Transportation Task Force
1/16/08 Meeting
Minutes

Members Present:

Randy Kincaid, Chairman	Karen Floyd, Secretary
Gary Knox, Vice Chairman	Chris Ahearn
Jim Bensman	Lawrence Kimbrough
Charlie Jeter	

<u>Buses; What are we doing now, mesh with Transit Corridor – Larry Kopf, CATS & Janet Thomas, CMS</u>

Ms. Janet Thomas has been with CMS for 20 years and explained the following things that affect school bus transportation in North Carolina:

- The State Board of Education governs how bus stops are set up, bus routing, and bus maintenance.
- The State of North Carolina owns the buses and sets the specifications for them.
- Public school laws control what can and cannot be done with transportation.
- The State Tort Claims Acts covers bus accidents.
- All bus drivers must have a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) and complete a four day classroom training course followed by a five day on-the-road training course.

Additional regulations of consideration when providing school bus transportation are:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
- No Child Left Behind Act
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Local policies that regulate transportation are:

- Student assignment plan
- Eligibility based on student assignment
- Reassignments and transfers
- Equal eligibility for bus transportation

All of the listed policies are important as they dictate how many students will be eligible and how many buses will be needed in certain areas. The State funds 76% of the bus transportation, the County funds 20% and the remaining 4% is covered by other local funding.

CMS is ranked 9th in the nation's top 100 school bus fleets and have the largest student transportation system in North Carolina. In 2006-2007, CMS transported 85,000 students daily on 1,198 school buses.

Mayor Gary Knox stated that Dr. Gorman said there are over 100,000 bus stops. Ms. Thomas stated that in many cases, 1 child will have more than 1 bus stop. The Choice Plan changed the dynamics of the busing system by making 95% of CMS students eligible for transportation. This created a need for additional buses, bus stops, and the number of buses servicing the same neighborhoods. CMS goes over

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and above the State requirements for pick-up and drop-off of students by allowing bus stops in neighborhoods.

Mayor Kincaid asked what impact rising gas prices were making on the bus transportation and if Freightliner was making any improvements in new buses. Ms. Thomas explained the gas prices are drastically affecting the budget and in the last two years the State has had to pay the Emergency Contingency Fund to cover fuel costs. CMS is currently piloting a hybrid bus; however, the savings has not been tremendous as the cost of the hybrid bus is $170K compared to $80K for a straight engine bus. Mr. Jeter stated that as of January 1, 2007, the manufactures of large diesel vehicles had to make changes in emissions to improve air quality.

Mr. Bensman asked if CMS is looking at the rising cost of gas and how the choice plan affects it. Ms. Thomas stated that several board members are asking the hard questions and making suggestions on how to have a more efficient transportation system. One suggestion was to have cluster stops where children would meet at a central location. Another suggestion is to increase the walk distance for middle and high school students when riding the bus.

Mr. Kimbrough asked how many kids drive to school. Ms. Thomas stated she did not have an exact number system wide as it varies from school to school.

Mayor Knox stated that he had invited Dr. Gorman to come observe the busing system set up for Cannon School that takes place at the Peninsula Club. The system involves three buses (elementary, middle, and high school) that line up in the parking lot and in a matter of 15 minutes over 95 students have boarded the buses and are headed for school. Ms. Thomas said that she would mention the idea again to Dr. Gorman and would like to maybe observe the system herself.

Mr. Larry Kopf of CATS presented the bus service provided in North Mecklenburg. Some facts about CATS are as follows:

- Fares (seniors and disabled are half price)
    - Local - $1.30
    - Express $1.75
    - Village Rider $0.65
- 80 Bus routes – included are
    - Lynx Blue Line
    - Special Transportation Service – STS (door to door service)
- 324 Buses

The Countywide Transit Service Plan is a 5 year plan that gives guidance for growth and change. Several elements are taken into consideration when the plan is being developed; public participation, market and travel analysis, and performance analysis. These elements help to determine the need for additional park and ride lots, bus stops that have high or low ridership, and where new routes could increase ridership.

The 77X North Meck Express route was split into two routes as it was carrying over 20,000 passengers a day. Many of the passengers were boarding in Huntersville so CATS created the 48X route which now allows for bus service in the North Meck area every 7 ½ minutes. It is estimated that in 2008, there will be 300,000 Express riders.

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The Village Rider system consists of four bus routes that service Cornelius, Davidson, and Huntersville. Their hub location is at the North County library and provides a more direct service by allowing buses to go off route and pick up or drop off those riders located within ¾ of a mile from a route.

Ms. Ahearn asked what amount of ridership was coming from Mooresville. Mr. Kopf explained that CATS lost many of their Park and Ride lots after Hurricane Katrina, the increase in riders verses lack of available parking spaces is the reason for the decline of Mooresville ridership.

Currently there are two Park and Ride lots in North Meck, the Northcross lot and Gateway lot, which are both located in Huntersville. The Countywide Plan recommended an addition Park and Ride lot in Davidson and research is being done. Mayor Knox asked what level of capacity the Northcross and Gateway lots were at. Mr. Kopf stated that Northcross is at 75-80% and Gateway is at 95% capacity.

The Vanpool service is yet another service provided by CATS. Mr. Kimbrough asked how many vans are there and what disadvantage is there to using the system. Mr. Kopf stated that CATS owns 50 vans and explained that in order for the vanpool to be successful, a group of people need to live and work within close proximity to one another and must have similar work schedules. The group is established and a driver is identified. CATS will give the driver a van and gas card to provide shuttle service for the group. The riders, excluding the driver, pay a fee based on mileage.

Mr. Jeter asked if the rail system does not come north what impact will there be on the bus service. Mr. Kopf stated it is possible that more Express buses would be needed, the Village Rider service might not expand as quick, and the circulator bus service would not be implemented. Mr. Bensman asked if there have been any studies done on bus service as it relates to the proposed transit station locations. Mr. Kopf explained no firm study has been done but if rail system does happen a new express service would need to be determined.

Mayor Kincaid asked what the impact of gas prices has done to ridership. Mr. Kopf stated the increase has been continuous especially on the Express routes.

Mayor Kincaid stated that there has been a dramatic change in the bus system and it is something to be proud of. Mr. Kimbrough asked if CATS was in all contiguous counties. Mr. Kopf stated they are in all counties but Lancaster.

Mr. Bensman asked what the four towns could do to promote transit ridership (ex. Signage, more lots). Mr. Kopf stated that he would like to partner with the towns and come up with something to promote ridership. Mayor Kincaid stated that the clustering land use will also drive people to ride more. Mr. Kopf also suggested that the towns keep transit in mind for new developments. Mayor Knox suggested that CATS continue to get to know the towns better in order to promote transit that will meet the growing needs of the towns. Mayor Kincaid invited Mr. Kopf and Ms. Thomas to forward any suggested action items they might have for the committee to consider.

Adjournment
6:31PM

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