

Princeton

400 Witherspoon Street □ 1 Monument Drive
Princeton, NJ 08540

Public Transit Advisory Committee

MINUTES –February 19, 2015

The Public Transit Advisory Committee met in the East Conference Room of the Monument Municipal Building of Princeton, NJ at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 19, 2015.

Attendance

Present were: Marvin Reed, chair; Anton Lahnston; Fay Reiter, director of social services, Princeton Community Housing; Joan Lockwood-Reck of the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association; and Don Mayer-Brown of the Engineering staff.

Also present were local residents Ralph Widner and Kip Cherry.

Ridership

Joan reported on January “FreeB” ridership and on-time service:

- -- Ridership on the Commuter Route in January dropped slightly to 915 passengers, an average of 45.8 riders per day, compared to 989 the previous month, a daily average of 45.0. The 2014 January daily average was 40.3 riders.
- -- Ridership for the Mid-Day Neighborhood Route in January also dropped slightly, to 1,862 passengers, an average of 74.5 daily riders, compared to 1,956 the previous month, a daily average of 75.2 riders. The 2014 January daily average was 54.9.
- -- Mechanical issues on Jan. 6 were reported. On Jan. 7, the “FreeB” bus broke down and missed four scheduled loops. The older back-up vehicle was deployed, although it had no heat. Further equipment problems on Jan. 30 called for deployment of the back-up vehicle, but electrical issues with its lights resulted in suspension of service.
- -- On three days in January there were over 90 passengers on the Mid-Day Neighborhood Route, with over 100 tallied on Jan. 23.
- -- At times the number of riders wanting to board on the Mid-Day Neighborhood Route exceeds the 18-passenger limit of the “FreeB” jitney, especially on the first AM loop on Friday mornings. The driver does not encourage standees and, in a few instances, has told passengers they must wait until the next round 70 minutes later.

The Committee asked that more data be gathered on over-loading. It suggested further investigation of strategies to encourage switching passengers to lower-volume loops. It may also become necessary in the future to deploy part-time drivers and use back-up equipment to cover heavy-demand times.

Up-Grading the System

Don reported that the former TRADE vehicle donated from Mercer County was now here and ready to be used in place of the unreliable older back-up vehicle.

He noted that he was still trying to complete specifications for the purchase of a new vehicle (being financed by Princeton University) but still needed to add bid language to invite vendor-supplied equipment and maintenance as an alternative.

Committee members expressed concern about breakdowns that resulted in cancellation of service, stressing how critical continued on-time service is in establishing reliability, especially for morning commuters making “Dinky” connections to the Northeast Corridor. They underscored with Don the critical importance of completing specifications and getting the bidding process underway.

On motion by Anton, the committee agreed to establish a special meeting on March 5 to concentrate on bid specifications and other factors relating to reliability and capacity of the service.

Holidays and Snow Days

Committee members reviewed the low ridership on Monday, January 19 (Martin Luther King Day) as well as ice and snow conditions that affected on-time service or cancellations on other days. Whether to set a coordinated policy which coincides with NJ Transit emergency radio announcements will be explored.

PickUp and Drop Off at Copperwood

Joan reported that effective March 2, schedules for the Mid-Day Neighborhood Route will be altered in the northeast section of the municipality for a four-month trial of providing front-door service for the new Copperwood senior citizen apartments on Bunn Drive. The change represents about a minute less and a minute more on the route above the Witherspoon St. Municipal Buildings. Temporary schedules and posters for the residents there are being provided.

Subcommittee on Coordination and Promotion

Members of the Subcommittee on Coordination and Promotion as called for in the Memorandum of Understanding regarding “Dinky” operations and other transit improvements reported that an initial meeting with University staff had been cancelled because of a snow emergency. It is being rescheduled.

Market Opportunities to Improve Transit

Ralph Widner reported on a series of focus groups and other survey approaches to identify factors that might prompt drivers to shift from their automobiles to build a stronger market for transit in Princeton. The Committee will continue to follow this effort.

Next Meeting

The Committee’s next regular meeting will be held at 9:30 a.m. in the East Room of the Monument Municipal Building on Thursday, March 19. (The special meeting will also be held there at that time on March 5.)

