

TRAC Meeting Minutes
March 14, 2012, at 12 p.m.
Greater Des Moines Partnership – 2nd Floor

TRAC members present: Crystal Estabrook, Jinsong Chen, Helen Boles, Eileen Bradley, Kelly Henry, Rod Van Genderen, Greg Boesch, Matthew Ott, Alexander Grgurich and Cyrilla Gregory.

TRAC members absent: Peggy Chong and Al Root.

DART staff present: Jim Tishim, Chet Bor, Neil Hampton, Gunnar Olson.

- A. ROLL CALL AND ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM
- B. APPROVAL OF JANUARY 11, 2012, MINUTES
- C. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. DART Central Station Update and Photos

Public Information Officer Gunnar Olson shared a series of photos of the construction of DART Central Station, as well as a time-lapse video showing the past several months of construction in 19 seconds. Eileen Bradley asked if photos of the construction would be displayed as art at DART Central Station. Olson said that yes, the project would likely be documented in some visible way at DART Central Station. Cyrilla Gregory asked if construction remained on schedule. Olson said that, yes, the project remained on schedule. He said the station is due to open this fall.

Matt Ott asked if the time-lapse video was posted on YouTube. If not, he added, it should be. Olson said that was a good idea. He said he

had tried doing just that recently but ran into technical issues that prevented him from uploading the video.

2. Public Feedback on 2012 Service Changes – Jim Tishim, Planning Director

Jim Tishim gave an overview of the public comments received in February regarding the 2012 service changes. He said DART held nine public meetings, as well as two additionally scheduled meetings with groups of On Call riders in West Des Moines. A total of 256 people attended the 11 meetings. He said DART received 234 comments, including 149 comment cards turned in at the meetings, 34 turned in through the operators, and 51 comments via email.

He said DART staff compiled the comments and that the Planning Department is taking all comments into consideration and making recommendations for adjustments to the proposed service changes. The final recommendations will be presented to the DART Commission during the March Commission meeting.

Once approved, the finalized 2012 service changes will be communicated to the public through various channels, including open houses prior to implementation.

Rod Van Genderen asked what the biggest issues were to come out of the public meetings. Tishim said DART received the most questions and concern about the evolution of DART's On Call services into Flex Routes.

Alexander Grgurich asked why attendance at the meetings was so high? Tishim said he thought it was because of the magnitude of the changes.

Jinsong Chen asked when the schedules would be available. Tishim said the maps and schedules would be made available to the public during the May open houses.

Matt Ott asked how much DART's forthcoming online trip planner would cut down on the number of calls into customer service. Tishim said that the number of calls was estimated to drop by 50 percent.

Kelly Henry asked how many people would be "displaced" by the service changes. Tishim said that most riders would still have transit options.

Henry said she had heard concerns about gaps in service in the Flex Zones. Neil Hampton said DART planning staff is still finalizing the service areas.

Henry stated the importance of focusing on keeping the existing DART customers happy.

Ott said that the service changes in 2012 would hopefully increase ridership.

Gunnar Olson said DART planning staff was looking at options for two areas in particular: the portion of Route 90 that would lose service on the south side of Des Moines and the portion of Route 91 that would lose service on the northwest side of Des Moines. He said some level of service may be made available as spurs on local routes 8 and 16,

respectively. He stressed that these were at the proposal stage only and not finalized.

Eileen Bradley stated that some riders on Route 8 will be unhappy about any change.

3. On Call and Paratransit Overview – Paratransit Director Chet Bor

Chet Bor gave an overview of DART's Paratransit Department, including the services defined as Bus Plus and On Call. He traced the history of paratransit service to the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973. From then through the 1980s, the service was largely operated by private, non-profit organizations. The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 dramatically changed paratransit by requiring public transit agencies to make their service accessible to persons with disabilities. He said the two primary Paratransit services are Bus Plus and On Call. Bus Plus is paratransit service for those who cannot use regular service due to a physical or cognitive disability; it must be offered in areas where fixed-route service is operated. By comparison, On Call is for the general public, meaning anyone can ride it; unlike Bus Plus, On Call service operates within predefined boundaries such as a city's borders.

Helen Boles asked the difference between "Paratransit" and "Bus Plus." Bor said those are two different names for the same type of service. Hampton added that, in Greater Des Moines, Polk County offers free paratransit service to qualifying residents based on their income level; this is referred to as "Polk County funded paratransit"

or simply “paratransit.” “Bus Plus,” on the other hand, is the name for the service that’s available to anyone with disabilities preventing them from using fixed-route service, regardless of their income level. Henry asked if the forthcoming online trip planner would allow residents to plan their trips on paratransit. Bor said the service is too individualized to offer that on the trip planner. Tishim noted that the trip planner will alert users to paratransit options and provide a means to get more information. Hampton noted that DART’s website also includes general information about the service. Grgurich said the website could be more intuitive and do a better job of presenting information.

Henry said it was important to make the information as easy to access as possible for the people who really need the service.

4. TRAC Goals Update – Gunnar Olson, Public Information Officer

Olson said DART was making progress on all of the goals set by TRAC for DART in 2012. He said he forgot to bring a copies of the progress report and promised to email them out to TRAC members that afternoon.

D. TRAC MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS

1. West Des Moines On Call experience – Helen Boles

Helen Boles told of a recent poor experience she had with the West Des Moines On Call. She was delivered to the back door of a clinic for a medical appointment. When her appointment was over, she

returned to the back door, where she expected to be picked up for her trip back home. However, when no one picked her up at the back door, she called into DART and was told that the driver had marked her down as a “no show.” Further, she was not offered a means of getting home, requiring her to ask to be picked up by a friend. She said the experience was very frustrating and that she believed the example spoke to an overall decline in the quality of service on the West Des Moines On Call.

She said she later learned the reason why she wasn’t picked up where she was dropped off. There had been a change in operators. The first operator dropped her off at the back door in a gesture of going above and beyond the requirement, which was to drop passengers at the front door. The second operator, meanwhile, stuck to protocol and attempted to pick her up at the front door. When she wasn’t there, he marked her down as a no-show, even though she was waiting around back where she’d been dropped off.

Olson thanked Boles for sharing her experiences and, on behalf of DART, said he was sorry for the poor experience. Bor and Hampton each offered apologies, as well. Bor went further, sharing with TRAC the internal debate that staff has about the best way to deliver the best customer service as possible. One school of thought would side with the first driver in this example, with the operator offering to take a customer the additional short distance to her final destination, rather than drop the customer off at the curb defined by protocol. The other school of thought takes the long view; while it may be a

nice gesture, it can set expectations among customers that, in the long run, can cause incidents such as the one Boles experienced.

2. Bus Stops – Kelly Henry

Henry said TRAC members joined the committee out of a desire to be a benefit to DART. She thanked Olson for fielding all of the comments from TRAC members and relaying them to the appropriate DART staff members.

She said she'd recently told DART about bus stops that had not been replaced after they were removed temporarily due to road construction.

Tishim noted that DART is looking to bring on a couple of interns to help update the network of some 3,600 bus stops throughout Greater Des Moines.

Henry said she hadn't met a DART operator she hasn't liked. She said they're very helpful.

Gregory asked if the changes to Express Routes were occurring in June. Olson said yes, they were.

Henry said the hangtags on the buses with information about DART were very effective. Bradley had a suggestion; operators should notify blind passengers that the hangtags were there.

E. PUBLIC COMMENT

No members of the public were present.

F. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

1. Finalized 2012 Service Changes

2. Customer-Satisfaction Survey

3. RideShare Update

4. Federal and State Transit Issues

G. Next DART Commission Meeting: 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 27, 2012

H. Next TRAC Meeting: Wednesday, May 9, 2012