



Duluth Transit Authority

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MINUTES

Special Board of Directors Meeting
Tuesday, July 13, 2021
DTA Administration Offices / Board Room
4:00 PM

NOTICE: The DTA Board of Directors will be holding its Board Meeting by other electronic means pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.021 in response to the COVID-19 emergency. Board members will be participating through video conference. Due to the COVID-19 emergency and the closure of City facilities, public comment will not be taken in person. However, members of the public can monitor the meeting and provide public comment on agenda items through WebEx Events. All persons interested may monitor and participate in the public hearing by clicking on the following link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86931286162?pwd=UGRyT09PSWlqVXFUURcFMzYy94dz09> or by dialing (312) 626-6799, Meeting ID: 869 3128 6162; Passcode: 590174. The public is also encouraged to submit written comment to lpaczynski@duluthtransit.com. Please include "DTA Special Board of Directors Mtg. July 13, 2021 Agenda" in the subject line and include your name, address and the agenda item you are commenting about. Please note that all public comment is considered Public Data.

CALL TO ORDER

Directors Present: Aaron Bransky, President; Henry Banks, Secretary/Treasurer; Michael Casey; Edmund Gleeson; Julie Zaruba Fountaine; Krystal Brandstatter; Tom Szukis

Directors Excused: Rondi Watson, Vice President; Joshua Smerdon

Directors Absent:

DTA Staff Present: Rod Fournier, Interim General Manager; Mark Horlocker, Director of Operations & Training; Chris Belden, Director of Planning & Grants; Dave Clark, Director of Marketing; Lisa Paczynski, Administrative Asst.; Jeff Dahlgren, Director of Scheduling

Others Present: Adam Barnum, Connetics Transportation Group; Kris Liljeblad, City of Duluth; Mark Baker

President Bransky called the meeting to order at 04:04 PM.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No public comment.

OLD BUSINESS (120 min.)

- Comprehensive Operational Analysis "COA" - Better Bus Blueprint "BBB"
President Bransky stated the purpose of today's meeting is to dig deeper into the Better Bus Blueprint and to answer any questions or concerns from Board members. Prior to opening the question and answer period, the DTA Director of Planning and Grants, Chris Belden, and Adam

Barnum of Connectic Transportation Group ("CTG") gave an overview of the Better Bus Blueprint "BBB" and highlighted routes that would be affected by the proposed BBB. A lot of data, maps and details are included in the BBB that will help to explain why some decisions were made and the recommendations thus far. DTA ridership is down about 33% compared to pre-pandemic ridership numbers (June 2019 vs June 2021). Nationally, DTA ridership is trending right along with other transit agencies and it has been very slow to recover for all. Travel patterns and behaviors are expected to change in the Pandemic aftermath due to various reasons (i.e., safety on board the bus, employees working from home; stimulus money and record car sales, higher availability and lower costs of parking areas). Collaborating with local partners such as the City, MnDOT and the County to improve transit infrastructure and maintenance will show that transit is still viable, thriving and important, which will help increase ridership. Grant funding is also important in showing that performance metrics are good and ridership is strong. Lessons were learned from the MnDOT New Service Expansion grant that was received a few years ago; a lot of those routes were coverage-based in a geographical sense, and several of those routes were discontinued due to low ridership. Compared to MnDOT, WisDOT funding has not been increasing and often doesn't keep up with inflation costs. Therefore, the City of Superior has taken on more of the financial burden and, because they are doing too much with too little resources, on-time performance and different reliability issues have been realized. In regard to Duluth, a lot of comments have been made that it is a confusing, complicated system because of its various route patterns and spans. Making small tweaks within the system as it is today is very challenging due to interlining, transfers, scheduling, etc., so that is part of the BBB motivation of wiping the entire slate clean and looking at Duluth and Superior with fresh eyes. The Technical Advisory Group who recommended a complete bus network redesign is comprised of staff from CTG, DTA, MIC, Duluth's Transportation Planner and Superior's Planning Director. Some of the BBB changes will affect some people positively, and unfortunately, some negatively in areas where bus service was discontinued due to low performance. Presently, there are 33 routes and the BBB's Recommended Draft Network would reduce that number to 14 routes, which are operated all days of the week. Of these 14 routes, 2 routes will be high frequency, pre-Bus Rapid Transit ("BRT") routes. The Recommended Draft Network allows for consistent service spans (routes start and end at similar times), reliable corridor frequencies and improved weekend service. The pre-BRT areas add about 8 additional miles of high-frequency service to the DTA system and less dependency on schedules. Other benefits of the Recommended Draft Network are improved travel times, enhanced access to major destinations, and with the high-frequency network, there is an increase in equity population access. The BBB still serves 98% of the DTA's existing ridership. The BBB survey is still live, a stakeholder meeting was recently held, and the network was launched for public review in an effort to gather as much feedback as possible. The Draft Network Recommendation and other BBB information is available on the DTA website. President Bransky commented that he was glad to see the level of specificity in the proposed BBB, and fully supports the concept of a memory bus schedule for weekdays and weekends. UMD is part of the Stakeholder Committee and seems to be supportive of the proposed changes. DTA staff are hoping to conduct more outreach in Kirby Center once the school year begins. Director Brandstatter expressed her disappointment with the changes to service in Superior because of how it would affect two homeless shelters, Billings Park elderly residents and Bryant and Cooper Elementary Schools. Mr. Belden noted that Superior service was not easy by any means, but it is expected that through the network redesign, ridership will increase because the service becomes more efficient and attractive by offering a service that performs much better and offers more access to more people. In response to

Director Banks, the Draft Network Recommendation provides more frequent service to Walmart in Hermantown and Superior. One area of concern for Director Casey is the reduction of service and frequency to Western Duluth and Superior. Mr. Barnum explained that in order to provide a 30-minute frequency in Western Duluth, a transfer would have to occur in the Spirit Valley area rather than a one-seat ride to downtown, but this is something that could be explored. Addressing Director Zaruba Fountaine's question, Mr. Belden stated the Better Bus Stops initiative will improve passenger amenities by establishing better bus shelter locations and addressing any spacing issues. Director Szukis believes the major road reconstruction planned for Central Entrance would be a perfect opportunity for the DTA to work with MnDOT to integrate BRT in the new design of that corridor. Overall, Director Szukis is in favor of the plan as it is, but he expects there to be additional conversation to plug in other areas that have been left out. Mr. Belden added there is a big element of empathy and preparation to make sure that this is far enough in advance, so people have enough time to prepare if service is removed from any certain area. In closing, if individual Board members have additional questions or concerns that they would like to discuss further, separate meetings could be scheduled with DTA staff and Mr. Barnum.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

President Bransky announced that the next Special Board Meeting will be held Tuesday, July 27, 2021, to allow for more Board member participation. The purpose of this Board Meeting is to make a decision regarding the permanent hire of a DTA General Manager. A Selection Committee will be chosen to virtually interview GM candidates and will recommend the best qualified candidate at the July 27 Special Board Meeting.

- Next Special Board of Directors Meeting - July 27, 2021
- Next Regular Board of Directors Meeting - August 25, 2021

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a **motion** was made by Director Gleeson and **seconded** by Director Szukis to adjourn; motion carries. Meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Paczynski
Recorder

Aaron Bransky - Board President

Signed/Title

7-25-2021

Date

