

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
DRAFT MINUTES
Thursday, October 29, 2009
9:00 a.m.
NWMC Offices
1616 East Golf Road
Des Plaines, IL 60016

Members Present:

Kerry Cummings, Co-Chair, President, Village of Glenview
Ken Nelson, Co-Chair, Mayor, City of Rolling Meadows
Jeff Berman, Trustee, Village of Buffalo Grove
Sandy Frum, President, Village of Northbrook
Tim Oakley, Director of Public Works and Engineering, City of Des Plaines
Louella Preston, Trustee, Village of Niles
Arlene Mulder, Mayor, Village of Arlington Heights
Brian Kozminski, Village of Northfield
Mike Janonis, Manager, Village of Mount Prospect
Al Larson, President, Village of Schaumburg

Others Present:

Rick Mack, Metra
Andy Plummer, RTA
June Johnson, Village of Schaumburg
Chris Staron, NWMC
Earl D. Dunn, IDOT
Greg Summers, Village of Barrington
April Koos, Pace
Mike Pagones, Village of Arlington Heights
Larry Widmer, NWMC
Janet Bright, CMAP
Bruce Christensen, Lake County
Mike Walczak, NWMC
Bob Israel, Mactec

I. Call to Order

Chair Cummings called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. She asked those present to introduce themselves.

II. Approval of the October 1, 2009 meeting minutes

The October 1, 2009 meeting minutes were approved on a motion from Mayor Nelson, seconded by Trustee Preston. Mayor Larson and Mayor Mulder abstained.

III. Service Board Budget Presentations

Mr. Mack delivered the Metra budget report. He reported that Metra is dealing with a tough budget year due to declines in ridership, ticket sales and sales tax revenues. He said that Metra amended its budget twice in 2009 due to a \$64 million decline in revenues. He noted that the 2010 budget assumes that sales tax revenues will remain flat

from the amended 2009 figures. He reported that ridership has declined four percent in 2009, which Metra attributes to the recession and possibly the lower fuel prices. He reported that Metra is proposing fare increases for 2010; however, he explained to the committee that Metra is trying to minimize the impact on daily riders. He said that the fare increases will not affect monthly passes or ten-ride passes. He reported that Metra is proposing an approximately six percent increase in one-way fares. He said that across all fare zones, the increase averages \$.30 a trip. In addition, he said that weekend fares will increase from \$5 to \$7 and the on-board ticket purchase penalty will increase from \$2 to \$5. He noted that free rides for seniors are costing Metra approximately \$10 million per year. He reported that Metra has begun to accept credit card purchases online and will be expanded credit card purchases to stations in 2010. Mayor Mulder said that she had a lengthy discussion with Phil Pagano about the free rides for seniors. She informed the committee that the issue is being taken up by the Illinois House today. She said a change in the program could impact proposed fare increases. She said that the \$5 penalty was the toughest for her to swallow as a Metra Board member. Trustee Preston asked about the \$4 million cost for accepting credit cards. Mr. Mack said that Metra knew the cost would be substantial. Mr. Oakley asked how ticket purchases will be facilitated in regards to kiosks or ticket agents. Mr. Mack said that there will still be ticket agents at the stations where they currently are. Chair Cummings said that it probably makes sense to move to kiosks eventually; however, she noted that this is also a labor issue.

Ms. Koos reported that Pace is facing similar budget struggles. She said that in 2009, declining sales tax revenue caused a \$23 million decline in funding. She further reported that in 2010, Pace must identify an estimated \$6.5 million in budget reduction. She informed the committee that Pace is proposing a \$2.7 million cut in non-service administrative operations. She said that Pace has proposed \$3.8 million in service reductions and eliminations. She explained that 52 Pace routes will have reduced service or will be eliminated. She said that sixteen of these routes impact NWMC communities. She noted that Pace has identified these routes as having the highest rate subsidy and lowest overall performance. She said that Pace is willing to work with municipalities, community colleges and others to examine vanpools and other Pace service arrangements in the absence of traditional bus service. She said that Pace is not considering fare increases for its traditional service in 2010; however, Pace is proposing fare increases for its paratransit service, which is facing a \$28.9 million budget shortfall. She reported that under the proposed budget, Paratransit fares would increase to \$4.50 in Chicago and \$3.50 in the suburbs.

Trustee Berman asked about North Shore routes. Ms. Koos responded that she did not bring that information, but noted that she can provide it. Mr. Oakley asked if the handouts show the ridership on the days that service will be cut or a weekday average. Ms. Koos said that she would double-check. Trustee Preston asked what is meant by a service reduction. Ms. Koos said that it commonly means less frequent service or less service hours. Ms. Koos said that legislation is pending in the General Assembly to fund Paratransit service before the funding is divided among the service boards. She added that 64 people attended the northwest suburban Pace budget hearing. She reported that there were many comments about routes 696 and 699. Mayor Mulder asked what alternatives there are to outright service cuts. Ms. Koos responded that Pace does not want to take away service but there are serious productivity concerns with some

routes. She said that Pace is trying to find a way to still provide service and that they are working with Harper College and surrounding municipalities. She said that the Pace Board will approve the budget at the November 11 meeting. She said that Pace and municipal partners should look at other ways to provide service such as the “New Champion,” which municipalities can lease. She noted that sponsoring a municipal van pool is also an option. Mayor Mulder asked if the free rides are taken away from senior will Pace reconsider there cuts. Ms. Koos said that funding changes could change the ultimate budget decisions. Mayor Larson asked about route 208 and the nature of the reduction and the standards. Ms. Koos responded that the route barely meets the minimum fare box recovery ratio. She said that she will get the reduction specifics to the Mayor. Mr. Larson said that he has concerns about suburban transit standards. Chair Cummings asked if notifications of service changes are posted at bus stops. Ms. Koos responded that there are notifications in the buses. Mr. Oakley asked if the 2010 budget reflects the reduced service. Ms. Koos responded that the budget reflects the proposed service cuts. Ms. Johnson asked if using smaller buses would reduce the cost of the routes with proposed cuts. Ms. Koos responded that she believed these routes already have the thirty foot buses.

Mr. Walczak reported that CTA was unable to attend the meeting. He reported that CTA is also facing daunting budget challenges in 2010. He said that CTA estimates its budget shortfall at \$300 million. He said that CTA is proposing to meet these shortfalls through staff reductions, furlough days, transferring capital funds to cover operations, service reductions and fare increases. He noted that, in regards to service reductions, CTA is only proposing to eliminate nine express bus routes; however, over 100 routes will be affected by less frequent service and shorter service spans. He reported that CTA is proposing increasing bus fares to \$2.50 for all riders and increasing rail and express bus fares to \$3.00. In addition, he reported that single and multi-day passes face fare increases. The CTA Board will consider its budget at its November meeting.

Mr. Plummer reported that while the service boards are considering their budgets, the RTA has supported a rollback of the senior free ride program. He said that a study by the Urban Transportation Center estimates that the program has cost the transit system \$25.1 - \$76.3 million, which is unsustainable. He said that 350,000 seniors have registered for the program. He said that the General Assembly is considering changes to the program. Mayor Mulder said that there have been negotiations about freezing fares for the next two years. Mr. Plummer said that RTA’s budget hearings will be kicking off in December, but there is no north or northwest Cook County location. He also reported that there will be a subregional performance measures workshop on December 3. Ms. Preston raised a concern about fare equity when traveling between the Pace and CTA. Mr. Plummer said that RTA is aware of the issue. Mr. Plummer said that the RTA is still working towards a universal fare medium. Mayor Mulder said that the way that Metra and CTA calculate fares is a stumbling block to universal fares. Mr. Plummer said that the RTA is focused on providing a universal fare payment mechanism so that riders can use the same card/device to pay their fares on Pace, Metra or CTA.

IV. Metra STAR Line Update

Mr. Walczak reported that the STAR Line Municipal Task Force met on October 19 to discuss the progress of the STAR Line Alternatives Analysis. He said that Metra has arrived at a locally preferred alternative, which is the rail option from O’Hare to Joliet.

He said that Metra presented the screening results, which included average weekday ridership, transportation system user benefits, capital and operating costs. He reported that these factors produced the best cost effectiveness score for the rail option. Mayor Mulder said that business parks in the area may be special ride generators. Chair Cumming noted that the STAR Line is one of the NWMC priority projects and would be the first suburb-to-suburb commuter rail line. Mr. Walczak reported that the cost of the proposed STAR Line has gone up dramatically, but there is hope that the new federal transportation authorization will provide increased funding opportunities. He said that Hoffman Estates and Schaumburg are organizing a legislative meeting on the STAR Line to discuss state funding options. Mayor Mulder said that although the cost of the project is high, the cost to widen I-294 and I-355 was also high.

V. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Mr. Staron said that the subregional Councils of Mayors continue to obligate ARRA funding and are on schedule to meet the March 2010 deadline. He said that the North Shore Council will have all but two projects let after November. Mr. Walczak reported that the Northwest Council is making similar progress on its ARRA funding and that a majority of funds will be obligated before 2010. Mr. Christensen said that the Lake County Council is making good progress in obligating funding. He said that the de-obligation and re-obligation of ARRA funds due to low bids will be the real issue. He said that the process may stress IDOT. He said that it is something that municipalities need to watch. Mr. Staron explained that the current economy has produced very competitive and favorable bids for ARRA projects, which means that some projects will not be able to use all of the programmed ARRA funds. He said that the “leftover” funding can be obligated in a grace period after March. He noted that the Councils are working on strategies to use this leftover funding.

VI. CMAP Report

Ms. Bright reported that CMAP has released the draft Regional Scenario for the Go To 2040 plan. Mr. Walczak noted that the committee will discuss the draft Regional Scenario in greater detail in December.

VII. Other Business

Mr. Staron reported that the rescissions issue regarding the end of SAFETEA-LU is still pending. He said that the CMAQ Project Selection Committee is working on strategy to minimize the impact on programmed projects. He further said that CMAP has not taken up the STP issue as of yet. Chair Cummings suggested that it may be appropriate to provide a transportation glossary for new members of the committee to help with all the acronyms and abbreviations. Mr. Walczak said that the council methodologies have glossaries that could be useful.

VIII. Next Meeting

Chair Cummings informed the committee that there is no scheduled November meeting. She said that the next scheduled meeting date is December 17 at 9:00 a.m. at the NWMC offices.

IX. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was unanimously approved on a motion from Mayor Nelson, seconded by Trustee Berman.