

MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable, Manatee County Board of Commissioners
From: Ron Schulhofer, Director, Public Works Department
Date: May 2, 2016
Subject: Summary of Handy Bus Service Levels and Staffing Needs
Work Session on April 19, 2016



The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize the April 19th, Handy Bus Service Levels and Staffing Needs work session discussion and the Board's direction to the staff for the future actions.

A work session on Handy Bus service levels and staffing needs was held with the Manatee County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on April 19, 2016. Public Works staff led a discussion with the Board on Handy Bus service demand and ridership levels, current staffing levels, a summary of program needs, and a proposed new fare structure. Staff present at the work session included:

- Ron Schulhofer, Director, Public Works
- Chad Butzow, Deputy Director, Public Works
- Bill Steele, Manager, Transit Division
- Ryan Suarez, Planning Manager, Transit Division

Topics covered at the work session are summarized below.

1. Handy Bus Service Levels & Staffing Needs:

Staff provided an overview of the Handy Bus program including the type and number of trips provided under the program, year-to-year ridership levels and ridership projections, and how staff is working to match ridership demand to staffing. Relevant topics covered included an effort by staff to better match the number of daily Handy Bus trips provided to available operator staff. This was conveyed in a series of bar charts and graphics including charts that illustrated the effect of the Affordable Care Act on the hiring and retention of part-time employees. In addition, staff presented to the Board the number of average daily trips being provided through the Handy Bus program; and how the number of daily Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), purchased transportation, and dialysis trips impacts the number of Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) trips available for staff prioritization. Most importantly, staff noted that Handy Bus ridership increased 26% over the last three years, while operational staffing declined overall during the same time period.

2. Fare Proposal and Recommendations:

To address the staffing level issues in the short-term and establish a 10% return on investment, staff proposed a new fare structure with a three dollar (\$3) one-way fare for proposal for ADA and TD trips. Presentation of that proposal was prefaced with a summary of Handy Bus program fiscal year 2015 costs and revenues and a framework for fare policy based on an operating cost recovery ratio. This analysis indicates that the County subsidy is 71% of operating revenue, with 24% coming

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for the TD grant and purchased service, and only five percent (5%) from ADA and TD fares. Staff also reviewed a peer comparison of existing regional paratransit fares; and noted that regional peers to the north have one-way fares that are four dollar (4\$) or more currently, and each has a paratransit fare that is twice the full cash fare for fixed route service. Moreover, the results of a Transit Division phone survey indicate that 59% of active Handy Bus users support a fare increase in order to maintain the current level of service.

Other recommendations by staff included use of the newly implemented pre-paid program as a paratransit trip sponsorship program for needy individuals, and the introduction of income-based eligibility requirements in Fiscal Year 2017 for all new TD program applicants.

3. Transit Division Staffing Needs:

After the discussion of Handy Bus service levels and the fare proposal, staff introduced a broader discussion on Transit Division staffing needs and operator hiring and retention. Staff expressed to the Board that the Transit Division is in dire need of additional operators and road supervisors, for both the fixed route and paratransit service, in order to maintain the current level of service; and that typically there is an "extra board" that is 15%-20% higher than what is required for daily work assignments. This "extra board" is intended to prevent excessive overtime, and cover open work assignments when operators are on sick, vacation, or Family Medical Leave.

Staff discussed morale and front-line employee burnout due to staffing shortages, and impressed upon the Board the need to find supplemental funding for Transit Division operations. A plan for hiring, training for applicants, and higher pay, is currently under development; and staff is working to facilitate the hiring and training process in order to help get new applicants prepared and credentialed as quickly as possible.

4. Comments/Discussion:

Board members engaged in a long discussion of how to fund Transit Division services, including the Handy Bus program. Options presented included using money from the reserve fund as a short-term fix until a longer term County-wide plan could be developed. Other options included eliminating the Longboat Key Trolley service and reassigning operators to the Handy Bus program. Board members also had questions regarding income-based eligibility for the TD program, operator minimum qualifications, and the County budget process.

Additional discussion focused on the long-term financial health of the County. The upcoming budget cycle was presented as another opportunity to address many of the challenges being presented as the County continues to grow and the need to restructure hourly pay rates to attract and retain qualified workers, and become more competitive for qualified, skilled workers in the Tampa Bay region.

5. Summary:

Staff provided a summary wrap-up to the Board which highlighted the major issues presented including the re-statement of staff's recommendation to increase the ADA and TD fares from \$2.00 to \$3.00. Action steps to be taken based on feedback received at the work session the following:

- Provide weekly status reports to the Board on Transit Division operator and road supervisor staffing levels including a summary of any missed service as a result of staffing shortfalls.
- Proceed with a Board Agenda item regarding the Handy Bus program fare structure.
- Proceed with effort to facilitate operator recruitment, and skill development including coordination with Human Resources Department, revising minimum qualifications, assisting applicants to achieve the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) credential, and participating in outreach and job fairs as needed.
- Working with County Administration in regards to the upcoming Fiscal Year 2017 annual budget presentations and discussions.

CB/td

cc: Ed Hunzeker, County Administrator
Karen Windon, Deputy County Administrator
Dan Schlandt, Deputy County Administrator
Chad Butzow, P.E. Deputy Director, Field Operations
William Steele, Transit Division Manager
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