



Minutes City of Tempe Transportation Commission January 14, 2014

Minutes of the Tempe Transportation Commission held on Tuesday, January 14, 2014, 7:30 a.m., at the Tempe Transportation Center, Don Cassano Community Room, 200 E 5th Street, Tempe, Arizona.

(MEMBERS) Present:

Charles Huellmantel (Chair)
Don Cassano
Ben Goren
Pam Goronkin
Kevin Olson

Nikki Gusz
Sue Lofgren
Philip Luna
Gary Roberts
Peter Schelstraete
Cyndi Streid

(MEMBERS) Absent:

Aaron Golub
German Piedrahita

Charles Redman

City Staff Present:

Shelly Seyler, Deputy Public Works Director Transportation
Eric Iwersen, Principal Planner
Sue Taaffe, Public Information Officer
Mike Nevarez, Transit Manager
Joe Clements, Transportation Financial Analyst

Travis Mullen, Administrative Assistant
Bonnie Richardson, Principal Planner
Julian Dresang, Traffic Engineer
Yvette Mesquita, Sr. Management Assistant

Guests Present:

ASU Staff Council

Commission Chair Charles Huellmantel called the meeting to order at 7:33 a.m.

Agenda Item 1 – Public Appearances

None

Agenda Item 2 – Commission Member Recognition

Commission Chair Huellmantel recognized Commissioner Benjamin Sanchez as an outgoing member and introduced new Commissioner Cyndi Streid.

Commissioner Streid mentioned that she has been with State Farm almost 25 years and is looking forward to serving the Tempe community with her experience.

Commission Chair Huellmantel welcomed Commissioner Streid and introduced the Tempe Transportation Division staff.

Agenda Item 3 – Meeting Minutes

Commission Chair Huellmantel introduced the minutes of the December 10, 2013 meeting and asked for a motion.

Motion: Commissioner Kevin Olson

Second: Commissioner Don Cassano

Abstained: Commissioner Gary Roberts, Commissioner Philip Luna

Decision: Approved

Agenda Item 4 – Commission Business

Commission Chair Huellmantel recommended Commissioner Pam Goronkin as Commission Chair. Commissioner Goronkin has been the Vice-Chair for a few years and it is appropriate to nominate her due to her experience being a former Council member and dedication to the city of Tempe. Commission Chair Huellmantel asked for a motion.

Motion: Commissioner Ben Goren

Second: Commissioner Cassano

Decision: Approved

Commissioner Olson recommended Commissioner Don Cassano as Commission Vice-Chair. Commissioner Cassano was a former long-time Council member and the conference room named after him where the current meeting is held.

Motion: Commissioner Olson

Second: Commissioner Goren

Decision: Approved

Agenda Item 5 – Tempe Youth Transit Pass Program Update

Sue Taaffe, Public Information Officer, handed out a memo and updated the Commission on the status of the Tempe Youth Free Transit Pass program, and opened up the discussion for questions.

Commissioner Goren said since most youths who know about the program are enrolled and have a youth transit pass, if we could get the other half of the transit users who are eligible to know about the program we could get 90% of those eligible to be enrolled. Sue commented that that would be amazing, however, some of the issues preventing enrollment are parents who are afraid to put their kids on the light rail or bus by themselves, kids who are driven to school, and the location of schools from the light rail or bus stop. Sue said that staff still wants to see those numbers to continue to go up.

Commission Chair Huellmantel mentioned that nine years ago we did not have light rail, a consolidated system, or Orbit. The transit system has changed a lot in those nine years, and the concept is to teach younger people how to ride and be comfortable with the transit system. We have also seen a cultural change where people are not getting their driver's license as soon as they are able to. Sue added that an issue as far as getting more youths enrolled is that there is a large population of youths that just use Orbit. They are using the Orbit system to get to elementary, middle, and high school and are not getting the passes because Orbit is a free bus system.

Commissioner Nikki Gusz asked if there is any effort to renew passes every year. Sue responded efforts include mailing out letters and passing out information at schools. During one Saturday in May and August, the library serves as an off-site location to issue passes.

Commissioner Olson asked if staff could go to the schools and sign people up. Sue shared the issues of staffing and equipment has prevented this option. Shelly Seyler commented that part of the problem has been that the parents have to be present with a birth certificate and proof of address. Sue added that the Saturday library youth bus pass registration is the best option. The only exception is Tempe High School, which has a program where they administer the passes without the parents being present.

Commissioner Sue Lofgren asked if the trend of people waiting longer to get their driver's license would reflect in an increase of bus users down the line.

Commissioner Goren suggested giving the youth a coupon on their 19th birthday as incentive to continue riding. Sue responded that she would talk to Valley Metro about using coupons as incentives.

Commissioner Gusz asked if Back-to-School-Night would be a good place to issue youth passes. Sue responded that unfortunately with everything going on that night, the parents tend to forget the required documentation such as birth certificate and proof of address.

Commissioner Olsen asked why a birth certificate is needed to get a youth bus pass. Sue responded that the birth certificate has the name of the parents, which is required to get the youth pass. Commissioner Olsen asked what the alternatives are other than having a birth certificate. Sue responded that the City Council set the policies to issue the transit passes as recommended by the City Attorney's Office. Commission Chair Huellmantel asked the staff to check with the City Attorney about the privacy and education act and see how the City of Tempe can receive information on these types of issues.

Commissioner Peter Schelstraete suggested that when parents enroll their youth in school they also could sign some preauthorization document to request a transit pass. Commissioner Goren added there could be an additional form issued in the student enrollment packet that gives authorization for a transit pass.

Commissioner Gusz appreciated the information and asked how Tempe High School has the program set up to issue the transit passes. Sue responded that there is an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the Tempe Union High School District. Under the agreement, Tempe provides the school with 1,000 encoded passes, and Shelly Arredondo, the Vice Principle of Athletics ensures that the participant is a Tempe resident, and then the school bookstore issues the pass.

Commissioner Gusz asked if there could be a PTA or PTO organization that could help take on the role of issuing transit passes at the schools. Sue responded that the IGA is with the school district and that a school employee is needed, not a volunteer.

Commission Chair Huellmantel asked if it would be effective to have the Commissioners speak to the school districts to try to come up with a better way to increase transit ridership for the students. Shelly requested City staff try to reach out to the school districts first by asking about the impediments that make it difficult for them to register students.

Sue complemented the Tempe Transit Store staff for the time and commitment they contribute to the program. They have shown excellent customer service in dealing with a variety of situations such as explaining the program to frustrated parents and that the program is only for Tempe residents. Yvette Mesquita added that the staff does an awesome job and pointed out it is very rare to receive a complaint from a customer.

Commissioner Olson asked if Phoenix has any program similar to Tempe's youth program. Sue replied that the youth transit pass program is a regional priority, however; no other city has implemented a program like Tempe. Commissioner Olson mentioned that Tempe would love to have an IGA with Phoenix. Commissioner Goronkin added that this is especially true since we have an overlapping school district.

Commissioner Gusz asked if visibility in the schools would give other cities in the region incentive to adopt a youth transit program. Sue responded that this program is for Tempe residents and incentives would add another layer of complications to enrolment. Mike Nevarez responded that the rest of the region provides reduced fare for youth as their effort to increase youth ridership.

Agenda Item 6 – Priest Drive Buffered Bike Lane Proposal

Eric Iwersen, Principal Planner, handed out a memo, introduced the Priest Drive Buffered Bike lane Proposal, and asked the commission to take action.

Eric reviewed the proposal of the half-mile section of Priest Drive to eliminate two lanes of travel (one in each direction) and replace those lanes with a buffered bike lane, from Washington to Van Buren Streets. Staff looked at this project in more detail and is confident that existing traffic volumes support changing this roadway into a four lane arterial and adding buffered bike lanes.

Commission Chair Huellmantel thanked the staff for reviewing this roadway project and looking for ways to promote the bike culture in Tempe. The traffic pattern has changed, the use of the streets has changed, and the city of Tempe has taken on more interest in biking.

Commissioner Olson added that when this project works then it would make sense to extend to Rio Salado Parkway or University Drive because the road carries roughly the same amount of traffic. This would provide the conductivity for bicycles to downtown.

Eric responded that when looking at traffic volumes the traffic nearly tripled when connecting to the freeway, south of Washington. Staff is hesitant to move forward on anything beyond the half mile (Van Buren to Washington) to see how it would work first. SRP and the City of Phoenix asked for this project.

Commissioner Schelstraete asked why there are eight-foot wide sidewalks on this roadway. Eric responded that the width of the sidewalks is standard along all arterials. Shelly added the eight-foot wide sidewalks are for the safety and comfort of pedestrians who may walk side by side adjacent to streets with heavier traffic volumes. Commissioner Schelstraete asked if it was more expensive to reduce the width of the sidewalks instead of the roadway to create space for the bike lanes. Eric responded that people want to keep the width of the sidewalk and mentioned there is also landscaping separating the sidewalk from the roadway making it a nicer facility.

Commissioner Goren said that when he first joined the Transportation Commission one of the things he wanted to see were better bike lane standards in Tempe. He added that he is glad that Tempe is finally taking steps in this direction.

Commissioner Luna asked if the roadway along this proposed buffered bike lane area had many right turns that could put riders in jeopardy. Eric responded that this section of the road was already well built out with minimal driveways and right turns that could put riders in harm's way.

Commission Chair Huellmantel reviewed the Priest Drive Buffered Bike Lane Proposal and asked for a motion.

Motion: Commissioner Goren

Second: Commissioner Olsen

Decision: Approved

Agenda Item 7 – Department and Regional Transportation Updates

Eric said that our ranking for Tempe's bicycle friendly status is at the "Silver" rank according to the League of American Bicyclists. The rating is based on the level of bicycle facilities and the level of support for bicycle riders. Commission Chair Huellmantel added that Tempe is also applying for the U.S. Green Lane program. Eric stated the City is pursuing a higher ranking for bicycle friendly status.

Shelly informed the commission about the number of allowed absences stating that three consecutive or six unexcused absences in a twelve-month period will result in resignation. An excused absence is one that is consented by the chair of the commission. This will help us keep our quorum status so we can meet regularly.

Eric said that the construction contract for Hardy Drive and University Drive was approved by the City Council on January 9, 2014. Construction will begin in four to six weeks on these projects. Commission Chair Huellmantel asked what the next step was. Eric responded that it would be determined when they will start the project and how they plan on proceeding. Commissioner Goren asked how long the construction would last. Eric responded that it would last nine months.

Sue said Tempe applied for the Walk Friendly status, which asked for information on our sidewalks and street crossings. As soon as we get a response, back on that she will inform the Commission.

Agenda Item 8 – Future Agenda Items

Commissioner Roberts asked about the progress of the bike registration program. Shelly said that someone who is involved with the police department would be able to better inform the commission about the progress of this program.

The Commission's next meeting is scheduled for February 11, 2014.

Meeting adjourned at 8:34 a.m.

Prepared by: Travis Mullen

Reviewed by: Yvette Mesquita