MINUTES
BUS SERVICE CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
April 29, 2019
Lower Conference Room, City Hall
25 Cottage Road, South Portland, ME 04106

Councilor Kate Lewis, the Chair of the Committee, convened the Meeting of the Bus Service Citizens Advisory Committee at 9:00 a.m. In addition to Councilor Lewis, the following persons were in attendance: Councilor Maxine Beecher, Scott Morelli, City Manager; Joshua Reny, Assistant City Manager; Greg L’Heureux, Finance Director; Art Handman, Transportation Director; Rick Sargent, Bus Service Operations and Maintenance Supervisor; and Kathleen Babou, Director, Social Services. Also present were two bus service riders: Mary Lee McKenna and Stephen Kittredge; Tracy Vierra, South Portland resident; and Krysteana Scribner, Reporter from the Forecaster.

Councilor Lewis asked if any members of the public wished to address the Committee. Ms. Vierra asked to be heard. She expressed her problems with the parking situation on Portland and asked about establishing a park-and-ride lot with bus service at a lot on the South Portland-Scarborough line. She also mentioned that WEX was contemplating establishing a shuttle bus from South Portland to Portland.

Councilor Lewis then inquired whether there are any corrections or additions to the draft Minutes of the April 1, 2019 Committee Meeting. There were none. Accordingly, the Minutes of the April 1, 2019 Meeting of the Committee were adopted by consensus.

Councilor Lewis next asked for moving up Agenda Item 4.a. to be considered next. There were no objections. Mr. Handman responded to Ms. Vierra’s concerns she raised during the Public Comment Agenda Item. He related that the lot referred to by Ms. Vierra was privately owned and had obligations on its use by Volvo. He further suggested to Ms. Vierra that she could take the route 21 bus from Mill Creek or the Metro Route 5 from the Mall for far less money than the $140.00 parking fee she is now paying. Councilor Lewis added that the Committee should look into the feasibility of proving express bus service from South Portland to Portland on a more direct route basis than is followed by the existing 24A and 24B. Mr. Reny suggested that Portland should consider establishing a TIF to subsidize such a shuttle since it would serve Portland businesses and employers. Mr. Handman said he would contact WEX concerning its plan to initiate South Portland-Portland shuttle bus service.

Councilor Lewis asked Mr. Reny to report on the status of the discussions with METRO concerning its fare increase and fare collection method proposals. He reported on a meeting hosted by GPCOG attended by GPCOG, METRO, South Portland, Shuttlebus-Zoom, and RTP staff on April 9, 2019. At that meeting, METRO General Manager, Greg Jordan, agreed to take South Portland’s concerns about the elimination of 10-ride tickets, monthly passes, and transfers to his Board at its meeting on April 25th. Mr. Handman also mentioned that GPCOG has agreed to perform a Fare Equity Analysis on the proposed fare increase. South Portland staff received no update on either matter prior to this Meeting. Mr. Reny agreed to follow up with Kristina Egan, GPCOG Executive Director on both issues. Much discussion ensued.
concerning the mechanics of the proposed electronic fare collection proposal as well as the financial impact on the City of South Portland. It was agreed to wait for more data from Metro/GPCOG before performing a detailed cost and impact analysis for submission to the Committee for consideration at a future meeting.

Mr. Sargent outlined the minor schedule changes that will go into effect on July 1 for the 24A and 24B routes. The changes will reflect extended run times dictated by afternoon traffic conditions in the Maine Mall area. He also presented the schedule addition that will provide Saturday evening service into Portland on Saturday nights on the 24 Route.

Councilor Beecher recommended two ‘Parking Lot’ agenda items to be considered at a future meeting. They are:

1) Explore changes in service areas and/or routes for the 24A and 24B routes; and
2) Look into the feasibility of providing some bus service to the Food Pantry during its operating hours.

It was decided by general consent not to schedule the next meeting of the Committee until a definitive proposal is arrived at from further discussions through GPCOG or directly with METRO.

There being no further business brought before the Committee, the Meeting adjourned at 10:02 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Art Handman, Director
Transportation Department
Committee Staff Support
CITY OF SOUTH PORTLAND

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25 Cottage Road
South Portland, ME 04116-9422

Scott Morelli
City Manager

Joshua Reny
Assistant City Manager

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

May 17, 2019

Mr. Greg Jordan
General Manager
Greater Portland METRO
114 Valley Street
Portland, ME 04102

RE: Proposed Changes to Transit Fare Pricing and Payment Options

Dear Mr. Jordan,

Thank you for inviting the City of South Portland (and other local transit agencies) to participate in METRO’s proposal to adopt automated transit fare media and modify the pricing and types of fares. As longstanding partners, it is important that we approach these operational changes collaboratively to avoid unintended consequences that could impact the valuable public services our local transit agencies provide. The City of South Portland recognizes that it has been a number of years since the last fare increase, and at that time much effort was made to work together on a regional fare structure that was equitable and mutually beneficial. Our preference is to move forward in that same spirit.

The City of South Portland has interest in working collaboratively with METRO regarding its proposal, and our staff are prepared to initiate a conversation with our City Council (the Board of Directors of our City Bus Service) regarding the adoption of new fare technology and a review of the fare pricing structure. We have reviewed the proposal and, at this point, staff recognize the public benefit of adopting automated fare media and will recommend that the City participate in this initiative, including the associated fare capping. However, regarding the elimination of 10-ride tickets and monthly passes, it is too early to know how the City Council will judge that part of the proposal. We politely request that METRO collaborate with the City of South Portland on an implementation plan and schedule that will avoid fare disparity and/or premature elimination of cash and ticket transfers. We anticipate there will be concerns about how this will impact the most transit-dependent riders of both systems and additional analysis is required before we can make an affirmative recommendation.

Regarding fare pricing, it has been nearly a decade since fares were last adjusted and we understand a future increase is inevitable. However, we had not anticipated this for our FY2020 budget, which has already been developed. City staff will ask the City Council to consider the fare structure proposed by METRO and whether a price adjustment would be acceptable next fiscal year beginning July 2020. This would also give the City time to conduct the public process.
that is necessary to make such changes, and allow a considerable public notice so that riders can prepare for certain changes.

Considering the proposal in its entirety, we believe the phase-out of the popular 10-ride tickets may be the most challenging component. We anticipate there will be questions regarding the implementation schedule, whether it can be approached in phases, or perhaps adopt a longer transition period to allow time for riders to become familiar and comfortable using the new fare media. The City is also concerned about potential new barriers to accessing transit, especially for vulnerable populations, and has asked GPCOG to assist with an Equity Analysis that will be used to guide the discussions with City Council. We appreciate your support for this effort.

Although some questions remain, we feel that City staff have a good understanding of what is being proposed. We would like to thank you and METRO staff for responding to all of our questions and meeting with our staff to review and discuss the proposal in detail.

During the next month, City staff will be drafting recommendations to City Council, which will first be vetted by our Bus Service Citizens Advisory Committee. We have tentatively scheduled a workshop with City Council on July 2, 2019 to discuss METRO’s proposal in detail, and will present our staff recommendations. We kindly invite you and members of your staff to attend the meeting to be available for questions.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 767-7606 if you would like to further discuss the project.

Sincerely,

Scott Morelli
City Manager

CC: South Portland Bus Service Citizens Advisory Committee
    Art Handman, Director of Bus Services
    Greg L’Heureux, Director of Finance
    Joshua Reny, Assistant City Manager
    Kristina Egan, GPCOG