



Meeting Minutes

January 30th, 2020, 4:30 p.m.

Newport City Hall
 596 7th Avenue
 Newport, MN 55055

Commission Members	Agency	Present
Wayne Johnson	Washington County RRA	X
Jim McDonough	Ramsey County RRA	
Nicole Frethem	Ramsey County RRA	X
Dave Thiede	City of Cottage Grove	X
Myron Bailey	City of Cottage Grove	
Jane Prince	City of St. Paul	
Sandi Dingle	City of St. Paul Park	X
Mark Vaughan	City of Hastings	X
Tom Ingemann	City of Newport	X

Staff	Agency	Present
Emily Jorgensen	Washington County RRA	X
Joe Ayers-Johnson	Washington County RRA	X
Kurt Howard	Washington County RRA	X
Kevin Roggenbuck	Ramsey County RRA	X

Other Attendees	Agency	Present
Sheena Denny		X

Agenda Item #1: Introduction

Chair Wayne Johnson called the meeting to order, and introductions were made.

Quorum was met.

Agenda Item #2: Election of Officers

Mayor Dingle nominated Wayne Johnson for chair of the Red Rock Corridor Commission for the year 2020. Councilmember Vaughan seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Councilmember Vaughan nominated Mayor Dingle for vice chair of the Red Rock Corridor Commission for the year 2020. Chair Johnson seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Agenda Item #3: Approval of Agenda

Councilmember Ingemann made a motion to approve the agenda. Councilmember Thiede seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Agenda Item #4: Red Rock Corridor Overview

Emily Jorgensen, Washington County Planner and Red Rock Corridor Project Manager, provided an overview of the Red Rock Corridor for new commission members. Ms. Jorgensen described the geography of the corridor, prior activities completed by the Commission, and the Commission's ultimate goal of reaching full bus rapid transit implementation. Bolstering ridership and advocating for Route 363 as a legislative priority are additional activities undertaken by the Red Rock Corridor Commission. Ms. Jorgensen opened the floor to questions. No questions were asked.

Agenda Item #5: Recognition of Outgoing Members

Chair Johnson introduced two resolutions to recognize outgoing members of the Red Rock Corridor Commission.

Councilmember Thiede made a motion to adopt the resolution recognizing Councilmember Mills. Councilmember Ingemann seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Commissioner Frethem made a motion to adopt the resolution recognizing Commissioner MatasCastillo. Councilmember Vaughan seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Agenda Item #6: Consent Items

Mayor Dingle made a motion to approve the consent items, including minutes from the October meeting. Councilmember Ingemann seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Agenda Item #7: Draft 2020 Work Plan and Budget

Ms. Jorgensen presented the information for 2020 work plan and budget. The 2020 work plan is almost identical to that of last year. Washington County will continue to take on responsibilities that were formerly delegated to a communications consultant, as has been the case for the last few years. Funds have been set aside to bring a communications consultant on board in the event that Route 363 service begins. Ramsey County and Washington County are the Commission's only funding partners and the Commission has not been accepting dues for the last couple of years. The 2020 budget will be covered by the fund balance.

Mayor Dingle made a motion to approve the 2020 Work Plan and Budget. Councilmember Ingemann seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.

Agenda Item #8: Network Next Engagement Efforts

Joe Ayers-Johnson, Washington County Planner, presented on Washington County staff's engagement efforts on Metro Transit's Network Next initiative. Mr. Ayers-Johnson explained Network Next as the replacement for Metro Transit's Service Improvement Plan (SIP), which will serve as a visioning process for the bus network of 2040. The presentation described Washington County staff's efforts to supplement Metro Transit's engagement efforts by conducting pop-up engagement events at four locations throughout the county to inform the Network Next initiative with conversations and the collection of surveys. A summary of engagement results was also presented. Mr. Ayers-Johnson described how these results were compiled and presented in a comment letter to Metro Transit which makes a number of requests for future service improvements and will be signed by the chair of the Washington County Board. Mr. Ayers-Johnson then opened the floor for questions.

Councilmember Vaughan asked if the survey enabled respondents to select their own responses or if they chose from a set list of possible answers. Mr. Ayers-Johnson answered that a set list of options was included in the survey as well as opportunities for open-ended responses. Councilmember Vaughan commented on the potential for public-private partnerships to offer services that would assure transit riders that if they take the bus to get somewhere, they will be able to get a ride home. Ms. Jorgensen commented that Metro Transit offers a guaranteed ride home program which reimburses eligible transit riders up to a certain number of rides per month in the event that they need to take cab rather than a bus to get home due to certain circumstances.

Councilmember Thiede asked about the date when the pop-up at the Cottage Grove Park and Ride was conducted and the approximate sample size for the data collected. Mr. Ayers-Johnson answered that the pop-up occurred on January 14th and that staff spoke with around 75 people and collected 25 survey responses. Councilmember Thiede then asked if staff considered conducting engagement at locations other than the park and ride facility to reach people who are not currently using mass transit. Mr. Ayers-Johnson answered that engagement was also conducted at the Hardwood Creek Library, Century College, and the Washington Government Center in order to capture sentiments from people who need or want to access activity centers but do not currently have a transit option.

Councilmember Thiede asked about the degree to which first mile/last mile came through in the survey results. Mr. Ayers-Johnson answered that many commuters engaged at park and rides seemed to be choice riders who have access to a car but prefer to take the bus for convenience. However, at Century College many people expressed interest in using transit but cited lack of access to a vehicle as a barrier to taking transit, suggesting that access to a vehicle is an important factor for current and prospective transit riders to address first mile/last mile issues. Ms. Jorgensen commented that staff did not hear any input from people who were satisfied with their access to transit service and that service was not described as a viable transportation option for people to complete their day-to-day lives.

Chair Johnson asked about how people are made aware of the guaranteed ride home program described by Ms. Jorgensen. Ms. Jorgensen answered that the program is promoted by Metro Transit, including advertisements inside transit vehicles. Ms. Jorgensen offered to share a link to information on the program with the board and to share that information on the Red Rock Corridor Commission's website and Facebook page. Chair Johnson expressed his interest in seeing that information and described his personal experience with how important having a guaranteed ride home is to transit riders.

Agenda Item #9: Cottage Grove Circulator

Matt Wolf, Cottage Grove Economic Development Specialist, presented on the Cottage Grove Circulator. Mr. Wolf shared background on the interest in additional transportation options in Cottage Grove on the part of businesses who want to attract workers and seniors who want to be able to age in place. DARTS was identified as a potential service provider and an advisory committee was formed to plan service. Service began on October 15th, and Mr. Wolf described the service route, schedule, fare, and times of service. Mr. Wolf presented a snapshot of ridership after the first 13 weeks of service, a breakdown of the cost to operate the service, and comparisons with similar services in other communities. Mr. Wolf then opened the floor to questions.

Councilmember Vaughan asked if Cottage Grove has looked into whether or not it would be cheaper to offer on-demand service rather than a continuous route. Mr. Wolf answered that discussions between DARTS and Cottage Grove can be had to determine if that would be an option.

Chair Johnson asked about where ridership stands today. Mr. Wolf answered that there is currently an average of six riders per day with a range between five to nine riders, and 13 riders per week. Chair Johnson asked what was expected based on ridership projections. Mr. Wolf answered that no ridership projections were produced, and that historical numbers from DARTS were used to estimate demand for circulator service, which is currently on par with what was expected. Mr. Wolf explained that West Saint Paul's circulator service is on the high end, with 15 – 20 rides per day. Chair Johnson asked how long West Saint Paul's service has been operating and Mr. Wolf answered that it has been operating for three years.

Chair Johnson asked why Edina's circulator service costs \$100,000. Mr. Wolf answered that Edina's circulator operates two days per week with two interconnecting routes. Chair Johnson asked to confirm that the Cottage Grove circulator costs \$10,000. Mr. Wolf answered that the cost is \$10,000 - \$15,000 depending on sponsorships. Chair Johnson asked what the true cost of service is. Mr. Wolf answered that it costs \$25,000 annually to run the Cottage Grove Circulator. Chair Johnson commented that considering the cost per ride brings up important questions about how best to meet the transportation needs the circulator is intended to address.

Councilmember Thiede commented that he was just now seeing these numbers for the first time and that he will be taking a closer look with an open mind, but that he felt no need to respond at this time. Councilmember Vaughan expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to communicate the concepts surrounding circulator service and to get an understanding of the associated costs. Mr. Wolf commented that it will be good to talk to DARTS about the full range of options available.

Councilmember Ingemann asked if the possibility of expanding service to Newport or Saint Paul Park has been discussed with DARTS. Mr. Wolf answered that DARTS tries to limit loops to one

hour, but that a separate loop may be a possibility. Councilmember Ingemann explained that his reason for asking is the 200 unit apartment building being built in Newport, to which Mr. Wolf responded that the apartment building certainly represents a good opportunity to increase circulator ridership.

Chair Johnson commented that the Red Rock Corridor Commission is intentionally forward facing and that it is too early to read into the numbers too much. Chair Johnson expressed his support for being creative and positive at this stage since there is a relationship between the success of smaller services such as the circulator and the larger projects that the Commission is working to deliver.

Mayor Dingle commented that public transit will never pay for itself and that it is still a needed public service. Mayor Dingle explained her view that with that perspective, it is best to look at the numbers and think about what works best with the current options available. Mayor Dingle also expressed her view that the Cottage Grove circulator is a good start to addressing first mile/last mile barriers to using transit in the area.

Chair Johnson made concluding comments recognizing the importance of patience when new programs like the circulator are in development, and also the need to closely watch costs on behalf of constituents.

Agenda Item #10: Communications and Legislative Update

Kurt Howard, Washington County Planner, presented a communications update. Mr. Howard explained that communications predominantly take place on the Red Rock Corridor's Facebook page, which currently has 366 likes and 382 followers. No press has been released about the Red Rock Corridor since the last commission meeting.

Mr. Howard also presented a legislative update, explaining that Route 363 was included in Washington County's 2020 legislative priorities, and that the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority supports funds for a two-year demonstration of a new bus route with all-day service between Saint Paul and Cottage Grove. Mr. Howard then opened the floor for questions.

Mayor Dingle asked if the Red Rock Corridor is active on social media platforms other than Facebook. Ms. Jorgensen answered that the corridor is currently only active on Facebook but that there may be opportunities to expand social media presence to other platforms when there is more active work taking place in the corridor. Mayor Dingle commented that expanding to other platforms may help reach a more representative audience.

Councilmember Thiede asked about the number of buses and the cost of the proposed Route 363 service included in this year's legislative priority compared to last year's, and what accounts for the differences. Ms. Jorgensen answered that the change in price reflects a change from a three year demonstration to a two year demonstration. Councilmember Thiede commented that the price seems high and asked if he would be able to review cost details. Ms. Jorgensen answered that she will email the details to him.

Chair Johnson commented that posting to the Facebook page once a week or once every other week is not worth the effort and that posts are needed closer to three to five times a week to adequately get the message out. Additionally, Chair Johnson echoed Mayor Dingle's remarks

about the limitations associated with only using Facebook rather than expanding to additional social media platforms in order to reach a wider audience.

Agenda Item #11: Other

A. Commissioner Reports

Chair Johnson asked if any Commissioners have any Red Rock Corridor-related news to share.

Councilmember Thiede thanked the Commission for welcoming him as a member. Councilmember Thiede mentioned that he has been sitting on the East Metro Strong group for the last couple years and that he would be happy to facilitate coordination between the two groups. Councilmember Thiede is also sitting on the Great River Rail Commission along with Chair Johnson and will look for opportunities for coordination there as well. Councilmember Thiede is also very involved with connected and autonomous vehicles and has been in discussion with MnDOT and private companies that are thinking about the future of connected and autonomous vehicles.

Chair Johnson asked a question about the legislative update regarding the relationship between the bus driver labor shortage and what would happen if the Route 363 were to get funding as requested in Washington County's legislative priority. Ms. Jorgensen answered that labor issues have not come up during previous years of legislative asks with the exception of adding State Fair service, but that the State Fair service is a much larger increase in service. Therefore, it is not anticipated that the proposed Route 363 service would have the same issue. Mayor Dingle commented that the Metropolitan Council recently held a job fair at which 250 job offers for bus drivers were extended. Mayor Dingle explained that the Metropolitan Council is making a big push to address their driver shortages and expressed optimism that labor shortages will not be such a big issue for transit expansion initiatives in the future.

B. Next Meeting

Chair Johnson asked when the next meeting date is. Ms. Jorgensen responded that it will be held on April 30th.

Agenda Item #12: Adjourn

Councilmember Ingemann made a motion to adjourn. Mayor Dingle seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion Carried.