

**Transit Advisory Board**

**Alvarado Transportation Center – 2nd Floor**

**Meeting Minutes**

**November 8, 2018**

**Board Members**

In Attendance and mode of transportation:

Brendan Miller (walked), Harris Balkin (bus), Patricia Salisbury (bus), David Kesner (walked), Bob Tilley (walked), Orville Pratt (bus), Lucy Birbiglia (SunVan), Rachel Hertzman (rideshare), Nancy JonesFrancis (walked),William Moore (walked), Geoff Zehnder (drove)

**Members of the Public**

Nick Castales, Kelly Jo Parker, Aaron Montano, Erica Tenorio, Kathryn Arndt, Barbara Morck, Will Maus, Richard Steiner

**ABQ RIDE STAFF**

In Attendance:

Ernest Apodaca; Administrative Assistant (drove), Bernard Toon; Transit Director (drove)

**Meeting Called to Order at 11:48 AM**

Brendan Miller called the meeting to order at 11:48 a.m. Mr. Miller then took roll and asked everyone what their mode of transportation was. The attendees responded (see above) and the meeting started.

**Acceptance of Agenda:**

Mr. Miller motioned to approve November’s agenda and the attending TAB member’s unanimously granted the motion.

**Approval of the Minutes from September 13, 2018 and October 11, 2018:**

The minutes for September/October were approved after a review of the grammar and punctuation. Nancy JonesFrancis commented the wording is a little awkward in regard to Harris Balkin’s Vice-Chair nomination.

**Public Comment:**

Richard Steiner, who attended October’s TAB (Transit Advisory Board) meeting was the first person to have a public comment. He discussed again how after 3 years of being in Germany, he returned to Albuquerque and noticed ART (Albuquerque Rapid Transit) Project shelters on Central Avenue and discovered the cost of the project was about $120 million dollars. Mr. Steiner then contacted several departments within the City of Albuquerque and was able to get a cost breakdown of each shelter completed. He was surprised to learn how expensive concrete and televisions can be to purchase. Mr. Steiner concluded the average cost of each ART shelter amounted to around $400,000 dollars.

Next, Nick Castales from the New Mexico Juvenile Justice Division discussed how difficult it is for families and kids to reach his work location using public transportation. His work address is 5100 2nd St. NW near Montano Rd. NW. Mr. Castales would like the current bus routes in that part of the city expanded to cover his work location. Brendan Miller replied to the discussion by stating he would like to see a 2nd Street bus as well. He said one way you could make this happen would be to have the current North 4th Street bus route make a trip to 2nd Street and then have it loop back around to 4th Street. The suggested bus route would alternate between 4th St. NW and 2nd St. NW.

Mr. Pratt added to the discussion by saying Cristen Conley, a former Transit Advisory Board member often talked about this topic at previous TAB meetings. Mr. Tilley then commented on how the city of Houston has a very efficient bus system; that it took several years and public meetings to figure out where people were going or lived at. Overall, Houston accomplished their goals of becoming more efficient. Bernard Toon responded to this comment by stating it’s expensive; we’re loading it into the 2019 Budget, searching for a consultant and plan on heading to Houston in March to learn how Houston became so efficient. Mr. Balkin then added that Bus Route #157 is the closest bus he knows of to Mr. Castales’s work address. Ms. Salisbury then mentioned how infrequent the 4th Street bus runs in general and how the employees of those business have a hard time maintaining their jobs because of this issue, especially Rita Powdrell, who operates Mr. Powdrell’s BBQ on 4th Street NW.

**TAB Resolution and Discussion:**

Brendan Miller started TAB Resolution and Discussion with the possibility of changing the TAB meeting time from between 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. This occurred to Mr. Miller after a recent meeting with Director Toon. Patricia Salisbury stated she would make whatever time work for her. Director Toon then added the time change works for him because he gets pulled away a lot during the work day and it’s difficult to be in two places at once. Mr. Kesner commented that TAB members are required to attend these meetings and asked “Is there a requirement that Transit be required to attend?” Director Toon responded by saying “Oh sure.” Mr. Kesner then mentioned that wasn’t the case for the last meeting. Mr. Apodaca added someone from the Transit Department was here, but she couldn’t really answer any questions. Director Toon said “I get it and we’ll fix it.”

Next, Lucy Birbiglia commented on the issue of late night buses being available and suggested the solution to the issue is to have later buses. Mr. Tilley then mentioned how the Transit’s Department’s employees don’t know their own bus routes and almost always come up with an excuse as to why they can’t use the bus system. The department really needs to look into why the system doesn’t work for so many people in the City of Albuquerque.

Mr. Miller then redirected the meeting to changing the TAB time and discussed how most of the bus routes, #36, #97, and #16 seem to end at or near 6 PM. He motioned to change the meeting time to 4:15 PM to 5:45 PM. Ms. Salisbury and Mr. Balkin both agreed this motion should be postponed until the next meeting. Mr. Miller agreed and that ended the TAB Resolution and Discussion segment.

**Presentations:**

Barbara Morck, Director of University of New Mexico Parking and Transportation started her presentation by stating she remembers the days when she worked for public transportation. She said she was here to open a dialogue for some possible collaboration between the University’s shuttle system and the City of Albuquerque’s Transit Department. Mr. Miller commented on how he’d like to see better integration with UNM’s shuttle service utilizing city bus stops. Ms. Morck responded by stating it’s an interesting conversation. Some of the challenges of making this a reality is that UNM’s shuttles don’t require fare or for students to show their IDs. Basically, you get on the bus and ride to wherever it’s going. She also added there could be some resistance from UNM’s shuttle bus drivers. Ms. Morck then discussed how the Transit Department and UNM have worked well together when it comes to construction projects. The UNM south lot near the football stadium shuttles about four thousand students daily. Ms. Morck believes there’s a lot of potential. It’s a question of, what does this look like and how does this get accomplished? She added that one of the limiting factors for this collaboration could be UNM is a state entity, which limits and restricts them from doing more.

Next, Mr. Kesner asked if UNM’s service is a fixed route service and what is the possibility of integrating the shuttle on Girard Blvd with the city bus line. Ms. Morck replied that UNM shuttles use what’s called a “security system,” which is similar to the city’s fixed route service and getting shuttles on Girard Blvd would be challenging. Taking the system off the University campus removes it from the funding source and UNM operates under the Federal Motor Safety Carrier Association which limits what it can do. Mr. Miller inquired about the possibility of UNM paying the City to help with the #50 Airport bus route and traveling to areas like the UNM Rain Forest downtown. Ms. Morck responded the University does get paid for service to the UNM Rain Forest in Downtown and getting the University to contribute to the City is on “don’t hold your breath” status. There was then a small discussion between the TAB members and Ms. Morck on how the UNM sticker works.

Mr. Tilley commented on the alternative transportations available and how he would like to see more collaboration between Albuquerque Public Schools, ABQ Ride, UNM, and other services. Ms. Morck added by asking “how do you get choice ridership on your bus? Because that’s where your increases will occur once you know the answer.” Mr. Miller replied “I’m a choice rider for the record,” and added that he takes bus routes #790 and #157. Ms. Morck then thanked everyone for their time and concluded her presentation.

**Director’s Report:**

Director Bernard Toon started the Director’s Report by stating bus ridership has dropped but that’s mainly because students are coming back and the reduction in size of the freshman class. However, this happened after four months of consecutive growth which we think is largely related to gas prices. Director Toon then informed the meeting attendees that the Transit Department is working with the Mid Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) on a potential new route that would service the airport area better. This new route would also service the UNM sports corridor area. Mr. Zehnder commented on this by stating the current airport buses don’t start early enough. He has been pushing for better service for years on the airport route and this is why he joined the TAB board. He added there’s a high concentration of hotels near the airport and the hotels downtown don’t get many visitors because of how the #50 route is currently designed. He said if Albuquerque can get more service to downtown, more business will get involved and bring in more revenue. Mr. Tilley added that he attended a Rio Metro public meeting and discovered train tracks were designed to run from the main railroad tracks to the airport. Brenden Miller then mentioned he would like to see the #790 bus route service the Gibson Blvd. area and how it can run better than what we have now.

Next, Mr. Balkin asked Director Toon about the relationship status with the “Visit Albuquerque” Company. Director Toon answered by saying “he knows the Transit Marketing team is always working on a couple of projects.” Mr. Balkin then added he would strongly recommend having stronger ties with them. After the question was done, Ms. JonesFrancis commented on how BRT years ago did a study on the University Boulevard location. The study was done to see how a connecting bus for the airport, sporting arenas, and Journal Center would work out in that area. Director Toon commented by stating getting more service is costly and the Transit Department is currently experiencing a serious driver shortage which seems to be nationwide. The good news is the department finished driver union negotiations and they will be getting a $3.00 pay per hour increase. The department is also working with CNM to recruit more drivers and were down about 60 drivers at present.

Director Toon then mentioned in the seven months he’s been in charge of the Transit Department, the number of assaults on bus drivers is surprising and on the rise. He is currently looking into enclosure type devices that will better protect drivers from assaults and is going to ask the legislature to increase the penalties for these types of attacks. Director Toon then added there are security guards on the buses. However, our security force is spread thin and having the APD Safety Center here at the ATC has helped a lot. Transit security officers are now able to go two blocks east and west which means more coverage for this area thanks to the police being present here at our location.

Lucy Birbiglia asked Director Toon if all drivers were getting the pay raise, when does it go into effect, and will it cut into their medical insurance? He responded by stating yes they all get it, he’s not sure when in to goes into effect, and it should have a marginal impact on insurance costs. Next, Mr. Miller asked about the follow up to ART accessibility discussed at the last TAB meeting. Director Toon responded by saying next meeting he’ll bring a person who works on accessibility. Ms. Birbiglia added Albuquerque doesn’t have a disability organization like New York and the best people to get input from are people with disabilities. Mr. Balkin then reminded the TAB attendee’s that time is short and Director Toon needs to give an update on the ART project.

Director Toon started the ART project update by stating Mayor Keller didn’t start this project but was going to do his best to make it a success. The three big issues of infrastructure, technology, and the traffic signal priority have been mostly resolved. A fixed route service like ART will never be one hundred percent complete because there’s always something to fix or update. Once these issues were fixed, we began driver training and that’s where the major issues started. We brought in a group of people called “The Center for Transportation and Environment” from Atlanta that works exclusively with electric buses. They performed computer simulated environments such as cold/hot weather conditions with 50 people on the bus, and concluded that these buses should have never been purchased for this type of route. BYD (Build Your Dreams) was going to assist with building charging stations but by this point in time they mostly disappeared and things weren’t looking good. The main issues discovered during training was the ART buses doors were opening while the bus was operating and only the front brakes were working correctly. These buses have three axels, use air brakes, and everything should be working in unison. This was not the case. This issue was fleet-wide as are major safety issues. At this point, the Mayor had enough, grounded the bus fleet, ordered a complete inspection of the electric buses and will make a decision on whether or not to continue with BYD.

Mr. Kesner then commented it was a good call to ground the fleet, but you have a huge issue going on with the fact Central Avenue has been totally redesigned and people don’t understand why. There needs to be some sort of public information announcement so people can understand what’s going on with the ART project. Director Toon responded by saying “yes we have public service TV, radio ads, and a program with APD were going to do once we have an actually launch date. So yeah, we do have a public information campaign ready to go.” He then added he’s worked on projects like this before, but this project was done completely opposite of how it should have been done. Mr. Zehnder than asked, “what’s Plan B?” Director Toon answered by saying “were looking at potentially leasing buses for the short term or looking at potentially buying new buses that are different from the electric buses. He added “…and keep in mind we haven’t paid a dime to BYD for these buses until they have passed federal government testing in Pennsylvania. So were looking at replacing the entire fleet. That’s going to take 10 months to a year once you factor in assembly time and specifications. There are municipalities around the country that are having buses built that aren’t electric buses. No matter how many batteries you stack inside a bus without on route charging, an electric bus won’t work for the ART bus route, and we’re looking at getting clean diesel or compressed natural gas buses.” He added the plan is to piggyback on bus production in cities like Houston or Minneapolis.

Next, Mr. Miller asked the TAB members if they wanted to extend the meeting by fifteen minutes to finish the agenda and they approved his request. Mr. Moore then asked why not use the current buses we have now to run the ART bus route? Mr. Miller answered by saying “that’s what the Rapid Rides are doing already.” Director Toon added to the answer stating the current buses are not designed to use the ART docking platforms. Mr. Tilley commented on how very old the Rapid Ride buses are and this could be a safety issue. He also mentioned how news reporters want everyone to turn left, have protections for U-turns and all the other issues with ART. What the news and people should be looking at is how safe Central Avenue is now, the cars are driving slower, and it just seems safer overall. What needs to be done is the Rapid Rides need to be replaced since ART is grounded at the moment. Director Toon responded by stating we have Rapid Ride replacement buses on order and yes we’ve noticed the current Rapid Rides are old. The cost to repair an aging Rapid Ride engine runs the City around $36,000.00 dollars. Mr. Tilley then asked if Rapid Rides can use the ART stations because in Fort Collins, Colorado they have a lot of center stations similar to the ART ones here in Albuquerque.

Director Toon answered by saying “it’s very difficult to adapt these stations to Rapid Rides buses, it’s not safe, and wouldn’t be ADA compliant.” Nancy JonesFrancis then commented on how this project was designed to have fewer left hand turn lanes for a reason and that was to make it more pedestrian-friendly and safe. At a recent press conference she listened to, it seemed Mayor Keller wanted more left turn lanes which defeats the whole purpose of this project. Mr. Tilley added to the discussion by stating the Mayor said he was open to the idea, not so much going to do it. Mr. Miller then mentioned how he would like to see the left hand turns but there needs to be signs saying when or where the next turn will be to help drivers navigate the streets better.

Richard Steiner suggested you can’t run electric buses on Central Avenue at all. Director Toon was quick to point out you can, you just need on-route charging inside the buses, and on route charging stations. This was the original idea to make the ART project work. However, the buses were designed like electric car’s plug in and charging stations were going to be installed, but you know how that story ended. Mr. Balkin then mentioned how TAB Members don’t work for the City of Albuquerque and are appointed by the City Council of Albuquerque. We always seem to be the last to know what’s going on and find out through media outlets or news reports. He said “I know that there is not a whole lot that you can do about that, but a little advance notice would help, as TAB members we want to see this work.” Director Toon said “we’ll figure out a way to do this.”

**Unfinished BUSiness:**

Brendan Miller started unfinished business by discussing the rerouting of the #8 Menaul bus to consistently service 3rd and 12th Streets seven days a week. This rerouting can be accomplished by reducing the frequency slightly from 40 to 45 minutes. The rerouting would also stop the #8 from interlining with the #5 bus route. Mr. Miller then made a motion to approve this action, Ms. Salisbury then commented we should have a study done just to see if it can be done and having the Rapid Ride stop near the Regal movies at Winrock would be great. It’s a far walk for a 72 year old from Uptown to the Regal Theaters. Ms. Salisbury motioned that Winrock and the #8 bus route have studies performed on them. Director Toon replied by saying “would you mind sending me three paragraphs, one paragraph per idea?” and “I’ll get together with our planners.”

**New BUSiness:**

Mr. Miller started new business by discussing bus routes #12 Constitution and #34 San Pedro. He would like to see the #12 and #34 combine together. They would then reroute in the area between the ATC and the Uptown Transit Center, when the #12 becomes the #34, it would then go south to the VA hospital. I think this would be a great way to improve service. Ms. Salisbury then added she would like to see bus route #36 go back to its original route because the new #36 route misses the convention center all together. She said it would be great for the #36 to go down 2nd Street again. Mr. Miller then motioned for these topics to be accepted and the TAB members agreed to this motion. Ms. Salisbury then asked Director Toon about their free bus pass ID cards and Director Toon answered “oh sure.” Mr. Miller then welcomed William Moore as the newest member of the TAB and the meeting ended.

**Meeting adjourned at 1:33 pm.**

**Next meeting: 11:45 am, December 13, 2018 at the ATC.**

**Meeting minutes written with love and care by:**

**Ernest Apodaca**

**ABQ Ride, Administrate Assistant**