

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE

Minutes of Public Hearing
May 27, 2004

Downers Grove Village Hall
801 Burlington Avenue, Downers Grove

Commissioner Tully called the Local Transportation Subcommittee meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Tully, Commissioner Schnell, Robert Kollmar, Rich Mueller

Staff: Messrs. Dave Barber, Dir. of Public Works; Stan Balicki, Asst. Dir. of Public Works; Dorin Fera, Traffic Mgr.; Doug Kozlowski, Dir. of Marketing/Media Relations; Bus Drivers Carl Schumacker, Eric Akueltah, Bob Segroves; Kirsten Coulman, Megan Dugard, Recording Secretary

Visitors: William Waldock, 1409 Willard Pl.; Jim Mulqueeny, 1190 Parker Ave.; Jeff Waxman, 5503 East Lake Dr., Lisle; Dawn Larson, 7117 Dunham Rd.; Amy Buonassisi, 6841 Saratoga

MINUTES - No minutes to approve

OLD BUSINESS

Commissioner Tully explained the reason for the meeting was to bring ideas and recommendations from Public Works Director, Dave Barber and his staff, regarding the bus program, to a public forum and to carry forward some of the recommendations as discussed by Village Council. Commissioner Tully reminded the members that this subcommittee was only to meet until the new Transportation Advisory Commission was created.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Update on Progress since Last Meeting - Mr. Barber discusses he would like to take some of the goals and/or suggestions of this subcommittee to the Village Council meeting on June 8th, for adoption the following week, in order to implement them.

b. Review of Proposed Bus Advertising Plan - The first recommendation is to increase revenue through advertising on the buses by 1) equipping buses with metal frames to hold the proposed advertising information (approx. cost = \$2000); 2) develop a Transit Display Ad contract/permit for specific content, keeping the advertising local; 3) develop a list of potential advertisers to contact (materials to cost approx. \$300 per bus); 4) look at advertising in the interior of the bus; 5) establish rates; and 6) develop a

summary guide. Those parties interested in advertising on the buses may include existing local banks and businesses as well as new businesses coming to town; Commissioner Tully concurs.

Commissioner Tully discussed the advertising contract with Viacom and how the estimates of revenue were based upon that contract, which would be fairly reliable. He inquired as to the basis for the current estimates for local advertising, wherein Mr. Barber was uncertain. Commissioner Tully believed Council may have budget concerns as to spending the initial money on the advertising and asked whether there would be an interest in advertising up front to support the request. Mr. Barber could not confirm what revenue would be brought in to offset the dollars expended; however, he suggested setting up a flyer and receiving quotes in order to move the matter forward. Advertising on all buses would bring in \$300 a month or \$40,000 a year, which would more than offset the initial investment.

Traffic Manager, Dorin Fera indicated money existed for the metal frames on the buses in a current traffic contract. Further advertising ideas followed.

A resident suggested that since there may be budget concern by council, staff should formalize a plan to retain three advertisers to sign up for \$750.00 each, thereby assuring the \$2,000 was met. Commissioner Tully concurred. Commissioner Schnell voiced her opinion that she did not believe council would be too concerned about the proposal, as long as a plan was presented in two weeks.

Mr. Kollmar provided other suggestions for advertising, such as advertising in the Village Corner, the Village Town Crier, etc. and advertising inside the train stations. Commissioner Schnell emphasized the need to advertise the reduced fares on the Village's cable system, provide press releases, etc. as soon as council approves the rate reduction. Members discussed the policy and process for restrictive advertising, such as tobacco and liquor. As to advertising inside the train station, Commissioner Tully believed the Main Street Station and the parking deck would be prime candidates for such advertising.

Mr. Kollmar moved and Mr. Mueller seconded, Motion to recommend to the Village Council that staff's recommendation of Action Steps 1, 2 and 3 to proceed as stated. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote of 4-0.

Regarding Action Step 4, as it relates to the informational flyer, Commissioner Tully suggested piggybacking on an existing mailing to save costs. Mr. Barber suggested contacting the Chamber of Commerce and culling the list in order to cut down on costs. Commissioner Tully agreed, mentioning many of the chamber's members would be local. Mr. Barber also added that the expertise of Marketing Director, Doug Kozlowski was available to the Village. Commissioner Schnell believed it was important to target the flyer to the right people and possibly phone them ahead to give a more personal touch.

c. Review of Proposed Marketing Plan – Mr. Barber explained the goal was to increase ridership, market the new rates when approved, and update the new flyers simultaneously with the bus schedule and new rates. The home page will have to be updated as well. Advertising will be promoted on the cable channel. Areas to target will include the south side of the Village, individuals on the waiting list for parking spaces, apartment complexes, and inserting a large article in the newspaper.

Commissioner Schnell suggested advertising the bus services if gas prices continue to rise. Mr. Barber and Commissioner Tully concurred. Other marketing strategies followed by Mr. Barber, including customer input, looping the buses around the Village to bring patrons to the Farmer's Market on Saturday, and possibly providing a booth there. Per Mr. Barber, the marketing program would be ever evolving.

Resident, Mr. Waldock, suggested that under the taxi program, seniors could use their taxi coupons for the buses. Mr. Kollmar spoke of the marketing opportunities existing at several kiosks as well as the buses being the best kept secret for advertising. Commissioner Tully suggested investigating the kiosk issue, costs, etc. Mr. Barber raised concern about maintenance and vandalism of the kiosks.

Other ideas placing new bus schedules in any empty, unrented newspaper boxes, providing larger print of bus schedules in front of the Village Council space during the Heritage Festival, advertising in unrented booths at the Heritage Festival, using Public Works vehicles for advertising, and promoting "Coffee with the Council" on the buses. Resident, Mr. Mulqueeny asked whether the advertising could expand to the new shelters being erected.

Mr. Barber emphasized it will be important to receive input from the bus drivers as it relates to route adjustments. Before any route announcement is made, a full assessment will be necessary but will be time-consuming -- commenting that the Public Works Department was in the middle of construction season. Commissioner Schnell's understanding was that Council wanted to keep or decrease the number of routes. Commissioner Tully recalled that the focus was to be "budget neutral" to enhance service. Mr. Kollmar discussed the importance of enhancing route frequency and obtaining the results Council was seeking; otherwise, the goal of increasing ridership by 50% would not occur.

Commissioner Tully raised the point that program "roll outs" may be necessary, i.e., rate changes, adding service, and significantly involving the newspapers. Mr. Barber did not envision changing the routes drastically but some enhancements were necessary. Per Commissioner Tully, adding earlier and later routes in a budget neutral scenario would be ideal. However, Mr. Barber discussed the labor costs and maintenance costs associated with adding more buses at the same time. Mr. Kollmar recalled that the cost per additional run for adding a bus was less than \$15.00. Mr. Barber explained that even though rates would be decreased, it could increase ridership, but it did not affect revenues. Mr. Mueller offered a suggestion to seek grant monies for new equipment, which could reduce the operating expenses.

Commissioner Schnell suggested contacting the Village of Woodridge to get news articles in their papers regarding the Park and Ride program and to advertise in other nearby communities.

Mr. Barber stated that in the future, he will be reporting on the condition of the buses, where the Village wants to go with the buses, and whether the Village wants to purchase or sell existing buses. Commissioner Tully then spoke about the new grant opportunities opening up since the Village's charter service was gone. On that comment, Mr. Barber reminded the members that the Village Council wanted to continue the bus service program for one year. He, however, would like to continue the service longer and provide a package as to the long-term feasibility of keeping the program. Since certain grants were multi-year, to seek them now could be premature.

In addition to marketing to those residents waiting for a parking permit, Commissioner Tully suggested as a routine procedure, to hand the bus/rate materials to those residents asking to be placed on the waiting list, thereby saving mailing costs. Mr. Barber concurred, and talked about what other communities were charging for residents getting on their waiting lists, i.e., a refundable or non-refundable \$50.00 fee as a commitment to being on a waiting list.

Regarding marketing, Commissioner Tully discussed the importance of using the grass- roots support for the bus service, using word of mouth, email and encouraging residents who already use the service to spread the word to their friends and neighbors.

Mr. Segroves believes visibility of a bus route is important. The library parking lot had poor bus visibility. He spoke of the bus service offered many years ago.

Mr. Kollmar asked that the comments/ suggestions in this meeting be included in the marketing program. Mr. Barber indicated staff was taking notes and would incorporate them and would continually report on what the department was doing with the bus program.

d. Review of Proposed Rates - Mr. Barber started off the discussion recalling that back in 2003 when rates were changed there was no change in PACE ridership. However, the drivers indicated that they lost riders closer to the train station. Per Mr. Barber, downtown parking was the department's competition at \$1.25 per day, making it cheaper to park downtown than ride the bus. A review of the former Cost per Day rates versus the Cost per Day Current Rates followed. A rate spread was noted. After calculating and reviewing the figures, Mr. Barber presented a Rate Comparison Table with staff recommending the \$.75/per one-way; \$18.00/12 ride; \$45.00/monthly ticket rates. However, based on input from the drivers concerning the problems with making change, a \$2 daily rate is suggested.

Discussion followed that the bus drivers were hearing positive comments from the riders regarding the new proposed rate structure and that much email was

being received as to when the new program would begin. Other member comments included the fact that gas rates were increasing and bus rates were decreasing and that bus service was another option for residents to consider. The service was reliable.

A resident inquired about giving frequent riders a rate break, referring to a list of long-time riders, wherein. Commissioner Tully and staff conveyed there were some ideas discussed about giving long-time riders a free cup of coffee or some sort of rate break. However, the goal of the program was to enhance the bus service, which included revenue. To offer reduced rates and give retroactive discounts would not be cost-effective and the program could be gone in a year.

Mr. Kollmar moved to recommend to the Village Council the proposed rate structure: \$2.00/per one-way; \$18.00/12 ride; and \$45.00/monthly ticket, and moving the matter expeditiously to the next Village Council meeting, seconded by Mueller. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote of 4-0.

Commissioner Schnell suggested that Marketing Director Doug Kozlowski publicize the rate program with the press as soon as the Village Council approves the rate program.

e. Review of Proposed Monthly Report - Public Works Mr. Barber stressed the importance of monitoring the program as it relates to ridership, i.e., track the number of riders per run per route; track the increase in riders. He will develop a monthly report beginning at the end of May for a June report. The report will also include progress on advertising/marketing, recommendations from tonight's meeting, and the overall status of the program of where it's heading; keeping more in line with Village Council's goal. Mr. Barber would like to bring the monthly report to this meeting so long as it meets monthly and to keep the matter moving forward, but would also present it to the Village Council, if necessary.

Commissioner Tully agreed time was of essence and suggested this subcommittee continue to meet monthly in hopes of getting the Transportation Advisory Commission formed as soon as possible. Staff and subcommittee members agreed. Mr. Kollmar also emphasized the need to report the information as soon as possible for purposes of tracking the budget, reviewing the ridership trends, and reviewing the strategies, but also to review the expense side of the program and review overhead issues. He conveyed the subcommittee would eventually have to address outsourcing some of the expenses. Commissioner Tully agreed the topics could be discussed for the next meeting.

Members and Mr. Barber agreed to hold the next subcommittee meeting on June 17, 2004, 6:00 p.m. at City Hall.

OTHER MATTERS

Mr. Segroves raised discussion about reducing the size of the signs on the passenger side of the bus due to maintenance issues but also review the rear sign on the engine. Regarding Step 4, Potential Advertising, Mr. Segroves suggested to phone riders in addition to sending the mail. Commissioner Schnell and Commissioner Tully agreed on that point. Mr. Segroves also discussed ideas for marketing visibility, similar to the Chamber of Commerce and offering a certain curve discount rate for riders over a period of time. Dialog followed regarding bus window advertising, the availability of "wrap" advertising, and advertising inside the bus.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Resident, Mr. Waldock, 1409 Willard Place, spoke about the recently released coordinated study between METRA and PACE to increase ridership. He reported on his recent attendance at the IAPCC meeting. It is his hope to see continued Village presence at the meetings, noting the IAPCC would not only be kicking off its "Ride DuPage" program on July 1, 2004, but the Mayors and Managers program was trying to get \$150,000 to begin circular bus routes through the transit program. Mr. Waldock believed the \$150,000 would offer benefits to Downers Grove; however, approximately 20 other communities were competing for the money. Mr. Barber indicated there would be a participant at the meeting.

Mr. Schumacker explained he has picked up a few more riders on his north route and believed it was important for the Village to advertise that the buses will travel to where riders live and suggested not to place a route out where no ridership exists. Commissioner Tully explained the subcommittee did review where people on the waiting list live within the Village and did see them as possible candidates for ridership.

ADJOURN

**THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 8:15 P.M ON MOTION BY MR. MUELLER,
SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER SCHNELL. MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted,
(as transcribed by tape)

/s/ Celeste K. Weilandt _____
Celeste K. Weilandt, Recording Secretary