



CHATHAM URBAN TRANSPORTATION STUDY

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARY**

**Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room
112 East State Street**

February 21, 2008

5:00 p.m.

Members

Representing

Present

Tony Abbott	Chatham County	X
Brant Attaway	City of Savannah	
John Bennett	City of Savannah	X
Gerald Cook	City of Bloomingdale	
Mark Egan	Chatham County	
Phyllis Hardeman	Town of Thunderbolt	X
Jason House	City of Savannah	X
Charles Hutchinson	City of Bloomingdale	X
Chandler Kinsey	City of Tybee Island	
Beth Kinstler	City of Savannah	X
Jack Knops	City of Savannah	X
Henry Levy	City of Tybee Island	
Helen McCracken	Town of Thunderbolt	X
Clint Murphy, Chairman	Chatham County	X
Russell Peterson, Vice Chairman	Chatham County	
Linda M. Smith	Port Wentworth	X
Joe Steffen	Chatham County	
Stephen Traub	City of Savannah	X
James Weaver	City of Savannah	

Others Present

Representing

Steve Cote	Reynolds, Smith, and Hills, Inc.	X
Jean Iaderosa	Chatham Area Transit	X
Jane Love	MPO	X
Barbara Settzo	for MPO	X
Wykoda Wang	MPO	X
Mark Wilkes, P.E., AICP	MPO	X

I. Approval of Agenda

Chairman Clint Murphy called the February 21, 2008 Citizens Advisory Committee meeting to order. It was moved and seconded to approve the final agenda for the February 21, 2008 Citizens Advisory Committee meeting.

CAC Action: the motion to approve the final agenda for the February 21, 2008 Citizens Advisory Committee meeting carried with none opposed.

II. Action Items

A. Approval of December 13, 2007 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

It was moved and seconded to approve the December 13, 2007 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes.

CAC Action: the motion to approve the December 13, 2007 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting minutes carried with none opposed.

III. Status Reports

A. CUTS/MPO “Year-of-Expenditure” Update for Financial Plan of the 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)

Mr. Steve Cote from Reynolds, Smith & Hills presented the status report. He explained why the Year of Expenditure update was necessary, the approach they took, the current status of the update, the schedule, and then addressed questions.

This update is required by SAFETEA-LU and requires estimating the time frame for each project in the Long Range Transportation Plan and applying an inflation factor to the project's cost so that the estimate is appropriate for the year of expenditure. Projected revenue from federal, state, and local sources is also inflated over time. They used the current 2030 LRTP and recent TIPs as the basis for the costs and funding figures. They have deducted what costs have already been authorized or completed since 2004, when the LRTP was adopted. The three cost bands are 2008-2013, 2014-2020 and 2021-2030, and the GDOT recommended inflation rate is 2.5%.

Mr. Cote explained that a draft update was submitted to GDOT and FHWA. Both agencies sent responses which the CUTS/MPO staff has received since the meeting packet was mailed. They are reviewing the comments and working to resolve issues brought up in these responses.

Mr. Mark Wilkes reported that originally the update had a figure for project costs of approximately, \$2,422,000,000. The projected available traditional funding sources came to \$1,654,000,000. This left a short fall of almost \$800,000,000 for projects already in the LRTP. This is due largely to the escalation of costs of transportation projects. In order to balance this financial plan the CUTS/MPO staff proposed a strategy to make any additional lanes on limited-access highways "managed lanes," meaning the new lanes on such facilities would be tolled in some way. Existing lanes on such facilities would remain untolled. This strategy would allow user fees to help re-pay the cost of implementing the improvements.

GDOT was not comfortable with tolling the interstate highways, and FHWA was not comfortable with treating some projects as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) without GDOT's support. Over the next few weeks, RS&H and MPO staff hope to resolve these issues and have a final draft ready for the Policy Committee in April. They are trying to avoid moving any currently funded projects in the LRTP to the unfunded list.

Mr. Jack Knops asked what GDOT's objection was to tolling. Mr. Wilkes reported that GDOT feels traditional funding sources will be sufficient for future widening of I-95 because many of the bridges have already been widened by the extra amount during the last widening project. Mr. Wilkes is looking to GDOT for clarification of funding sources.

Ms. Beth Kinstler believes the 2.5% inflation rate is too conservative over the scope of time in question with these projects. Mr. Wilkes agreed that some specific projects have increased much more, but the MPO is using this 2.5% figure under GDOT's guidance just to get through this step in the process.

Mr. Murphy questioned the use of any future T-SPLOST. He believes it will be difficult to support another SPLOST when other things haven't been completed from past SPLOSTs. Mr. Wilkes agreed that this revenue source was not a certainty, but if funding sources cannot be found the alternative is to stop funding projects that have already had significant work completed.

B. "Coastal Commuters" Program to promote alternatives to driving alone

Ms. Jane Love reported that this new, promotional program is an outcome of the Connecting Savannah process. One of the recommendations from that process was to encourage employees of the two large hospitals to utilize carpooling or mass transit in order to reduce congestion on DeRenne Ave. Last year MPO staff began meeting representatives from each hospital and completed a survey on their employees' travel behaviors. This new promotion of carpooling, mass transit, bicycling, and walking will begin in the next 4-6 weeks. One aspect of the program is an Internet-based ride-matching system. This will be open to the public and not limited to the DeRenne Ave. employees. The success of the ride-match service depends on a high level of participation so that those searching will be able to find matching trips. MPO staff asks the CAC to help get the word out.

Another component is an Emergency Ride Home Program to deal with employees' fear of not having a car for emergencies while at the workplace. Such emergencies would be a personal illness, an ill child, or unexpected overtime. MPO's planning funds cannot be used to reimburse taxi companies since this is not considered to be a planning-related activity. Therefore, they've asked the employers to fund this component. Therefore, it is likely that only the employees of the contributing employers will be allowed to use the Emergency Ride Home service.

The name of the program is "Coastal Commuters." The logo is still under development.

Mr. Stephen Traub asked about alternating or staggering shifts. Ms. Love said that the survey results seemed to indicate that the majority at least had a consistent schedule from week to week.

Mr. Tony Abbott said he believed Mr. Traub was asking if the large employers would consider adjusting the start and end times so that a lot of employees do not need to be on the road at the exact same time. Ms. Love replied that the hospitals already have many different shifts than typical 9-5 businesses do, and so their employees' trips are already distributed throughout the day.

Mr. John Bennett asked if the hospitals have said they will offer some of the employer-provided incentives, such as preferential parking for carpoolers, for those who participate in the "Coastal Commuters" program. Ms. Love said that the hospitals had not yet committed to do so. St. Joseph's/Candler has asked for more information about pre-tax deduction for transit passes.

Ms. Love displayed four proposed versions of the logo and asked for opinions from the group. After discussion, a non-binding vote was taken with the following results:

Logo Option #1	2
Logo Option #2a	0
Logo Option #2b	0
Logo Option #3	9

C. Chatham Area Transit Authority's Transportation Development Plan (TDP)

Ms. Jean Iaderosa, from CAT, presented the plan and shared the recommendations. The TDP is a 5-year planning document offering a thorough analysis of the current system and recommendations for making it better. There was extensive public involvement that included: stakeholder interviews; focus groups with neighborhood associations, regional employers, Tybee Island, and Teleride customers; on-board customer surveys; and public drop-in sessions at major transfer points.

They found that the stakeholders are pleased with the core downtown service but the Transit District boundary is a barrier to effective regional service. Ms. Iaderosa explained that there is a Transit District that is geographically defined and the population is taxed for transit service. This Transit District includes Savannah, unincorporated Chatham County and a portion of Garden City. When the district was created many years ago, the seven independent municipalities chose to opt out of the Transit District which is why transit service does not extend to those locations. This can be changed by local city councils or state legislation, but not by CAT.

Focus groups commented that transit is important for the growing employment centers in our community. If employers could see the benefit, they may make contributions such as transit passes for employees.

On-board customer surveys found that the majority of riders have ridden for 5+ years and ride 5-6 days a week and use transit to get to work or school. Many riders transfer buses at least once during their trip.

Ms. Iaderosa proceeded to share the demographics of the transit users and riding habit statistics.

The service analysis reviewed the performance of each route, both individually and as a part of the entire system. This analysis looked for where the service was most effective and where improvements could be made. The major strength is the strong core system, and the most desired improvement is more frequent service.

One recommendation is to enhance the strongest route – Abercorn #14 – by increasing service. They also recommended re-structuring and combining some routes. They recommended eliminating Montgomery #20 as a fixed route and offer some form of demand-response service instead.

Teleride is a very highly used service for individuals unable to use the fixed route service. Teleride surpasses the ADA requirements by serving all of Chatham County and not just the Transit District. It was found that Teleride is generally being well run, but it was suggested that they reduce the reservation window. She reported that the County Commission approved the purchase of new scheduling software which should improve the process dramatically.

Ms. Iaderosa recapped the market research findings. She said that employers without parking constraints do not view transit as a necessity. They do not even think about transit unless they have employees who use it to get to work. Education and promotion of various transit options is very important.

The downtown Transit Station project is still underway. The Greyhound site is the preferred site, but the Louisville Rd. site has not been eliminated from consideration. A transit station would not change the downtown loop except that the buses would not be idling on the loop.

Fare recommendations were discussed in the TDP. The TDP includes a chart comparing seven different fare recommendations, comparing ridership and revenue changes. The recommendation of choice raised the base fare to \$1.50 and offered a free transfer. The cost of the weekly and monthly swipe card, offering unlimited rides, would increase to \$16.00 and \$60.00, respectively. This scenario shows a modest reduction in ridership and a modest increase in revenue. They will be looking for vendors that would sell the swipe cards, thus making it more available to the customer.

A public meeting is scheduled for next Tuesday at 124 Bull St. at 6:00 PM. They are also presenting this report to the Policy Committee next Wednesday. Most immediately, they plan to implement some of the cost-neutral recommendations and service enhancements.

Mr. Abbott asked what per cent of operating revenue came from fares. Ms. Laderosa replied that 20% of operating costs comes from fares.

Mr. Knops asked about a specific route. Ms. Laderosa commented that what the plan includes are recommendations only.

Ms. Kinstler asked if getting an expanded transit district requires the citizens to pressure the local councils. Ms. Laderosa confirmed that it is local politicians and local communities that need to be convinced and persuaded of the value of transit.

Mr. Bennett commented that critics of mass transit emphasize how much public transit is subsidized, while ignoring the fact that the low cost of public parking, or so-called "free parking" at businesses is a subsidy for drivers.

In response to a question by Mr. Murphy, Ms. Laderosa explained that the Management Mobility Board is not a part of CAT. It is a non-profit entity funded by a hotel tax. CAT has a contract with them to provide a downtown route focusing on serving River St. and the downtown hotels. Mr. Murphy was concerned about duplication of services and was assured that it is not a duplication of services.

Mr. Murphy asked if there was any plan to encourage new riders, i.e. to get current drivers out of their cars and onto the buses. Ms. Laderosa replied that the web-based, trip-planning software, used in many communities, is currently outside of CAT's budget. It will be a future improvement. He is concerned that the CAT management is only concerned with sustaining CAT as it is rather than trying to attract new riders and expand the ridership base. Ms. Laderosa explained that they have great regard for their current ridership, but CAT has always marketed beyond the current demographics.

Ms. Kinstler's personal experience on the transit system has been very positive. She doesn't think the word is getting out enough to the general public.

Ms. Linda Smith suggested that government agencies downtown could buy passes for their employees in bulk and get a discount on the price.

IV. Subcommittee Reports

A. Short Term Improvements Committee

Mr. Stephen Traub referred the committee members to the written report. He suggested that the city's service line – 311 – could be used as a resource for submitting improvement requests. He thought it would be effective if those who travel our roadways constantly, i.e. taxi drivers, delivery persons, etc., would call 311 and report problems that they see on the roadways. He asked the committee to think of ways to make better use of 311.

V. Agency Reports

There were no agency reports at this time.

VI. Other Business

Mr. Murphy asked if anyone on this committee would like to be the designated person to represent this committee at the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC). The TCC meets at 3:00 PM, just before the CAC meeting. Typically the CAC Vice Chairperson takes this role, but Mr. Peterson cannot attend the TCC meetings. Ms. Kinstler said she would consider it.

VII. Other Public Comments

There were no other public comments at this time.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no other business to come before the Committee, the February 21, 2008 Citizens Advisory Committee was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Love
Transportation Planner