



Town of Sudbury

<https://sudbury.ma.us/transportation/>

Sudbury Transportation Committee

Minutes

Friday, 3 December 2021

10:30 AM - Noon

Via Town Zoom Conference Call

Core Members Present: Daniel Carty, Alice Sapienza, Doug Frey, Adam Duchesneau, Sandy Lasky

Core Members Absent: Dan Nason, Debra Galloway

Advisory Group Present:

Advisory Group Absent: Charlie Dunn, Scott Nix, Beth Suedmeyer, Carmine Gentile, Bethany Hadvab, Silvia Nersessian, Mary Warzynski

Guests: Ana Cristina Oliveira (Sudbury Senior Center), Lynn Puorro (Sudbury TV), Linda Faust (Guest)

Confirmation of Quorum

The statutory requirements as to notice having been complied with, and after confirming a quorum was present, Dan Carty as chair convened the meeting and called roll at 10:33 AM. Dan C announced this was a public meeting, and the meeting was being recorded via Zoom and by Sudbury TV for future viewing.

Selection of Clerk

Alice volunteered to take meeting minutes.

Administrative Items

Dan reviewed several items from the recent weeks:

1. The Select Board approved use of \$35,000 from Meadow Walk mitigation funds to the CoA, for continuation of GoSudbury! transportation services. Dan thanked the CoA and Sandy for her support, as well as members of the Select Board.
2. A letter from the Transportation Committee was sent to the Select Board and Town Manager, with requests for an amount from the town's state allocated American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds to be used for transportation.
3. The next Making the Connections meeting will be held on 13 December.
4. The Boston MPO Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC) will be holding a Zoom meeting on Wednesday, December 8, at 2:30 PM. Alice volunteered to attend, as did Sandy (Dan was unable to attend). The agenda item of note is: **Perspectives on Regional Transit Authorities, 40 minutes (2:35 PM), Collette Aufranc, Wellesley Select Board, and Meghan Jop, Wellesley Executive Director of General Government Services.**

5. Kevin Chan from Spare Labs, an on-demand software provider, is interested in talking with the Transportation Committee. Adam suggested asking if he could do a brief presentation about the company's platform at a January or February meeting.

Dan then suggested the key topics to be addressed in the meeting were: increasing co-pays for GoSudbury services (taxi, Uber); the Community Connections grant RFP; the request from the Select Board regarding sustainability of Sudbury transportation (e.g., high, medium, low projections) stemming from the October presentation; and reviewing both recent minutes as well as current finances. Alice suggested the Community Connections topic would warrant a fairly quick discussion, because completing an application by the due date (17 December) was not possible. However, she noted that these are important grants and we should apply in the future.

Community Connections (Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization [MPO])

“Community Connections (CC) is the MPO’s funding program for first- and last-mile solutions, community transportation, and other small, nontraditional transportation projects... Transit operations projects are those that close gaps in the transit network, including those that provide first- and last-mile solutions and address mobility needs not covered by existing fixed-route transit or paratransit services. Operations funded through the CC Program must represent *new service*.”

Sandy, Dan, and Alice noted the importance of collaborating with one or more RTAs as well as a TMA (CrossTown Connect), and possibly additional communities, for one of these grants. Alice said that Newton funds a portion of its Via service from an MPO grant and that the application (which she downloaded and distributed to the Committee) required a level of analytics that Sudbury should work towards, such as frequency, routing, and fares. Dan noted the utility of the Uber Dashboard with regard to our current pilot and that we are able to identify frequency and routes of targeted riders. What we should address going forward is creating a relationship with MWRTA (among others, depending on collaborating towns) to address transportation needs. Dan offered to speak with Debra Galloway and Carmine Gentile about this.

Linda Faust raised the issue of driver availability for the CoA vans (currently, only one driver and a substitute with limited hours are available). Ana Cristina stated that all CoA van requests for medical appointments were met; if no van were available, the rider was routed to one of the taxi companies. Also, in some cases vans could be used with minor changes to the rider's times (e.g., arriving somewhat earlier for an appointment).

Co-Pays for Rides

Both Dan and Alice provided information on the likely impact of charging higher co-payments for taxi and/or Uber rides. Dan calculated the possible revenue from Uber co-pays, based on the prior 4 months of usage and assuming co-pays of \$5 for within Sudbury, \$10 for rides to contiguous towns, and \$15 for rides up to 25 miles from Sudbury. The result, assuming no change in (1) percentage of rides in each category (i.e., no change in rider demand) or (2) ability to pay, is that about 20% of total cost to Sudbury would be covered. Alice did a similar calculation for 3 months of actual taxi data and, because of the higher cost per ride, found that co-pays would cover about 10% of total costs.

Material that Alice distributed to the Committee indicated that we could replace our Uber geofences with “miles from Sudbury” (this is subject to change, if we become part of a regional transportation system). For example, riders with an ability to pay could use vouchers and/or a centralized “cashless” system (credit/debit card), with rates according to miles from the Sudbury pickup or destination. Newton has a within-city service costing \$5 per ride (cashless system); Lexington uses \$5 vouchers for geofenced rides costing \$5, \$10, or \$15. Policies should be clear that certain riders (persons with a disability, financially vulnerable residents, etc.) are eligible for lower rates.

Based on simplified estimates and given assumptions, she noted that several conclusions can be drawn:

- Given the sizable difference in cost between taxi rides and Uber rides, copays are likely to make a difference only for Uber rides.
- If residents are faced with taxi costs that are not highly subsidized, taxi volume is almost certain to decrease.
- Moving to a subsidy by the town of taxi service would entail consistent grant funding and/or other “sustainable” means. It should also involve negotiation of rates by the town, for more cost-efficient contracting (i.e., setting up a taxi stand close to or within Sudbury).
- Wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) must be available in a sustainable transportation system, and these rides (though few) are expensive and should be subsidized for residents needing them.
- Because every transportation option will involve some subsidy, the Town needs to examine how best to make the service part of the annual budget.
- A key estimate *not* addressed is price-elasticity of demand; that is, how will changes in pricing (co-pays) affect the volume of rides by service provider.

Sandy raised the possibility of partnering with area healthcare facilities to help subsidize transportation. For example, she had conversations with an executive of a dialysis facility who was exploring provision of transportation for those services. The Community Health Needs Assessments carried out by nonprofit hospitals can be another source of identifying likely partners. Dan recommended that Sandy continue conversations and find out what the challenges facing such providers might be, and how can we help each other. Doug reminded the group of the need to provide WAV as well.

Sandy also brought up the idea of disseminating a brief survey to identify “price points,” or the amount of co-pay that might change the behavior of riders (i.e., increase or decrease demand). She will work with Alice to draft a survey, and Adam suggested using SurveyMonkey for distribution. Alice asked about FlashVote, and Dan wondered if that mode would reach the people we need to ask. He also suggested the survey refer back to the memo sent by Adam about future co-payments.

Ana Cristina was concerned about response rate, and Sandy reassured her that the survey data would not be used to make decisions, if too few people answered. Dan recommended “threshold” questions, such as: “At what co-pay would you be unable to use the service?” He also noted that there is an outstanding survey by Nelson/Nygaard (for the MTC program), and Adam said those results should be available in January/February.

Affecting Uber ridership is the question of driver availability. Linda Faust asked if Uber rides could be reserved, and the answer is that there is one program by Uber that is very expensive and usually offered by big employers for reserve rides for staff. The GoSudbury program does not allow reservation.

However, Dan also calculated Uber wait time by the time of day a request was made, to find out if certain blocks of request times were correlated with long waits for drivers. He found that, over the past 4 months of actual data, the average wait time ranged from 5 to 20 minutes, and there was no request time that reliably correlated with wait time. This is consistent with data showing that, if a rider requests a driver 30 minutes before s/he needs to leave for an appointment (i.e., also taking into account the travel time), an appointment could likely be met.

Ana Cristina told the group that she had one Metco parent referred to GoSudbury, and Dan said he would quickly follow up with the school staff about likely mileage from Sudbury. If we need to do so, we would change the mileage limit from 25 to, say, 30 miles from Sudbury for all riders.

Dan will open a discussion with the Select Board on the oversight of ARPA funds, and continue to act as our Committee's advocate with the Select Board on that topic.

Follow-up on Select Board Presentation

At the conclusion of the Committee's October presentation to the Select Board, we were asked to develop a business plan for sustainability, showing high/medium/low assumptions about ridership and cost. Dan recommended that, given the time needed for discussion, we dig into this topic at the next meeting.

Doug asked how long the additional \$35,000 in mitigation funds might allow the taxi program to continue, and Adam responded at least through April and likely through June 2022. Alice reminded the group that the MTC funds might also be available for taxi rides.

Next Meeting

The Transportation Committee voted unanimously to set the next meeting for **Friday, December 10, at 10:30 AM** via Zoom.

Meeting Minutes

Dan shared the minutes of the prior meeting and one correction was made. Alice moved to approve as amended, Sandy seconded, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Adjournment

Sandy moved to conclude the meeting, Dan seconded, and the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 11:56 AM.