# TRANSIT SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Meeting Summary**

**Thursday, February 13, 2020**

**TSAC Members Present:** Krissy Oechslin, Charlotte

Terry Lansdell, Charlotte

Sam Grundman, Charlotte

Jessi Healy, Mint Hill

Walt Horstman, Matthews

Daniel MacRae, Charlotte

David Snyder, Cornelius

Sherri Thompson, Charlotte

Jack Zovistoski, Huntersville

**CATS/City of Charlotte Staff:** Larry Kopf,Rachel Baker,Phil Gusman,John Howard, Bruce Jones, Erin Kinne, Blanche Sherman, Tracy Van Tassell

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

# Call to Order

Chair Krissy Oechslin called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

# Approval of January 2020 Meeting Summary

Krissy asked for a motion to approve the meeting summary from January 2020. Terry Lansdell made a motion to approve the summary. The January 2020 meeting summary was approved unanimously.

# Public Comment on Agenda Items:

No members of the public were in attendance.

# Information Items

# Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Budget

Blanche Sherman began her PowerPoint presentation by providing highlights on some of CATS’ major ongoing projects, including Silver Line Light Rail, Charlotte Gateway Station, Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Study, CityLYNX Gold Line, and 4th Street Bus/Bike Only Lane. Regarding the Silver Line, she said, Charlotte City Council has approved $50 million to begin the project. The Gateway Station project is in the procurement process to select a development consultant. The TOD Study is moving forward now that FTA funding has been programmed for it. Regarding the Gold Line, Phase 2 will start after the Republican National Convention is held in Charlotte, August 2020.

Next, Blanche presented on the CATS TRAX database which measures CATS’ performance on various metrics and compares to metrics across the industry. Blanche provided highlights of the FY19 Aggregate Scorecard. She stated that CATS has a structurally balanced budget. It is compliant with MTC financial and business performance objectives. The preliminary FY21 budget also positions CATS for future regional growth and provides mobility options to meet the needs of residents and other travelers.

Blanche provided an overview of the FY21 Preliminary Operating and Debt Service budgets and the FY21 – FY25 Capital Investment Plan. The FY21 proposed budget compared to FY20 shows a 3.6% increase overall. Blanche noted, at this time, the FY21 proposed budget excludes carryover items.

Blanche further discussed key changes in the FY21 budget, including increased sales tax revenue. Sales tax allocation is expected to account for 50% of the operating budget. The other categories are Fares & Service Reimbursements (16.9%), Non-Operating Revenue (14.1%), Maintenance of Effort (13.2%), Operating Assistance (2.9%), and Other Misc. (2.9%). The projected FY21 projected budget totals $176.6 million and results in additional funds available for allocation to the capital budget. (The FY20 adopted budget totaled $170.5 million.)

Terry asked, regarding the 1.2% maintenance increase, how much is for rail and how much for bus. He added that this breakdown will probably be requested by the MTC. Blanche responded that she does have those costs broken out between the two modes and she will provide them to the committee.

Blanche stated that CATS’ achievement of various financial performance objectives is in compliance with MTC policy. She detailed those performance objectives, which include Gross Debt Service Coverage and Net Debt Service Coverage. Next, she provided detail on the FY21 Debt Service Budget. Debt service for FY21 totals $50.9 million. David Snyder asked when the debt is expected to be paid. Blanche responded that CATS pays it in full as soon as our funding is received from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

Terry asked if Marketing expenses are included in the Operating Budget. Blanche replied yes. Krissy referred to one of Blanche’s slides which shows a decline in committed sales tax in the projected FY21 budget and asked why that is. Blanche answered that it is due to the development of the Silver Line project, and that number will go up if additional funding is secured for the project.

Next, Blanche reviewed the FY21 – FY25 Preliminary Capital Program Budget. The FY21 budget totals $38.2 million. Sources of funds include Federal and State grants, local sales tax, and carry-over project balances (not currently reflected in the preliminary program numbers).

Blanche summarized the key capital expenses, as follows. State of Good Repair (vehicles, facilities, etc.): replace 54 buses, 85 STS buses, 62 vanpool vans; contingency for Facilities projects (FY21-FY23); and Envision My Ride Shelters (FY25). Transit Safety & Security: camera replacements and dispatch upgrades and South Corridor lighting upgrades. Transit Long Range Capital Improvement: Silver Line Design (FY21 and FY22); ADA enhancements and improvements; and South End Station. Non-Revenue Vehicles: 15 new or replacement vehicles in FY21 and 52 new or replacement vehicles over five-year program. Transit Equipment: server refresh; UPS refresh; network infrastructure refresh; EPR initiatives; and tug replacements. Transit Other Programs: AVL upgrade for bus systems.

To conclude her presentation, Blanche provided key upcoming dates in the Proposed Budget Schedule, as follows. 2/18/20: presentation to CTAG. 2/26/20: presentation to MTC. 3/25/20: presentation to MTC. 4/15/20: CTAG recommendation. 4/22/20: MTC approval. 6/8/20: City Council adoption.

# ADA Transition Plan

Tracy Van Tassell introduced this item by providing background information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. When the law was enacted, she explained, the Federal government recognized the expense involved in meeting ADA standards, and allowed municipalities to develop transition plans to come into compliance over time.

The City of Charlotte’s plan did not include sidewalks. In 2010, updates to plans were required and ADA design standards were published. In 2017, the City entered into a contract with Cole & Co. to evaluate bus stops, crosswalks, curb cuts, sidewalks, pathways, etc. for compliance and concerns. At this time, the consultant is finalizing the data and compiling it into a plan, which is expected to be ready in June or July for public meetings with the intent of soliciting public input.

Tracy explained that public, municipally-owned spaces are not the only locations subject to the requirements of the ADA, but they are considered to be the highest priority among the categories of facility types. Next in that hierarchy, she said, would be universities and hospitals, then private commercial and industrial, then private residential properties.

Tracy also noted that changes to land development standards, particularly related to new construction, present challenges to reaching compliance. She added that no municipality is in complete compliance with the requirements of the ADA.

Sherri Thompson commented that in her experience Charlotte DOT is very responsive to ADA complaints and accessibility-improvement requests.

Jack Zovistoski asked if the ADA standards are based on minimum thresholds. Tracy answered yes. She added that we exceed the requirements in some cases, sidewalk width being one example.

Jack asked if the Department of Justice (DOJ) is planning any updates to the ADA (1990). Tracy replied that the DOJ’s current approach involves auditing cities’ compliance with the ADA and with their Transition Plans. Having a lawsuit brought, based on an ADA complaint filed, poses the bigger risk to municipalities.

Krissy described an example of a bus stop that could not be brought into ADA compliance due to various logistical conflicts and the decision was made to remove the stop completely, rather than continue to have a non-accessible and non-compliant bus stop. She said that losing the stop created great inconvenience for a large number of riders. She asked if the negative impact of a removing a facility is ever considered in cases like this where meeting ADA compliance is not feasible.

Tracy replied that the ADA Committee has members representing a variety of perspectives as they evaluate complaints and make resulting decisions. She noted that state roads also present limits to what the ADA Committee can do.

Larry added that he doesn’t believe there is much leeway for municipalities to have non-ADA-compliant transit stops. He noted that railroad-owned right-of-way is a common obstacle in some locations that limits our ability to adequately modify a site. It’s not clear if there are many options in these cases, he said, these issues can be brought up at the public meetings in June/July 2020 that Tracy had mentioned.

Tracy responded, if we get an ADA complaint, we have to address it. She noted that the ADA does not evaluate the complaints of able-bodied transit users; those complaints would go to CATS or another City department. She noted that an ADA complaint can only be filed by a person with disability standing, as defined in the statute. Tracy concluded her remarks by clarifying that ADA is not a building code; it’s a civil rights act.

# Bus Stop Policies & Practices

Larry Kopf began his PowerPoint presentation by stating that the issue of improving bus stop amenities, particularly in the Towns of Mecklenburg County, has come up at meetings of the MTC. Bruce Jones provided a handout to the committee members regarding CATS’ policy on bus stops, as defined in the Transit Service Guidelines. Larry stated that in November 2020 the guidelines will be up for review by TSAC, then will go to the MTC for adoption.

Larry reviewed the criteria that are used to assess sites where bus stops should be located, where amenities should be added, and how amenities will meet accessibility requirements. He stated that 25 boardings per day or wait times of 30 minutes are the typical thresholds for a stop to have a shelter and bench. Other considerations for the addition of amenities include high levels of use by seniors or people with disabilities and large numbers of transfers at the stop. CATS ensures that amenities that are installed are accessible and works with the jurisdiction responsible for sidewalks to ensure accessible connections to stops.

David Snyder asked if consideration can be given to stops that experience intermittent high-volume boardings but average below 25 boardings per day.

Larry replied that he doesn’t believe this type of situation has been considered in the past, but CATS could review stops like this in the decision process.

Walt asked if the term “benches” includes the semi-seats that are affixed to the pole. Larry answered yes, they are included with references to benches within the decision-making process on bus stop amenities.

Terry asked how long of a sample time is used to measure the boardings per day for the bus stops. Larry replied that the average is calculated over the course of a month, usually in October.

Next, Larry displayed a map of all of CATS’ bus stops, in and outside of Mecklenburg County. Beside the map, a chart provided a breakdown by jurisdiction of the total number of stops and the number that are without amenities. Larry clarified that CATS does not install amenities at stops outside Mecklenburg County, as there is not currently taxation in the other counties to pay for it. He added, most of the stops outside Mecklenburg are park and rides.

Terry asked if the numbers of stops without amenities reflect a fiscal deficit limiting the ability to add amenities at stops where the need has been identified. Larry responded yes, we are limited fiscally in meeting all of the needs at this time.

Terry asked if these needs are reflected in the proposed budgets for FY21 and/or future years. Larry replied that he will confirm this with Blanche Sherman and let the committee know. Krissy pointed out that benches are referenced in Blanche’s presentation, but not until FY25.

Terry commented that Metro Rapid service is not reflected in the assessment of the amenities. Larry said a lot of those stops already have amenities.

Sherri asked how decisions are made on where to install trashcans. Larry answered that it is based on several factors, including: staff evaluations of stops; complaints that are received; and whether a stop has a high rate of transfers.

Terry asked who is responsible for maintenance of the trashcans. Larry replied that CATS and Solid Waste Services are responsible for the maintenance.

Terry asked if all stops have signage indicating their unique identifying numbers. Larry replied, yes, all stops do.

Next, Larry showed slides with pictures of several stops that do not have amenities, particularly benches and shelters, and he reviewed the reasons that, in some cases, installation of amenities is not feasible. In the case of the Bryton Town Center stop in Huntersville, the amenities would need to encroach on private property and an agreement needs to be reached with the property owner. In the case of the Graham & Cottonwood stop in Charlotte, railroad tracks and railroad right-of-way abut the stop, leaving only a thin strip of land which is too small to accommodate amenities beyond a trashcan at the stop.

Next, Larry stated that CATS usually builds the amenities. CATS - Development is responsible for LYNX stations, sprinter buses, park and rides, community transit centers, and neighborhood transit centers. CATS - Facilities is responsible for handling customer requests, the Transit Enhancements Program, shelter refits, TAMS crew maintenance, and City Engineering’s in-house design process. City Engineering does the installations. Larry added that the amenities are built and installed to meet accessibility standards, in accordance with: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG); the US Access Board; and the Proposed Guidelines for Pedestrian Facilities in the Public Right of Way (PRWG).

Bruce Jones delivered the next portion of the presentation, to discuss the review process of the bus stop committee. He provided committee members with a handout outlining the guidelines of the bus stop committee and a flowchart depicting the bus stop committee process. Bruce described the purpose of the committee, which is to review and follow CATS guidelines on complaints and requests regarding bus stops, including requests for new stops, removal or relocation of a stop, removal of existing amenities, and safety and accessibility (ADA conformity) concerns. The committee does not review the following: installation of a bus stop amenity (shelter / bench / trashcan); route changes; rail station issues. These topics are reviewed by other committees and divisions. Shelter requests, for instance, are reviewed by CATS - Facilities.

Next, Bruce described the membership of the bus stop committee, who are selected to represent areas of their expertise. The committee membership includes: BOD Road Supervisor; CATS Safety & Security; CATS Transportation Planner; CATS Accessibility Coordinator; BOD Quality Manager; CATS Amenity Coordinator; CDOT Transportation Planner; CDOT Traffic Safety; and CATS TAMS Supervisor. Requests for the addition of new members shall be requested at the monthly meeting for review by existing members.

Criteria and considerations that the committee takes into account include the spacing of stops, safety, and accessibility. Bruce noted that CATS follows ADA requirements for accessibility for all new stops and for the improvements that are made to existing stops. Access to the stop, he clarified, can include parking lots and other paved segments that connect to the area. He added, by Googling “CATS Standards Details,” you can easily locate the Charlotte Land Development Standards Manual.

Bruce described the key bus stop guidelines, which include: a firm, stable surface (typically a poured concrete pad); that the pad clear a minimum eight-foot length perpendicular to curb or roadway by minimum five-foot width parallel to curb or roadway; that it connect to streets, sidewalks, or pedestrian paths by an accessible route; slope of the boarding area perpendicular to roadway not to exceed 2% grade; slope of the boarding area parallel to roadway must be same as roadway, to the maximum extent practicable.

Walt asked Bruce to confirm the dimensions of the pad—that the long measurement runs perpendicular to the roadway, not parallel to it. Bruce answered yes and explained that the space is needed perpendicular to the bus for APA compliant boardings and departures and for other maneuvering at the stop.

Jack asked if the City is responsible for pouring the concrete for the stops to meet these requirements. Bruce answered yes and specified that Charlotte DOT usually does it.

John Howard delivered the next portion of the presentation, covering the process for evaluating requests for bus amenities. He began by stating that there are 22 types of bus pad configurations in the City of Charlotte Land Development Standards manual. The design standards, he explained, address the variety of contexts that may exist at a stop location. Amenities are also evaluated based on the location’s development type and ridership.

Regarding Rezoning Review, John said, CATS receives a rezoning packet each month. Staff meets monthly with Charlotte DOT and Charlotte Planning, Design & Development (PD&D) to review rezoning applications. CATS provides comments on projects that are related to transit operations and submits them to PD&D.

John discussed the next step, Land Development Review. Design review meetings, he said, are coordinated through the Land Development department. City staff review projects in the plan review process, including urban, commercial, subdivision, etc. prior to meeting with developers. Comments are provided on plans and submitted to Land Development staff. Through this process, staff also requests the replacement of existing stops to meet ADA requirements.

Terry asked John if there is an identified threshold for CATS to weigh in and provide comments on rezoning requests. John replied that it depends on several factors related to the sites. CATS usually weighs in on every request.

Phil Gusman made a comment that the zoning committee gets to be a citizen voice. When they talk directly with developers, they are able to propose bicycle and pedestrian priorities, accessibility needs, etc. They can present the various aspirational priorities for a neighborhood.

Larry delivered the final portion of the presentation, showing several before-and-after photos of amenities improvements at stops throughout CATS’ service area. Walt asked if Larry knows how many amenities CATS currently maintains. Larry answered, 279 shelters and 222 benches.

Sherri asked, How much say does CATS have in Transit Oriented Design (TOD) decisions? John Howard responded that transit amenities are part of a bonus structure. CATS looks at adopted area plans and emphasizes land us that favors integrated transit connections, on a case-by-case basis.

Jessi asked if there are any efforts to promote ridership and get the numbers up. Larry replied yes. Specifically, MetroRapid service is increasing ridership for Davidson, Cornelius, and adjacent communities. In addition, a feeder bus network to connect to rail stops is being developed.

Krissy commented that Mayor John Aneralla of Huntersville brought up several of these issues related to increased ridership in northern Mecklenburg County at the last MTC meeting. This issue is on the MTC’s radar. Larry added that CATS staff will be meeting with several of these Towns soon to identify opportunities for growing service and ridership.

# Report from the TSAC Chair

Krissy Oechslin introduced this item by providing an overview of the January MTC meeting. She reiterated that there was a discussion of bus stops in Huntersville. There was also a budget presentation from Blanche Sherman, similar to the one she provided TSAC earlier in the meeting. The consulting firm STV gave a presentation on bus propulsion technologies, including information on electric buses as well as the drawbacks of investing in compressed natural gas (CNG) buses that some municipalities have experienced. Krissy asked if the presentation can be posted to CATS’ web site. Larry responded that he will send it out to the committee.

Krissy concluded her remarks by announcing that there are openings on TSAC and she encourages members to spread the word to those who may be interested in serving on the committee.

# Service Issues

Walt commented that the College Street closure was recently extended by several weeks and signs are saying it will be closed through February 20th. He asked if this new date is known to be accurate. Bruce responded that it’s expected to partially open February 22nd. The impact on service is being evaluated.

Sam commented that on New Year’s Eve all the clocks in the Charlotte Transit Center (CTC) stopped at 2 am, for several hours. Larry said he will have Technology staff look into it. Sam raised the following additional issues: drainage problems at CTC when it rains; Gateway riders are unhappy with MetroRapid; and train delays are occurring daily lately. Larry said that he will look into these issues.

Sherri commented that she is pleased with the announcements she has heard lately, related to delays, changes, etc. They have been clear, frequent, and adequately detailed.

Terry commented that transit signage at the airport has been unclear and incomplete in construction areas lately. Larry made a note of the issue.

Walt commented that a driver on the 65 Route into Charlotte has been doing an incorrect route recently. Larry said he would send this information to Reggie Arrington.

The meeting was concluded and adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

***NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY MARCH 12, 2020***