ( Mooresville Representative)

Mayor Jack Edwards (Pineville)

**Chief Executive Officer:** Carolyn Flowers

---

**I. Call to Order**

The regular meeting of the Metropolitan Transit Commission was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by MTC's Chairman, Commissioner Fuller. Commissioner Fuller then opened the Public Hearing. The regular meeting resumed at the conclusion of the Public Hearing.

The Public Hearing allowed the public to comment on the proposed fare increase of twenty cents on the current base fare. Fares for other services would also rise. Dee Pereira, CATS Chief Financial Officer, Assistant Director of Public Transit, reminded MTC members that the MTC Fare and Financial Policies recommend a fare increase every two years to ensure that fare revenues keep pace with inflation and reflect a fair-share contribution by the riders to the cost of operating the system. Transit expenses will exceed income by \$2.8 million next year if fares are not increased. Key cost drivers include fuel, utilities, personal services and risk insurance, costs which are largely not under CATS' control. If there is no fare increase in FY2015, there will need to be a reduction of 26,354 service hours to balance the budget.

Olaf Kinard, CATS Director of Marketing & Communications, showed the current fares compared with fares under the proposed increase. CATS' fares are higher than other NC cities, but CATS covers a larger service area with more frequent service and longer hours. CATS' fares are in line with other systems with rail and express buses. CATS began advertising the proposed fare on January 23, 2014 on buses and trains through notification on vehicles and the media.

Twelve members of the public made comments opposing the proposed fare increase during the Public Hearing. Many cited concerns about the impact of an increase on lower-income transit-dependent riders. Several stated that costs are rising in household budgets for fuel, heat, water, food and other necessities; if transit fares also increase, that will be too much for fixed budgets to absorb. Some speakers suggested ways to increase revenue without raising fares such as fixing inoperable fare boxes or urged CATS to come up with alternative revenue sources. Speakers also cited concerns about customer service issues, bus and rider cleanliness and route scheduling concerns.

Commissioner Fuller thanked everyone for signing up and making comments. Additional comments can be made through the website.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Mayor Taylor and seconded by Mayor Woods. The public hearing closed and the March meeting of MTC resumed at 6:20 p.m.

**II. Review of Meeting Summary**

The meeting summary of February 26, 2014 was approved as written.

**III. Transit Services Advisory Committee (TSAC) Chair's Report**

**Rick Sanderson**

Mr. Sanderson reported that TSAC met on March 13. Staff presented information on the proposed CATS budget including the proposed fare increase, as well as an overview on the state of CATS. TSAC members had a number of questions for CATS on the proposed fare increase. He will report comments from tonight's public meeting to TSAC at next month's meeting, as the fare increase will be on the agenda for action. TSAC's next meeting will be April 10.

**IV. Citizens Transit Advisory Group (CTAG) Chair's Report**

**Rob Watson**

Mr. Watson reported that CTAG met on March 18 and reviewed fare analysis and budget information, including the proposed fare increase. There was no notable feedback at that meeting. Mr. Watson said he will also deliver information from tonight's meeting to CTAG at the April meeting and bring back that feedback to the April MTC meeting.

**V. Red Line Task Force Update**

**Mayor Woods**

No report.

**VI. Transit Funding Working Group Update**

No report.

**VII. Public Comments**

None.

**VIII. Action Items**

**a. NCDOT FY2015 Transportation Demand Management Program Grant**

**Krystal Green**

Krystal Green, CATS Senior Transit Marketing Representative, asked that MTC members approve the staff recommendation for the NCDOT Transportation Demand Management Program Grant resolution. This NCDOT grant funds 50 percent, or \$1,103,417, of CATS' TDM efforts to educate people on the importance of using alternative forms of transportation, such as buses, trains, biking, walking, vanpooling and carpooling.

**Discussion:** None.

**Resolution:** Mayor Taylor motioned to approve the resolution to continue the regional program grant application and offset CATS' operating budget expenses; Ms. Diorio seconded the motion. The MTC unanimously approved the resolution.

**b. 2014 State Legislative Agenda**

**Dana Fenton**

Mr. Fenton, Intergovernmental Relations Manager with the City of Charlotte, said that he could answer questions about the proposed Legislative Agenda. The only item on the

Legislative Agenda in this Short Session is to reiterate MTC's support for the increased bus length legislation that passed the House last year and is awaiting the Senate's action.

**Discussion:** Mr. Coxe asked how potential issues that may arise would be communicated. Mr. Fenton replied that if an issue came up, he would communicate quickly with the CATS CEO. Ms. Flowers said that she would report any issues that arise to MTC members.

**Resolution:** Mayor Woods recommended approval of the Legislative State Agenda; Mayor Taylor seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**IX. Information Items**

**a. Title VI Fare Equity Analysis**

**Arlanda Rouse**

Commissioner Fuller said that this item will be deferred until April to allow for completion of the public comment period.

**Discussion:** None.

**b. CIP – Rapid Transit and Other Key Capital Projects**

**John Muth**

Commissioner Fuller said that this item should be voted on with the budget next month, so it will be deferred to April's meeting.

**Discussion:** None.

**c. 5307 and 5310 Funding**

**David McDonald**

Commissioner Fuller deferred the summary of these two federal funding programs until April when it will be voted on as an action item.

**Discussion:** None.

**X. Chief Executive Officer's Report**

**Carolyn Flowers**

Under the CEO's report, Ms. Flowers discussed the following:

**a. Financial Update:**

Recent sales tax receipts of \$7.4 million reflect holiday season spending. Staff continues to monitor sales tax receipts to make sure CATS stays on budget.

**b. Ridership Update:**

Ridership was affected by February's adverse weather. The three snow days significantly impacted on-time performance and route schedules. CIAA attendance was down this year, and CATS' ridership figures during the CIAA was commensurately lower. Uncertainty about whether the tournament would continue to be held in Charlotte in the future may have adversely affected attendance. The CIAA signed a contract to continue holding the tournament in Charlotte for six more years after this year's tournament completed. With this resolved CATS hopes to see a rebound next year.

**c. Legislative Update:**

Staff recently traveled to Washington, DC to advocate for continued funding and the transit reauthorization bill. Staff will work to ensure that CATS and the City of Charlotte continue to

provide input and support for transit reauthorization bill, which expires in September. This bill provides funding for highways as well as transit.

**XI. Other Business**

MTC will vote next month on the alternate for the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO). Mayor Swain will continue to serve in April.

Members agreed to discuss comments made during the public meeting. Mr. Messera asked what income the fare increase of thirty cents for STS riders is projected to generate. He was not interested in how that compared to the cost per ride. Mayor Taylor said the biggest question was how the proposed STS increase will impact the \$2.8 million gap.

Mr. Roberts asked if CATS tracks the percentage of time buses arrive on time. Ms. Flowers said that on-time performance is part of CATS' monthly performance indicators. The goal is 85 percent on-time performance, the range of which is measured as one minute early to five minutes late. Last year's Democratic National Convention affected on-time performance. This year, construction on Trade Street for Streetcar has affected the ability to access the Charlotte Transportation Center. The weather affected on-time performance as well. On-time performance can be reported on a monthly basis. Routes are adjusted three times a year in the service changes, using input from riders and bus operators. Construction on North Tryon Street has also affected on-time performance. As CATS progresses with LYNX Blue Line Extension construction, this will get worse over the next three years. The route on North Tryon Street is the number one line for ridership. A bus will be added to the line in the next service change to address the overcrowding issue on that line. There will be schedule adjustments for affected areas to address the scheduling issues as well.

Mr. Coxe said that if there are specific routes that cause higher levels of delay than others, it may be possible to coordinate with the people who operate the roadway network. Ms. Flowers agreed that CATS can coordinate with NCDOT and said that Mr. Messera keeps CATS informed on road conditions in Matthews so staff can plan for it. Mr. Messera asked about timekeeping; Ms. Flowers replied that there are time points along bus routes. Mr. Messera noted that Charlotte has heavy traffic; if a bus gets caught in traffic, it will not be on time. A train stalled in downtown Matthews three months ago, and three buses were caught in traffic waiting for the train to clear the crossing. Ms. Flowers said that CATS puts out push alerts to customers with smart phones with information to improve the experience. CATS is working on other technology; it is frustrating for customers to wait. Mayor Taylor asked for staff to follow up on the questions raised at tonight's public hearing and the number of fare boxes that are not working. Ms. Flowers said that Mr. Kopf wrote down the questions and said the fare boxes are archaic and are scheduled for upgrade. Mayor Taylor said he was concerned with the comments about staff behavior and the comments on bus cleanliness, as well as knowing the number of fare boxes that are not working. Ms. Flowers reminded Mayor Taylor that CATS' archaic fare boxes are planned for upgrade. Mayor Edwards said that he reviewed previous meeting minutes; those items have come up in the past and there never seem to be answers. He felt that it was vital to look at how many people are riding free because CATS cannot take their cash.

Mr. Collett said that NCDOT is exploring having secret shoppers for the Division of Motor Vehicles, and that may be worth exploring for CATS. Ms. Flowers said that CATS has a QA staff and already uses secret shoppers. Mr. Kinard said that in customer service surveys since 2003,

the rating of drivers being courteous has ranged from 88-92 percent. Mayor Taylor said he was concerned about the speaker who said that he had a bad conversation with a bus driver. Ms. Flowers said that she was not aware whether that had been reported to CATS as a complaint. Mr. Kinard reviewed the ways complaints come to CATS. Complaints are responded to within five days. Mr. Kopf said that the CATS system tracks complaints. Ms. Flowers said that disciplinary system with drivers is part of the collective bargaining agreement; therefore, disciplinary actions are handled by McDonald Transit. Mr. Thunberg said that there is a policy in place to handle the exceptions, but there is a lot that goes right all the time. It is rarely recognized because the expectation is that things will go right.

Mr. Messera asked if the bargaining agreement was a public document. Ms. Flowers replied that it is public, and she will send it to Mr. Messera. Mr. Collett asked about bus cleanliness and whether that is an item on the customer surveys. Mr. Kinard said he thought bus cleanliness is an item on the surveys. Ms. Flowers noted that some of the comments seemed to concern cleanliness of fellow passengers and not the equipment. There is daily cleaning on the buses, as well as deep cleaning and bus washing. Mr. Messera said that he rides the bus frequently and has never gotten on a bus that was dirty on the inside. He said the operators are fine.

Commissioner Fuller said there was a comment about overcrowded buses. Ms. Flowers said that was Route 11. CATS added a bus on that route to stretch out the loads.

Ms. Flowers said that she would like to update MTC members on advertising revenue. Mr. Kinard said that staff has been working on Pouring, or Concession, Rights on the LYNX Blue Line, to allow a drink device on the platforms. Staff will take an action item to the Charlotte City Council in April to approve an amendment to the contract. CATS would get a higher percentage on Pouring Rights than on advertising, 70 percent of the revenue and the vendor would get 30 percent. CATS is also finalizing the permitting to add station kings on station fencing; frames should be going up in mid-June. Staff is working on additional deals to bring in revenue as well. Mr. Kinard said that advertising revenue is anticipated to be \$1.4-1.5 million this year. The advertising contract has exceeded the guarantee by 24.5 percent year-to-date. Ms. Flowers added that is without advertising on the neighborhood circulators, STS and Gold Rush vehicles. Staff is considering whether to charge for parking at park and rides for events.

## **XII. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m. by Commissioner Fuller.

---

NEXT MTC MEETING: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2014, 5:30 P.M.