# TRANSIT SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Meeting Summary**

**Thursday, October 10, 2019**

**TSAC Members Present:** Sam Grundman, Charlotte

Louis Cosentine, Huntersville

Walt Horstman, Matthews

Terry Lansdell, Charlotte

Daniel MacRae, Charlotte

Chris Maloy, Charlotte

Krissy Oechslin, Charlotte

Patrick Paige, Mecklenburg County

Heather Seagle, ?

Sherri Thompson, Charlotte

**CATS/City of Charlotte Staff:** John Lewis,Larry Kopf, Molly Carter, Celia Gray, Bruce Jones, Erin Kinne, Pamela White, (2 other people)

***Meeting Time 4:00-5:30 PM***

# Call to Order

Chairman Sam Grundman called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

# Approval of September 2019 Meeting Summary

Sam Grundman asked for a motion to approve the meeting summary from September 2019. Terry Lansdell made a motion to approve the summary as written and Louis Cosentine seconded the motion. The meeting summary was approved unanimously.

# Public Comment on Agenda Items:

No one from the public was in attendance to comment.

# Chairman’s Report

Sam Grundman reported that the September MTC meeting included approval of the alignment for the Pineville/Ballantyne Blue Line Extension. It also included information reports on the Bus Pilot and Corridor Study, the North Corridor Express update, and the Regional Transit Plan status.

# Report from the CATS Chief Operations Planning Officer

Larry Kopf presented on the following information items.

1. Bike Lane Floating Platform
2. More Trips to Amazon Facility and 60 Tyvola Rd service
3. Annual Light Rail Weekend Shutdown
4. Gate Arms Repair and Replacement

# Bike Lane Floating Platform

Larry began his remarks by stating that Charlotte’s first floating platform was installed on October 10, 2019, on 4th Street between Tryon and Church. It is operating as a pilot program. More logistics need to be worked through before a second location can be identified.

Larry distributed printed information to the group, which included a photograph of the newly installed platform, signage, and painted markings. He stated that the purpose of the platform is to reduce conflict between bikes and vehicles, and that bicyclists were supposed to yield to pedestrians getting on and off the bus.

Krissy Oechslin asked if a floating platform design could be used on streets that don’t have bike lanes.

Larry responded that it can be used anywhere there is a substantial gap between the sidewalk and the point at which the bus comes to a stop, but it is primarily meant for use with bike lanes.

Louis Cosentine asked if there is adequate signage to make clear to cyclists how to maneuver when they approach the platform.

Larry responded that the yield sign is present to clarify right-of-way. Additional icons are being painted on the pavement as well. He added that this is being used in other cities, as well.

Chris Maloy asked if the platform is at curb height or at another height. He also asked if it is evident to cyclists what they need to do.

Larry responded that it’s at curb height. He also added that additional directional icons will be painted.

Terry Lansdell commented that the current striping and triangle “teeth” are consistent with CDOT’s program.

Heather Seagle clarified that the platform is rubber, after someone referred to it as metal. She commented that it is used so that buses don’t have to enter bike lanes during drop-off and pick-up.

Larry added that this makes it easier for drivers, as they don’t need to pull out of and back into the travel lane, which can be time consuming and can create confusion for other drivers regarding maneuvering around stopped buses.

Terry asked if a video will be produced to spread awareness and show correct use of platforms.

Larry responded that a video has not been created. He agreed it may be helpful. Larry added that outreach is being conducted through presentations at multiple meetings. Information is available on CDOT’s site and CDOT is taking lead on developing content.

Heather commented that CDOT is also studying before-and-after affects of this pilot platform.

Walter asked if this is part of the project on Trade Street, starting at McDowell, to create a bus-only lane.

Larry responded no. He added that the Trade Street bus-only lane project is delayed and it’s uncertain when it will continue.

Walter commented that the other side of Tryon Street, across from the floating platform, is blocked for construction.

Larry responded that he not aware of the project schedule.

# More Trips to Amazon Facility and Route 60 Tyvola

Larry began his remarks on the next topic by stating that additional trips have been added to the Amazon facility. After one week ridership is in the teens, but it is expected to pick up as Amazon ramps up its staffing. Ridership on route 60 is light so far, but there will be additional outreach to help it to pick up.

The additional trips are considered a low-cost solution to meet an expressed need.

Chris stated he appreciates the update and appreciate the approach to identified service issues.

Larry also added that on Monday October 7, service changes occurred and drivers were switched. He is not aware of any issues resulting from this.

# Annual Light Rail Weekend Shutdown

Larry announced that light rail operations will shut down the weekend of October 19 & 20. He stated that a bus bridge service will be available. He does not yet know the station routes / schedule. He added that it would take twice as long to run the full route with buses as opposed to the train, due to traffic congestion and lights.

Sherri Thompson asked to for confirmation that light rail will be closed for entire day both days.

Larry responded yes. He explained this is an annual practice to perform maintenance and inspections that are best done during daylight or that take longer than the few hours of system inactivity that occur in the early a.m. during normal operations. This includes maintenance to art.

Krissy asked if the rail trail will be affected.

Larry answered no. Rail trail access will remain open.

Chris responded that last year there were impacts on use of one trail. He stated it runs on both sides at that point and both sides were closed.

Larry said he will follow up on this.

Sherri asked about the security presence at the Third Street station. She said that people often congregate on and near the stairs and it sometimes feels unsafe.

Larry responded that CATS security officers don’t have jurisdiction outside the platform area. The stairs and sidewalk are CMPD’s jurisdiction. He added that someone would have to do something wrong/illegal to get a citation. He will ask Safety & Security to respond further on this issue.

# Gate Arms Repair & Replacement

Larry described the issue of motor vehicles causing damage to gate arms at rail crossings. He said this occurs when a driver does not slow down adequately and stop across the line with a gate arm across the hood of their vehicle. Movement of the vehicle while the arm is down causes damage ranging from $150-$700 to repair. Larry stated that cameras capture the license plate numbers, but this is not effective 100% of the time.

Sam asked if CMPD gives the offending drivers tickets for this.

Larry responded that they can, but he’s not sure how often they do.

Heather asked how often gate arms need to be replaced.

Larry answered that monthly we are replacing at least one. Drivers crossing the line and stopping improperly at crossings happens daily. He stated the highest occurrence rate is at North Tryon Street. He added that improperly stopped vehicles also require trains to reduce speed as they proceed through the crossing.

Walter asked if there have been any problems reported at the 7th Street crossing near the Spectrum Center. There is no pedestrian signal there and pedestrians cannot see the signal for the oncoming cars.

Larry said he will check but he’s not aware of any issues at this location.

CATS CEO John Lewis arrived.

# Information Items

# Bus Technology & Capital Replacement Plans

Chairman Sam Grundman introduced CATS CEO John Lewis.

Mr. Lewis provided a hand-out that covers: current sustainability initiatives; future fleet and fuel strategy; and transit bus purchase options. He began his presentation by describing CATS policy to replace buses after approximately 12 years or 500,000 miles. He stated that we successfully replace at these thresholds and we are constantly on a replacement cycle. Twenty-seven buses were replaced last year. With each year’s replacements, we have the opportunity to improve the fleet’s performance, efficiency, and environmental impact.

John elaborated that the City of Charlotte has adopted the goal of operating carbon neutral by 2030. Addressing fleet vehicles is critical to reaching this goal. He said that discussion of electric buses is active in Charlotte. He directed the group to page three of the handout, which lists pros and cons for several bus options. Electric buses include Rapid Charging and Slow Charging models. He explained that Rapid Charging buses take approximately 20 minutes to charge and cover 70-120 miles per charge. The average bus in operation covers 178 miles per day. Therefore, adding electric buses for regular service would create delays and/or require a greater number of vehicles to cover existing routes. At this time, he said, the cost of a full-electric vehicle ($900,000) translates to almost twice the cost of a diesel vehicle ($520,000) for half the performance.

Conversely, he explained, electric buses are fuel efficient and reduce emissions, making them ideal for niche situations such as the airport sprinter route, which is only seven miles. CATS is recommending electric for the airport sprinter, as part of its recommendations to the MTC. When it becomes more cost effective to add more electric vehicles to the fleet, CATS would like to do so. With an annual bus replacement budget of $56 million, CATS must balance a variety of needs and goals when replacing buses.

John described the pros and cons of diesel hybrid-electric buses and compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. He explained that their high reliability, high fuel efficiency, and lower fuel cost (than conventional diesel) makes them compelling options as bus purchases. Their purchase prices are higher than diesel buses but lower than full-electric buses.

Walter asked if the cost of retrofitting vehicles for use with alternative fuels has been evaluated.

John stated that it would average $50,000 per vehicle to do so, but the option is considered infeasible because after-market changes mean that we lose the warranty on the vehicle.

Terry asked if it’s possible to lease some vehicles, rather than purchasing all.

John responded that, yes, it’s possible. However, he explained that leasing is considered an operating expense, and would need to be covered with tax revenue, rather than a capital expense, which is eligible for Federal funds.

Terry asked if we could consider using electric buses for rapid transit.

John answered that many areas have tried pilot programs and they do not continue using the electric buses for rapid transit beyond the pilot due to issues of reliability. Given that CATS has committed to reducing travel time and wait times—the main goal of Envision My Ride—this known issue with reliability of the vehicles does not make it an attractive option at this time.

Patrick asked, given CNG buses’ high greenhouse gas emissions, as stated in the handout, why are they considered a viable or attractive option.

John responded that these pros and cons are the facts and each type of vehicle has various trade-offs. The benefits with CNG vehicles include cost savings on fuel ($1.10 per gallon vs. $1.90 for diesel) and stable, multi-year contracts.

Terry asked if CATS has considered that electrics will potentially result in further reducing fuel costs if the buildings go to solar power, per the citywide plan.

John said that each year’s bus replacement choices will take into account the available benefits and efficiencies associated with electric vehicles at that time.

Terry asked about the availability of funding sources for alternative-fuel buses purchases.

John replied that CATS applied for $3 million in Federal funds to use toward an electric sprinter bus pilot program; however, did not get it. There are not a lot of funding sources for this that we’re aware of.

Louis asked if the current range of purchase options would get us to our goal of being carbon neutral by 2030.

John responded, no, with the current technology, it would not. We have to carefully reevaluate the options each year to work toward this goal.

Terry asked if a goal exists to reduce CO2 exposure in places where buses idle, such as the transit center.

John responded that many, various improvements to the transit center are considered an overarching goal.

Sam asked if more overhead wires will be considered for electric transit.

John replied that the power draw for the Blue Line is about half the cost of fuel expenditures. So, it is known to have a cost-effectiveness benefit.

Terry asked for more information on the new van pool investments.

John responded that CATS is partnering with Duke Energy and using three all-electric vehicles in the van pool. They are studying their performance against the other vehicles in the pool.

Terry asked if the buses will be integrated with apps in the future.

John replied that the procurement process for a real-time is underway. Currently, staff is developing the scope. CATS is also working on on-board wi-fi with the City of Charlotte right now.

# Open Question & Answer Period

Krissy asked if fare capping is being considered by CATS.

John said yes, it is being explored. He explained the concept of fare capping for the group, which is a system that stops charging regular riders each month after they have spent a certain threshold amount. This would incentivize routine ridership and ease the financial burden of riders who rely on transit for their daily or near daily travel. John explained that the technology is complicated and developing a system that accurately captures ridership and rider spending is a challenge. He said options are being explored, including some that involve smartphones. Most passengers have a smartphone, but some do not.

Krissy added that fostering economic mobility is a priority for the City. She noted that corporate partnerships to achieve this goal are possible.

Walter asked for an update on the Hawthorne Bridge status.

John responded that the old steel is coming down and new steel is being delivered for the total rebuild. It will be open to traffic and rail by March/April 2020.

Sam asked John to review some of CATS long-term goals with the group.

John said that planning for the Silver Line alignment is underway. The corridor has been identified, from Indian Trail/Stallings, through uptown Charlotte, to the airport, and across the river to Belmont. The contract covering through 65% design will go before the MTC soon. At 20-25% design, we’ll be able to develop a cost estimate for the project. He also noted it is necessary to coordinate design and right-of-way acquisition with several active projects that impact the lengthy corridor. He said that the Ballantyne Blue Line Extension plans are in a similar state of development.

John added that the current half-cent sales tax will not fund the construction costs. Additional funding sources will need to be secured. The County cannot authorize a sales tax increase; it would require state legislative action.

Louis asked if there has been any movement on the issue of the Red Line.

John responded no. Norfolk-Southern and North Carolina Railroad have the plan in a holding pattern. They have been great partners on several other projects, but on this they have not been receptive to adding commuter rail service along what is currently a low-use corridor.

Patrick asked for updates on expanded Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service on I-77 north of Charlotte.

Larry responded that an additional express route will open in February 2020 with direct service from uptown to the park and rides. There is an ongoing study and discussions with Mooresville and other jurisdictions regarding expansion of BRT service.

John added that BRT improvements could include direct connects (building stops that would not require buses to exit I-77).

Terry asked if this is a fare-review year.

John responded that CATS has not raised the overall fare in several years. We have raised the top tier fare, but have also offered many discounted prices, keeping the average fare at $1.25.

Patrick asked if the City is considering increasing property taxes along light rail lines and directing the revenue to improving services.

John replied yes, CATS is making the argument to City Council that a portion of property tax increases should be invested in light rail service. Public investment produced this service and created the real estate value that exists along the light rail line.

Terry asked if Special Tax Districts produce revenue that CATS can use.

John responded that the funds have to be used in those Districts.

Sam asked for an update on the status of private investments in stations.

John replied that the RFP for Gateway Station’s development partner will be issued soon.

Patrick asked about the proposal submitted by Whitepoint Partners.

John said, in exchange for the property, the developer proposes to construct a new, modern transit center there. CATS is working through an evaluation of the proposal.

# Service Issues

Walter stated that many of the information screens in the transit center are broken.

John replied that the center overall is old and it is ready for replacement.

The meeting was concluded and adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

***NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY NOVEMBER*** *14, 2019*