

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

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

1:30 PM

City Hall

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 1:38 PM. Deputy City Clerk Aurora Perkins 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*
Marina Alderete Gavito, *Member*

Members Absent: Melissa Cabello Havrda, *Member*

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes from the January 16, 2024 Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting.

Councilmember Kaur moved to Approve the minutes of the January 16, 2024 Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: Cabello Havrda

Public Comment

None.

Briefing and Possible Action on

2. Briefing by VIA Metropolitan Transit on an update to their Better Bus Plan. [Roderick Sanchez, Assistant City Manager; Catherine Hernandez, Interim Director, Transportation]

Interim Transportation Director, Catherine Hernandez, introduced the Item and VIA Transit (VIA) Senior Vice President of Public Engagement, Jon Gary Herrera and VIA Planning Director, Sandip Sen, who provided an update on VIA Transit's Better Bus Plan. Herrera noted that VIA had been in operation for over 45 years and had over 75 bus routes with 5,980 total bus stops with over 2,300 as sheltered stops. He stated that VIA serviced 14 member cities with over 1,210 square miles in their service area and over 24 million passenger trips annually.

Herrera reviewed VIA's Discounted Fare Programs which included fares for children, the disabled and Veterans, students and Medicare/SSDI categories. He spoke to typical VIA ridership data which were found to be Hispanic, low-income household members, employed full-time and frequent bus users. Herrera noted that VIA continuously surveyed riders and residents for feedback of bus services with feedback pointing to improved bus stops and availability. He added that VIA's Fall 2023 Net Promoter Score was 57 which monitored how likely a rider would recommend VIA to others and added that the industry average score was 29.

Herrera provided an overview on how VIA was funded which was primarily derived from the Penny Sales Tax Allocation with VIA receiving half of a cent of all funded entities allocations. He noted that VIA remained the least funded transit agency among major metro areas in Texas to include the cities of Austin, Dallas and Houston and spoke to funding challenges in the delivery of services.

Herrera spoke to the three pillars of VIA's Keep SA Moving Initiative which included the components of a Better Bus Service System, VIA Link Service and the Advanced Rapid Transit Network. He noted that all components were guided by improving overall bus service with improving frequency of bus routes and increased access to opportunity for ridership. Herrera stated that VIA continuously analyzed populations and ridership data to improve ridership services. He added that the goal of routes was to have all routes be less than 30 minutes in wait times.

Sen reviewed the Better Bus Plan to conduct analysis in order to find opportunities to reduce wait time and improve access. He noted that the Better Bus Plan goals and objectives concentrated on frequency of routes, considering direct and faster service, providing a simple to use service and to provide a convenient service that was available and accessible where needed.

Sen stated that VIA was currently evaluating and conducting ongoing public engagement efforts to inform the current bus system design. Sen noted that the engagement would assess current service, complete peer review, evaluate market conditions and identify gaps and needs. He stated that VIA was dedicated to providing an equitable and accessible service to all.

Sen reviewed the next steps of the Better Bus Plan to include continuing public engagement meetings until late February 2024 and development of the Plan which would be shared with the VIA Board in Summer 2024. Herrera reviewed upcoming engagement opportunities from February 19 - March 22, 2024 to include an online survey, stakeholder meetings and At-Stop

Outreach which would educate VIA on future Plan recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Chair Pro-Tem Alderete Gavito expressed concern that the Better Bus Plan would not be fully implemented until 2025. Herrera stated that he shared the concern for providing the Plan earlier but noted that hiring and training of bus operators was the limiting factor. Chair Pro-Tem Alderete Gavito noted that discussions with the City should be held to identify opportunities for hiring bus operators sooner.

Chair Pro-Tem Alderete Gavito asked if there were challenges with the bus fleet. Herrera confirmed that there were no issues with the fleet and that the electric fleet was being expanded.

Chair Pro-Tem Alderete Gavito requested data on unsheltered bus shelters by council district and how to explore creative ways to shelter stops by utilizing trees.

Councilmember Courage asked if bus operator pay had been evaluated to try to increase hiring of bus operators. Herrera stated that VIA Transit had the highest pay for transit operators and noted that companies such as Amazon had shrunk the availability of drivers. He added that VIA had initiated hiring bonuses and other incentives to increase the bus operator pool.

Councilmember Courage asked how much ridership fees impacted the Budget. Herrera stated that ridership provided about 10% of the Budget for operations and that there was an increase in number of discounted fares that impacted available funds. Councilmember Courage asked if there was consideration of providing free fares in order to increase ridership and being able to identify funding in other areas to increase hiring of bus operators. Herrera stated that VIA management was evaluating how to provide free fares but they had to consider a balance for riders to use services for intended services of ridership.

Councilmember Courage noted that the Chinese Transit System utilized electric vehicles and was autonomously operated and requested possible consideration to address hiring challenges of bus operators and rising fuel cost considerations.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked for clarification on the timeline of next steps related to the budget year. He asked for clarification on the decrease of stops from May 2023. Sen stated that routes were impacted due to VIA Link and construction of streets. Councilmember McKee- Rodriguez requested updated data on number of sheltered bus stops.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked for a conversation by City Council to consider free fare options by council districts. He expressed concern to ensure that services were provided to the most vulnerable to include the homeless population. He reiterated the importance of providing timely and efficient routes for riders who were dependent on VIA to get to work and conduct business. He stressed the need for discussion during the upcoming City Budget regarding opportunities to fund VIA at greater level.

Councilmember Kaur expressed concern of the Better Business Plan goals obtainment of less than 30 minute wait time within three years. Herrera stated that analysis of the size of bus system and

frequency was dependent of budget gaps to obtain the goal. He added that partners were needed to quicken the goal obtainment. Councilmember Kaur acknowledged that additional support was needed for gap funding from partner organizations.

Councilmember Kaur stressed the need for working with non-profit partners that utilized reduced or bulk fares to assist residents. She requested data on the partner organizations that utilized reduced or bulk fares for service delivery.

Chair Pro-Tem Alderete Gavito requested that VIA provide information on opportunities to educate residents on programs and input. She asked for clarification on incentive ridership programs for frequent users. Herrera reviewed ridership programs that capped fees for frequent users once a certain level of ridership was obtained.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested GIS mapping of current routes.

This Item was for briefing purposes only.

3. **Briefing on the Pleasanton Road Safety Improvements Project.** [Roderick Sanchez, Assistant City Manager; Catherine Hernandez, Interim Director, Transportation]

Interim Transportation Director Catherine Hernandez, provided an update on the Pleasanton Road Safety Project performed in partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDoT). She noted that the project was identified under the City's Vision Zero Program and funded for \$3.8 million with the City portion funding 100% of the design and 10% of the construction.

Hernandez reviewed the elements of the project which included raised concrete medians, mid-block crossings and existing conditions. She stated that the project was identified for funding due to crash data which revealed 190 crashes a year over the past seven years. She added that existing conditions also took into consideration of VIA Transit bus stops ridership and resident needs.

Hernandez stated that the project development to this point was performed due to the evaluation of crash and VIA ridership data and field observations for pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Hernandez reviewed outreach efforts to gain data which included SASpeakUp feedback, a social media campaign, door to door campaign and public meetings. She reviewed community feedback to include traffic patterns and safety concerns.

Hernandez reviewed design components at the 30% and 60% design stages which included changes of bus stops and midblock crossings. She noted that the projects final design would be completed in the Spring of 2024, pre-construction to begin in Summer 2024 and actual construction tentatively beginning in Fall 2024 through Summer 2025. Hernandez stated that the construction component was set to be completed in three phases to limit impacts to traffic and bus services with notification to the public being completed throughout the project phases.

DISCUSSION

Councilmember Courage stated that the Pleasanton Project was long awaited and that he supported

the initiative.

Councilmember Kaur asked how a project would be considered and brought forward for application for funding. Hernandez stated that crash data, traffic analysis and other factors were continuously evaluated under the Vision Zero Initiative to increase safety and noted that this was done in order to support funding applications in partnership with TXDoT.

The Item was for briefing purposes only.

Next Meeting Discussion

Councilmember Courage stated that the March 17, 2024 meeting would include the interviewing of applicants to recommend for the Airport Advisory Committee. He stated that he would like to develop a subcommittee to review the initial list of applicants for interview consideration and asked Councilmembers Alderete Gavito, McKee-Rodriguez or Kaur to serve on the subcommittee. He stated that he would work with staff to finalize the subcommittee and timeline for consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:50 PM.

Approved

John Courage, Chair

*Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk*