

Memorandum

Date: 6/23/2016
To: Teri Kouba, Grand Forks – East Grand Forks MPO
From: Bethany Brandt-Sargent
RE: Public Input Meeting Summary



Remarks

On June 8th and 9th, 2016 the first series of public input meetings for was held in Grand Forks, North Dakota and East Grand Forks, Minnesota. The series consisted of three stakeholder meetings held at Grand Forks City Hall on June 8th and three open house style public input meetings held on June 9th at various locations in the metro area, including

- » Hugo's in East Grand Forks from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.
- » Metro Transit Center in Grand Forks from 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.
- » Grand Cities Mall in Grand Forks from 4:00 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.

Focus Groups

The Grand Forks-East Grand Forks MPO contacted stakeholders directly to invite them to one of the three focus groups, one of which was directed specifically towards human service providers. Each focus group included a short presentation on the existing conditions, discussion on system needs and an activity to connect desired origins and destinations.

Despite lower than expected turn out, a variety of system issues and needs were developed and are summarized below. Further, the primary barriers outlined with in the current ***Coordinated Human Service Public Transit Plan*** (2012) were validated as still being relevant to the public transit system in Grand Forks-East Grand Forks.

Key system needs identified in general through the focus group process were as follows:

- » Information Gap regarding available services;
- » Need for additional marketing and information materials to targeted populations;
- » Access to Jobs within the Industrial Park west of I-29;
- » Recognize transit as an option for community sustainability initiatives;

Focus Group 1: Human Service Providers

Only a representative from the Senior Center attended the first focus group. The following issues were discussed:

- » Seniors previously rode the fixed route transit before the system switched to designated stops, which are too far from where people live or do not have amenities that allow seniors to wait comfortably.
- » Seniors do not like that they have to call ahead of time and are worried about cancelling too often.
- » Seniors would prefer to ride the fixed route service and will typically use whichever fare type is the best deal.
- » Seniors occasionally comment that they need earlier or weekend service.
- » Senior Center staff was not aware of one call/one click program.
- » Major gap in service for rural seniors needing to get to medical appointments multiple days a week.
- » The Senior Center has requested new brochures but none have been delivered, so they have been making copies. Brochures do not have dates so it is impossible to tell how current the maps being used.
- » Senior Center, Altru campuses, Walmart, pharmacy and beauty salons are important destinations.
- » New senior housing in southern Grand Forks is not well served.
- » Seniors would benefit from transit informational sessions.

Focus Group 2: General Users

Representatives from the Veterans Affairs Clinic and the Center for Independent Living attended this focus group. The following issues were discussed:

- » Veterans generally and homeless veterans specifically need to get to the VA clinic but the closest stops are Target, Walmart and Columbia Mall which are either too far away or require crossing busy streets, including 32nd Avenue. The clinic desires a stop nearer their location.
- » The Center for Independent Living reported that their users find paratransit is inconvenient but didn't know that all buses are accessible.
- » Lack of information and how to use the fixed route system prevent many from using it.
- » Information on how to voice complaints or needs is not readily available.
- » Many clients of the Center for Independent Living would benefit from better evening and weekend service.
- » As more riders with mobility devices switch to the fixed route service, on-time performance issues would likely increase.
- » Center for Independent Living tries to use one-call/one-click but the service is inconsistent because there are not enough providers.

Focus Group 3: General Users

Representatives from Cities Area Transit, the Economic Development Corporation and the Grand Forks Sustainability Office attended this focus group. The following issues were discussed:

- » Some paratransit riders did not know the fixed route buses are totally accessible.
- » Industrial park would benefit from service but indirectness is a barrier. Cities Area Transit has worked with companies in the past but their interest has not been maintained. The Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation is working on developing park and ride locations because businesses in the industrial park have run out of parking space.
 - Many employees of the Industrial Park businesses do not have a license (approximately 40 percent).

- » The City of Grand Forks is interested in encouraging employees to use the bus, but indirectness is a barrier.
- » Convenient service would be a benefit to the 42nd Street corridor that attracts many visitors. The Alerus Center and neighboring hotels like transit because it adds a selling point for special events.
- » The hub and spoke system as currently designed is outdated.
- » Private suppliers of transit, like the Grove apartment complex are providing service. Grand Forks City Council denied their request to add transit to their location and existing transit routes are not direct enough to be useful for the residents.
- » Given budget cuts, the University of North Dakota may be interested in contracting out their transit system and should consider what the relationship may look like.

Open Houses

Throughout the day, the study team engaged members of the general public and current riders on the issue of transit in the Grand Forks – East Grand Forks metro area. Specific issues discussed included:

- » Need for Sunday bus service, potentially similar to how current night service operates
- » More robust evening service in terms of coverage area and hours of operation; potentially looking at expanding the hours of operation of more popular day routes (E.g. 3, 5, 10, etc.)
- » Better service on routes which are currently working well (E.g. 3, 4, 5, and 6)
- » Improve connections north to south on west end of town, specifically along 42nd and Columbia Road
- » Evaluate transit access and circulation along 32nd Avenue South, area seems ineffectively served given the large amount of employment and retail
- » Drivers need training for different types of mobility devices
- » Desire for service to Parkwood Place and North Dakota Eye Clinic
- » General theme identified the need to ensure adequate shelter distribution, specifically at high boarding locations; specific shelter requested at Walmart on Gateway Drive
- » Getting to the City Halls is difficult
- » Service to the industrial park was identified as a need
- » Identified need for a second hub or transfer station that might serve to support a more efficient route pattern
- » Explore options for park and ride locations
- » Route Shout is a good service but does not include the Night Bus
- » Perceived safety issues and troublesome passengers
- » Drivers sometimes do not stop at the timed stop, hold until scheduled time or call ahead for transfers
- » Route 8/9 is confusing

Route Desire Lines

Each of the Focus Group meetings and the Open Houses provided participants an opportunity to illustratively denote *transportation desire lines*. Participants were given yarn to represent a limited number of bus headway and asked to “connect” major destinations they consider important.

In general, existing riders who completed the exercise tended to select and highlight those corridors which currently provide needed transit services they current used. For those non-riders and stakeholders who



participated in the exercise, a more global view was taken. Non-riders tended to make connections along corridors such as Gateway Drive and 42nd Street which are currently served by transit.

An extrapolation of these outputs will be factored into the Issues Identification process currently underway.

Survey

As part of the outreach efforts for this plan, a survey was developed which included questions for both current riders and non-users to understand the needs and perceptions of the system. The survey was distributed through various channels, including but not limited to:

- » Grand Forks – East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization’s website.
- » Cities Area Transit’s website.
- » Grand Forks – East Grand Forks Transit Development Plan’s Facebook page.
- » On-board during the route reconnaissance event. Additional surveys were left at the MTC.
- » At the Focus Groups and Open House events.

At the time of this writing, 74 responses were received via the on-line version of the survey and 62 responses were received via the paper copy version of the survey.