

AMES TRANSIT AGENCY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

AMES, IOWA

November 12, 2015

The Ames Transit Agency Board of Trustees met on November 29, 2015 at 4:00 p.m. in the CyRide Conference room. President Haila called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. with Trustees Madden, Schainker, Haila and Teubert present. Absent: Trustees Abbas and Gartin.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

AMES AREA MPO FUNDING REQUEST: Director Kyras said the Ames Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) will be requesting applications for planning dollars and also for the surface transportation program dollars. Director Kyras indicated that at the previous meeting the board provided direction to request \$100,000 from the AAMPO carryover dollars and will make that request when the applications process moves forward.

She indicated that staff had not discussed another opportunity with the AAMPO's STP funds (Federal Surface Transportation Program). In light of CyRide's lower federal capital dollars, Director Kyras explained that this source of funding could assist in purchasing new buses in the future. She indicated that the STP funds could be used to fund highway, transit, bicycles, or shared path use projects after submitting an Ames Area MPO application for these funds. Further, she said that currently the MPO has STP funds programmed through 2019, but will be asking for applications for 2020 shortly. Director Kyras shared, that, after talking with her peers around that state more transit managers are considering or are already receiving STP funds to help purchase needed bus capital. She provided an example of how this was accomplished at the Des Moines MPO. Director Kyras requested direction from the transit board as to whether the transit board wanted CyRide staff to submit an AAMPO application when the application process is announced.

Trustee Madden shared his opinion that if CyRide does not make a request, it cannot be considered. Further he shared that he thought CyRide should make the request with the understanding that if there are other issues or priorities for this funding, the City can make that decision based on its prioritization.

Trustee Schainker asked where the 15% figure had come from and if there was any rationale to this number. Director Kyras said there is no strong correlation to this figure, but that the total AAMPO allocation was approximately \$1.4 million and that 15% for CyRide would generate about \$200,000, which would allow CyRide to purchase a bus every one to two years; or, fund the additional cost for an articulated bus. Trustee Schainker asked when applications need to be submitted by CyRide. Director Kyras indicated that it could be December 2015 or January 2016.

Trustee Schainker said that the MPO approved the Long Range Transportation Plan and that using STP funds for transit would reduce the funds available for other projects in that plan. He questioned what other projects had or would be submitted. Director Kyras indicated that she was not aware of what other projects were being considered.

Trustee Madden shared his thoughts that he believes that the 15% figure is reasonable for a program of this nature. Further, he indicated that he believes that, as transit trustees, they have a responsibility to seek funding to support the system and that he would be in favor of submitting a proposal to the MPO, who would then have to prioritize this request among all other requests.

Director Kyras said Des Moines has a similar program that supports transit annually. Shari Atwood, CyRide's Transit Planner, shared that Des Moines' 15% represents approximately \$520,000 per year to support bus capital and further that CyRide carries about two million more passengers than the Des Moines system.

Trustee Haila asked what geographic area was served by the the Ames Area MPO. Director Kyras explained that the Ames Area MPO provides regional transportation planning for the greater Ames area. This includes Gilbert as of the last census. As a result, the Ames Area MPO is provided federal funding to plan for a regionally-coordinated transportation system. Further, she indicated that the dollars are provided through the Federal Highway Administration, but can be "flexed" for use on transit or bicycle projects.

Trustee Madden made a motion to have CyRide staff develop an FY2020 application for 15% of the AAMPO's STP allocation for the purchase of buses. Motion was seconded by Trustee Teubert. (Ayes: Three. Nays: One.) Motion carried.

ORANGE ROUTE STUDY UPDATE AND PRESENTATION: Director Kyras said that the Orange Route Study's work tasks were close to being completed and that during the July Transit Board meeting, the transit board requested additional information regarding the remaining options before making a decision on a locally-preferred option. She shared with the transit board members the preferred alternative the Study Committee chose that their meeting their previous day (Bus Rapid Transit alternative), an updated cost savings, side-by-side comparison of the three remaining alternatives, and return on capital investment. Director Kyras introduced Bill Troe with SRF Consulting for further explanation of the materials.

At the request of President Haila, Mr. Troe began with an explanation of the side by side comparison table and an overview of the alternatives the transit board would be looking at.

Mr. Troe began with the alternatives being considered, explaining that the first option is a “no action” alternative where existing service would continue; however additional 40’ buses would be added as demand requires.

The second option would be to convert all the buses on the Orange route to articulated buses. A smaller minibus would operate between Vet Med and the Iowa State Center (ISC), connecting to the articulated buses at the Iowa State Center. The current route structure would remain the same as it is today; however, only eight articulated buses would be needed as opposed to the current twelve 40’ buses required to provide service in the future. The number of buses decreases because capacity is approximately 60% greater with an articulated bus than a 40’ bus. The all articulated bus alternative would support peak demand within the next ten years, at a 3 minute frequency between buses.

The third option is to implement Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service on a modified route. This option would include the same shuttle as explained with the all articulated bus option, but once the articulated buses leave the Iowa State Center they would travel on Beach, Osborn Drive and then turnaround at Bissell Rd. via a new roundabout that could be constructed as part of this alternative. Mr. Troe also explained that the Cardinal route could be rerouted to operate on Morrill Road to allow transfers at Osborn and Morrill Rd. providing service within the core of central campus. A signal priority system would be added to the stop light at Beach and Lincoln Way.

Trustee Haila asked whether more buses on Osborn Drive would further congest this already heavily-utilized corridor. Trustee Madden indicated the removal of parking along Osborn Dr. has greatly improved the safety and congestion issues in this area of campus and that the feedback ISU has received has been favorable. Trustee Teubert shared that he believes Osborn Drive is a heavily traveled corridor and not using this street could positively impact the university and students. President Haila expressed his concern with the BRT on Osborn Drive due to the congestion issues currently being experienced along this roadway and his belief that the university was trying to reduce traffic along this corridor. Trustee Madden indicated that this has significantly improved this school year with the removal of parking along this street.

A concern was raised about whether the future System Redesign Study recommendations could change where buses operate on central campus, making any option chosen at this time unrealistic. Director Kyras indicated that the study could impact where buses operate on central campus; however, she believes that any options brought forward through this study would marginally impact service in this area, mentioning that Pammel Road instead of Osborn Drive could become the new east-west bus routing.

Mr. Troe provided information on the “no action” alternative indicating that, with 40’ buses, the number of buses operating along Osborn Drive each day would increase to 240 buses; however, with the all articulated buses alternative the number of buses would be reduced to 199 and with the BRT alternative would increase to 320, due to the two-way movement of the route on this section of roadway. He also indicated that the number of bus trips on Morrill Road and Beach Dr. would be reduced under the BRT alternative. Mr. Troe also explained that the BRT alternative estimates that more students would walk to locations on campus after arriving via the BRT style Orange route as opposed to transferring to the modified Cardinal route under this proposal. This concept therefore supports the walkable, sustainable campus initiative.

Mr. Troe also explained how the signal priority system at Beach and Lincoln Way would work in that it holds the green signal longer if a bus is nearing the intersection as opposed to providing the bus priority at any time in the light’s cycle. Another concept of the BRT is the roundabout at Bissell and Osborn Dr. that would be created to allow the buses on the BRT route to turnaround. He indicated that this could also benefit general traffic flow in this area of campus.

Another aspect of the BRT alternative is assistance in repaving two lots at the ISC lot. Director Kyras explained that ridership on the Orange route has grown to the point where CyRide is “spilling over” into lots C5 and C6 and the repavement of these lots could be potentially funded with 80% federal dollars.

Finally, Mr. Troe indicated that the BRT concept moves CyRide into a new federal funding stream under the program called “New Starts” where up to 80% of the total project could be funded with federal dollars.

Mr. Troe then explained the Side by side comparison provided to board members. Trustee Schinker asked why CyRide would need ten more buses on this route. Director Kyras explained that this is not additional buses. She indicated that 12 buses currently operate on this route and this would be reduced to eight buses and two spare buses. She also indicated that the Orange Route has averaged a 3% ridership growth per year in the past ten years, but this year, with the addition of the Plum route, ridership to-date on this route is flat.

President Haila inquired about the university’s prediction for future enrollment and wondered if recent year’s increases would begin to slow. Mr. Madden shared his views on enrollment changes. Director Kyras cautioned board members on using predictions as they have tended to be too conservative in the past when predictions were for a maximum enrollment of 32,000, then this was changed to 35,000, and now it is at 37,000 students. She urged board members to plan services for the worst case and build service to short term reality. Trustee Madden shared that enrollment over the last five

years is substantially above previous assumptions, but further stated that he anticipates the growth rate will be slower/stable in the future.

Mr. Troe detailed the differences between the three alternatives regarding their operating cost, calculated in year 2024 dollars. He indicated that the “no action” alternative would cost CyRide an estimated \$1.6 million dollars per year to operate, compared to \$1.3 million under the all articulated bus option and \$1.2 million under the BRT alternative. Director Kyras explained that the costs were based on the number of hours the buses operate under each alternative multiplied by the estimated hourly cost in 2024 dollars of approximately \$76 per hour.

Trustee Schainker shared his concern regarding a park and ride lot structure and questioned whether this is the most efficient method for CyRide to provide service. Director Kyras stated that this type of system was the most efficient way for CyRide to operate – a short 3 miles loop carrying over 14,000 rides per day as opposed to spreading these 14,000 trips throughout the community requiring more buses to cover the larger geographic area. She acknowledged that the community benefits are reduced due to more cars on the street to travel to the park and ride.

Mr. Troe continued with the annual savings, in local dollars, the capital cost and the estimated capital payback period for each option. He explained that the “no action” alternative would be the most expensive and offers no savings; however, has the lowest capital cost of \$200,000, mainly for the purchase of used buses to increase the number of buses on this route. He explained that the BRT alternative was the least costly to operate each year with an annual cost savings of \$226,800 compared to \$170,200 for the all articulated bus option. The capital cost of the BRT alternative would be approximately \$1.7 million compared to \$1.5 million for the all articulated bus option, with a slightly lower capital payback period for the BRT of 8 years compared to 9-10 years for the all articulated bus option. He also indicated that the BRT alternative, at a total cost of \$8.5 million, was a very small federal project where typically projects ranged from \$25 million to over \$100 million dollars. He indicated that this was a positive aspect of this project for consideration for federal funding.

Transit board members shared several concerns regarding the BRT alternative. They indicated that to accumulate the local share of \$1.7 million to match a grant, that budgets would immediately need to be increased; they indicated that they believed that the savings would not happen as more needs would be identified in the future to negate an actual reduction in costs; and they were also concerned with the number of drivers the option would require. Trustee Teubert shared his concern with the BRT option in that it eliminates the Orange Route from Morrill Road, leaving students with fewer transit options in this area. Director Kyras clarified that students would still have bus service as they could transfer to the Cardinal Route – that the only change was that it no longer was a direct route on the bus. Director Kyras shared that Trustee Abbas attended

the Orange Route Study Committee meeting the previous day and was supportive of the BRT option as students could see the benefit of BRT system in the long run with their fee dollars.

Trustee Schainker asked for more information on the percentage of Orange route rides compared to the entire system. Director Kyras stated that daily ridership on the Orange route is approximately 14,000 rides per day compared to an average of 45,000 per day for the entire system. Mr. Madden shared that approximately 5,000 cars park at the Iowa State Center parking lot each day. Mr. Troe shared that through the survey completed for this study, that approximately 70-75% of the individuals using the Orange Route live within Ames.

Mr. Troe provided information regarding each alternative's ability to continue to grow as ridership changes. He indicated that the all articulated and BRT alternatives each provide for the estimated 3% continued growth per year, but that the BRT option provided the most capacity to meet future demand.

Mr. Troe then explained the customer experience comparison on the Side-By-Side comparison. He indicated that the "no action" alternative would have the lowest customer satisfaction with fuller buses and being passed by with full buses. He indicated that the BRT option provided higher customer service satisfaction due to the signal priority aspect of the project, allowing for a faster trip into/out of campus. He indicated that the Orange Route Study committee's recommendation was to add this technology to the all articulated bus option as well if it was chosen so that both options could have this advantage. Also, the all articulated bus option does not require transferring on campus to the Cardinal route, which would be an advantage for this option.

Trustee Schainker questioned how the signal priority technology would work when traffic backs up on Beach during events in the evening and weekends. Director Kyras explained that service on the Orange route does not operate on the weekends and could work through the occasional evening event.

Director Kyras shared the Orange Route Study Committee recommendation for a preferred alternative as follows, "Select the Bus Rapid Transit alternative as the Locally Preferred Option for implementation on the Ames Transit Agency's #23 Orange Route, with an intermediate plan to incrementally increase the number of articulated buses and deploy signal priority technology as possible prior to receiving federal grant approval and funding." Director Kyras shared that if this recommendation was approved by the transit board, that there would be a longer federal process to complete before implementation could begin. She briefly explained the required federal process, including the development of a "Project Development" document, an environmental assessment and formal request to enter into a New Starts funding agreement. She also

shared that the federal representative responsible for this program in Washington DC would be coming to Ames in late March 2016 to learn more about a possible BRT project in Ames.

Board members asked several questions regarding timing of the federal process if the BRT alternative were chosen, when a financial commitment would need to be made and what the next steps would be.

Director Kyras shared a tentative timeline stating that first the board would need to formally approve a preferred alternative, then with remaining project dollars left, SRF could assist CyRide staff in developing the federal documents (Environmental Assessment, Project Development letter, etc.) for submission. Shari Atwood, indicated that once the process begins, if approved by the federal government, it typically takes two years to have the funding placed into the President's budget so that a grant can be approved.

A lengthy dialogue followed where transit board members voiced their concerns about committing to the BRT alternative, such as students opinion of this alternative, the financial commitment required, the pressure on CyRide for capital and operating costs, the need for more bus storage, etc.

President Haila asked what is needed to complete the study and Director Kyras said that the transit board needed to select one of the alternatives. President Haila shared his discomfort in making this decision at the meeting with two board members not present.

There was further discussion regarding board members concerns about the BRT option.

Trustee Schainker asked about the impact of the BRT or all articulated bus option on residents living on Beach Ave. Director Kyras said there should be a positive impact with the all articulated or BRT option with fewer buses operating. She confirmed that there would be no construction that would impact residents. Trustee Schainker indicated that the resident's opinion on the service should be considered. Further, he said that staff should include this in a five or ten year financial pro forma.

Board members then discussed bus service to the Research Park extension versus the existing Research Park.

Board members asked if a decision needed to be made at the meeting. Director Kyras indicated that no decision needed to be made, but that the grant funding this study was very old and that FTA was anxious for CyRide to make a decision and close out the grant. She suggested that a decision on the locally-preferred alternative be made within the next several months, and if the option chosen was the BRT alternative, allow staff to begin preparing the federal documentation to enter the project in consideration for

New Start funding, with the caveat that it would take two years to even know if the project would be considered for federal funding. In the meantime, further discussion on the alternative could take place throughout the community and the project could be pulled from consideration at any time before this period as a result of community, student or financial concerns. She indicated that the \$40,000 remaining in the current project could be used to prepare the federal documentation required, which would need to be returned if it was not used for this purpose.

Trustee Schainker expressed his concern for this approach indicating his discomfort with the ability to pay for any of the alternatives and in moving forward with a financial commitment for the BRT without further vetting the service concept. Trustee Madden indicated a desire to make sure that students were comfortable with the concept.

Trustee Schainker questioned how to adequately evaluate the alternatives and asked what the alternatives were trying to accomplish. He questioned what the priorities were for the transit system. Director Kyras stated that the Side-By-Side comparison provided the evaluation based on criteria the Study Committee believes is important. Further, she indicated that she believes the BRT option provides more benefits (funding for articulated buses, roundabout and repavement at the ISC lots that will benefit the university not only transit with the BRT option, additional route capacity, shorter payback period, greater savings, etc.) for almost the same cost as the all articulated buses. The disadvantage is that with the BRT option requires an upfront financial commitment within the next two years as opposed to the all articulated option, which is more of a pay-as-you go approach.

Transit board members inquired as to what initiated the Orange Route Study. Director Kyras said that initially the Transit Feasibility Study completed in 2008 recommended changes to the route as a result of its high ridership. In 2008, ridership was at 9,000 rides per day and using all articulated buses on this route was recommended. As a result, a federal grant was approved to look at this route to determine the best option for the future.

Trustee Teubert made a motion to table the decision. Trustee Schainker seconded the motion. (Ayes: Four. Nays: None.) Motion carried.

Transit board members discussed the possibility of arranging a meeting in December to further discuss this study when all board members could be present. Director Kyras said the next meeting is scheduled for December 3, 2015 and felt it would be difficult to arrange another meeting in December close to finals and before the students left on winter break and that the December 3rd meeting agenda was full with budget, capital plan and fuel purchases.

Trustee Madden left at 5: 30 p.m.

Trustee Schainker shared his thoughts about CyRide's financial situation – cash flow, other financial pressures. President Haila's also shared his thoughts on the pressure facing CyRide's financial situation.

Trustee Teubert suggested scheduling a meeting with the students so they were involved and educated on the subject. He shared that he did not want to make it appear that CyRide was putting an expectation on students.

Director Kyras suggested further discussion of this topic at the January board meeting, as it is difficult to get people together in December for another meeting.

NEXT MEETING TIME AND PLACE:

- December 3, 2015 – 8 A.M.

Meeting ADJOURNED at 6:03 p.m. upon consensus of the remaining members, as there was no longer a quorum.