



COUNTY OF HUNTERDON NEW JERSEY

HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOLISM & DRUG ABUSE YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION MENTAL HEALTH BOARD



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REFERENCE:

- ☐ Council
- ☐ Mental Health
- ☐ Youth
- ☐ Disabled
- ☐ Substance
- ☐ Use Disorder
- ☒ Transportation

Approved January 12, 2022

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting

Wednesday, November 10, 2021, 1:30 p.m.
Via Conference Call

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

M. McDonough
J. Ricketts
J. Hager
M. Bartelli
M. Westlake

EX-OFFICIO

STAFF

E. Neukum
S. Taylor
M. O'Reilly
L. Nauman

GUESTS

L. Empson
L. End
T. Shepherd
K. Kaczetow
K. Hillman

I. CONVENE: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING STATEMENT:

"This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21. Notice of this meeting has been provided in the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Courier News. A public notice announcing this meeting has also been placed in the lobbies of the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services, the first floor of the Main Street County Complex, 71 Main Street Building #1, Flemington, NJ; the first floor of the Route 12 County Complex, Building #3, 314 State Route 12, Flemington, NJ and County Clerk's Office."

M. McDonough read the Open Public Meeting Statement and opened the Transportation Advisory Committee at 1:30 p.m. with a quorum present.

II. MINUTES: M. McDonough made a motion and J. Hager seconded to approve the minutes of September 8, 2021. All were in favor. The minutes for the September 8, 2021, meeting passed.

E. Neukum conveyed the 2022 LINK Overview, as well as the TAC Meeting schedule had been attached to the TAC meeting packet. At this time, it is anticipated that all meetings for 2022 will be held via Webex, however, this may change and open-up to a possible in-person meeting when she receives approval, which may be a hybrid model; the participant can come in-person OR be online.

III. CORRESPONDENCE: No correspondence at this time.

IV. **PRESENTATION:**

V. **Reports:**

- A. **Transportation – Erin Neukum:** E. Neukum conveyed the County looked at purchasing new vehicles, however there are no chassis left for 2022 in that co-op. They will have to wait until another bid is out for the 2023 chassis. She does not see the County purchasing vehicles in the near future but is hoping to purchase vehicles around the middle of next year that will have the 2023 chassis.
- B. **Systems Operations – Easton Coach, Linda Empson:** L. Empson conveyed she is looking forward to working with M. O'Reilly and her team to try and get the Clinton location either adjusted or moved slightly due to the continued challenges with the creek, that creek that flows through there and the ponding that had taken place for the fire school. In order to keep all of the buses out of harm's way, they will be moving to a bit of a higher ground hopefully at the same location.

L. Empson announced that the Easton Coach Company had become a part of Beacon Mobility which happened about a month ago. She exclaimed there should not be any changes or interruptions in service, personnel or letterhead. There were two partners in Easton Coach who were at retirement age and they had not been active in the business and wanted out. The company did become a part of Beacon Mobility which is a Massachusetts-based company. They have other businesses in the New England area, as well as some in the Midwest. L. Empson forwarded an email to E. Neukum to share with the Transportation Advisory Committee.

L. End advised a new tablet was installed in one of the vehicles and the unit is currently being tested. Any additional modifications should be rather easy to correct; the tablet seems to be working better than the older tablets.

L. End noted there had been an increase in ridership over the past couple weeks and are picking-up more riders that are going to the Arc, as well as CEA. The driver situation is still creating a problem with delays as far as trying to get some riders picked-up on time and to their locations on time.

E. Neukum stated M&W had installed the last updated radio into #329 this morning. All of the radios in all of the buses had been completed updated.

E. Neukum inquired if there had been any new drivers hired. L. End replied Easton Coach is still in the process of hiring new drivers. He noted there is a potential new driver sitting in their waiting room filling out paperwork and awaiting an interview today. He conveyed that M. Fulper will be retiring December 17, 2021, therefore, they need to hire more than one driver at this point. K. Hillman inquired how many vacant driver positions need to be filled. L. End replied that at least three to four are required to cover M. Fulper's retirement and with the increase of ridership for the Arc and CEA, especially in the afternoon. They have opened up, at times, eight runs for Demand Response in the afternoon; sometimes nine runs. The need for an additional driver is required for Demand Response and also including the out-of-county trips. When a driver calls out or a dispatcher is unavailable, management covers the trips. They are trying to do the best they can to utilize everyone in-house. K. Hillman conveyed she was a prior board member, as well as a current rider. She is federally disabled. One of her concerns is the proposed impact. It had been a big issue getting

transportation around the County now in a lot of different ways. She conveyed service over the last six to eight weeks had gotten worse and not getting better. She voiced her concern with more people requiring transportation needs due to an increase in housing which they will be inhabiting. K. Hillman asked what the needs will look like in about ten months from now with the increase demand of LINK services due to her opinion of a significant growing population in Hunterdon County. She also raised the concern of no weekend service. E. Neukum replied that these concerns will be addressed through a transportation survey and transportation analysis plan that will happen next year. An RPF will go out that will address transportation on certain days of the week and certain hours. This will all be looked at and occur in the very near future. K. Hillman offered some additional suggestion. L. End did advise of the shortage of drivers. Discussion ensued.

K. Kaczetow raised her personal concern regarding the volunteer driver program. M. O'Reilly replied that the County had recently contacted the volunteer drivers who had provided their time pre-COVID, is working with the purchasing department to ensure the vehicle are safe for transportation and the drivers are vaccinated and feel comfortable. Discussion ensued.

M. Westfield joined the conversation and stated that members are hearing the concerns and the inquired how is Easton Coach promoting in attracting new drivers via bonuses and other incentives. L. End replied that there are advertisements via major job search sites, referrals through drivers, and he further stated that COVID vaccination demands are causing people to vacate positions. He conveyed they are doing all they can to attract drivers.

K. Hillman suggested to look at ways to maximize and/or streamline the routes to accommodate priority ridership. M. McDonough suggested to get the volunteer driver program up and running. Discussion ensued.

J. Hager noted he appreciated the conversation and understands the issues need to get rectified, but the meeting needs to continue with the agenda in providing a read-out of the reports.

M. McDonough made a Motion and was seconded by J. Hager for E. Neukum to explore the prioritization of medical and other important trips.

L. End added they are doing the best that they can given the circumstances. The average driver is out on the road between 10 ½ to 13 hours a day which is really pushing them to the maximum as well. K. Kaczetow again expressed her personal experiences and feels the issues at hand should've been addressed months earlier.

- C. **Fiscal – Keith Tustison:** In K. Tustison's absence, E. Neukum conveyed for the 2nd and 3rd quarter 2021. Demand Response trips for the 2nd quarter were 9,679 and for the shuffle routes there were 10,725 trips. They are not collecting fares at this time; therefore, fares were very minimal. \$3.00 was collected on Demand Response and \$6.00 was collected on the shuffle routes. Demand Response trips for the 3rd quarter were 10,043 trips and the number of shuffle routes trips were 12,303 trips. There is a steady increase of at least 2,000 trips a month from the 1st quarter to the 3rd quarter. No fares had been collected for the 3rd quarter. The Arc and CEA trips are included. The Arc is not fully open.

- D. NJ Transit Report:** E. Neukum conveyed the County had received a small survey inquiring about electric vehicles. What would be the pros and cons of operating in their fleet. Some other counties replied the cost of operating the vehicles, more cost for maintaining the vehicles, more charging stations would have to be set-up around the counties and the amount of the time the vehicles are spent on the road, i.e., 10 – 14 hours a day. The battery life would have to be long enough to accommodate the driving length of time. J. Hager added the average battery life is 95 – 120 miles on a school bus size chassis. He suggested there may be more on the LINK vans, but it may not be enough. E. Neukum added that both the Demand Response and shuffle routes would maximize the battery life. The option of purchasing more vehicles was discussed to maybe run a different shift morning and afternoon. It really does not make financial sense for the vendor to change out vehicles all day long. It is not efficient, and the vendor would be spending less time transporting passengers. M. McDonough added it is a lot of logistics and a lot of buses.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- A. Capital Bus Purchases:** E. Neukum addressed this topic earlier in the meeting. Cost had gone up significantly for vehicles, therefore the available budget for purchasing vehicles would have to increase. Because it had gone up so much instead of purchasing three vehicles, only one may be feasible.

VII. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Transportation Plan Analysis:** E. Neukum advised the County will be seeking an outside professional company to manage the Transportation Plan Analysis. The goal is to have the company review their current system and make specific plans and recommendations with taking into account the infrastructures that are going up. She cannot provide too much information at this time because the RFP had not been released yet.
- B. LINK 2022 Overview Attached:** E. Neukum provided the LINK Overview; the days the LINK will not be running for holidays in the meeting packet, as well as she discussed the 2022 TAC meeting dates schedule earlier during this meeting. There may be an option to host the TAC meetings via hybrid later next year.
- C. What Information Do You Want to See Next Year?:** E. Neukum stated she feels she has a good idea of what information the committee wants to see based on the prior conversation during the meeting. Looking at the routes, analyzing where they are going and if they need to be changed; change the priorities of the trips that are accepted.
- D. What Presentations Do You Want to See Next Year?:** E. Neukum asked if there are any presentations the committee would like to see next year. K. Hillman feels there is not a big “buy-in” from the city mayors. There is a big gap that is missing between the County and each individual mayors. There are developments being constructed and missed information. Discussion ensued. E. Neukum will look into contacting city mayors and ensure they have enough information about LINK so they can help residents in their city and look into more advertising. M. McDonough pointed out that prior to COVID, there were efforts in place to advertise and advise the communities about the LINK.

Erin Neukum explained further what she was referring to regarding presentations, i.e., Ecolane (2 presentations). Discussion ensued. A suggestion came through to implement a script for the dispatchers if the trip cannot be accommodated.

M. Westlake and J. Ricketts from the Hunterdon County Library are interested in doing a presentation on the services that are available to help the public during next year. J. Ricketts suggested to add stops at the library and promote and disseminate information about their services. K. Kaczetow mentioned the volunteer opportunities directory. That is an online directory that is posted through the library website and the County website. It is organizations looking for volunteers who can try and recruit and request people. She would be very happy to have LINK contribute. She stated they will do what they can to help.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned. K. Hillman made a motion and M. McDonough seconded to adjourn. The next regular meeting will be held on January 12, 2022, at 1:30 pm via Webex. Members are requested to call the Department of Human Services if they are unable to attend/be a part of the call.