

# Princeton

400 Witherspoon Street □ 1 Monument Drive  
Princeton, NJ 08540

## Public Transit Advisory Committee

MINUTES -- March 20, 2014

The Public Transit Advisory Committee met at the East Conference Room of the Monument Municipal Building of Princeton, NJ at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 20, 2014.

### Attendance

Present were: Marvin Reed, chair, David Keddie, Anton Lahnston, and Nat Bottigheimer. Also present were Kim Jackson, director of transportation and parking services at Princeton University; Joan Lockwood-Reck of the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association; and Don Mayer-Brown of the Engineering staff.

### February Ridership

Joan presented a report on February FreeB ridership and on-time service:

- \* On a total of 5 days service was noticeably disrupted because of weather.
- \* On 2 days service was suspended. Because of heavy snow NJ Transit ran an enhanced weekend schedule, meaning no Dinky service until 9:30 AM
- \* Because of some severe weather conditions, ridership on the Commuter Route in February dropped to 784 passengers, an average of 42.4 riders, compared in January to 887 passengers, a daily average of 40.3 riders. The 2013 averages were 38.2 and 30.4 respectively.)
- For the mid-day Neighborhood Route freeB, heavy snow made some streets impassible. Service to Elm Ct. , Redding Circle, and Community Village was stopped due to icing, trees being down etc...
- \* AM service was canceled one day; service started late another day due to weather.
- \* The old freeB bus was being used one day (other was down). It was unable to climb the hills at Elm Ct., Redding Circle & Community Village because of rear-wheel problems..
- Despite the weather conditions (or, perhaps, because of them) the mid-day Neighborhood Route carried 1,521 passengers in February, an average of 69.1 daily riders, up from 1,422 in January, an average of 54.9 daily riders. (The 2013 averages were 62.2 and 46.7 respectively.)
- Some 92% of all trips were on-time.
- The Mid-Day Neighborhood Route hit a record 105 passengers on February 4, many of them new passengers.

## Applications for Mass Transit Trust Fund Grants

Marvin shared with the Committee a response received to three application letters for grants from the Mass Transit Trust Fund, a joint effort between the municipality and Princeton University.

These included:

a. GPS Transponders to Show FreeB on Tiger Tracker – a request for \$34,000 to install inside the “freeB” jitney vehicles the appropriate GPS transponders as will permit those vehicles to appear on the University’s Tiger Tracker website to inform waiting passengers when the next shuttles will be arriving.

The Fund Trustees expressed interest, but asked that a specific staff member be named as the point of contact. (This was noted to be Don Mayer-Brown, the staff member who works with the Public Transit Advisory Committee.)

It was noted that the number of transponders to be acquired for this purpose at this time would be 2, enough to be installed in the regular “freeB” vehicle and in the back-up vehicle.

In response to the Fund Trustees request for a project schedule, Don reported that the overall allowance for lead time prior to having an operational system is 60 days. The process and schedule for preparing the hardware and software is as follows:

- Following receipt of a signed contract or Purchase Order, Transloc would conduct an internal kickoff meeting. The lead service person would send a form to Princeton requesting information about the location and name of the stops on our route(s).
- Once Transloc receives this form back from Princeton, their map-builder would prepare a map of our system, and integrate this map with that of the University’s map. This step would likely take one week to complete.
- The hardware installer would also contact Princeton to schedule a time for traveling here and installing the 2 units in our mini-buses. The actual work would be done in one day, but 2 weeks is allotted to allow for coordinating with existing work orders.
- The final phase is testing the system to make sure the units installed in the mini-buses work properly, and to see that the automated aspects of the system also operate correctly. This could take up to one month.

In response to a request for projected travel costs, Don reported that the projected travel costs would essentially involve Transloc sending one individual to fly to NJ (\$300), rent a car and drive to Princeton (\$150), stay overnight for one night in a hotel (\$150), and return to Durham, NC the next day. The total estimated cost is \$600.

b. Replacement Vehicle for “freeB” –a request for \$75,000 to acquire a new “freeB” jitney vehicle so that the current vehicle (which has operated for almost 100,000 miles) can be retired but retained for back up and supplemental service.

It was noted that, in keeping with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University and the municipality regarding the new Arts and Transit District the University should continue to assist the municipality in supporting the “freeB” as part of the collector transit system that will bring passengers to and from the new station from and to collection points in the municipality north of Nassau Street.

It was estimated that the “freeB” covers approximately 4,000 miles per month, or a total of 48,000 miles per year. With good maintenance, a “freeB” vehicle should be able to continue in service for at least 150,000 miles.

The Transit Fund Trustees indicated in response to the application that: “The municipality has secured another funding source for the replacement of the “freeB” vehicle and did not consider the request.

Members of the Committee surmised that the Fund Trustees probably anticipate the “freeB” replacement being covered by a grant from NJ Transit or as a capital equipment acquisition by the municipality itself. (See Application to NJ Transit for Replacement Grant below.) Noting that acquisition through a NJ Transit grant might take as long as two or three years, the Committee agreed to continue to monitor the suitability of the existing equipment and the grant application process.

c. Additional Vehicle for Dinky Station Connection for Mid-Day FreeB – a request for \$75,000 to acquire an additional “freeB” jitney vehicle in order to increase frequency and efficiency of service and hourly connections to the new Dinky station during the day. The Committee further requested that the University provide an annual operations contribution for the “freeB” to match the \$100,000 appropriation made each year by the municipality.

It was noted that, in keeping with the MOU, the University should continue to assist the municipality in supporting the “freeB” as part of the collector transit system that will bring passengers to and from the new station from and to collection points in the municipality north of Nassau Street.

It was also noted, however, that the Mid-Day “freeB” only connects local neighborhoods as far as Nassau Street. This is a special hardship for senior citizen who use the service during the mid-day and who must walk from Palmer Square to the new station.

By operating two vehicles it would be possible to make six 60-minute loops providing:

- -- double 30-minute “freeB” coverage in the core between Palmer Square and the Harrison St Shopping Center.
- – have half of the routes terminating at the Dinky Station and half terminating at Elm Court.
- – have half the routes terminating at Princeton Community Village and half terminating at Redding Circle and Griggs Farm.

The Trust Fund Trustees requested ridership data for the existing service. (Marvin and Joan agreed to compile such statistical information from recent monthly ridership reports. See above.)

The Trustees also asked about funding sources for the ongoing operating costs of a third bus. It was agreed to continue such efforts to meet Dinky trains with bus and/or jitney connections as preparations are made to open the new Dinky Station when it is completed in the fall.

Marvin indicated that he will be meeting with the Trustees of the Mass Transit Trust Fund on April 11 at which time he will respond to the questions regarding potential funding of the Committee's grant requests.

### **Application to NJ Transit for Replacement Grant for "FreeB" Vehicle**

Don noted that a grant application has been prepared and submitted by the Municipal Engineering Department as part of the Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan prepared by the Mercer County Coalition for Coordinated Transportation by which NJ Transit funds shuttle services especially for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The "FreeB" share of the project budget would provide for approximately \$175,000 to cover costs of a new replacement vehicle and its annual costs of operations.

The Committee questioned whether the current "FreeB" vehicle could operate for two or more years until the review and funding process is completed.

### **Communiversality**

Marvin noted that as of the date of the meeting he had not received back any communication from the Arts Council or other sponsors, that the "freeB" would be expected to provide transportation from remote parking areas to the in-town activities of Communiversality on Sunday, April 27.

Kim indicated that her department at the University had not been requested to participate in such service on April 27 either.

Committee members indicated that the "freeB" might be made available for some transportation as part of a cooperative expense-sharing arrangement with the Arts Council and the University but could not otherwise be expected to fulfill such service on its own.

### **Restoring "freeB" Sandwich Boards**

Don reported that new posters promoting the "freeB" have been inserted in some of the municipality's electronic trash cans in the Central Business District. He also showed how new sandwich boards will soon be set up at the Dinky Station displaying the "freeB" timetable for arriving passengers heading into town.

### **Route #655 Review**

Marvin indicated that he has been asked to represent the Committee on March 31 at a meeting of interested stakeholders with NJ Transit representatives regarding continuation of the Route #655 bus that connects Princeton to Plainsboro and the relocated Hospital there.

The Committee indicated that service should be continued, but could be improved by (1.) connecting from Princeton to the Junction Train Station before continuing to the Hospital and (2.) by using traveling via Witherspoon St. instead of Harrison St. in connecting to the Harrison St. Shopping Center.

### **Up-Grading Bus Stops and Bus Shelters**

Anton indicated that Traffic and Transportation Committee, of which he is the chair, has submitted for funding by the Mass Transit Fund for a demonstration grant to produce a creative design as well as installation of new bus shelters at Palmer Square and at the Harrison St. Shopping Center. He indicated that his committee is also pursuing possible installation of regular shelters currently offered by NJ Transit at several other locations served by NJ Transit buses.

### **Next Meeting**

When the Committee meets in April and May, it was suggested that (1.) the possibility of discussing Dinky Service be arranged with representatives of NJ Transit or (2.) the possibility of discussing bicycle connection paths/trails through the campus to the University's new Dinky Station when it opens in the Fall.

Marvin distributed copies of an updated spreadsheet showing "FreeB" connections to the Dinky and Dinky Service to the NE Corridor trains at Princeton Junction Station. Committee members were asked to review at points at which service, connections, and ridership appeal might be improved.li098

The next meeting will be held at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, April 10, 2014, the 2nd Thursday in the month.