



CITY OF NORMAN, OK CITY COUNCIL COMMUNITY PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING

Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray, Norman,
OK 73069

Thursday, June 23, 2022 at 4:00 PM

MINUTES

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CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT

Councilmember Ward 1 Brandi Studley
Councilmember Ward 2 Lauren Schueler
Councilmember Ward 4 Lee Hall
Councilmember Ward 8 Matthew Peacock
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman, Chair

ABSENT

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

Dr. Marilyn Dillon, Ph.D., Mobility Management Administrator/American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator for Embark
Mr. Marion Hutchinson, Regional Transit Authority of Center Oklahoma Representative
Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works
Ms. Heather Poole, Assistant City Attorney

AGENDA ITEMS

1. UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA ACTIVITIES.

Mr. Marion Hutchison, City Representative to Regional Transit Authority of Central Oklahoma (RTACO/RTA), updated the Committee on the RTACO. He said the Authority will have a better idea of how the system will look, costs of infrastructure, etc., if Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad agrees to allow RTA to run the type of system they want to run using existing railroad tracks. He said progress is being made, but previous studies, i.e., Commuter Corridor Study, 2006 Fixed Guideway Study, etc., have been deficient on a lot of questions. He said no one has spoken to BNSF about using the existing railroad tracks, as it was assumed they were aware of the interest for commuter rail. He said during the process of discussing use of rails with BNSF, the RTA had to amend some statutes regarding the ability to indemnify, etc., because BNSF does not want to be liable for anything happening through commuter rail.

Mr. Hutchinson said when the RTA was created, Midwest City did not want to join because the revenue stream would most likely be sales tax and they did not want to impose additional sales tax on their City for commuter rail. He said the RTA has looked at all funding options and the only option allowed by State statute is sales tax revenue. He said Moore joined the RTA when it was created, but they are unsure about moving forward because they do not even have a transit system, which is an important component of commuter rail. He said there have been rumors that the RTA could impose a 4% sales tax; however, that is not true. He said Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) in Dallas, Texas has a 1% sales tax and Salt Lake City, Utah, has commuter rail, light rails, and streetcars and has a .68% sales tax. He said beyond 1% is not even fathomable and the RTA Board cannot make that decision because the Board works as representatives of the Authority. He said it is up to cities to make those decisions.

Mr. Hutchinson said once a system is in place and running, suddenly everyone else wants to join, but to be clear, cities will not be able to join without paying their fair share of total costs. He said the RTA is proposing to pay for stations through a base package and each city can determine what type of station they want, but will pay additional costs beyond the base package. He said RTA will not have the authority to declare eminent domain or to utilize Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District; however, cities do have those abilities to assist. He said large portions of Norman are designated enterprise zones, which qualifies for TIF funding, and if stations are located there it would have a huge impact on local development and system support.

Chairman Holman said it was his understanding that RTA would provide a basic package and the City has discussed having four station locations south of the Lindsey Street area, e.g., Downtown Norman, Classen Boulevard, State Highway 9, and the Tecumseh Road area.

Item 1, continued:

Chairman Holman said another concern is the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) proposal and how that will affect commuter rail. He said the Robinson Street Underpass was built to accommodate a double railroad track in anticipation of a regional transportation system.

Mr. Hutchinson said the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has a large pot of money available for grants pertaining to planning: i.e., environmental planning, engineering planning, etc., covering a large percentage of costs. He said RTA applied for a grant, which can exceed \$100 million. He said this is exciting because FRA is all about rail so this opportunity comes at a time when the RTACO is trying to establish commuter rail in one of the higher capacity, important freight rail corridors and AMTRAK is looking at extending the Heartland Flyer for through service. He said all improvements cities do to allow commuter rail operations benefit FRA.

Chairman Holman said the sales tax revenue is the only thing that gives him heartburn and he understands why other cities have opted out. He said this could be the biggest hurdle for commuter rail.

Councilmember Peacock asked if any counties have been approached about regional transportation and Mr. Hutchinson said meetings have included city, county, and state representatives, but counties are not part of the RTA as this is more of a city effort. He said the RTA has seen no support from rural county areas for transit, but park and ride locations could be an option for rural areas.

Mr. Hutchinson said the RTA is moving full speed ahead with connecting Tinker Air Force Base (TAFB) as part of RTA. He said although that line does not run through Norman, many TAFB employees live in Norman as well as the metro area. He said it is important for participating cities to expand transportation service to the stations.

Chairman Holman said he has always considered rail between Norman and Edmond to be a metropolitan transit system, but for that system to work there has to be a reliable bus transit system to get people to the stations.

Councilmembers thanked Mr. Hutchinson for the update and expressed how appreciative they are to him for representing the City of Norman.

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2. PRESENTATION BY A REPRESENTATION OF EMBARK ON THEIR CLIMB RIDE PROGRAM.

Dr. Marilyn Dillon, Ph.D., Mobility Management Administrator/American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator for Embark, said the Climb Ride Program effectively demonstrates that a public transit mobility solution can provide measurable outcome improvements when paired with a social service system. Climb Ride serves families in the foster care system, providing the family with comprehensive transportation options to complete their court-ordered services and reunite with their children. She said by removing the barrier of transportation and embedding a Mobility Coordinator directly into the family's Department of Human Services (DHS) support team, Climb Ride supports parents and their DHS team to shorten the time to permanency and provide post-program transportation support to ensure continued family connection and parental success.

Funded by the Transportation Innovation Grant (TIG) through the Arnall Family Foundation, Climb Ride was conceived and developed through design-based innovation by EMBARK, the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), and the Oklahoma Transit Association (OTA). Climb Ride was launched in 2019, and as of November 30, 2021, the program has expanded to support all Oklahoma County DHS offices. Climb Ride has served 151 participants, provided over 6,289 trips, and supported 22 families to reunification. Climb Ride participants have an average time to permanency of 16.5 months and 63% of Climb Ride families are successfully reunited.

Frequent visits with children during a foster care process improve reunification success; however, parents without access to reliable transportation face an uphill battle to complete all court-ordered services within their reunification plan while maintaining a regular pattern of visitation and securing steady employment. Transportation barriers often increase the time children are in the foster care system, with some cases being active from 18 to 24 months or longer. The Climb Ride Program was designed to address these challenges, improve program engagement, increase opportunities for visitation, and shorten the time of reunification.

Climb Ride has demonstrated that reliable transportation can shorten the time a child spends in the foster care system, saving money and providing more flexibility to the State of Oklahoma to invest in preventative services. For example, foster care services and support for a family with two children in foster care can cost approximately \$7,500 per month and shortening the time to permanency by only four months saves the State approximately \$30,000 on a single case involving two children.

Item 2, continued:

The Climb Ride Program serves two audiences – families and DHS Staff with positive and supportive feedback from both. Climb Ride helps parents attend appointments and visitations with ease so they can focus on their family without the worry of missing an appointment because their ride fell through at the last moment. Children benefit by easing stress in knowing their parents have a reliable and consistent avenue to attend visitation and engage with their children. Climb Ride is a critical component of success because without transportation to court-ordered services, the family has another stressor in their lives that could trigger a return to addiction or other destructive behaviors. All drivers have training that provides the tools to respond to individuals in crisis and the Climb Ride team developed a comprehensive, web-based trauma informed training class geared toward public transit.

Councilmembers were very interested in the program and asked if this was something Norman could utilize as well, and Ms. Dillon said yes.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Climb Ride Program"
2. Climb Ride Program Report by EMBARK

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3. UPDATE ON THE GO TRANSIT STUDY.

Mr. Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager, said the GO Norman Transit Study was completed in mid-2021, and adopted by Council on June 22, 2021. Since then, Staff has been preparing for implementation that included a transit survey. He said according to the survey, rider's priorities include safety on the bus (48%); reliability of schedule (47%); speed of service (34%); frequency of service (29%); days of service (24%); comfort at bus stops (23%); and hours of service (23%).

Mr. Johnson said key study recommendations include updating and streamlining the route network; establishing a downtown transit hub; strategically expanding bus service; upgrading and standardizing the fleet; continuing to operate fare free; and promoting transit supportive land use.

Most routes on the existing route network converge at Brooks Street on University of Oklahoma (OU) Campus using a loop system and has a growing number of non-student riders. The recommended route network will establish a downtown (acquired property on East Comanche Street) as the primary connection point; save riders time by improving route directness using a grid system; reinvests unproductive service into high-need areas; and creates a strong foundation for future upgrades and expansion.

Item 3, continued:

Mr. Johnson said future expansion includes adding Sunday service; upgrading service frequencies; extending route to Moore-Norman Vo-Tech; and adding new routes in south and east Norman.

The City purchased property in Downtown Norman to be used as the main transit hub instead of Brooks Street so routes will need to be aligned and updated based on the transit hub design.

Next steps include three public hearings (August, September, October); committee and Council meetings; Transit Center design; Transit Center bid process; Transit Center construction; bus stops bid process; bus stops installation/upgrades; service change marketing campaign; and service change implementation.

Councilmembers thanked Staff for the update.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "GO Norman Transit Study – EMBARK Norman," dated June 23, 2022

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4. PUBLIC TRANSIT REPORT

Mr. Johnson said the fixed route service transported 20,501 passengers in May 2022, compared to 22,690 in April 2022. The daily average ridership was 820. There were 1662 passengers with bicycles and 203 passengers with wheelchairs or other mobility devices transported in May.

The paratransit service transported 1,952 passengers in May 2022, compared to 12124 in April 2022. Average daily ridership was 78, an increase of 5.13% compared to March 2022.

Saturday service totaled 1,944 in April 2022, a 10.54% decrease over 2,173 in April 2022.

Mr. Johnson said Staff worked with Nelson/Nygaard, the consultant for Go Norman Transit Plan, on an amendment to their contract to make minor changes to reflect using 318-320 East Comanche Street as a Transit Center rather than the Norman Depot. Staff is now working with McKinney Partnership Architects on the architectural design for the renovation of the new Transit Center. He said this will be a functional Transit Center with restrooms and a water bottle fill station and hopes to present the proposed design to the Committee soon.

Item 4, continued:

On October 1, 2021, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) announced the grant cycle was open for the Air Quality Small Grant Program. This program seeks to improve air quality in Central Oklahoma by reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicle trips. Small transportation infrastructure projects and transit improvements as well as projects focused on congestion relief efforts are all eligible.

Mr. Johnson said Nelson/Nygaard has been working on a new, efficient bus route system and Staff is looking at the overall schedule for implementing the recommended route network in the GO Norman Transit Plan. This will include a public participation process to finalize the route changes, implementing bus stop changes, renovating the new Transit Center, and marketing.

Staff is awaiting news on a few grant applications that include a RAISE Grant to purchase and install two pantograph chargers providing for in service charging for the new electric buses as well as grant applications to replace two Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) 35 foot fixed route busses and four paratransit vans.

Items submitted for the record

1. Memorandum dated May 26, 2022, from Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager, through Shawn O'Leary, P.E., CFM, Director of Public Works, to Council Community Planning and Transportation Committee
2. EMBARK Norman Performance Report for April 2022

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ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 pm.

Deputy City Clerk

Mayor