



The COMET Service Committee Meeting minutes are prepared and presented in summary form. Audio recordings of the meetings are on file at The COMET and are part of the approved minutes. If you would like to hear the recording from the meeting, please contact Paige Jernigan at pjernigan@thecometsc.gov.

Per SC Code of Laws, Title 30, Chapter 4, Section 30-4-80 - All public bodies shall notify persons or organizations, local news media, or such other news media as may request notification of the times, dates, places, and agenda of all public meetings, whether scheduled, rescheduled, or called, and the efforts made to comply with this requirement must be noted in the minutes of the meetings. The COMET complied with the notification of this meeting on Friday, April 3, 2020 at 3:15 p.m.

**Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority
Service Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 8, 2020-12:00 P.M.
3613 Lucius Road, Columbia, SC 29201 - Conference Room A**

Members Present:

John V. Furgess, Sr.*
Carolyn Gleaton*
Derrick Huggins*
Al Koon*
Colonel (R) Roger Leaks, Jr., Chair*
Lil Mood*
Geraldine Robinson*

Guests Present:

Pam Baker, Burr & Forman, Attorney*
Jackie Bowers, Transdev, Operations Manager*
Tanisha Gibbons, Human Resources Manager*
Larry Gabaldon, Interim Transdev, General Manager*
Zane McGhee, Davis & Floyd, Engineer*
April Platts, Interim Paratransit, Operations Manager*
Todd Warren, Davis & Floyd, Engineer*

Absent Committee Members:

Skip Jenkins

**indicates participation by phone*

The COMET Staff Present

John Andoh, Executive Director/CEO
Pamela Bynoe-Reed, Marketing and Public Information Manager
Leroy DesChamps, Director of Administrative & Customer Service Specialist
Alexis Feliciano, Transit Traffic Checker
Eric Harris, Planning & Development Specialist
Paige Jernigan, Administrative & Customer Service Specialist

1. CALL TO ORDER AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Col. Leaks called the meeting to order at 12:04 P.M.

A quorum was present at the opening of the meeting.



2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion:

A motion was made by Ms. Gleaton and seconded by Mr. Furgess to adopt the agenda.

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Huggins, Leaks, Mood

Absent: None

Motion passed

3. MIDLANDS TRANSIT RIDERS ASSOCIATION UPDATE (Verbal)

No representation

4. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

- COMMENTS MUST PERTAIN TO ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA. THE BOARD CANNOT COMMENT.
- INDIVIDUALS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE BOARD MUST SIGN UP PRIOR TO THE CALL TO ORDER.
- COMMENT TIME LIMIT - TWO (2) MINUTES PER PERSON

No representation

5. MINUTES FROM the March 11, 2020 MEETING

Motion:

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Ms. Gleaton to approve the minutes from March 11, 2020

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Huggins, Leaks, Mood

Absent: None

Motion passed

6. MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

A. DISCUSS PREVIOUS MOTIONS FROM 2017 TO PRESENT.

Mr. Andoh summarized the motions.

- Service Committee development of long-term service plan
- Service Committee to work with South Carolina Department of Transportation to develop a plan for Park and Ride Service
- Streetscape plan for Harden & Taylor
- Review impacts to paratransit service prior to fixed route service changes
- Plan for encouraging people to vote and use public transit
- Terminate Security and Police Contracts
- Approve Safety Policy



7. TRANSDEV OPERATIONS REPORT

Mr. Gabaldon reviewed the Operations Report. He stated there was one (3) preventable accidents. He added that there were three (3) non-preventable accidents. He confirmed that they held a Safety Meeting on February 22, 2020. Topics:
Pedestrian Awareness.

Events:

- Special Service – Provided bus for Mardi Gras Parade on February 22, 2020.
- Special Service – Provided bus for Eau Claire High School Transportation Career Day on February 27, 2020.

Ms. Mood asked for more details regarding the preventable accidents. Mr. Gabaldon explained that there were (3) three accidents and went into further detail.

- Hitting a fixed object
- Pedestrian Strike
- Improper Backing

Ms. Mood asked for clarification and expressed concern on the total number of Road calls/Swap Outs/Repair in the Field as still being high. Discussion ensued regarding swap outs.

8. RIDERSHIP REPORT

Mr. Andoh asked Mr. Harris, Planning and Development Specialist to review the Ridership Report.

Boardings:

- February boardings of 219,270, an increase of 7,677 boardings
- Flex Route boardings increased by 2,190
- Dial A Ride Transportation decreased by 203 boardings.

Col. Leaks asked about the increase in boardings. Mr. Harris explained that routes are improving, the economy, etc. could be the rise in number of boardings.

Ms. Feliciano explained the routes that the numbers are declining. Ms. Mood commented that this level of reporting was reassuring.

9. DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

A. Passenger Amenities Program Update and Bus Shelter Design

Mr. Andoh introduced Mr. McGhee from Davis & Floyd to give an update on the recent projects regarding the passenger amenities program. Mr. McGhee verified that Davis and Floyd continue to move forward with the Taylor and Harden Street Improvement project. He added, through discussion with SCDOT regarding the encroachment permit they are requesting a letter from the City of Columbia stating they approve of the parking space removal. Through discussion with the City of Columbia they are requesting that Benedict College and Allen University indicate that



they also approve of the parking space removal. He stated that they have received no response from Benedict regarding this project to date and are now in the process of requesting information from both schools.

Mr. McGhee mentioned that ADS Specialty Contractors has completed construction of four (4) shelters and one (1) bench in the past month. He continued that there are some additional sites that have concrete pads poured and are awaiting a new order of shelters and benches. Mr. McGhee added that they completed permitting for one (1) bench in the past month. He concluded that Davis & Floyd have been following up with easement requests that are still pending.

Mr. Furgess stressed the importance of making sure that all locations of the shelters match the ridership. Mr. Andoh agreed and assured the Committee that is the intention.

B. Service Impacts to The COMET in relation to COVID - 19

Col. Leaks mentioned that at the end of the last Committee meeting, he asked Mr. Andoh to put together a plan for implementation of the COVID - 19 measures.

Mr. Andoh stated that since March 17, 2020, The COMET has reduced its level of transit service to a "Saturday" level of service. This reduced the number of weekday hours from 630 to 423, thus causing The COMET to pay Transdev based on a Tier 1 rate structure vs. a Tier 5 rate structure for the fixed route service. This increased The COMET's cost per hour from \$65.09 to \$69.46 per hour.

Mr. Andoh added that once the Governor of South Carolina declared a "State of Emergency" on March 13, 2020 and the City of Columbia implemented a "shelter in place" ordinance, the Director of Administration and Operations/COO under the Executive Director/CEO authority implemented a reduction of service as part of the Fare and Service Change Policy adopted by the Board of Directors in November 2018, as long as notification is provided to the Board of Directors, which was provided on Monday, March 16, 2020. This authority is only valid for 180 days and the Board of Directors will have to determine appropriate action to set the level of service until normalcy returns to the Central Midlands area and allows The COMET to return to a regular level of service.

The following measures taken to date to combat COVID-19 by The COMET are as follows:

- Effective 03/31/2020 COMET Central was temporarily closed until further notice.
- Seating on the bus is now be limited to one passenger per row to encourage safe distancing.
- Only 35 and 40-foot buses are operating.
- Hand sanitizers are installed on all 83 vehicles.
- Signs inside all restrooms encouraging people to wash their hands.
- All buses are detailed four times a month to ensure cleanliness.



- All buses used in service go through a thorough cleaning daily, in addition to their four times a month detailing.
- All bus operators have hand wipes, masks upon request.
- All buses are being fogged to ensure cleanliness.
- All 83 vehicles are going through a routine pest control program to ensure there are no insects, bugs or vermin on the vehicles.
- The COMET will participate and cooperate with CDC, DHEC, City of Columbia, Richland County and Lexington County to ensure the public is aware of what is being done to keep customers safe.
- The COMET suspended service of the downtown circular, The Soda Cap Connector buses and trolleys beginning Tuesday, March 17, 2020.
- All service moved from a normal schedule to a Saturday schedule beginning Thursday, March 19, 2020.
- Dial A Ride Transit service is still available to those individuals needing paratransit.
- The COMET requests that any trips on fixed route service be limited to essential travel (work, medical, grocery, etc.),

Options for the future include:

- Return to regular service.
- Continue Saturday Service
- Continue suspension of Routes 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 76 due to lack of demand of these routes.
- Reduce service to Sunday Service
- Completely suspend transit services until the "State of Emergency" has ended.
- Use alternative transit programs such as Lyft, Uber, Taxis and transportation measures that promotes "single" use. Presently there is COMET To The Market, COMET @ Night and soon the subsidized taxi program and volunteer transportation program.
- Implement a limited dial-a-ride service, as done during Hurricane Florence in September 2018 whereas Customers can call (803) 255-7100 for a ride at least one hour in advance and state the bus stop location that the customer is boarding at.
- Install driver barriers on the buses to separate bus operators from the passengers and resume front door boarding and fare collection.

Mr. Andoh stated that the Committee should be mindful of the following:

- Passenger fares have not been collected since March 17, 2020. The COMET averages \$5,800 a day in fare revenue. We are down approximately \$139,200 in fares estimated.
- If fare collections were to return, there needs to be a mechanism in place to protect the bus operator from passengers breathing on them. This could be in the form of a driver barrier which the investment is expected to cost \$4,000 - \$5,000 per installed



- shield. A total of 83 shields would need to be installed between fixed route and DART vehicles to the tune of \$415,000.
- Richland County Penny funds are anticipated to be down. The COMET projected \$18,855,298 in anticipated revenue received. With non-essential business closed and shelter in place ordinances implemented, The COMET will need to revise this projection to match projected spending.
 - FTA has announced that the Columbia Urbanized Area will receive \$15,295,748 from the CARES Act. This funding is available immediately, retroactive to January 20, 2020, to reimburse for operations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no local match for the use of this funding. There may be a need to share a portion of this funding with Santee Wateree RTA due to their service area extending into Elgin.
 - SCDOT will be announcing soon an FTA Section 5311 allocation which could possibly be an additional \$425,000 to The COMET.

Mr. Furgess mentioned that in Greenville, the City is testing essential employees for the virus and wanted to see if we could do something similar. Mr. Andoh stated that Mr. DesChamps has reached out to that organization. Mr. DesChamps explained that a provider group would have to issue a doctor's order. Mr. Furgess suggested reaching out to the City to see if we can expedite the process due to the virus and treat The COMET as an overall group. Mr. Andoh stated that he and Mr. DesChamps will try to contact the City.

Ms. Mood asked if we could do a combination/hybrid of fixed route and Uber, Lyft and dial a ride route? She added that this would take care of those out of the area of pickup. She inquired about the consensus of those who are not in the area of pick up. Mr. Gabaldon stated that the biggest concern right now is the limited number of passengers due to social distancing.

Discussion ensued regarding the Governors State of Emergency status.

Mr. Huggins suggested forming a Task Force that could monitor the issues and he added he would be willing to serve on this committee. Mr. Furgess agreed that the Task Force is a great idea, but we need to make sure that Mr. Andoh has the flexibility to make decisions as he is the first to see the issues as they arrive.

Motion:

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Mr. Huggins to recommend moving to Sunday service and to provide limited Dial A Ride service to riders who are on routes that would be left out of the Sunday service. In addition, continue fare free service with back bus entrance only. The COMET is to establish an Ad-Hoc Task Force to be available to the Director on a daily basis as a sounding board for new developments. The COMET is to maintain the flexibility for the Executive Director to make decisions in an emergency consistent with the current adopted policies.

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Huggins, Leaks, Mood



Absent: None

Motion passed.

Mr. Huggins asked who would serve on the Task Force Committee.

- Huggins
- Mood (available if needed)
- Leaks

Mr. Huggins left the meeting at 1:28 P.M.

10. LEGAL/CONTRACTUAL/PERSONNEL (may require executive session)

Motion:

A motion was made by Mr. Furgess and seconded by Col. Leaks to enter Executive Session.

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Leaks, Mood

Absent: Huggins

Motion passed.

Service Committee entered Executive Session at 1:28 P.M.

Motion:

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Ms. Gleaton to exit Executive Session.

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Leaks, Mood

Absent: Huggins

Motion passed.

Service Committee exited Executive Session at 2:02 P.M.

No action taken in Executive Session.

Motion:

A motion was made by Ms. Mood and seconded by Ms. Gleaton to concur with the Finance Committee recommendation to explore this expansion in a Board workshop.

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Leaks, Mood

Absent: Huggins

Motion passed.

11. Adjourn

Motion:

A motion was made by Mr. Furgess and seconded Ms. Gleaton to adjourn the Service Committee meeting.

Approve: Furgess, Gleaton, Leaks, Mood

Absent: Huggins



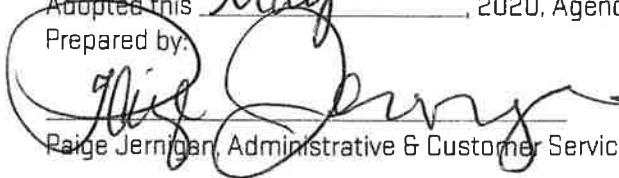
Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 2:04 P.M.

CENTRAL MIDLANDS REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Adopted this May, 2020, Agenda Item _____

Prepared by:



Paige Jernigan, Administrative & Customer Service Specialist

Approved by:



Andy Smith, Secretary