

Southeast Transportation Planning Region Transit Working Group #1 – Meeting Minutes

Date: July 24, 2013
Time: 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Location: City of Lamar Cultural Events Center
102 East Parmenter
Lamar, Colorado

Meeting Attendees:

Dan Tate – Southeast Colorado Economic Council (SECED)
Janine Pearce-Vasquez – Otero County Department of Human Services
Don Oswald – Kiowa County Commissioner
Dick Scott – Kiowa County Commissioner
Lynden Gill – Bent County Commissioner
Rick Klein – City of La Junta Administrator
Darren Glover – Prowers Area Transit Services, Lamar Community Resource and Senior Center
Jeremy Miller – Prowers County Veteran Services Officer
Dan Harbour – Southeast Developmental Services, Inc.
Kyla Sather – Colorado Department of Labor and Employment
Leonard Vance – RSVP
Wendy Buxton-Andrade – Prowers County BOCC
Connie Brase – Southeast Health Group
Cory A Forgue, KVAZ Radio
Tracey MacDonald, CDOT Division of Transit and Rail – Project Manager
Wendy Pettit, CDOT – CDOT 2 Regional Planner
Paul Westhoff, CDOT – Lamar Resident Engineer
Cally Grauberger, Transit Plus – Southeast Transit Plan Manager

Welcome and Introductions

Introductions were given with each attendee providing their name and organization.

Project Background

Tracey MacDonald gave an overview of the Statewide Transit Plan process and the timeline for completion of the Statewide Transit Plan and the Regional Transit Plans for the rural planning regions. There was also a discussion by Tracey about the MPACT 64 (**M**etro **M**ayors **C**aucus, **P**rogressive 15, **A**ction 22, **C**lub 20, **T**ransportation) Initiative and a request that was made by this group for CDOT to prepare a list of project needs, including transit needs that this group can then use for the initiative. More detailed information was provided in the meeting packet. A discussion of transit needs was discussed later in the meeting.

During the introductions, several topics were discussed:

- Veterans Service Officer from Lamar – Jeremy Miller gave a quick overview of his program. His program provides transportation services for veterans for medical trips to La Junta, Colorado Springs, and Denver. These trips are funded through a federal grant with transportation services provided by volunteer drivers.
- Bent County – Commissioner Gill stated that Fort Lyon would reopen in September to house homeless and veterans from around the state. Though many of the services will be provided on site, transit services to the surrounding area in Lamar and La Junta should see an increase along with more regional trips to destinations along the Front Range.
- Southwest Chief – Rick Klein gave an overview of the efforts of the Coalition to retain Amtrak service along its existing alignment. The effort includes Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico DOTs, BNSF Railway, and Amtrak.

Public Involvement Approach

Tracey also led a discussion to identify the techniques that should be used to involve the public in the transit planning process.

- There should be at least two meetings due to the long travel distances within the area. Lamar, La Junta and Las Animas should be considered as locations for open houses.
- May attempt an electronic town hall” to see how it works but there may not be much interest.
- For our communities, the best conversations happen at the community/town level. It was suggested that a “meet and greet” format where the commissioners host discussions could work too. Although they felt that the consultant would need to be at each meeting, it was discussed that the travel funds may not be available. Cally Grauberger of Transit Plus thought a short 4-question survey could be used at these meetings to solicit comments on transit without the added travel cost.
- Prowers County conducts a yearly passenger survey so this information could provide some information for this transit plan. There was a suggestion to maybe distribute a comment sheet with a couple of questions to riders on what their transit needs are.
- Other suggestions were to provide project information at Senior Centers (La Junta, Lamar, etc.), each town hall in the TPR, county offices, human services agencies, hospitals, libraries, and the Amtrak station. This would include flyers and take away postcards.
- All flyers and postcards should be prepared with English on one side and Spanish on the other.

Regional Planning

Cally led a discussion on the demographic data for the region. The data will be used to help with identifying needs within the region. The comments received during the discussion are provided below:

- Activity Center Map – A sheet was handed out to get comments on changes to the map and the list of activity center destinations. There was a comment that the Southwest Chief shown on our map seen to not include the BNSF RR. The consultant will recheck the map.
- Intercity Map – There was a comment that Southwest Chief was not shown with the correct alignment. The consultant will review the map and make the appropriate changes.
- Zero vehicle households - Some people have cars but don't use them for long trips; only short trips because of the condition of their car. Is there a way to account for these trips? Since most of this information is taken from the Census Bureau, this type of information may be difficult to collect; as it's not readily available.
- Prowers Areas Transit Services (PATS) saw a spike in ridership over past 3 years, about 20 more riders/day

- In the Southeast area, many young people don't have cars and need options. Some have started to use local transit services. There is an increase in the number of young persons using transit.
- Department of Social Services is also experiencing a spike in needs
- Job Growth – There were questions on the information for Kiowa County and where all the jobs are coming from in 2020 for the county. There is a need to explain the job growth and how it was derived. The consultant will check on this data and report back to the group.
- Residents Age 65+ - The senior population is growing and so is the need for transportation services.
- Some residents have to limit the use of their vehicle due to budget constraints. People do not have enough money to drive daily so there are decisions on which trips to make.
- Veterans Population – The veterans driver program make trips to Denver and picks up all over. However at this time, La Junta has no van program for veterans. Approx. 28-45 riders/month; 3 volunteer drivers; 2 mini vans and 1 ford Escape; 1-2 trips per weekday; rarely a need for Saturday; some clients have wheelchairs.
 - Fort Lyon reopens on September 1st as a site for homeless vets and other homeless populations. Health services are being provided by a variety of agencies on-site and off-site, so transportation is needed. Contact Lisa Trigilio and Bill Long to get them involved in our process.
 - Jeremy is working on a grant to start a VA Clinic in Lamar. This would mean that there would be more local services and potentially less trips to Denver.
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) - Most LEP residents are Spanish-speaking, some speak Chinese. Department of Social Services can provide information in other languages and helps with translation services. PATS uses Google Translate; Colorado Work Force helps with translation too. Southeast Developmental Services can translate, but hasn't had to do so. LEP population in SE is higher than shown on the map (check Dept. of Ed stats); CDS may have migrant data; Lamar School District has 83% free/reduced lunches.
- Workforce centers have monthly reports on employment.

Regional Transit Needs, Projects and Priorities

Needs

Cally and Tracey led a discussion on the Transit Needs that were identified in the 2008 Transit Plan. Each project was reviewed to identify if it was implemented, in progress, deferred or eliminated. This information will be used as a starting point for this transit plan update and will be provided to the MPACT64 group for their use.

Capital

- Replacement bus needs – These are ongoing, cyclical needs. There is a need to replace vehicles at 150K miles. A provider survey will be going out to each provider to update this information in the next few weeks. The information will be used to add the updated number of replacements.
- La Junta multimodal facility – Funds are being sought to convert the existing building to accommodate bus and rail and a park-n-ride. They have the money for design; working with CDOT on how to fund the rest. Keep in the Transit Plan.
- Prowers and La Junta need dispatch software
- Baca County needs a new van

Operating

- PATS has not expanded service; provides 2 days for shopping and 5 days for medical and employment trips; to Wiley 3 days a week (M, W, F)
- PATS – no after hours; closes at 5; tried it, but only 1 rider so not a need. The cost to provide later hours exceeded the benefit/need so not cost efficient.
- Kiowa changed from 5 to 4 days to get better utilization.
- Substance abuse population could use after hours service, but not cost effective at this point.
- Southeast Developmental Disabilities has 20 vehicles in fleet; vehicle replacements are approx. every 2 years; always a need; lots of clients in wheelchairs; have 2 vans with lifts and 2 buses with lifts; funding comes from Medicaid which covers gas and some costs but not replacement.
- Key challenges for transit in southeast region: not enough funding, resources and time
- Good ridership from Kiowa to Pueblo; not as much to Denver
- PATS used to go to Pueblo, Colorado Springs and Denver from 2003 to 2005 about 3 trips/month
- Not much need for service to adjacent states; people use Amtrak
- Not much need for Saturday service; however trying to expand service for substance abuse riders
- PATS does provide services for those with DUIs thru their regular service within business hours
- Need more regional transit service and on a regular basis, including more service to Pueblo, Colorado Springs and Denver
- Some training offered through PATS and CASTA

Coordination

- Key short-term goal is to have better interconnections between services; more coordination; how can services meet up, use/share buses, etc. Need help with coordination piece
- Provide more info on SUCAP service from Durango to Grand Junction and how they got the service started.
- Should consider bringing some specialized doctors to southeast rather than transporting people to front range for medical/dental services; no specialized medical services here for disabled or special needs (e.g., dentist for autistic children); could set up service here on a regular basis to reduce regional trip needs
- Expand mobilized services thru AAA if possible
- Human Service agencies try to utilize PATS as much as possible and have riders through a voucher program
- PATS is coordinating with human services and mental health to handle many of their clients' trips.
- RSVP provides limited service to Crowley and Sugar City – reimbursed for mileage only so hard to grow the number of volunteer drivers; not feasible for many to volunteer for mileage only
- Regional service:
 - PATS doesn't go out of the county
 - Intercity bus does travel through the region but due to their schedules, their services do not provide same day travel needs.
 - Veteran Service Officer asks for vouchers for transit in each county to get to Pueblo because services are just provided within counties to each county line
- There is a need to increase coordination at county lines for regional service and look at costs to do so.
- Kiowa County is operating a limited fixed route service. Others agencies and providers would like to hear more about the operations and costs of the program.

Other Projects

- Improve Lamar transit facility (similar to La Junta multimodal facility) – FASTER grant to build a new facility near the old facility for Amtrak and PATS – not able to match so lost grant; still want to keep this project on the list.
- SW Chief - \$100 M for track rehab/replacement; \$20M each for 5 entities; \$2 M a year for maintenance; BN and Amtrak agreed to 5 way split with KS and NM with CO currently the weak link. Applied for TIGER grant; be consistent and fair in funding SW Chief and CA Zephyr
- A project was listed for a reconstruction of the railroad overpass over SH287 in Eads (for the Towner Rail Line). There was a question about the status of the Towner line. Paul Westhoff, the Resident Engineer, in Lamar said that it would be discussed in the Statewide Planning meeting and he would let us know the final decision.

Next Steps

Will be getting back with the TWG on the next meeting date and time.

Adjourn

Tracey MacDonald of CDOT thanked the group for attending and reiterated the value of their participation and that we look forward to working with them over the next several months.

Project Contacts:

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