

## **Meeting Minutes**

**Salisbury Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization  
February 28th, 2005**

**City of Salisbury/Wicomico County Government Building  
125 North Division Street, Salisbury, MD  
Room 302**

### **Attendees:**

#### SW/MPO officials:

Larry Points, Delmar, MD, Deputy Mayor  
John F. Outten, Sr, Delmar, DE, Mayor  
Ron Spaulding, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Rick Pollit, City of Fruitland  
Stevie Prettyman, Wicomico County Council  
Mike Dunn, City of Salisbury, City Council  
Ted Shea, Wicomico County  
Marvin Long, Wicomico County Council  
Mike Nixon, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Barrie Tilghman, City of Salisbury, Mayor

#### Others:

Jack Lenox, Director, City of Salisbury/Wicomico County Planning  
Mary Ellen Gray, SW/MPO staff, City of Salisbury/Wicomico County Planning  
Rob Hart, Shore Transit  
Mike Pennington, Tri-County Council  
Jim Thompson, Maryland State Highway Administration  
Gary Pusey, City of Salisbury/Wicomico County Planning  
Lenny Howard, Maryland Transit Administration  
Tracey Gordy, Maryland Department of Planning

### **Discussion**

Mr. Lenox opened the meeting at 1:05 PM and welcomed everyone. Mr. Lenox indicated that Ms. Gray has resigned her position as Transportation/Long Range Planner and thanked her for her service. Mr. Lenox indicated that his office will continue the work of the SW/MPO.

Members and other attendees introduced themselves.

Ms. Gray reviewed the agenda and asked whether anyone had any suggestions for deletions/additions to the meeting agenda. Mr. Spaulding added discussion of the Long Range Plan which was added after agenda item 6. - Discussion of FY '05 Unified Work Plan (UPWP)

Councilman Long moved to approve the January 24, 2005 meeting minutes.

Councilman Dunn – Seconded the motion. All Board members indicated aye, none opposed - motion passed.

#### Organizational issues - Discussion of Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Councilman Dunn who had volunteered at the last meeting to participate in the nominating committee, with Ms. Gray and Mr. Lenox coordinating, nominated Councilman Long as Chair, and Mr. Pollitt as Vice Chair and opened it up to members for discussion. Hearing none -

Councilman Dunn moved to make Councilman Long Chair. Mayor Tilgman – Seconded the motion. All Board members indicated aye, none opposed - motion passed.

Councilman Dunn moved to make Mr. Pollitt Vice Chair. Councilwoman Prettyman – Seconded the motion. All Board members indicated aye, none opposed - motion passed.

The meeting was handed over to Councilman Long as Chair.

Councilman Long indicated that as Chair of a new Board he would like to facilitate the organization of this group. He would like to ensure that the Board members have a common understanding of the terms discussed which include TIP – Transportation Improvement Plan, and UPWP – Unified Planning Work Program.

#### Follow-up on the Technical Subcommittee

Councilman Long asked Ms. Gray to report out on her follow-up with the Technical Subcommittee. Ms. Gray referred the Board to the handout titled Membership to the SW/MPO Technical Advisory Committee dated February 16, 2005. Ms. Gray indicated that this was the list of entities that were discussed by Board members at the last meeting and that she had contacted these entities via email and asked the Board for any additions/changes. Mr. Spaulding indicated that the Federal Highway representative is Neel Vanikar and the Federal Transit Administration representative is Gail McFadden-Roberts. Mayor Tilgman indicated that Paul Weber is the representative for the City of Salisbury Transportation & Safety Advisory Committee.

#### Discussion of Operations and Funding for Shore Transit

Mr. Hart, Director of Shore Transit, made a presentation on the history, funding and operations of Shore Transit.

History – Shore Transit was formed by consolidating three separate transit services in the three counties under the Tri-County Council utilizing federal funding.

Operations – Ridership has greatly increased over the past couple of years. A couple years ago, ridership was 600,000/yr to 625,000 last year. In addition, by the end of the

2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of this year, 500,000 folks have utilized Shore Transit. There are six (6) routes in the SW/MPO region.

Funding – Originally, Shore Transit primary funding source was through a federal job access commute program. Now, since the area is an MPO, it qualifies for additional federal funding called the 5307 grant which has a 50% state and local match. Currently the local funding source is Wicomico County which contributed \$190,000 for FY '05. Additional funding is from the Americans with Disability Act which has a state and local match and from the Wicomico Health Department.

In order to be eligible for federal funding, performance standards need to be met. There are different performance parameters for the SW/MPO area routes and the rural area routes. Shore Transit has met six (6) out of seven (7) performance parameters for the SW/MPO area (five (5) out of seven (7) are required) – [Please refer to Handout 'Table 3-3 MTA Standards for Lots Performance Indicators'].

Funding levels over the past couple of years has remained flat while costs have gone up. Two main contributors to increasing cost is insurance and fuel. As a result, in order to maintain the same level of services, additional funding will need to be raised. In the alternative, if no additional funding can be raised then some options need to be explored. Some options that Mr. Hart and his staff are currently looking at include:

1. Reducing the hours the customer service center is open.
2. Change the frequency of bus service. Currently, buses operate from 6:00 AM to 10:30 PM and routes run hourly.
3. Cut routes.
4. Build new partnerships. An example of a partner that Mr. Hart has made is Salisbury University where Shore Transit currently operates a bus route between Salisbury University and University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

#### Discussion –

There were a lot of questions and comments on this issue by Board members. The questions and comments expressed included:

- What has caused the increase in ridership?
- Is it a lengthy process for Delmar residents to transfer?
- Have you looked at regional express buses?
- Would like to see Shore Transit continue to build upon developing partnerships.
- What is the cause of the difference in vehicle and maintenance expenses in the budget?
- How is Shore Transit going to meet the deficit? What is the expectation in the community?
- Shore Transit can't be everything to everyone. Wouldn't it be better to keep the routes but reduce the frequency?
- How do you cut routes and handle drivers? Do you have data and statistics to make an educated decision?
- What is the schedule for FY '06 budget review? What is the public info requirement?

- Being able to make up the funding gap by today is a non-starter. Shore Transit needs to work within the confines of existing budget and look at essential versus non essential services, then look down the road. Can only currently afford the essential.
- This calls for an in-depth evaluation. Currently don't have enough information at this point.
- Would like to see reasons why people are riding Shore Transit. Shore Transit wasn't meant to be a public transportation system.
- Would like Shore Transit to analyze data including a history of rate structure and how it compares to other systems and bring recommendations back to the Board.
- Sees two alternatives – 1) secure more funding, 2) Change services to the public.
- All of the entities are represented in the SW/MPO so it would make sense for this Board to make recommendations on operations and funding.
- Sees a change in the model from when the transit system was first formed. Shore Transit has evolved to a modified public transportation system.
- Sees Shore Transit as a part of public transit system and not just providing essential services. Need to look at public transportation in urban area.
- Due to 5307 funding, can't limit services to just serve the physically challenged and elderly.
- Would like Shore Transit to work with the SW/MPO Technical Advisory Committee and put together recommendations and bring back to the Board.

Rob Hart, Director of Shore Transit addressed these questions and comments with the following:

- It took a while to build up trust with ridership. Before Shore Transit was formed, riders primarily utilized this system for medical appointments and by the physically challenged. However, now, riders also include students from Wor-Wic Community College and Salisbury University, folks who are shopping and seasonal riders going to Ocean City.
- Currently don't have much ridership from Delmar.
- Need to look at regional buses. Have looked at express, however, in Delmar, the ridership currently isn't there. This might in part be due to DART which under federal job access funding is providing bus service between Delmar and Laurel at no charge.
- The previous Gubernatorial administration focused on increasing ridership. The current administration is focusing on increasing efficiency. Currently, it costs \$30/hour to operate Shore Transit which is the lowest rate in the state.
- Changes in the budget are largely due to increases in insurance, fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. Both the insurance and vehicle maintenance costs are expected to go down in the future. We are bidding out the insurance and are scheduled to purchase some new buses which will reduce maintenance costs.
- Currently the busses run every hour. We could eliminate routes, and/or reduce the frequency. Each route costs approximately \$120,000.

- We collect data on all of the routes. However, since we have chosen to not fill four vacant administrative positions, we don't have anyone to regularly analyze the data.
- Would like to get direction on budget today. However, if the Board needs more time, can push things back including the public hearing and continue to work on things.
- It's up to the Board to determine what's essential.

In summary, Mr. Hart will conduct some analysis of the data and work with the Technical Advisory subcommittee to come up with possible solutions for discussion at next meeting.

#### Discussion of FY '05 Unified Work Plan (UPWP)

Mr. Lenox gave the background of the UPWP – Each year the Feds and State make an appropriation for the MPOs. For SW/MPO the funding level has been approximately \$80,000 with a local in-kind match of \$8,000, so the funding amount is approximately \$72,000. It appears that this appropriation will be about the same (with a slight reduction) for FY '06. For FY '05 we have some funds to encumber by June 30, 2005 for planning and for special projects including the Long Range Plan. Originally, the SW/MPO had a year to put the Long Range Plan together. However, in a meeting with MDOT and FDOT, the Federal folks indicated that the Long Term Plan was due October 1, 2005. Continued Federal funding is contingent on a timely completion of the Long Range Plan. The Feds have offered some services to help meet this deadline including peer review. As a result, completion of the Long Range Control Plan should be the main priority for the FY '06 UPWP. Once adopted, the Long Range Plan is good for five (5) years, however, it can be amended by the Board at any time.

#### Follow-up Items

- Ms. Gray to convene a meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Agenda items for the TAC will include
  - Recommendations for FY '06 Operations and Funding for Shore Transit.
  - Recommendations for next steps for the development of the Long Range Plan.
- Mr. Nixon will send electronic versions of other MD MPO's UPWP to Ms. Gray for distribution to the SW/MPO Board members.

#### Next meeting agenda items include:

- Discussion of recommendations for FY '06 Shore Transit Operations and Funding
- Discussion of SW/MPO map boundaries
- Next steps for the development of the Long Range Plan

Next meeting is scheduled for **March 21<sup>st</sup> 2005 from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM** at the same location.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM.