



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

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

Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 4:00 PM

MINUTES

The Community Planning and Transportation Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room of the Norman Municipal Building, on the 28th day of March, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Holman called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman, Chair
Councilmember Ward 8 Matthew Peacock
Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash
Councilmember Ward 2 Lauren Schueler
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant

ABSENT

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

Mr. Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager
Mr. David Riesland, Transportation Engineer
Mr. Scott Sturtz, Interim Public Works Director
Captain Eric Lehenbauer, Norman Police Department
Mr. Lamar Hammon, EMBARK Operations Specialist

AGENDA ITEMS

ITEM 1: PUBLIC TRANSIT REPORT.

Mr. Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager, provided the transit report to Council.

He said the City is close to accepting the five new paratransit vans. These are the smaller cargo type Ford transit vans that are rear loading and Staff is working on processes and procedures for the operation of them.

On March 28, 2024, Council approved acceptance of an ACOG grant to purchase and install some pantograph chargers for the Electric Vehicle (EV) buses. This is a big project for transit, but these chargers will allow the buses to run all day with a shorter charging time, without the need to pull them out of service to charge.

Staff is working through the expansion and extension of the Micro-Transit Program as Council requested. Staff is working with OU and Via to get the program amendments drafted before bringing them to Council, hopefully the expansion documents will be ready for approval within the next month and the extension ready for July with an approved budget at that time.

Mr. Johnson, said the total ridership for EMBARK Norman in February 2024 was 35,374 compared to 29,401 in February 2023, with the average daily ridership being 1,415. Total ridership 269,167 year to date, which is a 29.91% increase system wide.

The fixed route service transported 33,569 passengers in February 2024, compared to 27,620 in February 2023. Passengers with bicycles totaled 744 and 607 passengers with wheelchairs or other mobility devices were transported in February 2024.

Looking at the overall numbers, it shows that the transit fixed routes across the board is serving approximately 20 riders per service hour. This is really healthy for a system like the City of Norman's and on par for a lot of other systems.

Saturday service totaled 2,666 in February 2024, compared to 2,616 in February 2023, a 1.91% increase, averaging 15.23 riders on each route per service hour.

Norman On-Demand completed 2,619 rides in February 2024, with 19 wheelchair accessible vehicle requests for a total of 15,870 riders since August 2023. There are currently 908 active accounts that have completed more than five rides each.

Chairman Holman stated that it appears that the Lindsey east and west both show significant growth. Lindsey east shows more riders than the other two combined. This is partly because of the ability of the residents in the apartment complexes on the route to access the grocery stores without having to transfer to another bus.

The next thing to do, when funding becomes available, is to add a bus to Lindsey West to make it a 30-minute route.

ITEM 2: (continued) PUBLIC TRANSIT REPORT.

Chairman Holman noted the significant increase in wheelchair ridership. Mr. Johnson said it could be due to colder temperatures and not wanting to get out in February or it could be a change from On-Demand riders switching to Fixed Routes.

Councilmember Grant asked how far out the Lindsey West route goes? Mr. Johnson said that the route goes west on Lindsey on the west side of the University to 24th Avenue SW and north to Main and Main Street over to 36th Avenue MW and then north on 36th to Hollywood Theatre on Robinson Street.

There was a bench in front of Sam's Club for the original route and a bench has been added in front of Sooner Mall since the route is now bi-directional.

Chairman Holman noted the numbers show ridership has increased month after month over the last fiscal year, including Saturday riders.

Mr. Johnson said Staff appreciated the support for Public Transit Professional Day on March 18, 2024. Had a great day celebrating with transit and support staff from Legal, Finance, IT with a luncheon provided by EMBARK and the City of Norman.

Transit Day at the Capital was Tuesday, March 26, 2024. Staff attended and met with legislators to encourage support for the transit program and funding on the state level.

Items submitted for the record

1. EMBARK Norman Performance Report for February 2024

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ITEM 2: PRESENTATION REGARDING LOCATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF ACCIDENT AND FATALITY COLLISIONS.

Chairman Holman said this item is on the agenda because there have been many collisions at high traffic intersections within the City of Norman and wanted to know if there is something that can be done to reduce the incidents. He requested statistics from staff and Police Department so they can discuss issue.

Presentation by Captain Eric Lehenbauer, Norman Police Department, on Collision Hotspots.

Captain Lehenbauer The most dangerous thing to do in Norman is drive. Driving cars causes more fatalities, injuries and overall cost to fix the damage from collisions' than all other part 1 crimes combined.

Highway 9 is one of the biggest hot spots, but not as high for collisions as 24th Avenue West, 12th Avenue East, downtown areas, and Main Street (historically West and East), with Highway 9 having the most fatalities.

ITEM 2: (continued) PRESENTATION REGARDING LOCATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF ACCIDENT AND FATALITY COLLISIONS.

Chairman Holman asked what factors and why Main Street and 24th Avenue West and downtown have the most collisions? Captain Lehenbauer stated that the downtown collisions are due to high traffic; backing and pulling into/out of spaces; following too close; lots of cross streets close together; and people trying to get into a parking space from the middle lane on Main Street versus the outside lane.

Councilmember Grant wanted to know if these numbers also include pedestrian and bicyclist accidents. Captain Lehenbauer said the more serious injuries are on the bike paths on the east side of town, with the highest volume being around campus or downtown.

Chairman Holman asked if recommendations can be made to Oklahoma Department of Transportation to help reduce accidents by making changes on Highway 9, like cable barriers in city limits.

Mr. Scott Sturtz, Interim Director of Public works, said they had been working with ODOT on some options. Staff is currently working with ODOT on the installation of a signal light at Post Oak Road and Highway 77. Staff has also reached out to our partners at ODOT and requested they do a safety audit on Highway 9. He expects it will bring more clarity and identify safety issues and options for that corridor.

Staff is always looking at intersections and evaluating to determine if there are ways that things can be made safer within our city limits for our residents and visitors, (Tecumseh Road, Flood Avenue and 24th Avenue NE, Main Street & 24th Avenue NW, and also looking at other hotspots for improvement types, signal timing, turn lanes, etc.

Chairman Holman asked if the widening of Highway 9 helped improve safety, is there data available for accidents before and after the improvements? Two lane compared to four lane road? Are people driving faster since the improvements, is the width making it harder to get across it? Mr. Sturtz said it may be hard to determine if the improvements made things safer if no data was being kept at the time.

Mr. Sturtz said there are still un-signalized intersections on Highway 9, with hills at some intersections that cause visibility issues. Staff and ODOT are constantly looking to see if additional turn lanes, lights, etc. are needed to help minimize collision risk on the highway.

A very in-depth study was done on Lindsey Street after work was completed and the data showed a significant decrease in accidents through the corridor.

Councilmember Grant stated that she liked the idea of a safety audit between the City and ODOT. She noticed that Highway 9 and Jenkins Avenue has a lot of collisions and it reminded her of a project Norman is working on, (Jenkins Avenue, Marshall and Highway 9). Staff needs to work with ODOT on a potential safety issue for a known existing collision spot.

ITEM 2: (continued) PRESENTATION REGARDING LOCATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF ACCIDENT AND FATALITY COLLISIONS.

Councilmember Schueler said the West Lindsey audit indicated there were less collisions in the corridor after improvements were made and would like to see how other corridors rate. It would be interesting to see how the two-way Gray Street and Main Street changes will impact safety in this corridor.

Chairman Holman said since the improvements to West Lindsey Street have been made, there has been a 50% reduction in collisions, which previously had the highest collision rate per mile in Norman. Because the speed limit is lower, there have been less fatalities when there is a collision. Bigger, wider streets and lanes and higher speeds are not necessarily safer. It can potentially move traffic along, but it will bring more traffic over time and then you are back in the same situation in the future.

Councilmember Nash asked if any there are any common themes among the fatalities; e.g., distracted driver, speed, turn left into oncoming traffic, going left of center.

Captain Lehenbauer said there are definitely issues with distracted and inattentive drivers in collisions. Going left of center is definitely a cause of collisions, with other common causes of collisions in Norman being speed, following too close, and failure to devote full time and attention while driving.

Councilmember Nash asked how effective are speed traps on Highway 9? Captain Lehenbauer said "speed trap" is a naughty word and rarely works long term, when you stop spending time there the lasting effect dwindles.

Officers on his shift are asked to be visible and make 1.5 traffic contacts, (no quota), per day, either issuing warnings or citations depending on the seriousness of the violation, with hazardous violations being issued a citation. Officers work four day weeks, making six traffic contacts weekly.

Chairman Holman stated that public comments are not normally taken in this meeting, but there are a few people present that have been impacted by collisions on Highway 9 recently and hopefully will have an influence on whatever recommendations the committee will send forward to ODOT.

Rhonda Mitchell, her daughter was killed on Highway 9 on August 4, 2023.

Brittany Mitchell, whose sister was killed on Highway 9, read a letter to the committee.

Tawana Rooter, Noble resident at 168th & Cemetery Road, said she and her husband travel Highway 9 regularly from 120th Avenue SE, three to four times a week and are familiar with this accident and many others.

David Murlo, daughter was killed on Highway 9 on August 4, 2023.

ITEM 2: (continued) PRESENTATION REGARDING LOCATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF ACCIDENT AND FATALITY COLLISIONS.

Kathryn Thompson - lost her sister, a Norman Regional Nurse, on the way to their fathers' house for a family meeting, on Highway 9, March 1, 2024.

Chairman Holman said Highway 9 is a state highway and ODOT has a working relationship with City of Norman. He said he feels cable barriers through city limits and a lower speed limit would be the best option to help prevent some accidents and he is sure that Council will be happy to sign off on whatever they need to do to rectify this issue.

Mr. Sturtz stated that a letter of support or resolution and willingness to work with ODOT from Council will help. ODOT is being very cooperative and was receptive to performing a recently requested safety audit. Highway 9 gets a lot of attention from ODOT and Norman staff speak to them regularly about it. Mr. Sturtz visited with the ODOT engineer for the area and he was very receptive to performing an audit. He acknowledges the issues, wants to be partners with the solution.

Chairman Holman asked if any of the other councilmembers would have an issue with sending a supportive resolution to ODOT.

Councilmember Grant supports the resolution, and asked about some suggestions on ways of correction.

Mr. Sturtz said he would recommend waiting on sending suggestions to ODOT until the safety audit is completed as there may be better ways identified that they would prefer.

Councilmember Schueler supports the resolution.

Chairman Holman said he is looking forward to a full resolution for Council to consider and recommendations for improvements. Also need to look at other problem locations in Norman needing improvements to reduce collision and fatalities. Would like to look at downtown area as well to see what are the contributing factors to collisions.

Items submitted for the record

1. "Collision Hotspots" dated March 18, 2024

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor