

GRTC Transit Advisory Group Meeting
Thursday, April 18, 2019
5:30-7:30PM
Richmond City Hall
900 E Broad Street

In Attendance:

Seven members of the TAG were in attendance: Sam Davies (Chair), Paul Jez (Vice-Chair), Kayla Diggs Brody, Jessica Reveley, Adam Lockett, Michael Zeevi, and Cody Symanietz.

Not in Attendance:

Nicholas Smith (Secretary), Celia Yette, Courtney Vaughan, and Ashely Staton

GRTC Staff:

Tim Barham, Carrie Rose Pace, and Sheronda Hill

Public:

There were about 8 members of the public in attendance at the start of the meeting and one member of the press (Richmond Times-Dispatch)

Call to Order:

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

Introductions:

Members of the TAG introduced themselves

Approval of Minutes and Agenda:

Motion proposed that the minutes of the January 2019 TAG meeting be adopted and approval of this meeting's agenda.

This motion was approved unanimously.

Service Updates:

Ms. Carrie Rose Pace presented new schedules in effect Sunday, May 12, 2019. These updates included restored 15-minute frequency during peak hours for the the 4A/4B (Montrose and Darbytown). 30-minute frequencies will remain during the middle and end of the day on the 4A/4B routes.

Also highlighted were the routes 50, 76, and 77 which are interlined buses. Ms. Pace explained that the same bus does multiple routes in a sequence. The Science Museum of Virginia has ended their turn-around contract in order to provide space for future development. The new routes will serve the Sauer's Center and the new Whole Foods grocery store closer to the Allison Street Pulse stations.

At the intersection of Libbie and Grove Avenues, there were concerns from the neighborhood that the buses could not make a safe turn from Grove onto Libbie Avenue. Ms. Pace explained that the traffic engineers need time to fix the intersection. There is a detour will go into effect on May 12, 2019 where the Route 77 will detour onto Three Chopt Road and return onto Patterson Avenue to complete the route. Libbie Avenue stops will be missed.

The Southside will also have new, extended service on the route 87. It now runs beyond 7:00PM until 10:00PM.

The Route 75 will also increase from hourly-limited service to half hourly-limited service during weekday peak hours. Mr. Lockett asked about how this change came about, and Ms. Pace explained that University of Richmond employees are needing more coverage to connect to the Pulse in Willow Lawn.

Ms. Pace also explained that new smaller service changes across the network's timetables.

VCU/VCUHS Pilot Program:

Ms. Pace explained that VCU ridership was perceived to be 10% of overall ridership, but the VCU GO Pass tap cards are showing that ridership is higher than that, even off of just the Pulse and Route 5, the two most popular VCU affiliate routes.

At the end of this month, VCU and GRTC will decide if the partnership will continue and in what capacity after July 31, 2019.

In a hypothetical situation, Mr. Lockett asked if VCU affiliates would have to have a new u-Pass in the addition to the VCU GO Passes should the partnership be cut back. Ms. Pace said that they would have backend solutions.

Ms. Pace also responded to Mr. Davies asking about Fare Enforcement where VCU riders must show their ID and GO Pass on local routes, but their ID, GO Pass, and Proof of Payment when using the Pulse. Ms. Pace said that GRTC is working on being able to load u-Pass/e-Passes on to the GRTC mobile app in order to cut down on paper uses.

Mr. Zeevi asked why all 3—Proof of Payment, VCU ID, and the GO Pass—are needed to show the Fare Enforcement Officers. Ms. Diggs Brody asked about the possibility to group VCU IDs and GO Passes all in one card. Ms. Pace explained that VCU did not end up going with that option though it was explored by VCU's card office.

Mr. Jez asked if the term "Pilot Program" will go away after this year-long contract. He also urged GRTC to reach out to other corporations to make similar deals with GRTC.

Fares and App:

Ms. Pace said that a reloadable smart card grant has been submitted. She is hopeful that funding will come through for “4K” Smartcards that allow stored-value that would allow someone to keep their GRTC card and use it over and over again.

Ms. Pace also explained that more funding for development of the GRTC app is also within that grant. A recent development is push-notifications. Right now, they are being used for system-wide announcements, but she hopes that someday they can be made by stop or be route-specific.

In the future, she also wants to make more ‘Clever’ (the system that handles the backend data of our smart buses) that could allow detailed detour or delay information. Hampton-Rhodes has someone who manually posts such alerts, but SEPTA in Philadelphia has one that is seemingly more automatic.

Fare Enforcement:

Mr. Davies asked about his 30-minute proof of payment given it takes more than 30-minutes to get from end to end on the Pulse, especially if he missed the bus. Ms. Pace said that the inspectors know that the route takes more than the window and that there is some wiggle room.

Ms. Reveley asked about the validity of passes. People who are from out of town or are new to the system may not know that the passes are bought to be used right away, not for the future. Ms. Pace said that they might add some kind of warning screen to the Ticket Vending Machines.

Follow-up regarding public comment from January 2019 Meeting:

The responses to public comments made in January 2019 was not able to be provided at this time.

Follow-Up regarding questions presented by the members of TAG from January 2019 Meeting:

Ms. Pace explained that Section 508 complies with their website that was updated in the 2010s. The new regulation, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0), has some new requirements that will be scanned and improved including descriptions of embedded images.

On the glass panels that have shattered at Pulse stations, there is a patent on the original glass panel manufactured in Pennsylvania. There is a 6-month lead time to replace them. Glass panels are cleaned once a month.

Mr. Barham spoke on some regular route GRTC buses running in place of the Pulse branded buses. Recently, there was service needed on Pulse bus engines. In order to maintain 10-minutes frequencies, they had to dip into their local route fleet. Pulse buses had engine issues under warranty and local route buses temporarily needed to run the circuit.

On the topic of Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs), there is a capital purchase process in order to obtain another TVM. Ms. Pace explained that there are identified stations that have the demand for a second machine: VCU/VUU, Government Center, and VCU Medical Center stations are high on the list to receive a second TVM like Willow Lawn Station received earlier this year.

For cars illegally parked in the Bus-Only lane, passengers may contact the non-emergency line of the Richmond Police. The Operators are also encouraged to radio about illegally parked vehicles. Mr. Jez asked what the fine is for illegally parked vehicles, but that was not known. He asked if there was a way to lobby for an increased fine for violating Bus-Only rules. Mr. Barham spoke to the contingency plans to best serve Pulse stations and bus stops when the stations are blocked. Mr. Barham said that the authorities are reluctant to tow a vehicle without a second a "No Parking" sign, only give a ticket.

For safety concerns, bikes are allowed to in curbside Bus-Only lanes, however skateboarders are not allowed. Bikes are welcomed on the curbside bus-only lanes, but not the median bus lanes. Mr. Barham advised for people to call the non-emergency number to discourage hazardous skateboarding in the Bus-Only lanes. Ms. Diggs Brody asked if someone is between VCU and VCU Medical stations if they can contact VCU Police, Ms. Pace explained that the VCU non-emergency number is available as long as the issue within their jurisdiction.

Ms. Pace addressed painting Bus-Only lanes to be painted or laid to be the color red just to alert drivers to stay out of the lanes. Due to cost and maintenance costs every two years, it was dismissed. GRTC liked the idea from a safety perspective, but the cost was too great to go through. Mr. Barham said that out of town tour buses, especially, believe that they can use the 'Bus Only' lane. Drivers are getting better, but there are still some issues. Mr. Lockett offered that a double white line marking might be affective in alerting other vehicle drivers that there is a Bus-Only lane in effect.

Route 5, a 15-minute frequency route, actually is running at 85% on-time, which is generally higher than the whole system.

Mr. Barham said replacing accurate route sign numbers in the process. He hopes to have an update by the next TAG meeting.

Mr. Jez asked if on-time performance is posted on their website. Ms. Pace said that they could post it on their schedule page. Mr. Barham said that buses that run early, it does not count as on-time. GRTC is addressing with operators to stay on their schedules as there is no incentive with the customer, but the operator has an incentive to run early with their break at the end of the line. Mr. Davies asked about accountability and Mr. Barham said that they can radio operators in real-time, but also has the ability to do a playback and a run a full report of on-time performance by route and their operators who drove the bus. Ms. Reveley asked about an incentive to stay on-time, and Mr. Barham said that could be a conversation with the operator union. He

mentioned that the downtown express routes are the only routes that could need tweaks.

Public Comment:

Public comment is limited to 2-minutes per person.

A gentleman, who has been riding GRTC for many years, wanted to get information on when there would be buses that run into Chesterfield County. He was interested in new routes that extend down Jefferson Davis highway to John Tyler Community College, the Chesterfield Government Center off of Ironbridge Road, and/or the Chesterfield Town Center. He would like to see this service restored in a few years.

Ms. Pace responded by saying Route 3 A/B/C would be the most obvious way to connect to the GRTC network. Ms. Pace said that there are transit advocates in Chesterfield County working to get GTRC in their county. She cites Henrico County being a success story of an area that needed increased bus service. It did take time to gather public feedback and budget for service, but it is possible that Chesterfield County will take similar steps. There has been public comment conducted on the state level from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation.

Another member of the public said that getting to her Oakwood neighborhood difficult and that it's complicated when you have to transfer. She hopes that there can be service to connect within the Churchill area to avoid going downtown if someone does not want to. She also noted that 25th and Main is dangerous getting off of the Pulse. 23rd and Franklin also needs streetlights in her opinion.

Ms. Pace responded that there's demand to get out to White Oak without needing to connect to the Route 7 A/B. That would require cooperation between Richmond City and Henrico County to operate that way, like across county/city lines with the Pulse, in order to make those connection to a new route. The 56 is the closest route right now, but it runs a very limited schedule. To stay within Churchill, the Mayor is seeking a new Churchill route that parallels the Route 7 A/B an does a "deeper dive" in the Churchill neighborhood.

Another resident of the City asked about interlined buses. He got off of a bus only to get back on to the same bus doing an interlined route. He recommended that there could be joint schedules posted and printed to reduce confusion and alleviate transfers. He also commented about the Route 5 having a problem pulling out of traffic and infrastructure to have rubber platform boarding. He asked about the parking spaces in the Bus-Only lane on Broad Street. He also observed a lot of illegal left turns onto Altamont Ave. in Scott's Addition

Ms. Pace responded said that interlined routes have been a learning curve. There also will be curbed bump-out where the bus stops exist. Some already are in place on E. Main Street and Elwood Avenue. Mr. Zeevi asked about temporary rubber platforms and also serve as a parking restriction as well.

A woman from Churchill came to speak about buses blowing past her over and over again. She has had to jump out in the street and flag down buses time and time again. This is mostly happening on the Route 14 at night time. Mr. Davies provided a copy of an email exchange between them about her frustrations. She also suggested that the 12 and 14 buses could just have one bus number. She also feels that buses going around the block is a waste of time at 23rd and Franklin.

Mr. Barham spoke about the bad habits of some drivers. He said that, in sincerity, he sometimes needs to remind operators that they are there to serve customers, not just to drive the bus around the city. He said that there is expanded supervisor coverage and later into the night. He personally was out at 1 a.m. observing the operators at the Transfer Plaza and the Pulse outside of City Hall recently. He said it's not a training issue, but an ongoing performance issue of which he is aware.

Mr. Davies asked about being able to watch the external cameras. Mr. Barham said that that footage is able to be downloaded and looked over. Mr. Barham said there are 8 cameras onboard after a question from Mr. Jez. Footage can be retained for "days to weeks."

A gentleman addressed the Franklin street stop that is problematic. He noted that customers with disabilities, both seeing and hearing impaired, need to be put first. He urged an immediate survey to address stop safety.

A woman who rides buses from Willow Lawn, asked about the Westbound/Eastbound overhead signs. She said that the signs haven't changed over to the right direction four times in the past week.

Another member of the public asked about service alerts after hours. When customer service is closed, it is hard for people to know that there are ongoing problems.

Ms. Pace said that there is a need to extend call center hours from 7:00PM to 9:00PM, but that requires funding. During the transition to the new GRTC network, call center hours were extended until 9:00PM and people found that to be helpful. Solutions to delays, out of service buses, and more would be a collaboration with the Clever system and call center for people to get information.

Ms. Reveley asked about a pre-recording call center service impacts. Then, Ms. Pace said that still requires her and someone from Information Systems to upload it. There is a company in Richmond that GRTC has spoken to, but future improvements might be possible.

A member of the public asked about the Fare Enforcement policy for when the TVM is not working. Mr. Barham said that the current policy is that the customer gets off at the next stop to pay. The operator is supposed to wait a few extra seconds for the customer to get back on board. He said that the Director of Risk Management would work on

consistent messaging on how payment should be collected when TVMs are not working.

Ms. Reveley noted a conversation from the last TAG meeting discussing the demeanor of Fare Enforcement Officers and said their performance has improved over the past few months.

Ms. Pace also said that the Director of Risk Management's presentation at the last GRTC Board Meeting shed light on improved Fare Enforcement Officers' performance. Since these officers are not armed, they do not make as much as an armed security position. Increasing pay for these workers via the contractor can be a competitive and making way for high quality officers from Top Guard.

Open Discussion:

Mr. Davies said he had a conversation with Mr. Barham about footage retention which is 3-7 days, unless GRTC has a reason to keep it.

Ms. Diggs Brody asked about the status of hiring a new CEO. Ms. Pace said that interviews were conducted on Tuesday, April 16, 2019. There was a second layer that included additional vetting by stakeholders including members of the public. The stakeholders met in March 2019 to review applications in addition to a recruiter. The committee recommend 5 people, and a decision should be open to the public by late-spring.

Mr. Davies shared a story of his cellphone slipping out of his pocket and that he called Customer Service who said they could not radio the operator for a cellphone. The lost and found policy is only for a wallet or keys. Ms. Pace said a similar incident happened within the last month. This customer's phone *is* their wallet too. They have revisited the Lost and Found policy for the operator to sweep the bus at the end of the line to find the phone. The customer is given the option to wait for the bus to come back around or let it get back to Headquarters.

Mr. Davies also asked about the new Whole Foods at the Sauer's Center near Lee's Chicken and Allison Street Pulse stations. Ms. Pace said that the developers wanted protected left turns and safe pedestrian access to and from their property. GRTC has not asked about a parking policy that would be friendly to GRTC riders. GRTC is still looking for Park & Ride locations for commuters.

Mr. Zeevi asked Ms. Pace about service alerts. He wants GRTC to be better about service alerts including Information Systems having the ability to provide service alerts through third parties such as the Transit App and Google Map, not just the GRTC Twitter and App. He wishes that there were more visual aids such as maps to show scheduled detours. He also noted that the Pulse electronic arrival signs at Pulse stations displayed a Route 3 bus alert, but even if it was a mistake, that it's an option to use those signs. Lastly, Eastbound on the Pulse, there are a lot of delayed statues at

early stations such as Staples Mills and Scott's Addition. He stated that "DLY" or "delay" is not helpful and wants it to be a number of minutes estimate instead.

Ms. Reveley inquired about a mostly-full Pulse stop when a customer had a walker, but the operator told her she could not get on the bus because it was "full." She wanted to see a better attitude toward that customer and wondered about the policy. Mr. Barham said he was upset when people are not served properly and then violate the law, specifically the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). He said that there could be violations and lawsuits if such regulations are not followed. "We are here to serve as people," Mr. Barham added.

Mr. Barker, who works for the Office of the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Human Services, spoke up and gave TAG contact cards to give people better mobility devices.

Adjournment:

Motion proposed to adjourn.

This motion was approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned 7:38PM

Next Transit Advisory Group Meeting (tentative):
Thursday, July 18, 2019