

**CITY OF COLUMBIA
WORK SESSION MINUTES
MARCH 15, 2010 – 4:00 P.M.
CITY HALL - 1737 MAIN STREET
2nd Floor – COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM**



The Columbia City Council scheduled a Work Session on Monday, March 15, 2010 at City Hall, 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and the following members of Council were present: The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann and The Honorable Belinda F. Gergel. The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine and The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III were not present. Also present were Mr. Steven A. Gantt, City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Salley, City Clerk.

PRESENTATION

1. Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority Update – Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority and Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority presented findings and recommendations from the CMRTA Comprehensive Study Project, which was conducted between October 2009 and January 2010. The study included a comprehensive operations analysis, management performance review and the park and ride program. The recommendations focus on near, short and long term objectives. Currently, there are 36 buses with 24 weekday routes. There are 2.3 million annual boardings and 67% of Richland County including the City of Columbia is served at an operating cost of \$11.5 million. The near term recommendations include 35 buses, 22 weekday routes and serving 67% of Richland County at an operating cost of \$11.6 million.

Councilor Davis inquired about service in the Harbison area. Will buses impact the flow of traffic?

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that they are working with property owners in the area to determine if they will be able to get off the road, in some instances. In many instances we will still travel down Harbison Boulevard, but we don't stop if nobody is there.

Councilor Gergel asked how the routes will be changed.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that they don't know yet, but they have identified the unproductive routes and we will get the extra hours from those routes to make the improvements. We will be able to implement near term recommendations almost immediately. The Intergovernmental Agreement requires us to come to City Council and County Council; present you with our recommended changes; both Councils must agree before we can change a route; and then we would conduct a public hearing in compliance with our federal funding sources.

Councilor Rickenmann asked when they will look at involving the universities and schools like Pickens.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that we have recommendations for working with building partnerships with the schools. Some discussions have started and we think the best thing we can do is to open the service to all university and college students and allow them to ride for free, because we will get credit in our federal funding formula for each passenger that boards the bus. This has not been discussed by the board. We will be able to document the number of students riding our buses in hopes of new funding partners.

Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council said that we must first build a system that appeals to the general public and then we can come back and look at that.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority continued to report that the long term recommendations include 75 buses, express buses, vans and cutaways. There would be 36 weekday fixed routes with projected annual boardings of 5.4 million. The CMRTA would serve 90% of Richland County at an operating cost of \$32.34 million. The service frequency would increase by 71% over a four year period if we were to get the adequate funding in place. The overall system would include a Park and Ride Program from areas like Blythewood, Eastover and Ballentine and those buses would not make any stops. There are recommendations for providing a neighborhood collector service in places like Eastover to help people get to the Park and Ride services. Also, that collector service could operate in the area to get people to grocery stores and doctors appointments. There are also recommendations for Call-A-Bus and carpool coordination. In a 15 to 25 year period the bus fleet will turnover twice and we are starting that process now with stimulus funds.

Councilor Davis asked how they are addressing the use of large buses versus the economy.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that some community collector services will be operated with a smaller vehicle, probably less than thirty feet. It is not cost effective to bring a large bus in that was used during peak hours, park it and leave with a small bus for the mid-day service.

Councilor Rickenmann inquired about the Transfer Center being on Laurel Street and no where else. It makes it more difficult to get around. How do you see that changing in the long term?

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that there are several new routes that will be more direct and we are looking at three different satellite locations, which will reduce the traffic at the Transfer Center at Sumter and Laurel Streets. These satellite locations will be in general areas like Dutch Square. We carefully considered the opinions and the needs of our core group of riders and the general transportation disadvantaged population. The study has a strong focus on drawing and attracting new riders. We have been woefully under funded and this is a chance for us and this community to make improvements and make public transit a part of the community.

Councilor Rickenmann mentioned the trolleys and the possibility of running them through downtown when we have people from places like Lexington, Sumter and Northeast Columbia in order to get them into the restaurants and boost sales. Is that being looked at?

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that a downtown shuttle service is one of the mid-range to long-range recommendations,

Mayor Coble asked if the referendum would be the funding source for that if it were to pass.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said it would be included; that's correct.

Councilor Rickenmann inquired about the cost to operate the trolleys.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that before they stopped operating the trolleys in 2005, they were running on 15-minute frequencies linking the Vista and Five Points and it cost \$600,000 annually. The trolleys ran during the mid-day and evening.

Councilor Davis inquired about the demand for the trolleys.

Councilor Rickenmann said that we should look at that even if it's funded by the Hospitality Tax in the future.

Mayor Coble said that the CMRTA would seriously consider that if we provided the funding source.

Mr. Ric Luber, President and CEO for the Midlands Authority for Conventions, Sports & Tourism said that they did some surveying of other competitive cities that we deal with and all of those cities have a downtown trolley system. If the downtown hotels are running at 60% occupancy then you would have another 1,200 people that are downtown and wanting to go to the restaurants and museums. There is not a readily available cab service in the downtown streets so visitors are stuck in a hotel and will only travel within a one block radius around that hotel to spend their money.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority presented the projected average annual funding requirements of \$32.34 million, noting that between fares, tickets, miscellaneous revenues and federal and state sources they can come up with \$14.21 million in the long term. The average annual local funding needed is \$18.13 million in the long term.

Mayor Coble asked how much the penny sales tax would produce.

Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council said that they didn't bring those figures. Based on the study, it would generate \$50 million and we would need 41% of the penny sales tax collected to generate \$18.13 million leaving 59% of the penny sales tax.

Mayor Coble asked what options they had looked at.

Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council said they will consider several options at the upcoming workshop. She said that a ½ penny sales tax would barely generate enough to operate the bus system, but a penny sales tax would allow us to have a funding source for other projects.

Councilor Rickenmann said that a hospitality travel system has to be considered as a near term recommendation.

Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council said that they will seriously consider adding the trolleys in the near term, because the people using the Park and Ride service will need transportation once they get downtown.

Councilor Davis inquired about the trolley being operated in the northeast on Saturdays.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that they are operating two trolleys in regular fixed route service: one is used as a spare and the other is operating a regular service and it runs from Columbia Place Mall out to the Village at Sandhill. The only way we could get the property owner at the Village at Sandhill to allow us on to the property was for it to be a trolley and not a bus. The other four trolleys are retired and we obtained permission from the federal government to sell them.

Mayor Coble said that the \$18 million is the same figure used in the past.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that the numbers are very close.

Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council said that today's figure was updated from the 2006 numbers.

Ms. Mitzi Javers, Executive Director of the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority said that the consultant will be at the joint meeting on Thursday and will be able to provide more in-depth details on service adjustments, service changes and what the future holds for us. The Parsons Brickenhoff team is working for the County and they've taken our fifteen year study horizon and extended that out to a twenty five year period. Transit is very different from roads and bridges in that transit can move as the community changes and grows. A comprehensive study should be done every five years.

Ms. Joyce Dickerson, Chair of the CMRTA Board and District Two Councilmember for Richland County Council stated that this study includes recommendations on transit oriented development, which is a big focus in the unincorporated areas to ensure that the connectivity is there. This study also compliments the study the County is currently doing on Broad River Road.

- **The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley
City Clerk