

MINUTES

21st Century Transportation Task Force

February 5, 2008
3-5 PM

Council Committee Room, 9th Floor

Type of meeting:

Third Task Force Meeting

Attendees:

Councilor Isaac Benton, Mike Skaggs, Claude Luisada, Claude Morelli, Moises Gonzalez (absent), Jeffrey Peterson, Antonio Sandoval, Charles Ivy, Terry Keene, Gary Bodman, Nevin Harwick (absent), Alex Romero, Bert Thomas (absent), Bob Murphy, Brent Wilson (absent), Chris Blewett, Clovis Acosta, Cynthia Reinhart (absent), Dale Lockett (absent), Jeannie Chavez, Joanne McEntire, Joel Wooldridge, JW Madison, Martin Sandoval, Ralph Cipriani, Frank Burcham (absent)

Resource Persons:

John Castillo, Michael Riordan, Pat Montoya, Andrew de Garmo, Keith Perry, Tom Menicucci, Donna Baca, Kara Shair-Rosenfield, Tony Sylvester

Observers:

Sandra Han

AGENDA TOPICS

Welcome

Councilor Benton

Discussion: Councilor Benton called the meeting to order.

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Councilor Benton

Discussion: Councilor Benton moved to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Councilor Benton moved to approve the minutes from the 1-23-08 meeting. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Discussion: Chris Blewett gave a PowerPoint presentation that briefed the Task Force on what the Mid-Region Council of Governments is and what MRCOG does. Chris explained that MRCOG does many things, including land use, water, and economic planning, workforce and training development, Rail Runner planning, construction and operation, and, most pertinent to the Task Force’s discussions, regional transportation planning. The first part of Chris’s presentation focused on the role of the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO is a federal designation), the policy-making board that deals with transportation planning and projects. Chris outlined some of the major issues and challenges that must be taken into consideration when doing transportation planning in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area (AMPA): rapid population growth and land development patterns, increasingly congested roadways, limited river crossings, transit service, bicycle facilities and connectivity, pedestrian access, crashes and safety, air quality, and limited transportation funding. He then explained how the Long-Range Plan, also referred to as the 2030 MTP (Metropolitan Transportation Plan), is developed and what some of its projections are. After going over population, housing and employment growth projections between 2004 and 2030, Chris told the Task Force that, unfortunately, the end product of the Long-Range Plan, with the population projected to increase by 40% and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) projected to increase by 50%, is that we can expect travel times to double or triple by 2030. He also mentioned that the AMPA is close to exceeding federal standards for acceptable ozone levels and that non-attainment in the area of air quality could have a significant impact on the region’s transportation planning efforts. Chris pointed out that bicycle facilities and regional trails are included in the 2030 MTP, but the existing plan doesn’t do as much to address pedestrian facilities. He explained that Systems Management & Operations tools, such as Intelligent Transportation Systems, Managed Lanes (HOV, transit only, reversible lanes), and Incident Management, can be used to improve the performance and efficiency of our roadways, as can public transportation (commuter rail, fixed-route bus service, park & ride, etc.). The final thing that Chris reviewed as part of the MPO discussion was the Transportation Improvement Plan, which is basically the first 6 years of the MTP and is similar to the City’s Capital Improvements Plan.

The second part of Chris’s presentation dealt with the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter train project, for which Chris is the project manager. Chris briefly reviewed the history of the project: Gov. Richardson announced the project in August 2003; the Legislature, in a special session in September 2003, appropriated funding for the project; the first part of Phase I was completed and opened in July 2006; all 50 miles and 5 stations included in Phase I were completed and operation by Feb. 2, 2007; Phase II, the Santa Fe Extension, is expected to be completed by December 2008. Chris also provided information on the funding and to-date use of the Rail Runner: a total of \$400 million in state funds have been allocated to the project - \$75 million was programmed for Phase I (came in under budget), \$250 million for Phase II (expected to come in slightly under budget), \$75 million to acquire 270 miles of BNSF class for track (Belen to the Colorado state border); 12.6 million passenger miles have been racked up in the first year (average trip length – 23 miles; when Santa Fe Extension opens, average trip length expected to jump to 50 miles). Chris also pointed out that 7 new bus routes have been created to connect to the Rail Runner, including, for example, Route 317 that serves Kirtland Air Force Base, and he cited an August 2006 *Albuquerque Journal* poll that revealed that there is a great deal of support for the Rail Runner (69% of residents in the Albuquerque metropolitan area), even though it requires a great deal of subsidies.

The final part of Chris’s presentation provided some “food for thought” on the issue of the relative costs of different transportation modes and choices. Chris noted that the average American family spends three times as much on auto travel as they do on healthcare and that, on average, drivers in the Albuquerque metro area spend 247 hours (10 full days) annually in their car and drive approximately 11,000 miles. He

also raised the question, “When will it pay for itself?” which is a question that always comes up when talking about public transportation but that never, or rarely, is brought up when it’s a road project that is being discussed. Chris pointed out that billions of dollars are spent on road/highway facilities every year and that those projects require a 50-70% subsidy, depending on volume and tax rates. Some other numbers that Chris provided: by 2025, traffic volumes between Albuquerque and Santa Fe will double, resulting in a travel time of 2 hours 15 minutes between their downtowns; adding a new lane on I-25 between Tramway and Santa Fe would cost \$350 million and would only reduce travel time by 25 minutes; the average automobile commuter spends about \$13,500 per year on transportation.

Presentation 2: Albuquerque’s Modern Street Car Proposal (2006)

**Michael Riordan,
DMD**

Discussion: Michael Riordan gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Albuquerque Modern Streetcar project as proposed in 2006. He explained that the two most important goals of implementing a modern streetcar system in Albuquerque are connecting people and shaping places. He also said that modern streetcars are considered to be a powerful redevelopment tool because of the investment they attract and the return on investment that is created when modern streetcar lines are installed. Michael used the examples of Portland, OR, Kenosha, WI, Little Rock, AR, and Tampa, FL, and provided a table that shows an average return on investment of 1000-1500% in those locations. The presentation included information about why modern streetcar is a better fit for Albuquerque than light rail would be, the features and benefits of modern streetcars, the proposed alignment of Phase I, how the locations of streetcar stops would be determined, options about what to do with existing bus service, and the cost to construct a modern streetcar system:

Light Rail vs. Modern Streetcar

- Light rail would be double the cost of modern streetcar
- Light rail would be 10-15 years away because we would have to compete for federal funding, which is the only way we’d be able to afford to build light rail
- Light rail systems are much larger in scale than modern streetcars: require exclusive guideway; car dimensions – 270 feet long, 9 feet wide, holds 550 passengers; top speed of 55 MPH
- Modern streetcar rail is built into existing roadways and shares lanes with other traffic; dimensions – 66 feet long, 8 feet wide, holds 150 passengers (by comparison, Rapid Ride buses are 60 feet long and carry 75 passengers); top speed of 40 MPH
- Light rail construction is more disruptive to businesses and adjacent property owners than modern streetcar construction, which is typically 3 blocks in 3 weeks

Modern Streetcar Features & Benefits

- Electrically powered
- Easy access for wheelchairs, bicycles, and strollers
- Stops include shelter canopy, benches, bike rack, message board/wayfinding signage, trash receptacles, and are ADA compliant
- Quiet
- Preserves increasingly scarce street capacity; makes better use of existing infrastructure
- Attracts new riders
- Attracts investment
- Promotes infill and redevelopment

Proposed Alignment

- Central Avenue from Rio Grande river to Carlisle (City Council extended it from Atrisco Dr. to San Mateo)

- Why Central? Because of existing high ridership numbers.
- Also, Sunport loop – University Blvd. from Central to Avenida Cesar Chavez; Cesar Chavez from University to Yale; Yale from Central to the Sunport
- Total of 16 miles of rail; route is only 8 miles
- Lane alignment options include right lane running, left lane running, and midblock cross-section
- Streetcar stop options include near side stop and center platform stop

Determination of Stop Locations

- Primary considerations: ridership, stop spacing, land use, potential
- Secondary considerations: space requirements, visibility, connections to bus stops and bike routes, storefront activity, proximity to transit-dependent populations, on-street parking availability, other engineering issues

What to do with Existing Bus Service

- Keep #766 Rapid Ride on Central, but split #66 Central?
- Move #766 Rapid Ride to Lomas?
- Keep #50 Downtown to UNM, but remove #50 on Yale Blvd. and replace with modern streetcar?

Cost to Implement Modern Streetcar

- \$28 million per track mile (based on late 2006 estimate and 2008 construction)
- Includes: track, stops, traffic signals, roadway improvements, power system (new substation every 2-2.5 miles), vehicles, maintenance facility
- Total cost for Phase I: \$224 million
- By comparison, Big I cost \$230 million (10 years ago), and Coors/I-40 cost \$100 million
- Proposed funding sources: ¼ Cent Transportation Infrastructure Tax, State funds; other cities have used parking revenue bonds, local improvement districts (LID), tax increment financing (TIF/TIDD), regional transportation funds

Councilor Benton pointed out that Governor Richardson was very interested in the Yale/Sunport line as a regional tie-in and indicated that he would help fund that portion of Phase I.

Bob Murphy asked how much the Sunport line alone would cost.

Michael Riordan answered that the Central and Sunport lines are approximately the same distance and cost – about \$110-120 million each. The expectation was that the City would pay for the Central line, and the State would pay for the Sunport line.

Jeffrey Peterson asked questions about how riders would pay for a fare, whether or not there is an operator on board the streetcar, and how/when the streetcar would cross between the inside and outside lanes of traffic.

Michael Riordan responded that the details about how fares would be paid hadn't been finalized, but options might include pre-pay stations at each stop and purchasing passes online. He said that there would be a driver/streetcar operator on board but that they would be separated from passengers. With regard to how/when the cars would cross between inside and outside lanes, Michael explained that this would occur mid-block.

J.W. Madison asked how long a streetcar line could be extended for before it would no longer make sense to use a modern streetcar type of transportation system. He suggested that redevelopment along Central

could conceivably take place from the western reaches of the city all the way to Edgewood.

Councilor Benton suggested that perhaps J.W.'s question could best be addressed by the consultants who are working on the cost-benefit analysis; the consultants will be presenting to the Task Force in the near future, hopefully at our next meeting.

General Discussion and Questions & Answer

Task Force Members

Discussion: The idea of break-out groups had been suggested by a couple members as being one way for the Task Force to proceed after all of the informational presentations had been given. Councilor Benton began general discussion by asking members for their thoughts on breaking out into smaller groups, each of which could work on a particular component of the Task Force's charge. He offered the following as possible topics for break-out groups: 1) ¼ Cent Transportation Tax – extension, dedication of, possibility of increasing to ½ cent? 2) Residents'/Businesses' needs – river crossings, peak travel times, multi-modal facilities, transit options. 3) Modern Streetcar – should we invest in a modern streetcar system, how could it be funded, where could it be expanded to? 4) Policy Amendments – Comprehensive Plan, CIP Ordinance, Sidewalk Ordinance, etc.

Claude Luisada said that, with so many issues to be covered, we would probably have to limit each group to no more than 3-5 people.

J.W. Madison asked when and how the Task Force would come back together to discuss what recommendations to make as a whole.

Ralph Cipriani said that he would be in favor of breaking out into smaller groups, but that it would first be important to articulate a very specific charge for each group.

Martin Sandoval suggested that, if the Task Force decides to break out into smaller groups, maybe have no more than 4 groups or topics. But before breaking out into small groups, the large group should decide what each of the smaller groups should cover.

Clause Luisada said that there is a lot of unexplored territory and thinks that groups will probably come up with new questions and issues to address as they begin their work.

Councilor Benton said that the idea of break-out groups is not necessarily the best way to proceed and that maybe the group should stay together for the time being.

Joanne McEntire asked where things are at with the streetcar cost-benefit analysis.

Chris Blewett said that the consultants are ready to present at the next meeting and that they will be looking for some guidance from the Task Force.

Joanne McEntire said that she thinks the Task Force should start with a discussion about the larger societal context of transportation/mobility issues and that maybe the group as a whole could first come up with a set of basic principles to guide its work. She suggested that one basic principle might be that anything we do with public money should have a goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled.

Alex Romero agreed that he would like to see the Task Force develop an outline of where it plans to go and what it plans to accomplish before breaking out into different groups. He felt that the group is not

quite ready to break out.

Claude Luisada said that he thinks the group needs to address a basic question: What are the needs – now, in 5 years, in 10 years?

J.W. Madison followed up on what Joanne McEntire had said about establishing some basic principles and parameters. He agreed with having reduction of vehicle miles traveled as a basic principle, and he offered two others: 1) fuel and energy economy, and 2) death, liability cost per passenger mile.

Joel Wooldridge said that there is a long-standing set of goals that the City uses each year and every other year to prepare the annual budget and CIP. He suggested that the Task Force might want to start with an examination of those policies and determine if they need to be modified at all. He asked if the Task Force has the authority to change adopted policies.

Councilor Benton responded to Joel's question and said that the Task Force has the authority to recommend that policies be amended, but that the Task Force itself could not amend adopted policies. He also asked staff (Kara Shair-Rosenfield) to prepare a whittled down version of the Indicators Progress Commission (IPC) goals.

Claude Morelli raised the issue of operating funds. He said that the ¼ Cent Transportation Tax provides critical funding to support Transit's operating costs, and he thinks that stabilization of ABQ Ride and other transit funding needs to be a central part of the Task Force's discussions.

Bob Murphy said he thinks it's critical to know where funding for all different programs could potentially come from. He asked how the ¼ Cent Transportation Tax was originally structured and if there was any ability to change the structure/allocations.

Councilor Benton said that there are basically three options with regard to the tax: 1) let the tax go away per the original sunset clause, 2) extend the tax and keep the original allocation percentages, 3) extend the tax but change the allocation percentages. He also asked for a brief synopsis of how the tax was originally structured and allocated to be prepared and provided to the Task Force before the next meeting.

Bob Murphy said he thinks there will be public support to continue the tax but that it is going to have to be made very clear how the tax is going to be used in the future. He commented that existing and new transit projects will probably be competing with the Rail Runner for taxpayer-supported funding. Finally, he asked how PIDs and TIDDs work.

Councilor Benton said that he thinks that 80% of property owners have to vote for a TIDD in order for it one to be put in place, but he asked staff to provide a more thorough explanation of PID and TIDD formation.

Ralph Cipriani said that the Task Force, in its discussions about transportation, cannot ignore urban/regional issues, such as land use, densities, and access to transit. He also said that he has felt really concerned that there is an over-simplification of references to Portland and that Albuquerque is very different than Portland. Ralph pointed out that it took Portland over 30 years to develop their growth management policies, and he stated that a regional growth strategy is desperately needed in Albuquerque.

Alex Romero, following on what Ralph said about Portland, mentioned that the Portland Authority has a staff of 300.

Councilor Benton asked if there was agreement that, in addition to transportation, this group also wants to look at land-use issues as they relate to transportation planning, i.e., not only different modes of transportation but also how best to facilitate and support multi-modal transportation through land-use decisions.

Claude Luisada said that one thing that should be taken into consideration by the Task Force is that there is a latent group that will use transit if you put it in front of them.

Joanne McEntire said she still thinks that the group needs to articulate the principles to hang the Task Force's work on and that those principles should be the same ones that are used to sell an extension of the ¼ cent tax to voters.

Councilor Benton noted that a few principles had already been articulated by the group: 1) Reduction of vehicle miles traveled, and 2) Increased mobility for all groups/users.

Martin Sandoval wanted to focus on the outcome of what the Task Force is trying to do. He suggested coming up with goals and objectives first, determine what outcome the Task Force wants to achieve, and do plan backwards from there.

Jeffrey Peterson said that maybe the Task Force needs to come up with a mission statement.

Chris Blewett suggested that the Task Force not limit itself to thinking only in terms of the ¼ cent tax and existing funding, which he said are inadequate to fully address future transportation needs. He wants the Task Force to consider biting a bigger bullet and said that he is not suggesting unbridled spending but that recommendations shouldn't necessarily be shoehorned into current funding levels.

Alex Romero brought up that the State's Task Force on Transportation's report showed that taxpayers are willing to pay more for transportation/transit depending on what they'll be getting in return.

Councilor Benton went back to Jeffrey Peterson's point about creating a mission statement. He suggested that perhaps a place to start with developing a mission statement is language contained in O-07-71: "Generate a report or reports (majority and/or minority if necessary) summarizing the available information and making recommendations with respects to the dedication of the Transportation Infrastructure Tax, the development of a Street Car in the context of roadway, city-wide public transit, and other multi-modal transportation improvements, and the financing of these improvements...". Councilor Benton also wanted the Task Force to keep in mind that there is a lot of pressure on local governments to create taxation for a number of special projects, such as the Rail Runner and possibly a downtown Events Center.

Ralph Cipriani said that one recommendation of the Task Force should be that any ballot measure or funding allocation must occur with an understanding of what current costs are. He thinks the general public is uninformed about transportation needs and costs and that a massive public education campaign, modeled after water conservation outreach, is needed in Albuquerque and the region.

Councilor Benton suggested that the Task Force's report could be considered an outline for a future public education campaign.

Clovis Acosta introduced himself and said that he would be replacing Carlos Romero as UNM's representative on the Task Force. Clovis is the Director of Parking and Transportation Services at UNM.

Councilor Benton reviewed the issues that were raised during the Task Force's General Discussion and specified what materials will be provided for the next meeting: 1) The Indicators Progress Commission's goals, 2) A breakdown of the ¼ Cent Transportation Tax, 3) A summary of the points and principles that were brought up by Task Force members.

Joanne McEntire requested that someone record the Task Force's General Discussion on a flip chart. She also suggested that members do a little homework before the next meeting.

	Scheduling of Next Meeting; Adjourn	
Discussion: The next meeting of the Task Force will be on Wednesday, February 20, 2008, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM, in the City Council Committee Room on the 9 th Floor of City Hall. The meeting adjourned at 5 PM.		