

GRTC Transit Advisory Group

5:30-7:30, Thursday, January 17, 2019

GRTC Headquarters, 301 E Belt Blvd, Richmond, Virginia

Minutes

In Attendance.

Members: Sam Davies (Chair), Cody Symanietz, Kayla Diggs Brody, Courtney Vaughan, Jessica Reveley, Adam Lockett, Michael Zeevi

Members Absent: Paul Jez (Vice Chair), Nicholas Smith (Secretary), Celia Yette, Ashley Staton

GRTC Staff: Tim Barham, Rob Taggart, Garland Williams, Patricia Robinson, Anthony Carter, Ashley Mason, Adrienne Torres

Public: There were about 8 members of the public present.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:40 PM.

Approval of the Agenda

Motion proposed that the agenda be adopted.

This motion was approved unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes for October 18, 2018

Motion proposed that the minutes of the October 18, 2018 meeting be adopted.

This motion was approved unanimously.

Introductions

Each TAG member and GRTC staff introduced themselves.

Follow-up regarding public comments from October 2018 Meeting

Mr. Davies asked GRTC for updates to the public comments during the October 2018 meeting. Mr. Barham requested that GRTC personnel provide updates.

Customer Feedback Systems were reviewed by Ms. Mason and they include phone, web and email methods. All customer complaints, comments, commendations, lost and found claims and requests have their own internal process and timelines for resolution. Mr. Lockett said that it can be difficult to know what email to send requests or concerns to because it is not clear what topics/concerns each

email address serves. He also said that conveying timelines to customers is very important. Process and timeline information can be found on the document that will be posted to the TAG webpage on the GRTC site as mentioned by Mr. Barham.

It was mentioned by Ms. Mason (and included in the written process write-up) that customers do not always receive written or verbal communication that their request has been seen, reviewed or processed. There was some discussion between the TAG members about this particular aspect of the feedback system. Mrs. Diggs Brody mentioned that when customers spend time crafting and sending messages or calling customer service it would be nice receive some notification that their comment and/or complaint was received and that GRTC was looking into it. She also mentioned that it can be frustrating to send an email and receive no response. Mrs. Reveley reiterated the concern brought up by Mrs. Diggs Brody. It would be nice to have some kind of feedback from GRTC to let customers know that their concern was received and is going through internal process.

There was also discussion between GRTC staff and TAG members about the feasibility of answering each individual comment received. Mr. Williams said that it sounds like the group may want a CRM system similar to the 311 system the city uses. You get a ticket number and receive follow-up information. He said this kind of system can be very expensive. He also said there have been discussions internally about technology upgrades but it can be difficult to develop and implement this kind of system. Mr. Zeevi suggested that perhaps GRTC could use the city's 311 center somehow. Mr. Taggart said the technologies from the city are great but unfortunately we cannot gain access to them.

Mrs. Mason said that recently a GRTC intern began responding to individual emails. Mr. Lockett brought up that there is now a google form online that customers can provide more detailed complaints and/or suggestions. Mrs. Robinson said the google form is working well and that she checks it at least once a week. Mr. Williams suggested that GRTC look into posting questions received on their social media accounts with responses.

Review of Role of the TAG

Mr. Davies reviewed the role of the Transit Advisory Group for the public, that members are primarily a group of people interested in transit and that the group make-up and dynamic may look differently based on the purpose of the group. Mr. Davies requests that GRTC consider what the purpose of the TAG is for future meetings so that the public and the TAG members understand what the group is charged with doing.

Mrs. Reveley, commented that the term representatives is misleading and that current members were charged with tasks to brainstorm and provide insight into transit issues. She said if we are representatives we should "represent" the community that we are from. She also pointed out that the rubric used to select the TAG members is blind to demographic factors. She posed the question, To what extent are we really representational of our communities?

Mr. Barham reviewed the history of the TAG and stated that in 2014 the CEO tasked him with creating advisory groups for the organization and out of that request the TAG and CARE groups were created. A group of employees put together guidelines and responsibilities for each group. Application requests

were disseminated to the community by various outlets. GRTC received 50 applications for the TAG. The CEO selected the members of the group after an initial meeting and discussion. At that point in time (2014) the TAG was charged to provide feedback and perspectives about new initiatives and issues as well as provide opinions and suggestions before projects moved along through the internal GRTC process and implementation.

Mr. Barham mentioned that when service changes went into effect in June 2018, there was great interest from the public regarding those changes. This created an influx of public comments that had not been experienced in prior TAG meetings. This sparked the concerns the TAG members may have with the current format and charge of the group. Mr. Barham suggested that discussions about the role of the TAG should continue throughout the next few meetings. He also mentioned that GRTC is in the process of hiring a new CEO and once he/she is on board, there will be conversations about the role of this group. The relationship between this group, the CEO and the public may change but will need to be discussed both internally with GRTC and amongst the TAG members.

Mr. Davies confirmed that at this point in time GRTC is okay with TAG's role transitioning from a representative to an advisory capacity. Mr. Barham confirmed this.

Mr. Davies said that this group hears information, complaints and concerns from the public and we want to help. In our current capacity, we cannot help the public with concerns they have even if the group wanted to.

Communication Strategies for TAG, GRTC and Customers

Mr. Davies said that he wants to respect people's time when they come to the meeting and suggested there is a better method to express public's concerns. Mrs. Reveley commented on how at previous meetings the public was frustrated that the TAG could not help them with concerns and that TAG members are as well because of the limitations in their role. She asked GRTC staff what they can do in the long term to change that role and expectations that the TAG and the public have. Mr. Davies said the group has ideas about how public concern could be solicited but perhaps waiting until the CEO is on board is a good idea. Mr. Zeevi suggested that GRTC may want to consider regular Town Hall Meetings instead of waiting for service updates. Ms. Vaughan said that town halls seems like they would be a great method to solicit feedback from the public. Having a face and personal connection to express concerns is sometimes desired by people.

Customer Service Questions from the TAG

Mr. Carter addressed questions the TAG previously submitted regarding the lack of professionalism and customer service of some GRTC operators, unsafe operation of buses and the behavior of fare enforcement officers, specifically how GRTC handles such issues. Mr. Carter explained that the level of unprofessionalism of the operator dictated what kind of disciplinary action(s) would be taken. At every opportunity GRTC attempts to train and educate operators and all of its employees before taking more serious disciplinary actions. If customers would like to report any issues they experience or observe, Mr. Carter suggested that customers email or call customer service with the following information: location, bus number, stop #, operators name, time, route, badge number and details about the situation. Personnel at GRTC review customer service tickets and can pull footage of reported incidents if the customer provided enough information. Training managers assess situation and determine the best

training method which could include classroom work, ride alongs, drive alongs and other solutions. Actions taken by GRTC will not be reported back to customers (as previously stated during Ms. Mason's discussion about Customer Feedback mechanisms). Mr. Carter stressed that managers need more than general information to follow-up on customer concerns and complaints.

Mr. Carter explained to the TAG that fare enforcement has been a learning process from day one. Bids from various security firms were submitted to GRTC. GRTC selected the current company because they have great reviews from the Hampton Roads Transit System. All fare enforcement officers are trained and have standards of operation but they may not be currently using these tools in the community. Mr. Carter said that the GRTC is getting rid of officers that do not follow the rules provided them to. Mr. Carter and the GRTC want fare enforcement officers to be courteous and enforce the rules. He mentioned that just a few days prior to the TAG meeting, they had training with shift leads reiterating the need to enforce rules with their subordinates. The GRTC is looking for accountability. Mr. Carter also stated that the GRTC has to work on building trust between operators and fare enforcement officers as well. Mr. Carter finished by saying that the GRTC will not tolerate unprofessional employees. Mr. Lockett asked what customers should do if they have a complaint about fare enforcement officers and Mr. Carter replied, customer service so that the GRTC can contact the contractor directly.

Ms. Torres addressed questions the TAG submitted regarding infrastructure. The TAG brought up a concern about stops with signage that does not display a full list of all routes that serve the stop or display no stop numbers at all. Ms. Torres said the goal is to install blades with correct bus route representation at all stops. A GRTC intern started traveling around the city for the quarter's review of incorrect signage. The GRTC does not store extra signs so if a blade goes missing or is needed they must have more printed. Some stops have temporary tape on the signs to inform customers as to what buses service a particular stop.

The TAG also asked the GRTC for updates on bus stop amenities. Ms. Torres said there would be meetings with the City of Richmond to review amenities for approval. The GRTC is working on getting new bus stop shelters from the County of Henrico and the City of Richmond. The hope is that the shelters will be installed soon.

Ms. Torres also responded to the TAG's concerns about communication with customers about snow routes. Within the next month, the GRTC will be installing snowflake blades to all signs with routes that remain active during snowstorms. Mr. Williams mentioned, the GRTC will be the first system in the country to have a separate blade notating whether or not a stop is active during snow routes. Ms. Mr. Lockett expressed concern about the BRT and snow routes. He mentioned the lack of clarity as to where he should be boarding the Pulse during the most recent snow storm because customers were told to board on the curbside of Broad St. and not at the median Pulse Stations but he saw numerous operators stopping at the median Pulse stations. Mr. Williams stated that operators should be stopping at curbside stops until the all clear is given to operate on the medians again. Mr. Barham pointed out that this was the first test of snow and the Pulse stations. Mr. Williams said announcements are made to operators on the bus and that the GRTC put out policy regarding how to operate the PULSE during snow route implementation. Mr. Williams also mentioned that the GRTC is working with city's Department of Public Works regarding the clearing of snow along the BRT route. Mr. Williams also stated that they recently hired a contractor to clear PULSE stations of snow and ice (this contractor was not available in

December). Mr. Williams also mentioned that the GRTC created signage to alert the public about when Pulse stations are closed.

The TAG expressed concern about the GTFS data and route direction information on buses and in the GRTC application. Mr. Zeevi stated that a lot of routes are not well labeled in the data to determine what direction the route is traveling based on the name on the bus, signage and app. Mr. Zeevi specifically mentioned the directional information on the Route 5 Cary/Main/Whitcomb route. When the Route 5 is heading West information provided to customers simply says Cary/Main. This simple label information is not very helpful to customers. Mr. Zeevi mentioned that destination based information or direction on the bus signage would be helpful. Mrs. Diggs Brody commented on Route 20. She mentioned that it is unclear what direction the bus is traveling while waiting at the City Stadium stops. She said that unless you see what direction the bus is approaching you from you really cannot tell whether it is traveling North or South. Ms. Torres mentioned that for routes that change numbers during travel, the outward signage will start changing before the route changes over. In addition, in the future there will be announcements on the bus to alert passengers of the change. Ms. Torres also stated that the head sign stop problem will be resolved in the future.

There was also some discussion regarding the Pulse station signage. The TAG had concerns about station name visibility while you are riding the Pulse. Ms. Torres commented that the initial design of Pulse stations was that the totem was the main signage for each station and that it is difficult to put additional information on the glass at the stations. The GRTC is working with someone now to determine the best method for improved signage that is visible from your seat on the bus. The TAG members suggested increasing the volume of announcements on the PULSE buses so that customers are more likely to hear what station they are approaching.

Mr. Williams responded to questions the TAG had regarding overcrowding of the Pulse buses during rush hour. The TAG mentioned that there is a great issue during rush hour with the Pulse buses being overcrowded and passengers being left behind at stations. They also brought up the issue of back doors getting stuck on the Pulse platforms and Pulse bus bunching during certain times of day. In response to doors getting stuck on the platforms, Mr. Williams said that their mechanics have tried just about every tactic they can to overcome this issue including cutting the molding of the doors and considering to reverse the direction of the door opening. The GRTC is still trying to determine a solution. Mr. Williams commented that the GRTC cannot simply adjust the schedules of the Pulse and must have more money to add more buses to accommodate a frequency adjustment. He said that discussions concerning funding have not begun with the necessary parties to mediate this issues. Mrs. Diggs Brody asked who the TAG should contact to help solicit additional funding for GRTC. Mr. Williams said to contact Dironna Moore Clark in Henrico County, Todd Eure with Henrico County, Chief Venuti at VCU and Clayton Harrington at VCU.

When asked what operators are instructed to do when buses bunch, Mr. Williams said that operators are told to continue their route as normal to maintain their schedule. Mr. Williams also mentioned that at times, if a bus is too far behind schedule they are told to only allow passengers to deboard but that the Pulse does not typically follow this rule. Mr. Davies pointed out that based on time of day some buses seem to be consistently late. He pointed out that the 14, for example, seems to be consistently late each afternoon based on downtown traffic. Mr. Williams said that adjustments to these types of issues are made with each new booking and that adjustment priorities are based on budget allocations.

Mr. Taggart responded to technology related questions submitted by the TAG. Mr. Taggart said that the Transit Signal Priority system was approved and tested by vendor. The TAG asked if there had been any efforts to include one ride and one ride plus passes in the mobile ticketing app. Mr. Taggart said that the GRTC looked at both of these options and determined one ride plus will not work. He said that the barcodes used in the app include encrypted data that says this barcode is valid from this time to this time and there is no way for the app to create a new barcode after the initial use. With regards to one ride passes, Mr. Taggart said there may be issues with people activating their one way fare too soon and then requesting refunds. The GRTC will be launching a new pay app soon. The TAG also requested an update on reusable/refillable tap cards. Mr. Taggart said that the GRTC is very interested in working toward a reloadable smart card option but that the main roadblock right now is funding. Mr. Taggart also said that they will be launching new functionalities within the mobile app as well.

The TAG also submitted questions regarding the VCU Pilot Program and onboarding. Mr. Taggart said that operators on fixed routes hit a special button when VCU students and employees use their cards. Currently, there is no way to get VCU information from Pulse buses unless VCU students and employees swipe their cards at the kiosk on the platform. It was asked, when will VCU students and employees no longer be allowed to use their VCU ID to board the bus and Mr. Taggart said that date would be determined by VCU and then communicated to GRTC. Concern was expressed by the public that when VCU sends fare card to the incorrect address the wait time to be issued a new card is too long. MR. Williams mentioned that requiring students to tap cards also helps VCU determine if their card should still be active based on registration status. A TAG member said that some extra information may need to be provided to VCU students, staff and faculty to tap their cards at the PULSE because there seems to be confusion.

Public Comment

The chair called for public comment.

One member of the public commented on how several bus drivers told her grandchildren that they were no longer in operation and headed to the garage while the bus should have been actively picking up passengers. This confusion left her grandchildren with no way to get home.

One comment from the public focused on stops with incorrect names in the GRTC app. The stop mentioned should be Kanepa and Oakwood but currently says Oakwood and Boxley.

Another person commented on the incorrect information she was provided by customer service. She was given incorrect information by two customer service representatives which resulted in hours of time wasted. She also expressed concern that complaints and commendations submitted by the public are not responded to. She mentioned that when you submit a concern, you want to know what will be done to fix the situation or that a commendation was provided to an operator. She also talked about her concern that senior citizens with disabilities are having to walk long distances to reach Route 78 or Route 5 because the extension into Randolph was removed. She stated that the 78 is not sufficient enough for the Randolph, Byrd Park, and Maymont neighborhood.

Another member of the public expressed concern about the condition of the stop at Azalea and Chamberlayne when it rains. They said it gets incredibly muddy when it rains and that the GRTC should look into ways to provide amenities to combat the issue.

Mr. Davis asked the public if they liked having the public comment at the end of the meeting or at the beginning. Two people responded that they liked having it at the beginning.

Public comment ended.

Bus Shelter Design Survey

Information about the Bus Shelter Design survey provided by Patricia Robinson. TAG members and the Public reviewed and completed the Bus Shelter Design Survey independently. All responses were collected by GRTC and will be entered into the online version of the survey to be included in data analysis.

Agenda Items Not covered in meeting:

Mr. Davies, seconded by Mr. Zeevi, moved

The following agenda items be tabled until the next TAG meeting in April:

- Route/Service Updates for 2019
- VCU/VCUHS Pilot Program Updates
- Fares/Mobile App
- New/Upcoming Business
- Open Discussion

This motion was approved unanimously.

Adjournment

Mr. Davies, seconded by Mrs. Reveley, **moved:**

That the Committee be adjourned.

This motion was approved unanimously.

The Committee adjourned at 7:45.

The next meeting is (tentatively) April 18, 2019.