MINUTES
RURAL and HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION (RHST)
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, November 29, 2012

Call to Order

Chairman Dennis Holder called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Meeting agendas, minutes from the August 23rd RHST Advisory Committee meeting, and copies of the draft Regional Mobility Action/Coordination Plan were distributed.

ATTENDEES

Jessica Bird – Warner Robins Area Transportation Study (WRATS)
Nathaniel Brown – Peach County
Jacob Cox – Houston County
Jade Daniels – Macon-Bibb County Transit Authority
Cheryl Herrington – GA DHS OFSS Region 6 Transportation Office
Dennis Holder – Wilkinson County
Ralph McMullen – Baldwin County
Sheila Milikin – Area Agency on Aging
John Pugh – Robins Air Force Base
Bob Rychel – Middle Georgia Regional Commission
Joseph Schneider – Putnam County
Judy Sherling – Twiggs County
Nancy Smith – Middle Georgia Community Action Agency

Approval of August 23, 2012 Minutes

Chairman Holder asked the committee to take a few moments to review the minutes of the August 23rd meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Judy Sherling and seconded by Mr. Ralph McMullen to approve the August 23, 2012 minutes as circulated. The motion was carried unanimously.

Discussion on Regional Transit Options

Mr. Rychel asked the committee for their input regarding the two presentations that were given at the August 23rd meeting pertaining to rural regional transit systems operating in

Coastal Regional Commission service area and Three Rivers Regional Commission service area. Mr. Rychel asked the committee if a similar-type system was implemented in Middle Georgia did they feel it would work and be beneficial. Ms. Nancy Smith stated that a regional system would be beneficial in that vehicles would be able to cross county boundaries in order to get riders to appointments in other counties. Ms. Cheryl Herrington inquired if rates would be different if vehicles traveled across county boundaries. Mr. Rychel answered that an appropriate rate structure would have to be worked out prior to implementing a regional or multi-county system.

Mr. Ralph McMullen stated that an analysis needed to be accomplished examining trip destinations and travel patterns in order to ensure a multi-county system would operate efficiently. Mr. Rychel agreed and stated that it might be wise to look at a three or four county system before expanding to a larger or regional system. Mr. Joe Schneider inquired if a multi-county transit system could include counties outside of the Middle Georgia service area. Mr. Rychel stated that an intra-region system is possible and should be explored where it made sense. For example, Baldwin, Putnam, Greene and Oconee Counties could form a multi-county, intra-region system because of their close proximity to one another and common trip destinations. Ms. Judy Sherling offered another example where many residents of Twiggs County require transportation to Dublin in Laurens County. Ms Sherling also stated that an analysis should also look at potential future travel patterns as areas develop and population increases.

Mr. Jacob Cox inquired if there were any funding assistance programs available through the Department of Defense for transit programs in support of military installations, such as Robins Air Force Base. Mr. John Pugh, representing Robins Air Force Base, stated that there were no funding programs for transit operations, only for fare reimbursement when applicable.

Chairman Holder stated that he felt a regional or multi-county system would be particularly beneficial for the rural counties because it would provide for a better delivery of service. Currently, rural systems are reluctant to cross county boundaries because they have limited resources (i.e. vehicles) and do not want to tie up their vehicles on lengthy trips outside of the county at the expense of citizens needing transport within the county. Chairman Holder also stated that he would like to eventually see some fixed routes established within Wilkinson County.

Mr. Joe Schneider informed the committee that the future closure of Plant Branch in Putnam County could potentially decrease the need for transportation in the county due to a corresponding decrease in population as well as the county tax base.

Chairman Holder advised the committee that the dispatchers for rural public transit should be engaged because they are the most knowledgeable about the needs and concerns regarding transit in the individual counties. Ms. Nancy Smith concurred with this and stated that the Middle Georgia Community Action Agency dispatchers are often the best source of information regarding transit issues and solutions. Ms. Jade Daniels with the Macon-Bibb County Transit Authority (MTA) also concurred with dispatchers and operators being extremely useful in determining needs. She explained some of the surveying tools that MTA employs in order to accurately assess transit needs.

Ms. Daniels also went on to explain the MTAs efforts at expanding service outside of the City of Macon and Bibb County. Mr. Rychel reminded the committee that recently passed legislation allows MTA to provide transit service to other counties within the region if requested by those counties.

Mr. John Pugh stated that most people want to see some sort of tangible benefit in order to ride transit, especially younger people. The elderly often ride transit out of necessity, but other potential riders will need to be persuaded or convinced of its benefits. He also stated that for a regional system to be successful he felt a strong marketing plan was needed.

Ms. Judy Sherling recommended that we reach out to the family Connection Boards for each of the individual counties within Middle Georgia to determine transportation service needs for families and schools.

Update on Transit Initiatives

Chairman Holder asked Mr. Rychel to please provide the committee with an update on various transit activities taking place around the region and state. Mr. Rychel described the following activities:

The committee was advised that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has come out with interim guidance concerning many of the transit programs and funding mechanisms under the new Transportation Reauthorization Bill - Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21). The FTA website was identified as a useful source of information for specifics related to individual programs.

An update was provided on the recently concluded Warner Robins Area Transportation Study (WRATS) Transit Feasibility Study. Activities undertaken by the consultants performing the study since the last update include identification of public service transit options, transit

ridership estimation, a preferred transit service plan, a financial capacity assessment reflecting estimated costs and potential funding sources, and an implementation plan with specific start-up tasks and activities. Additionally, an information open house was held to present the study findings to the public. Ms. Jessica Bird stated that the study is in the hands of local officials for the various communities that make up the WRATS and they are in the process of examining the findings and recommendations contained in the study.

Mr. Rychel advised the committee of the upcoming Georgia Transit Association (GTA) Annual Conference to be held December 5-7 in Athens. He informed the committee that he would be participating in a panel discussion on Mobility Management at the conference and intended to hi-light the work of the Middle Georgia Rural and Human Services Transit Advisory Committee.

Regional Mobility / Action Coordination Plan

Mr. Rychel presented the draft Regional Mobility Action/Coordination Plan to the committee. He provided a brief description of each of the sections contained within the Plan and informed the committee that the most important part of the document was Appendix B which contains a table of implementation activities. Mr. Rychel stated that the Plan was intended to be action-oriented and a tool to guide the efforts of the Regional Mobility Manager and the RHST Advisory Committee. Mr. Rychel also informed the committee that the implementation activities contained within the Action/Coordination Plan are a result of discussions with the RHST Advisory Committee as well as a review of individual county Comprehensive Plans and Transit Development Plans.

Mr. Rychel asked the committee to please review the document and advise him of any needed changes by the next Advisory Committee meeting in February 2013.

Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

New Business

Mr. Rychel provided the committee with a list of the 2013 committee meeting dates and informed all that meetings will change to a 1:30 p.m. start time beginning in 2013.

Mr. Rychel also informed the committee that a component of his new work plan from the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) involved a Resource Bundling Feasibility Report

and that he intended to work with many of the committee members on an individual basis during the course of developing the study.

Chairman Holder reminded all that the next meeting was scheduled for February 28th at 1:30 p.m. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:01 p.m.