

City of San Antonio



Minutes Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

2023 – 2025 Council Members

John Courage, Dist. 9, Chair

Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2 | Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6 | Marina Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7

Monday, August 19, 2024

2:00 PM

City Hall

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 2:04 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: John Courage, *Chair*
Dr. Sukh Kaur, *Member*
Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, *Member*
Melissa Cabello Havrda, *Member*
Marina Alderete Gavito, *Member*

Members Absent: None

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from the June 4, 2024 Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda moved to Approve the minutes of the June 4, 2024 Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Courage, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito

Public Comment

All Public Comment was regarding Item 2.

Emily Doherty provided a written statement in support of the horse-drawn carriage industry and was

opposed to the transition from horse-drawn carriages.

Stephanie Garcia, Skylar Newman, Kathy Stephens, Marisela Martinez, owners of the horse-drawn carriage companies spoke in support of keeping the carriages downtown with no Ordinance changes. Garcia asked that if electric carriages were piloted, could the horses continue along with them. Martinez commented that in Port St. Lucia, Florida they had banned horse-drawn carriages and moved to electric carriages and people were still protesting the electric carriages.

Chris Davis, owner of one of the horse-drawn carriage companies, spoke in support of keeping the carriages downtown with no Ordinance changes. Davis read a letter supporting the horse-drawn carriage industry from Dr. Ben Espy, a veterinarian hired as a consultant for the City of San Antonio to inspect the horses permitted by the City for horse-drawn carriages.

Lisa Barnes, an employee of the horse-drawn carriage industry spoke in support of keeping the carriages downtown. Shane Tilton, certified horse farrier and farrier for the downtown horse-drawn carriages stated that he was a skilled craftsman specializing in the care of equine hooves, including trimming, balancing, and shoeing.

Rose Hill spoke in support of the horse-drawn carriage industry.

Mariah Smith, Brian Wheat, and Samantha Teran spoke in support of getting rid of the horse-drawn carriages asserting that the practice was not humane to the horses used in the industry.

Rachel Wolf, founding member of "Voice for Animals" spoke in support of closing down the horse-drawn carriages and provided a handout to the Committee that asserted that two local news media polls indicated that between 57% and 59% of San Antonio Residents supported banning horse-drawn carriages.

Valerie Rieffert spoke in support of moving the horse-drawn carriages out of downtown as they created traffic and safety issues.

James Barnes commented that there needed to be more discussion regarding other issues such as homelessness instead of horse-drawn carriages.

Briefing and Possible Action on

2. Briefing and possible action on the Council Consideration Request by Councilmembers Jalen McKee-Rodriguez (District 2) and Phyllis Viagran (District 3) on A Just Transition from Horse Drawn Carriages. [María Villagómez, Deputy City Manager; William P. McManus, Chief of Police]

Assistant Director of the San Antonio Police Department Rick Riley provided background on the Council Consideration Request (CCR) submitted by Councilmembers Viagran and McKee-Rodriguez on November 28, 2022. The CCR requested that staff develop a plan to phase out the use of horses with horse-drawn carriages in San Antonio, to include the abolishment of Ordinance(s) or policies as they related to Chapter 33 permitting equine-drawn carriages.

Riley stated that the CCR requested that the Plan include: 1) Determination of the feasibility and

establishment of a program to support a workforce transition from horse-drawn carriages to electric carriages and pedicabs; 2) The establishment of a prohibition of the use of horses with carriage rides; and 3) Immediate cessation of the issuance of all new horse-drawn carriage permits, medallions, and/or Special Event Permits so that eventually all valid permits, medallions, and/or Special Event Permits would expire.

Riley stated that horse-drawn carriages were governed by Chapter 33 of the City Code and enforced by the SAPD Ground Transportation Unit (GTU). He noted that the City had been issuing permits since 1865 and currently had five permitted horse-drawn carriage companies each holding five permits for a total of 25 horse-drawn carriages and there were 81 permitted horse carriage drivers.

The Governance Committee heard the CCR on April 17, 2024, and referred the Item to the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, according to Riley. The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee originally discussed the CCR on June 4, 2024, and requested a survey of residents, tourists, and businesses; research of other cities' transition from horse-drawn carriages, a briefing to the Animal Care Services Board, independent veterinarian evaluation of the horses, and a draft workforce transition plan incorporating feedback from carriage operators/owners.

Alanna Reed, Communications & Engagement Director, provided the results of the survey. The purpose of the survey was to understand how residents, tourists, and industry stakeholders felt about a proposal to ban horse-drawn carriages in the downtown area and was available from the period of July 25, 2024 to August 13, 2024. She stated that the survey asked if the respondent was a resident, tourist, or downtown business owner and optional demographic questions, whether they had ridden a horse-drawn carriage in San Antonio, and whether they supported alternative options to horse-drawn carriages.

Reed reported that 50,746 responses had been received and 51.98% of the respondents supported the phase-out of horse-drawn carriages completely while 29% recommended keeping the practice as is, 11.1% recommended the development of alternate hours and expansion outside of downtown, and 7.9% recommended the carriages move to City Parks.

Riley reported that in June 2024, SAPD met with all five Horse Carriage Industry Companies and all five companies expressed concern for the livelihood of their business, staff, and the future of the horses. He noted that the companies proposed reducing operating hours and four of the five companies were open to operating electric carriages if the City provided financial assistance to procure them and reducing the number of permits by 20%. He added that the companies requested an average of five years for the transition time to phase out of the industry.

Riley stated that SAPD had briefed the Animal Care Services Board about the CCR in July 2024. He indicated that staff researched other U.S. cities. Riley reported that the US cities permitting horse-drawn carriages to operate downtown and/or in historic districts included: Dallas, TX; Austin, TX; Indianapolis, IN; Oklahoma City, OK; New York, NY; Charleston, NC; Mt. Dora, FL; and Fernandina Beach, FL. He stated that cities prohibiting horse-drawn carriages included: Chicago, IL; Las Vegas, NV; Salt Lake City, UT; Camden, NJ; and Asheville, NC. Riley stated that there were several Cities allowing electric carriages which was an industry that was only in the beginning stages. Custom made electric carriages at a cost of \$20,000 each, used mechanical propulsion to replace the horse and were operating in Mt. Dora and Fernandina Beach, FL and were being tested in

Philadelphia, PA. Riley noted that the electric carriages were not authorized in Florida or Pennsylvania to drive on City streets according to State regulations.

Riley noted that the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee had requested that an independent veterinarian evaluate horses, the impact of working conditions, and suitability for pulling carriages on City streets. SAPD contacted five equine veterinarians and none were interested in performing evaluations, and some veterinarians cited a conflict of interest.

Assistant City Manager Alex Lopez provided background information on employees in the carriage industry stating that staff had met with the carriage owners who provided information about their carriage drivers/operations. She stated that the drivers/operators ranged in age from teens to over 60 years old and included college students, veterans, single parents, seniors, and individuals with disabilities and their tenure ranged from a few years to over 25 years, and a majority of drivers worked as independent contractors.

According to Lopez, the transition options for carriage drivers included training to operate electric carriages by the manufacturer of the electric carriages transitioning into new tour guide occupation (river barges, segways, pedicabs, trolleys) or into new occupation in a high-demand field via Ready to Work. She added that another option for persons interested in starting their own business would include a transition to an entrepreneurial opportunity with support from Launch SA and LiftFund. Lopez reported that staff would be meeting with carriage drivers/operators to obtain their feedback.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Courage commented that the carriage operators had asked the City Council to see their operations, so he planned to visit them. He also noted that there had been mention of rescue groups that would take the horses, but he had not heard from any of them so he wanted more information. Chair Courage requested a breakdown of the percentage of survey respondents that were tourists. Reed stated that of the 10,931 tourist respondents, 63.9% stated that they would support transitioning to the electric carriages and pedi-cabs and ban horse-drawn carriages completely.

Chair Courage expressed concern that no local veterinarians wanted to take on the task and suggested looking outside of San Antonio. Chair Courage asked how the owners of the carriage companies would be re-trained noting that Lopez only outlined options for workers or employees. Chair Courage expressed concern that the survey was not thorough enough to get an answer because people may not know enough about the subject to respond.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez thanked staff and the public for speaking today and commented that the survey had demonstrated that people supported transitioning away from horse-drawn carriages downtown. He provided background on the CCR and provided a memo that requested a three-year phase-out plan that authorized the use of electric carriages and establishment of a program for electric carriages as “vehicles for hire” that would set parameters and permit requirements.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested staff to develop a plan that included stakeholder input but led to the retirement of the horses which could be assisted by the animal welfare organization Brady Hunter Foundation. He asked staff to evaluate the type of support that could be provided to

carriage companies to acquire the new Electric Carriages (E-Carriages) and a comprehensive plan to assist employees by prioritizing them in the Ready to Work Program.

Councilmember Aldrete Gavito thanked the Councilmembers that developed the CCR, speakers at the meeting, and the over 50,000 residents and visitors that completed the survey. Her main concern was public safety noting that the slow movement of carriages delayed response time for fire and police. She supported phasing out of horse-drawn carriages downtown and a faster timeline for transition.

Councilmember Kaur thanked the members of the public that came out to speak today and the staff for performing their due diligence on this issue. She noted that the five carriage companies had done a lot for San Antonio's tourism industry over the years, but at the same time, it was important to look to the future. Councilmember Kaur acknowledged that there were competing interests and information, however, the survey response rate was excellent. She requested a breakdown by council districts and a subset of Council District 1 downtown as well as whether there were multiple responses by the same Internet Protocol (IP) address. Reed replied that there were 39,461 unique IP addresses and over 11,000 duplicate IP addresses but the IP addresses might be duplicated if they came from the same server such as the City of San Antonio's employees or users of the SA Free WiFi, adding that the responses from duplicate IP addresses were disparate which indicated they were likely from different people with different perspectives.

Councilmember Kaur asked why the five-year transition plan was requested by the industry and whether other locations were identified. Riley stated that five-years was related to debt the companies had and noted that most did not support locations outside of downtown. Councilmember Kaur recommended a survey of employees of the industry to see what route they wanted to take. Councilmember Kaur recommended a five-year transition plan working with the industry.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda acknowledged that there was a lot of passion on both sides of the issue. She commented that the community had raised concerns that we were not serving our constituencies and noted that the survey spoke for itself since the majority wanted to transition. Councilmember Cabello Havrda recommended looking at other cities models to determine the plan which should include specific deliverables such as timelines and financial considerations including the cost of the electric carriages.

Dangers of traffic, pollution, and stress on the animals in the downtown heat were a major concern for Councilmember Cabello Havrda. She supported the transition proposed by staff but suggested that this could be done more quickly to account for the welfare of the animals.

Chair Courage stated that it was apparent that there needed to be a transition plan noting that it was not that easy to shut down a profitable business, get out of leases and debt in only a year, but he acknowledged that three-years was a long time suggesting two years. He commented that the request was to offer electric carriages as a replacement which was \$20,000 per vehicle and he suggested that the firms be connected to Lyft Fund for financing. Chair Courage requested a detailed re-employment plan for workers and transition for the business owners to be submitted to the City Council with a two-year period to get the transition accomplished.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez moved for staff to present options for a 1 and 2-year phase-out transition plan at a B Session between September 18, 2024, and October 15, 2024, for City Council feedback and consideration. He stated that this should include, but not be limited to, consideration of

reduced operating hours, a change in the downtown footprint, a phase-out plan to reduce the number of horse-drawn carriages operating during the duration of the transition, and options to provide support for the acquisition of e-carriages.

Interim Assistant City Manager John Peterek asked Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez to allow staff a little more time and proposed modifying the deadline for the B Session to October 31, 2024. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez agreed to the extension.

Councilmember Kaur asked staff how the transition plan might look at two and three years. Deputy City Manager Maria Villagomez offered staff to provide phase-out plans for one year, two years and three years. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez accepted the addition of a three-year phase-out plan as a friendly amendment.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez moved to have staff present options for a one-year and two-year phase out transition plan at a B session to April 16, 2024 for City Council feedback and consideration.

Councilmember Kaur made a friendly amendment to receive a transition plan from 12 to 36 months.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Courage, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Approved

John Courage
Chair

Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk