



BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Special Meeting
June 15, 2015 – 7:00 PM
FDA Building – 208 Strawberry Street

MINUTES
(Approved at July 13th Board Mtg.)

BOARD MEMBERS AND OFFICERS PRESENT:

Matthew Stanley, Brian Baird, Christina Murray, Jennifer Mullen, Jack Burke, Tim Feehan, Jenna Mosman, Heather McQuillan, Tricia Bryant and D. Walton.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Christy Lantz, Danielle Dick, and Katherine Jordan.

Purpose of this Special Meeting and Call To Order – Matthew Stanley

Matthew Stanley called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and welcomed those in attendance. He made several opening remarks. This Special meeting was called by the FDA Board to seek comments from our elected council members and our community on the subject of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) after which the Board will conclude this public meeting and reconvene in Executive Session to determine an FDA position on the BRT.

Further, by way of background he stated that the majority of the email comments the FDA has received in advance of this meeting were overwhelmingly negative but two citizen endorsements were received.

Three Richmond City Council Members; Charles Samules, Jon Balilies and Parker Agelasto were invited to the meeting and since only Council Member Balilies had arrived, he was asked to share his thoughts to begin.

Comments (comments written in first person)

1. Jon Balilies - Richmond City Council Representative, First District

There is a lot of history behind the plan as we know it today. We believe that the BRT is a much more efficient model than light rail, the choice made in Norfolk, which is probably 4 or 5 times the expense. We have been making progress on issues such as the initial no left turns onto Broad Street. The Public Comment phase was completed in May and next up is the Planning Commission in July. We don't believe that GRTC's plan will destroy neighborhoods like the Richmond Petersburg Turnpike did decades earlier. We met with the Cleveland BRT expert last year and talked about Cleveland's success. We see our plan as a positive step for Richmond but I encourage you to be vigilant throughout the process. If we do this right we will see positive impact for decades to come. I see tremendous potential for development in my District – Staples Mill to I-95 in particular.

Question – What are the final approvals needed and from what authorities?

Answer – The feds have issued a Tiger Grant. The City of Richmond must approve the final planning and design so both the UDC and Planning Commission must pass on the plans. Further, the City Atty believes that since this is a multi-entity contract we (Council) will need to approve. The feds are giving us most of the money. We won the grant, but still need to earn it. The Grant stipulates 14 stations – if we want a fifteenth it will be our money that pays for it. The Tiger Grant stipulates protected lanes for 50% of the project and if you do the calculation today that protected figure is more like 42% - we will find the additional lanes to meet the 50% threshold.

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Question – What are the design elements that are fixed (like the 50% protected lanes) versus those subject to local negotiation and improvement?

Answer – Not sure.

Question – Has the City considered the impact of a 4-5 month station construction interval per station?

Answer – Wasn't aware of that estimate.

I would suggest that the FDA incorporate a list of these sorts of questions and the answers developed on its website and include the source of the answer.

(Council Member Balilies was invited to stay for the conversation that followed but other schedule demands prevented him from doing so.)

2. Dr. Renata Forssmann-Falck

I am on the William Byrd Board and we (collectively) have been concerned with the absence of effective public transportation and its impacts on our poorest citizens for years. This plan does not address that need. The BRT will in fact provide another divide between neighborhoods; between the Museum District and Scotts Addition, The Fan and Carver – such divisions have not served us well in the past. The loss of parking will have a negative impact on businesses on West Broad and its side streets and will push vehicle traffic to other east/west corridors. What will happen to our First Fridays, our Food Festivals and other Broad Street events?

Perhaps if we don't pursue this plan we (City) will have another \$7m to invest in education.

3. Mike Bell

I ride the bus today and simply don't see any advantage to this plan versus using Express Bus service along this proposed path.

4. Alyse Auernheimer

This plan is simply a way to utilize the Federal Tiger Grant funds, we got the money, now let's use these funds where we can. I have encountered lots of concerns stemming from the confusion of what is said in public forums versus the information on the GRTC website.

(Comment from Matthew Stanley - We have heard that GRTC is about half way through a total route assessment and re-structure that may provide some clarity to the overall vision. Despite the outcome of the re-structure the "plan" will maintain curb running lanes for 6 months after the BRT is completed.)

5. Christine Baum

I spoke with the owner of a barbershop at 819 West Broad who was not concerned with the BRT plans. [Remaining comments redacted due to conflicting accounts.]

6. Eleanor Daub

I am very happy with the current bus service along Broad Street. I am concerned with the announced operating costs of this proposed plan and disturbed that it does not address currently un-served areas. I fear that the result will send more vehicles circling our area when they can not make turns from Broad Street. This is not Cleveland and a comparison to that model simply does not apply here.

7. Daniela Wyatt

Is this the plan that Richmond needs? Let's make a plan that works for us and our current conditions. I am fearful that the simple perception of no parking will deter others from shopping and visiting our neighborhood businesses.

8. Mark Auernheimer

There is a lot we don't know. What we do know has mitigated the problem. There is a way to test this "no left turn" and no parking plan before it's implemented. If you have a game at VCU – what's the impact? Those sorts of realities have not been addressed or tested.

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9. Kerthy Heath

Where is the environmental assessment? The reason for this project is future development but at what cost to the folks who have lived here for years?

10. Roger Whitfield

I live in Rockett's Landing and would like to see this project succeed. We don't have a public transportation option at present (at Rockett's Landing) and I believe that this is a good long term transportation solution.

11. Kevin Wilson (on behalf of the Fan Area Business Alliance)

We support improvement in public transportation but don't believe that this project achieves that end. Until we talk about how folks enter and leave the Fan, we can not support this BRT plan. The details give us problems specifically the construction period, the removal of parking and the loss of left turn. The published construction intervals for the stations will kill our small business owners. In addition, the plan call for service stopping at 11:00 PM.

12. Sandra Leibowitz

I am a sustainability professional. This plan seems fundamentally flawed. We should be engaging assets at groups like "Partnership for Smart Growth in Richmond" and others for a true in-depth assessment. A lot is being said on the plan but certainly no depth here...

13. Parker Agelasto - Richmond City Council Representative, Fifth District

I am here principally to listen to your concerns. Many of you may not be aware that the City of Richmond and Chesterfield County own GRTC. There is tremendous potential here for us as the City of Richmond to change the conversation with the counties, in fact Henrico County has told me that if we get the BRT to Willow Lawn they will take it to Short Pump. This really is a part of a much larger master transportation plan.

14. Charlie Diradour

We have participated in length in a Master Planning Process for the City of Richmond – where is this component in that plan? In fact where has GRTC even considered that plan in the BRT. The opportunity seems simple – develop a transportation plan to bring people who need jobs to the locations where we have jobs. This "plan" falls short of that mark.

15. Scott Garnett

This BRT is a very real threat to the Arts District. Until the City sees and feels the very economic threat that we do I doubt that we will see anyone at the City voluntarily supporting our demands for help from this BRT.

Absent any other requests to speak the Board Meeting adjourned into executive session at 8:35 PM.

The Board reconvened in Executive Session once the room was cleared of visitors.

The Board reported the following from the Executive Session:

Expect this issue to be brought before the Urban Design Committee on August 20th.

The Planning Commission will likely consider it in September

Based on Jon Balilies' comments and the need for Council approval of a multi-jurisdictional contract, expect this issue to be back to Council for approval later in the year as well.

The Board unanimously authorized the President to draft a letter of opposition to the BRT stating our concerns and that we are disappointed with the City and GRTC handling of this very important transportation initiative. The President will also prepare a proposal to form a new coalition to advocate against BRT and for inclusive mass transit reform.

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Hearing no further business, the Board adjourned at 9:30 PM.