

**Notes**  
**INTERCITY TRANSIT AUTHORITY**  
**PLANNING SESSION**  
**April 27, 2012**

**Members Present:** Chair and Citizen Representative Martin Thies; City of Lacey Councilmember Jeff Gadman; Thurston County Commissioner Sandra Romero; City of Tumwater Councilmember Ed Hildreth; City of Yelm Councilmember Joe Baker; City of Olympia Councilmember Nathaniel Jones; Citizen Representative Ryan Warner; and Labor Representative Karen Stites.

**Staff Present:** Mike Harbour; Rhodetta Seward; Ann Freeman-Manzanares; Ben Foreman; Meg Kester; and Dennis Bloom.

Also present were facilitators Faith Trimble and Kendra Dahlen.

### **OVERVIEW**

Trimble provided an overview of the agenda and objectives for the day, explaining the tools and exercises she would use and incorporate.

### **VISION**

Each person was asked to draw a picture of where they see the system in 25 years; no rules. Each person shared their drawing and explained their vision for Intercity Transit in 25 years. Some common themes included connections, integration, and a spectrum of modes, movement of people, fast service, environmental concerns, and hubs.

### **UPDATED SIX-YEAR FINANCIAL FORECAST**

Harbour presented an updated financial forecast, explaining the various assumptions included with the forecast. After the presentation, attendees were asked assuming the financial forecast is accurate, which scenario is most preferable in responding to service requests:

1. Maintaining status quo
2. Maintaining status quo, but reallocate
3. Increasing revenue
4. Deferring capital projects

Upon the initial vote, zero voted to maintain status quo; 36% voted to maintain the status quo, but reallocate some service based on priorities; 38% voted to increase revenues; and 25% voted to defer capital projects.

## WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN INFLUENCING LAND USE POLICY

Harbour reviewed the land use issue and current status. He noted the desired outcome of the discussion was to provide general guidance for staff to use in developing an Intercity Transit Land Use Policy. The major question was how should Intercity Transit affect land use decisions and land use policy development? Another question is whether Intercity Transit should require land use to meet certain criteria for the agency to extend or increase service to an area. Some things to consider: density, proximity to existing routes, and population characteristics. Should areas or destinations meet in order to respond to requests for new or increased service? Should service to destinations within the current service area be given priority over expanding service to new areas? Should priority be given to productivity (ridership per hour) or coverage (service to an area currently not served) when new service is being considered?

Harbour provided several scenarios for participants to discuss. The facilitators then asked participants to discuss these scenarios and asked if staff should have reacted as they did in each situation or should they be more proactive or more assertive in the future.

Feedback from these discussions:

- Intercity Transit is too late in the process; we respond to proposals and we need to be more engaged earlier in the process, whenever that is.
- Predicable, institutionalized and pro-active role in local land use planning:
  - Land use zoning and development regulations need to be LINKED to transit service.
    - There needs to be clarity in local codes and regulations about where service will and will not be provided so this is known up front.
  - Define service standards/level of service standard that can be applied in the early stages of the planning processes.
  - Each jurisdiction needs to have 'trigger(s)' for involving Intercity Transit (density, use, demographics).
    - It's too late for Intercity Transit to be constructive in the planning process when the "cat is already out of the bag."
  - Development regulations need to be transit friendly – even if service is not currently provided (an example is the existing Ecology building off of Martin Way). The design should accommodate transit service.

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- Educate: Incorporate Intercity Transit early in the pre-submission phase of the project. Educate jurisdictions, communities, developers, and the public about transit services (how, what, when, why, and why not).
- Awareness Building: Let developers know what services can and cannot be provided – short term and long term.
- Intercity Transit needs to be CONSTRUCTIVE in their involvement and responses.
- STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS. This may include upfront relationships with the cities, TRPC, the county, port and the Economic Development Council. Active education and awareness about transit impacts of development outside and inside the Public Transportation Benefit District.
- Intercity Transit needs to be more ASSERTIVE throughout the spectrum of comprehensive planning, writing development code supporting transit oriented development, and responding to development proposals. This may lead to the Authority writing a letter in response to a development proposal.
- Cities and the county would welcome Intercity Transit's guidance and opinion during the decision making process.
- Intercity Transit needs to develop a short and long-term action plan for these activities.
- One recommendation was to use outside resources (grants/land use experts) to assist with the implementation of an action plan.
- The Authority places high priority on productivity as a standard for consideration of new/expanding services.
- More work can be done on establishing "scientific" standards (maybe similar to existing performance standards) for considering proposals for new/expanding services.

**Scenario #1:** A poll was taken: A proposal is made to place a facility/project in one of the identified transit corridors. The project is a relatively low-intensity, auto-oriented use. What role should staff or the board play in the approval process for this project? *(Used example of needing a bus stop and saying here's what we need.)*

17% voted staff should handle it the same; 22% voted staff should be more proactive; 44% voted staff should be more aggressive and later agreed the word should be "assertive."

**Scenario #2:** A major project or facility is proposed for location in an area beyond a current Intercity Transit route or in an area with inadequate service for the expected demand. What role should staff or the Authority play in the approval process for this project? (*Used the ACS site in Lacey as the example.*)

11% voted we should handle this the same way we did; 56% feel we should be more proactive; and 33% feel we should be more aggressive (assertive).

**Scenario #3:** A new facility or project is located in the current service area but current service to the area is inadequate to meet the demand for service to the project. How should staff respond to requests for service to this site? Should service to new projects within the current service area receive priority over service to new areas? (*Used new Children's Hands On Museum as example.*)

11% voted we should handle the situation the same way we did; 56% voted we should have be more proactive; 33% voted we should be more assertive or constructive. There was a discussion regarding the "definition of service" and cost benefit analysis.

## **SERVICE AREA TRADEOFFS RELATED TO LAND USE**

Discussion ensued around productivity or coverage, current service or expansion to new areas, and requirements for new or increased service. Participants brainstormed criteria for requests for new or increased service:

- Density
- Likely productivity
- Over capacity
- Destination purpose
- Partnership
- Demographics
- Cost/Benefit with Budget
- Service fits with Comp Plan

The highest priorities for expanding service, based on a poll were:

#1: Likely productivity

#2: Within budget

#3: Density

#4: Service fits with Comp Plan

Facilitators then asked participants two questions:

Should priority be given to productivity or coverage? **100% responded productivity.**  
Should priority be given to expanding service in our current service areas or into new service areas within our PTBA? 89% of the participants supported within our current service area and 11% supported expansion to new services areas.

### **WHAT IS OUR ROLE IN PROVIDING REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SERVICES?**

- Should Intercity Transit increase service in the I-5 corridor between Thurston and Pierce counties?
- How should we respond if existing service in the corridor experiences significant ridership increases?
- Should Intercity Transit plan to add service to connect to the Sounder commuter rail service when it extends to Lakewood and how does this fit with other service requests and needs?
- What role should we play in providing service connecting to other areas outside our services (south Thurston County, Lewis County, Mason County, and Grays Harbor)?
- Should we place limits on the growth of our vanpool program?

Outcomes of the discussion:

- The Authority definitely has regional transportation connecting to the north and south as part of their long-term vision. We cannot turn our back on our regional role.
- We are connected although not directly to the Sounder; seamless transportation is important, but no need to connect directly now. We have been heroic up to this point and to add more regional service would require a reallocation of other service.

- The priority for existing funding is local service; new funds could help expand service to the north.
- New funds and partnerships are needed in order to reach the regional vision. Thurston County can't shoulder the burden alone. In some sense, we already carry "our fair share." State and federal funding sources are desired.
- Partnerships and reciprocity is important in providing regional services. Also, recognition that a "bus" service may not always be the solution. Rideshare, vanpool and other modes may be the best we can do going south. Often, smaller systems meet the larger systems rather than the larger going to them.
- Strong desire for more federal funds.
- Intercity Transit needs to develop a long-term action plan for developing partnerships and federal/state leadership in funding regional connections.
- The operations costs of vanpools are primarily paid for, but there are some capital costs not completely covered. We may want to consider fare increases to cover all costs, including facility costs, but there was definite support for continuing with the vanpool program. There was some concern about origins and destinations of vanpools.

The Authority was asked if given \$2 to spend, what would they spend it on:

- Expanding regional service to Pierce County/Souder
- Expanding connections to Lewis County
- Expanding connections to south Thurston County
- Expanding vanpool service and replacement vehicles or
- Expanding local service

They could spend \$1 on two different things. Results were:

- \$3 would be spent on expanding regional service to Pierce County/Souder
- \$0 would go to Lewis County
- \$1 would go to South Thurston County
- \$2 would go to expanding vanpool service and replacement vehicles
- \$12 would go to expanding local service

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

Harbour explained there were three alternatives for future direction:

- Maintaining status quo, continuing to provide our current service with the current sales tax levels and fare structure.

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- Maintaining the current revenue and expense levels and reallocating our existing service to meet Authority priorities.
- Increasing revenue through a sales tax increase, fare increase or a combination of these and use the increased revenue to expand service.

Questions posed to the Authority were:

- How should staff and the Authority respond to service requests when resources to sustain new services are uncertain?
- Is maintaining status quo a viable and acceptable alternative?
- Should Intercity Transit ask the voters to consider an increase in the local sales tax and if so, when?
- Should Intercity Transit consider raising fares to increase revenues and allow modest increases?
- Should Intercity Transit continue the current capital program to prepare for future growth or should capital projects be deferred?
- Are there services or areas of expenditure that should be reduced or eliminated to allow resources in other areas or to extend or expand service?

After discussion by the groups, feedback was provided:

- It was clear delaying the capital program or deferring capital projects was not an option.
- It appeared the status quo was not a viable option for the longer term (maybe it could be for the next year or two).

The Authority was asked again, the same question they were asked at the beginning of the planning session: *"If the financial forecast is accurate, which scenario is most preferable in responding to service requests":*

1. *Maintain status quo*
2. *Maintain status quo, but reallocate service*
3. *Increase revenue*
4. *Defer capital projects*

**This time the answers were:**

1. *Maintaining the status quo: 0% compared to 0% in the morning*
2. *Maintaining the status quo but reallocating the service: 33% compared to 36% earlier.*
3. *Increasing the revenue: 56% compared to 38% earlier in the day*
4. *Defer capital project: 17% compared to 25% in the morning*

The Authority asked staff to vote on this as well and their results were:

Maintaining the status quo:	0%
Maintaining the status quo, but reallocating the service:	25%
Increasing revenue:	75%
Deferring capital projects:	0%

Facilitators noted the Authority appeared to be in agreement that revenues need to increase in 2012-2013 – the question is what type of revenue. They posed this question: What should be increased in 2012-2013? The Authority asked staff answer the same question.

	<u>Authority</u>	<u>Staff</u>
• A sales tax increase?	17%	25%
• A fare increase?	50%	50%
• A tax and fare increase?	17%	0%
• No increase at all?	0%	25%

- There was some receptiveness to requesting the last 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a percent in sales tax, but not a clear consensus as to when; a 2013 ballot or later.
- The Authority appeared to be more receptive to a fare increase before they went out for a sales tax increase. They would be open to a discussion sooner than later.

The dialogue around the “when” pursued and no real consensus was reached. Some wanted a sales tax ballot in 2013 and some supported 2014.

## **NEXT STEPS**

There was agreement on next steps:

1. Begin working with the cities on their comp plans beginning with the City of Olympia and keep the Authority informed of the progress.
2. Begin discussions with the Authority regarding fare increases, the first being vanpools in June 2012.
3. Renew discussions regarding a ballot measure to incorporate into the Strategic Plan for 2014 at the latest, but perhaps 2013.
4. Move forward with the capital project plan.
5. Need to be more participatory at the beginning of the land use process and be more assertive in those processes.



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6. Follow the land use spectrum; be at all of the points and add resources to achieve this, in order to make this change.

Everyone agreed this was an outstanding session with excellent participation at all levels.

Respectfully submitted by:  
Rhodetta Seward  
Executive Services Director