



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

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

Thursday, May 23, 2024 at 4:00 PM

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## 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 23rd day of May, 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 4:02 p.m.

### PRESENT

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

### ABSENT

### OTHERS PRESENT:

Mr. Taylor Johnson, Transit and Parking Program Manager  
Mr. David Riesland, Transportation Engineer  
Mr. Scott Sturtz, Interim Public Works Director  
Mr. Joseph Hill, Streets Program Manager  
Ms. Sara Kaplan – Retail Marketing Coordinator  
Mr. Chris Mattingly, Director of Utilities  
Mr. Darrell Pyle, City Manager  
Mr. Anthony Purinton, Assistant City Attorney  
Mr. Lamar Hammon, EMBARK Operations Specialist  
Mr. Marion Hutchison, RTA Chairmember, Citizen Representative  
Ms. Helen Wolney – Campus Corner Association

## AGENDA ITEMS

Chairman Holman asked that Item 3, "Bollards" be moved up and handled as the first item of business.

### ITEM 3: DISCUSSION REGARDING THE INSTALLATION OF FESTIVAL STREET BOLLARDS ON CAMPUS CORNER.

Mr. David Riesland, Transportation Engineer provided an update to Council, the Bollards are in hand, and presented the "Bollard" power point to the committee.

Chairman Holman asked if people walk through the Bollards and if the area is not accessible to vehicle traffic. Mr. Riesland said yes to both questions and that the Bollard System will meet regulations for ADA accessibility.

Chairman Holman asked if the project is on schedule to be completed by the end of July when students move back to campus. Mr. Riesland said it has been moved to a later date due to some issues that would not ensure the installation would be complete for game day.

Mr. Joseph Hill, Streets Program Manager said this is a specialized install and, timing to start will depend on bids received by July. Staff will work with Campus Corner on closure for installation.

Councilmember Grant said the project needs to go with the installation/completion date that is least impactful to campus.

Chairman Holman said that if it cannot be done before August, it will most likely be after football season in 2025.

The Campus Corner Association is usually the ones who close the streets, but would like to see the City take over the street closing. Councilmember Grant asked about the roads being closed from Boyd. Ms. Wolney said that Boyd Street is closed 2 hours prior to game time.

Councilmember Grant asked if the bollards and barriers will be used to block traffic? Mr. Hill said yes, but currently other measures used to block traffic are in place, fire and police department, bus, etc., physically block the roads with vehicles and barriers.

Mr. Riesland said that advance warning has to be provided prior to getting to the Bollard system.

Councilmember Schueler said she is not comfortable with the Campus Corner Association having the ability to raise and lower the bollards and agreed that some kind of pre-warning is needed before people come up on the bollards. Ms. Wolney, from the Campus Association said the Association does not want a key to operate the bollards.

Councilmember Schueler asked if there is a procedure in place for open/closing already. Staff said Traffic Control Division has been the ones closing the streets, with assistance from police, fire, etc. Councilmember Grant said that it makes sense that traffic maintain primary control of the bollard system as traffic staff are available in office when activated.

Police should be the ones to give the traffic closure notices. Councilmember Nash said it is natural for the Police to raise and lower the bollards as the streets do not open until Police leave. Mr. Riesland said that all the bollards go up and down at same time making it easier to handle and ensuring a uniform opening/closure of the area.

ITEM 3: (continued) DISCUSSION REGARDING THE INSTALLATION OF FESTIVAL STREET BOLLARDS ON CAMPUS CORNER

Chairman Holman asked how other cities and colleges are using the Bollard System and said the point for the system was for Aesthetics and Safety.

Mr. Hill said Staff are unsure of time frame for construction, and may look at splitting the project to do one side of road at a time so the traffic can still be moving. Possible 30-day turnaround once the installation starts, with the biggest time factor being for the concrete delivery.

Items submitted for the record

1. Festival Street Bollards Pilot Project updated dated May 23, 2024

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ITEM 1: PUBLIC TRANSIT REPORT.

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

Mr. Johnson hopes to bring a Council item to the next meeting for the Acceptance of a Paratransit Grant from the (FTA), Federal Transportation Administration for the six cut away buses. He is currently looking into grants to be used for the Charging System conversion for in-route charging.

Mr. Johnson said the total ridership for EMBARK Norman in April 2024 was 35,367 compared to 30,444 in April 2023, with the average daily ridership being 1,360. Total ridership 338,370 year to date, which is a 25.24% increase system wide.

The fixed route service transported 33,311 passengers in April 2024, compared to 28,479 in April 2023. Passengers with bicycles totaled 815 and we transported 407 passengers with wheelchairs or other mobility devices in April 2024.

Saturday service totaled 2,136 in April 2024, compared to 3,179 in April 2023, a 32.81% decrease, averaging 12.13 riders on each route per service hour.

Norman On-Demand completed 2,539 rides in April 2024, with 15 wheelchair accessible vehicle requests for a total of 21,071 riders since August 2023. There are currently 1,182 active accounts that have completed more than five rides each.

Chairman Holman asked for a breakdown on Safe Ride. Mr. Johnson said 50% of the students are using non-OU emails so staff is not getting accurate data on all riders, but will do more in-depth research on riders.

Councilmember Grant asked about the funding structure for Norman On-Demand program. Concerned that with the numbers there will not be enough rider fares to pay for the program.

Mr. Johnson said OU contributed \$120,000 to the budget in the contract expansion bringing the total funding to \$799,000. Chairman Holman said that the FYE 24 budget reflects a \$600,000 subsidy to continue On-Demand.

ITEM 1: (continued) PUBLIC TRANSIT REPORT.

Mr. Johnson said there may be some funds in Transit to offset the cost and reduce the subsidy and this is why he brought it to Council at the February meeting to discuss.

Chairman Holman said that riders want daytime rides and asked how much subsidy would it be to provide this service. Mr. Johnson said between \$300,000 to \$350,000 and would require a budget amendment. Mr. Johnson also said this will run parallel with the buses and defeats the purpose of On-Demand.

Chairman Holman asked if the increase included the expanded service area. Mr. Johnson said it does and expects that next years' costs may be lower. Chairman Holman asked if this included On-Demand operation during the week. Mr. Johnson said that it does, but can't financially fund both Day/Night/Weekend service right now.

Mr. Johnson said On-Demand is serving 20,000 versus 338,000 for fixed routes. The need for On-Demand is a lot lower in the evenings. The Micro-Transit Program is being used to test the market. Sunday service has been the number one priority for the riders.

Chairman Holman said ideally he would like to see seven-day service on fixed routes and On-Demand if funding is available, to fill in the gap of services, but he understands that we need to work within the resources available now.

Councilmember Grant said that she is supportive of a budget amendment for the next funding cycle to keep the service going. She further asked if Staff was looking at \$200,000 - \$300,000 reduction in cost, to which Mr. Johnson responded that he will look at the numbers, work with finance and get back with the committee, but he doesn't anticipate that high of a reduction.

Chairman Holman said he agreed on the amendment for increased service to the east side library since the Central Library is closed indefinitely. He said that we need to look at options as this is the primary library at this time.

Councilmember Schueler asked if anyone is working on transportation solutions for the proposed Entertainment District. Mr. Johnson said that transit is well positioned to provide service to the area and could add stops as needed.

Route 110 will encompass and serve that area when it is open and it would run approximately \$220,000 for one dedicated route. Mr. Johnson said that Mr. Hammon with EMBARK said these stops will be done within the current 1-hour time frame, with a couple stops being added in the Entertainment District.

Councilmember Schueler said that she has had a lot of questions on service and asked how many stops and time frame of expansion to the area.

Items submitted for the record

1. EMBARK Norman Performance Report for March 2024

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## ITEM 2. UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY LIGHT RAIL INITIATIVE

Chairman Holman summarized Regional Transit Authority, (RTA) rail system to date, saying that it has been in the works for two decades and has lots of moving parts. The purpose of the RTA is to have interconnected transportation options, not just rail based, connecting the OKC metro areas in Oklahoma.

Officials of the City of Edmond, City of Norman and City of Oklahoma City have been actively partnering on the transportation plan for years, with former Governor Brad Henry being the chairman of the RTA Board and representative for the City of Oklahoma City.

Mr. Marion Hutchison, provided a brief history of the RTA evolution. He represents the City of Norman on the board and has been involved with RTA since 2009 and served on the Mayor's task force in 2017. This project started in 2011 when OKC and ACOG had the dialogue bringing the Mayors together and the RTA was created in 2019.

The Norman to Edmond line, North - South to and from OKC is the first line that RTA is looking at. The RTA system will use commuter railway (heavier vehicles that run on rails), not light rail, running on existing freight lines. Negotiations have been ongoing with BNSF railroad. BNSF, who will be the contract operator, has embraced this project, and RTA/BNSF are still months away from a working agreement, but the BNSF Engineers are working with RTA Engineers and it is moving quickly.

Tinker Air Force base has expressed a great interest in being part of the rapid transit line to serve Tinker, as the base is expanding, and expressed they will put in a hub at Tinker as part of the line service.

RTA received a grant to do studies for a line to the airport and to west Oklahoma City Kimberly Horn conducted the study and recommended light rail to the airport. For more information on the study go to [RTAmoves.com](https://RTAmoves.com).

RTA is working with BNSF to identify, acquire or have some kind of control of property for stations. There are going to be 12 stations between Edmond and Norman to serve the route. Norman will have three primary and one special event station in partnership with OU located on Lindsey by the duck pond near the tracks and will be running game day trains for OU. Proposed station locations are on Tecumseh Road, Highway 9, current Depot and looking at a location on Cedar Lane around Post Oak Road for the maintenance facility.

RTA would like to have ownership, or contractual control of station properties before this goes to a vote. These are prime properties, but the Transit System is only going to be as good as the station locations are.

Councilmember Grant asked about Park-N-Ride situation at each station. Mr. Hutchison said Highway 9 & Tecumseh Road would provide considerable Park-N-Ride opportunities. The downtown Depot is another station location, with limited parking availability, but it will be a great walk up, bike up Urban location.

City Manager Pyle said Staff has been in discussions about having an eligible entity like, Cleveland County Industrial Authority tie up the property and if the community votes yes, the sales tax funds will be used to purchase the land for the stations.

ITEM 2. (continued) UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY LIGHT RAIL INITIATIVE

The property will have industrial value and if not used for the stations, the Norman Economic Development Coalition can be used to develop the property for other uses. Mr. Hutchison said a resolution was passed, with language that RTA will own the properties and will be buying back when the referendum vote is passed. There should be some definitive answers in 2025.

Once these stations are open, they will become fast growing development areas that will support the station traffic through business', housing options, etc.

Mr. Hutchison said RTA now has a Vehicle Review Committee that explores and determines what vehicles to use. They recently went to Fort Worth by Heartland Flyer, jumped on the Trinity Railway Express, an old commuter rail that runs from Fort Worth to Dallas Station, then took the light rail to DFW and then the new TEXrail that runs back to Fort Worth, stopping off at Grapevine to see the growth area around the station. The area was phenomenal, places to shop, eat, big hotel, multifamily construction all the way around the station. The committee had lunch while there and the place was hopping with people the whole time.

The vote for a new arena in OKC passed and plans are already underway to integrate light rail and other options to provide seamless transportation for downtown activities. This is the future of transportation!

Mr. Hutchison said that the bus system will need to expand to support the rail system and make this an all-inclusive, connected, seamless experience to encourage return users.

Councilmember Grant asked if the buses will go to the stations to reduce parking and congestion. Mr. Hutchison said, yes the buses will go to the stations as part of the Regional Transportation Authority System. This will allow all forms of public transportation to be coordinated by one entity, while providing the best service.

City Manager Pyle said through RTA/BNSF negotiations it was agreed it would be best if BNSF operate the system as they will be able to prioritize commuter rail over freight, stopping freight and letting the commuter train through to ensure it stays on time for connecting transportation. The partnership provides the ability to give a seamless conductivity relationship for commuters. The stars are lining up for this rail system as the Federal Government is investing in Amtrak. Every dollar they invest in Amtrak, reduces the cost to the tax payers and benefits the commuter system, because they will be using the same rails that were constructed with Federal funds.

Mr. Hutchison said there may be Federal funding for double rails up to the cities, sometime next year, (July 2025). The OKC Chamber, is working with Norman and Edmond, finalizing infrastructure costs with BNSF, before full costs can be determined. He said the 1-35 corridor is a one of the major freight corridors in the country and this is a good setup that will reduce traffic on the highway.

Councilmember Grant asked about the transportation tax and if it would be gone when this is passed. Chairman Holman said that if the RTA system takes over transit, the 1/8% goes away and the new tax takes over at the same rate as our existing tax, making Normans RTA tax a continuation of the current tax and not an increase.

*ITEM 2. (continued) UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY LIGHT RAIL INITIATIVE*

Mr. Hutchison said that he visited with City Manager Pyle, who is visiting with the City Managers of the other cities involved to determine when to do this and how to do it.

City Manager Pyle said when the state passed the grocery sales tax decrease, they added a section that there would not be an additional sales tax put on citizens until July 2025. Since there are a lot more election dates with the state than previously approved it will be easier to get it on a ballot. Mr. Hutchison said it would take 12-15 months to go to a referendum for an election ballot.

Chairman Holman asked if this is a Pass/Fail. Mr. Hutchison said that RTA would be a district vote and not a city vote. OKC Chamber of Commerce will lead the marketing program, with assistance from Norman and Edmond Chambers, as cities cannot legally do so.

Mr. Hutchison said they are trying to finalize infrastructure costs with BNSF and once this is done the consultants can go back and determine minimum bonding requirements to achieve phased in and we will find out what the "ask" number will be. BNSF is not doing this out of the kindness of their heart, they know they are going to benefit from a lot of infrastructure improvements with this RTA system project partnership.

Councilmember Grant asked, if this RTA system goes through, will the current bus service with EMBARK move back to EMBARK and will discussion of fare fall on them.

Mr. Hutchison said that EMBARK is under COPA, Central Oklahoma Parking Authority, a city trust and RTA is a regional trust. For EMBARK to continue as the operator of the bus system, they would need to come under the RTA. He further said there is a lot of discussion as things move forward.

Mr. Hutchison said that he just got back from visiting the Siemens Plant in Sacramento, the largest train manufacturer in the world. Mr. Hutchison said that these will be double decker coach line cars, sleek and modern.

Councilmember Grant asked about Wi-Fi options. Mr. Hutchison said Wi-Fi will be available and the cars will be set up with comfortable chairs, desks, etc. for those working as they travel. He also mentioned that these trains have bike racks, further opening options for travelers.

City Manager Pyle said the vision is that the cars end in Norman every night to be serviced, cleaned and sanitized. Chairman Holman said that Norman should see more than 150 jobs with the maintenance facility.

Chairman Holman said the experience in Texas on Cotton Bowl game day with this type of system was great and will be his mode of transportation for future games in Texas. Chairman Holman said that lots of people will want to use this for entertainment and work.

Mr. Hutchison said the Airport Trust is also involved in the discussions. They want to bring the light rail right into the terminal. This will be good for families taking a trip as they can jump on the light rail to the parking area.

*ITEM 2. (continued) UPDATE ON THE REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY LIGHT RAIL INITIATIVE*

Chairman Holman said Council needs to discuss what to do about properties for the stations and how it can be obtained. He said there are several property owners interested.

There is currently a willing seller on one property, nobody wants to claim one property, but there may be an option to purchase one on the other side of it and may have an option on another property. Chairman Holman said Flood Avenue and Tecumseh Road would be a good station location with good connection possibilities.

City Manager Pyle said that proposals have been received on some of them and staff is working on them.

Cleveland County is working on a hotel and parking infrastructure that will complement each other. A downtown parking garage will be able to help support the program.

Chairman Holman thanked Mr. Hutchison for coming to present the information to the committee.

Items submitted for the record

1. "Draft Full System Map" dated April 03, 2024

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

ATTEST:

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City Clerk

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Mayor