

# TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

## APPROVED

HELD ON November 15, 2022

The Transportation Advisory Board of the City of Mesa met in the Lower Council Chambers, 57 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street, on November 15, 2022, at 5.30 pm.

<u>TAB Members Present</u>	<u>TAB Members Absent</u>	<u>Others Present</u>
Michelle McCroskey (Chairperson)	Ryan Wozniak (Vice Chairperson)	Ryan Hudson
Tara Bingdazzo	Sam Gatton	Jason Coon
Ashley Gagnon	Daniel Laufer	Sabine King
Mike James		Jodi Sorrell
Rodney Jarvis		
Megan Neal		
Melissa Vandever		
David Winstanley		

Chairperson McCroskey called the November 15, 2022, Transportation Advisory Board meeting to order at 5:33 pm.

**Item 1.** Approval of the minutes of the Transportation Advisory Board meeting held on September 20, 2022.

It was moved by Board Member Neal, seconded by Board Member Gagnon, that receipt of the above-listed minutes be approved.

Upon tabulation of votes, it showed:

**AYES** – McCroskey – Bingdazzo – Gagnon – James – Jarvis – Neal – Vandever – Winstanley

**NAYS** – None

**Item 2.** Items from citizens present.

None

**Item 3. Hear and discuss a presentation on the Transportation Master Plan Update.**

Sabina King, Supervising Engineer, introduced herself and indicated that she would be giving an update on the Transportation Master Plan.

Ms. King explained that she will give a quick overview of the Transportation Master Plan. She said more detailed information will come out later in the process. She advised the group that this plan is looking out to the horizon year of 2050. She explained that the Transportation Department is working with Kittleson & Associates, as the partner consultant, who is collecting data while the city is providing them with their current data and network information. Then Kittleson & Associates is reaching out to Maricopa Association of Governments for more information. From there, they will start the public outreach process. Ms. King explained that the Transportation Department plans to provide the Transportation Advisory Board with different chapters of the report and give specific input as they move through the process of updating the current 2040 Transportation Master Plan. She said they started working with Kittleson & Associates about a month ago and today's meeting is the first time they are talking to anyone outside the City of Mesa. They are hoping to be done in about a year but will have a completed document by Spring of 2024 to present to the public. This will come after several public outreach/engagement efforts, TAB presentations and feedback, technical working committee meetings, and City Council presentations and approval.

Board Member Winstanley asked if this plan includes all forms and modes of Transportation.

Ms. King said specifically they are talking about vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians which will include sidewalks and pathways. Transit has its own master plan which will be presented next by Ms. Sorrell.

Board Member Winstanley asked if the gathering of data includes connectivity to other cities.

Ms. King confirmed that it does include this connectivity.

Board Member James asked if Ms. King could explain how this relates to future transportation spending or capital plans, long range.

Ms. King said they will look for areas where they need to focus money based on future needs and this ties back to the ultimate goals and vision established with the Transportation Master Plan.

Chairperson McCroskey asked if she could explain details about transit and specifically light rail.

Ms. King explained that would be part of Transit's Master Plan and Item 4 on the agenda.

**Item 4. Hear and discuss a presentation on the Transit Master Plan Update.**

Jodi Sorrell, Transit Services Director, introduced herself and indicated that she would be giving a presentation on the Transit Master Plan Update.

Ms. Sorrell said she was going to give a quick overview of the Transit Master Plan and the current efforts to update the plan, which will be in coordination with the Transportation Master Plan Update that Ms. King just presented on. The purpose is focusing on developing a productive, efficient transit system. She said they are going to identify types of transit services which may be a bus, but not in all areas, since, for example, sometimes a 40 ft bus is not the most appropriate transit option for a specific corridor, area, or region. It might be a circular or micro transit option. She said they will look at facilities, programs, system features and different items to meet the short and long term needs of residents. They will try to serve the activity centers as much as possible plus try to identify high priority corridors and routes. This means they will be working closely with those handling the Transportation Plan, Housing Plan, and the General Plan. The Transit plan has 5 focuses which are: community outreach, interdisciplinary coordination, existing conditions, service development, and implementation. She said they already got started on some of the community outreach efforts for the plan update.

Ms. Sorrell then referenced to the question about light rail from Chairperson McCroskey. She explained the Governor vetoed a plan which included two streetcar extensions for Mesa. It would continue the streetcar in Tempe down Rio Salado to Dobson, then Dobson to Main Street and was the first planned extension of the recently completed Tempe Streetcar. The second one would continue down Dobson to Southern and Southern to Country Club. She said those two extensions will be included and worked into this master plan update.

Chairperson McCroskey asked about the Governor vetoing the plan.

Ms. Sorrell explained that the Governor vetoed the plan for the MAG Prop 400 Extension proposal, so they are not able to put it on the ballot. She said they are trying to figure out how these potential extensions would fit into the regional funding streams without a dedicated funding source for freeways, streets and transit coming from a Prop 400 extension.

Chairperson McCroskey asked Ms. Sorrell if she knew why the Governor vetoed the Prop 400 Extension bill.

Ms. Sorrell explained that the respective veto letter referenced many items.

Board Member Jarvis asked what is the measured impact of the light rail that we currently have.

Ms. Sorrell stated that many different developments were spurred because of the light rail. Some examples of that are: the ASU building and campus in Downtown Mesa, the development at Mesa Dr & Main, improvements at the LDS Temple, apartments at the former Brown and Brown site, Eco Mesa (which is another set of apartments near Pepper Place and MacDonald), and the downtown Courtyard Towers facility (which was senior housing that is being renovated for apartments). Also, near the Sycamore Park and Ride, there is a vacant lot that faces Dobson Road and one to the west of it. Both are being redeveloped for housing. She said she does not have an exact number for what that economic benefit is, but in the past, it was something like for every dollar spent brings back approximately \$1.60 in economic benefit that comes back to

the region. She said when light rail is put in, it brings developers because it is not something that can be moved like bus routes.

Chairperson McCroskey asked what percent of the light rail is being used and who is using it. She then asked if it was at capacity.

Ms. Sorrell said that we are coming off the pandemic where transit ridership took a hit worldwide. She said ridership is coming back but it is not to pre-pandemic numbers.

Chairperson McCroskey asked what it was prior to 2020 and the pandemic impacts.

Ms. Sorrell explained that they had about 2.5 million riders a year. She said they are at about 1.6-1.7 million riders now. She said it will be a slow increase because so many people are working from home. She said this plan is coming at a good time for the City to adjust for post-Covid and put out productive service.

Board Member Winstanley said earlier in her presentation she mentioned citizen needs. He would like to know what is considered citizen needs verses citizen wants.

Ms. Sorrell explained an example for context. She stated that a need would be more represented as a necessity to get to work or the grocery store, and a want would be wanting transit services 24 hours a day.

Board Member Winstanley asked how you distinguish a need to use public transit verses using a vehicle or other mode of transportation.

Ms. Sorrell explained that not everyone can afford an automobile, and this would be one example.

Board Member Winstanley asked how she would make that distinction.

Ms. Sorrell explained that it comes down to looking at the areas that have zero car households and what transportation options are available to those areas.

Board Member Winstanley asked if the light rail caused some of this need as a “build it and they will come” concept.

Ms. Sorrell said no. She said there are zero car households in our communities that are nowhere near the light rail.

Board Member Winstanley asked how to find where those areas are.

Ms. Sorrell said that these areas are currently shown and represented in the 2040 plan. She said that will show the map with zero car households and other applicable data.

Chairperson McCroskey what was the percentage of zero car households.

Ms. Sorrell said she did not know that percentage.

Chairperson McCroskey asked what type of surveys are done to determine what type and why people use the light rail while others do not use the light rail.

Ms. Sorrell said Valley Metro does an origin and destination survey with their bus and light rail riders. She said she believes people chose light rail because it is dependable, every 15 minutes it will show up. Some bus routes run every 15 minutes while others run every 30 minutes. Then if you have to make a transfer, you could be adding 5-30 minutes to your commute. She said she believes if we had service every 10 to 15 minutes, it would draw more people because time is a big factor.

Chairperson McCroskey asked about safety on the light rail and what are riders' thoughts on it.

Ms. Sorrell explained that is a Valley Metro measurement and she would have to ask Valley Metro how they are tracking it. She said the city does not track it because the city does not operate the service.

Board Member Gagnon asked how many of the riders are Mesa residents.

Ms. Sorrell said the city does not have a way to track that. Residents in other cities can use City of Mesa Park and Rides then catch the bus so it is viewed as a regional asset that resides in Mesa.

Board Member Gagnon if there is any way that she can work with Valley Metro to come up with that number.

Ms. Sorrell explained that this is a regional system and there is no way to tell how many Mesa residents are using the services. She said just like Chase Field probably cannot tell you how many residents are from Phoenix attending a game.

Board Member Gagnon asked if there was any way to see how many were getting on in Mesa or using it to get to Mesa.

Ms. Sorrell said she can tell how many people board at the stations in Mesa, but she cannot tell how many are using it to come to Mesa. There is nothing that keeps track of where they get off.

Board Member Gagnon asked if there was a way for her to work with light rail security to come up with those numbers.

Ms. Sorrell said she can ask but she does not know if it is possible. She explained it is hard to tell if someone is coming back to Mesa from a trip into Tempe or if they are coming from another city into Mesa to do something.

Chairperson McCroskey said she heard there were a lot of homeless that use the light rail for the air conditioning, and she is curious if the light rail is benefitting Mesa and its residents more than the homeless.

Ms. Sorrell explained that it is a public service open to everyone and they cannot discriminate. She said the homeless on the light rail is just like what they see in parks, libraries and on the street. It is another outlet for them.

Board Member James said with all the ridership metrics that they have, he asked Ms. Sorrell to share some of the productivity around the newer services like the Fiesta District circulator and micro transit options in Mesa.

Ms. Sorrell explained that when they put this together, they looked at maximizing bus funding. Currently, Mesa is getting \$18 million a year for transit funding. Then there is a formula grant option that is additional funding for Mesa. The amount of money that Mesa gets from that grant depends on the number of riders and miles within the city. In Mesa's case that is about 10 million additional dollars. This grant money is reevaluated every two years and will fluctuate depending on ridership and productivity. Mesa tries to put the most productive service out there in hopes of keeping most of that grant funding, so they do not need to reduce service or ask for additional funding every two years. For example, she explained that in some areas a 40-foot bus is not the best operational option, and in those areas a neighborhood circular or micro transit would be more productive. For this plan they will discuss what would be more productive, a bus every 15 minutes on the University fixed route or a bus that goes out to Signal Butte.

Board Member Winstanley asked if this would include the last mile.

Ms. Sorrell said that yes, it would include the first and last mile. She said sometimes the route to and from the transit services is the biggest barrier to get people to use transit. She explained that this is a primary reason why they work in coordination with the Transportation Master Plan because it could be an issue with sidewalk access or lighting that is keeping someone from getting there.

Board Member Neal asked if the board would see items like mapping, service, population growth and impact studies as the plan is created to identify those corridors.

Ms. Sorrell confirmed yes.

Board Member Neal asked if there were economic impact studies for streetcars.

Ms. Sorrell said they are way down the road for streetcar options. She said they are looking at doing a joint study with Tempe, hopefully in early 2023. She said this is just preliminary because they do not even have a funding source for it currently identified.

Board Member Neal asked Ms. Sorrell if she stated the public outreach started already.

Ms. Sorrell explained that public outreach was started in the sense that the bus drivers were surveyed and there have been meetings with council members to see what their visions are. She said there is a nonprofit organization called Pinnacle Prevention that has a grant from the Maricopa County Health Department to do a similar study to look at transit options to get people to food sources, so the city is coordinating with them and maximizing resources.

Chairperson McCroskey asked what they hope to get from the survey of riders.

Ms. Sorrell said they are looking to know where they want to go, why they use the transit system, and what is important to them like frequency, span of service, or something else.

Board Member James explained that he knows Valley Metro can do a presentation on security, and he would like to see this presentation focusing on Mesa.

Chairperson McCroskey said that was a good idea.

Board Member Gagnon asked if there were numbers on criminal activity in the city prior to the light rail coming in Mesa and if those numbers have gone up or down.

Ms. Sorrell said maybe that is something that the police department has but not her.

Board Member Vandever asked how this plan is going to work for seniors and those with disabilities.

Ms. Sorrell explained that they have Paratransit for the disabled. They also offer a service called RideChoice which is a deeply discounted taxi service for seniors and disabled. Also, when someone goes to Valley Metro to get ADA certified they have an option to get an ADA Platinum Pass and the city pays for their bus or light rail trips.

Board Member Vandever asked if the city had enough to meet the needs of the seniors and disabled in our community. She also questioned an education program because a lot of the seniors she knows are not aware of these options.

Ms. Sorrell explained that her staff is three people which includes herself. She said prior to Covid she had one of her staff going out to educate community groups. She said probably in this next calendar year they are going to revamp that and start educating people on what services are available.

Chairperson McCroskey added that seniors really need to know about RideChoice because some, depending on their disability, do not feel safe riding the bus. She said she agrees with Ms. Sorrell and feels that promoting more about the services is needed.

Ms. Sorrell said that they agree that is why they offer the service. She said RideChoice originally allowed people to take 50 eight-mile trips a month but that did not work for one of their residents, so they began to also offer four hundred miles a month instead as an option. She said one resident uses the four hundred miles a month to go to the west valley once a week. She said that option allows her to have a livelihood.

Chairperson McCroskey asked if that was at less of a cost.

Ms. Sorrell said RideChoice is about three dollars for the passenger and about twenty-eight dollars for the city. She said the city pays more for the longer trips, but it is still less expensive for the city than a paratransit trip.

Chairperson McCroskey thanked Ms. Sorrell for presentation.

It was motioned by Board Member Winstanley, seconded by Board Member Vandever, to adjourn the meeting.

**AYES** – McCroskey – Bingdazzo – Gagnon – James – Jarvis – Neal – Vandever – Winstanley

**NAYS** – None

Meeting adjourned at 6:18 pm