

TRANSIT SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Meeting Summary
August 9, 2001

PRESENT: Mark Loflin, chair, Charlotte
Jim Bensman, Cornelius
Jim Blank, Charlotte
Laura Blue, Charlotte
Paul Edmunds, Davidson
Linette Fox, Charlotte
Walter Horstman, Matthews
Sherry Miller, Charlotte
Kelly Gallant, Charlotte

STAFF: Keith Parker, Dave Hines, Pete Wallace, Vida Covington, Dietrich Brown,
Jerry Roberson, Mason Martin, Ann Boggs

ABSENT: Raenice Goode, Mecklenburg County (see para I. below)
Bob Inskeep, Huntersville
Kathy Matson, Mint Hill

MEETING TIME: 4:00-5:30 PM

I. Call to Order

Mr. Loflin called the meeting to order. Ms. Goode was excused from this meeting in order to attend a CATS-sponsored special transportation forum.

II. Approval of June 14, 2001 Meeting Summary

The June 14, 2001 Meeting Summary was approved as written.

III. Discussion Items

A. New Fall Services: Mr. Parker briefed the members that CATS will undertake a significant service expansion between October 2001 and May 2002, and provided them with a handout describing the service changes.

He explained that the Gold Rush Trolley service will replace the current Uptown Circulator service, using rubber tire trolleys, beginning September 10th. He noted that the Gold Rush service will provide streamlined routing and greater frequency; and that every vehicle will be equipped with all standard CATS bus technology. He told the members that the kick-off ceremony for the service will be September 7th.

Mr. Parker also described the introduction of skip stop service, which will give chosen regular routes an aspect of express service. Mr. Parker also highlighted service changes in the Central Avenue area, Matthews, and the South park area; as well as

describing service changes to Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville. Mr. Bensman asked how CATS advertises or publicizes new services, and Mr. Parker explained that normally relatively little marketing of new services is done until the service has become established and begun to build some ridership, at which point heavy advertising begins.

Mr. Bensman asked whether TSAC members can be provided with ridership figures for the various services, and Mr. Parker agreed to provide ridership figures at every meeting.

B. #18 Proposed Service Changes: Mr. Parker advised the members that a resident of the Barclay Downs neighborhood had requested that route #18 be changed to move bus traffic from her street to Colony Road. He told them that CATS had issued a public notice that such a change was under consideration, and citizen response was overwhelmingly against the change, so the route will not be changed at this time.

C. Bicycle Parking Facilities: Mr. Brown explained that CATS is working toward installation of bicycle racks at every park-and-ride lot possible, and has purchased a number of Bike Rib model racks. He noted that there are currently two racks, with room for six bicycles, at the Transit Center, that racks have also been placed at the Arboretum park-and-ride and at several church and park lots, and that plans for placement at other locations are underway. Ms. Gallant asked whether there are bicycle racks on every bus, and was told that there are. Mr. Parker commented that CATS will have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on bicycle amenities by next year, and that racks are to be installed in every park-and-ride lot where the owner will allow it. He noted that as of this time, something over 50% of owners had agreed.

Mr. Parker also briefed the members that his staff has been in discussions with representatives of BIKES of Mecklenburg County, and that by and large they are satisfied with CATS' efforts. He mentioned that one BIKES member has continued to request that racks be placed at every bus shelter, but noted that research around the country shows that virtually no large transit system provides that many bicycle racks, and that very few do as much for bicyclists as CATS.

Mr. Horstman asked how bike rack utilization is monitored, and Mr. Parker told him it is not, that bicycle amenities are provided for the convenience of those who wish to use them. However, he noted that bus-mounted bike rack usage is recorded each month with all other ridership categories. Mr. Bensman asked how CATS maintains a balance between the demands of very vocal advocates for certain programs and the requirements of budget management, and Mr. Parker told him that in the case of bicycle amenities, Mr. Tober, Mr. Hines and he were all in agreement that bicycle racks are a legitimate and effective use of resources in the effort to build ridership.

D. Fare Policy Discussion: Mr. Parker provided the members with a summary of the proposed CATS Fare Policy, which he noted was one aspect studied by the Countywide Transit Services Study. He briefly described the provisions of the policy,

explaining that all fares are based upon the base fare, which is currently \$1.00. He explained that express service fares are 40% higher, because they involve longer trips; and that fares for regional express service, which reaches outside Mecklenburg County, will be 100% higher than the base fare. Mr. Parker told the members that CATS will also institute reverse commute fares, which are designed to encourage return ridership on express routes. He told them these reverse commute fares will equal the base fare, and will be in effect during those hours when express buses have low ridership on their return routes. Mr. Parker expressed his belief that CATS is the only major transit system in the country to implement reverse commute fares. Mr. Horstman suggested allowing reverse commuters to ride for free, and Mr. Parker told the members that such a policy will be studied if the low-cost fare is not successful. Mr. Parker briefed the members that community shuttle fares will be \$0.25, in recognition of their shorter routes; and that activity center shuttle fares will be determined by the cost-sharing agreements which put them in place. He noted that light rail transit service will be similar to local bus service, and that therefore the base fare will apply to LRT service. Mr. Parker also discussed transfers, discount fares, and passes, and noted that a system of discount passes is under investigation.

Mr. Parker told the members that STS fares will remain at \$1.40, equivalent to express fares, but less than the \$2.00 allowed by Federal regulations. He explained that the STS fare is higher than the base fare because STS service is far more costly to provide, and because slightly higher fares act as an incentive to encourage those riders who are able to use regular route service.

Mr. Bensman asked whether the general public is satisfied with the current fares, and Mr. Parker told him that CATS receives relatively few complaints about fares, and that market research done in the Fall of 2000 showed that riders were generally satisfied with the fares.

Mr. Parker also discussed the fare adjustment policy provision, noting that the system requires a consistent mechanism for raising fares as needed. The draft policy call for an increase of \$0.10, or the percentage two year increase in inflation, whichever is higher, every two years. He noted that a fare increase this small will not likely result in a loss of ridership, and that the next fare increase will be in FY2004. He told the members that STS fares will rise by \$0.20. Mr. Bensman asked why STS fares will not increase more than that, given the costliness of STS service, but Mr. Parker explained that a higher increase would likely result in public dissatisfaction. Mr. Horstman noted that over the years, the fare rates are likely to rise more than the inflation rate, and Mr. Parker told him that, even so, increases will always be relatively small; and he commented that fare increases will be implemented in conjunction with service changes. Mr. Horstman asked about the logistical difficulty inherent in fares requiring odd amounts of change, and Mr. Parker noted that CATS is optimistic that more riders will use passes.

Finally, Mr. Parker told the members that the Fare Policy will be presented to the MTC for information at its August 22nd meeting, and for approval at the September meeting. Assuming MTC approval, the new fare policies will be implemented as of October 1st.

IV. Chairman's Report

A. Mr. Loflin requested that members attempt to attend as many public corridor study meetings as possible, and that they provide feedback on meetings they have attended to the rest of the TSAC.

B. Mr. Loflin also recommended that members attend the MTC meetings whenever possible, for familiarity with the process, and because his term as Chairman will expire in December, and it would be helpful for any prospective new Chairman to be familiar with the MTC.

V. Chief Operating Officer's Report

Mr. Parker briefed the members that he and a number of his staff were scheduled to attend a forum on accessible transportation issues sponsored by the Charlotte Mecklenburg Advocacy Council for People with Disabilities and CATS.

V. Other Business

Mr. Loflin briefed the members that Ms. Matson has resigned from the TSAC, and Ms. Boggs will draft a letter to the Town of Mint Hill asking that it appoint a successor.

VI. Next Meeting

The next TSAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 11, 2001 at 4:00 pm.