

Commuter Rail Task Force Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: April 20th, 1-3 pm

Location: 327 West Ship Creek Ave. (Alaska Railroad Corporation) / Teleconference (907) 266-2455

Participants:

Vern Halter*	Mat-Su Borough Mayor	Craig Lyon*	AMATS Transportation Planning
Virgie Thompson*	Mayor of Houston	Brian Lindamood	ARRC Director of Capital Projects
Nathan Wallace*	Palmer City Manager	Marc Luiken	DOT&PF Commissioner
LaMarr Anderson*	Public Member	Dave Kemp	DOT&PF Central Region Director
Cynthia Wentworth*	Public Member	Ernest Piper	Consultant
Allen Lucht*	JBER Base Planning		

*Indicates Appointed Task Force Member or Designee

Discussion

Subcommittee Meeting Recap: Two subcommittee meetings occurred the week of April 16-20, 2018, one focused on the Pilot Program, and one on a long term Commuter Rail concept.

During the Pilot Program Subcommittee, the general framework for the pilot was discussed. Capital improvements considered by the group totaled to approximately \$8m. These improvements include Wasilla Station improvements, construction of railroad siding, passenger access to the train, e-ticketing, parking and access improvements, and utility relocation work. Future expansion to Matanuska and JBER stops were also discussed, but considered not optimum for inclusion in the pilot.

Operational costs were discussed for a two year period, with service running 125 days per year over the winter. For a single train, costs were expected to be \$3.9m. Adding a second train was estimated to cost an additional \$3.5m. During the general Task Force meeting a question was raised about including costs for the municipality to incorporate service to the Ship Creek stop in Anchorage. It was noted that consideration of passenger dispersal would be important, though not necessarily critical as this element of the pilot program might not necessarily be transferrable to the long term commuter plan. Public/private partnerships for transportation at the last mile were discussed.

Governance was discussed at both subcommittee meetings. Two models were presented, both involving contributions from stakeholders, including customers and state and local government. One option is a Regional Transit Authority, another would be a Joint Powers Board. The Board or Authority would act as the Sponsor in interactions with the federal agencies and would oversee a contract with the commuter rail operator, in this case likely ARRC. It was noted that a Joint Powers Board had worked well in other areas of the country. When the question of how members might be appointed was raised, it was suggested that this Task Force might recommend stakeholders.

Task Force Goals: Following the recap of the subcommittee discussions, it was reinforced that ultimately this body would be providing recommendations to the Governor. To begin, the Task Force would determine if the goals of a Commuter Rail pilot are achievable.

Schedule: A review of the design, procurement and construction involved in preparing for a Fall 2019 pilot was presented. A request was made to list the funds needed for each phase in a graphic, which will be forthcoming.

Funding: It was noted that Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds could not be used for this commuter rail project due to the restrictions on the use of those funds. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds were discussed as an option, and various avenues for capital funding for the long-term commuter rail were mentioned, including direct capital improvement grants (5309 funds) and urban zone funds (5307). Similarly, Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) funds through the Tiger Grants Program were also identified as a possible source for funding a long-term effort. Mr. Piper reviewed the evaluation criteria and funding steps used by the FTA in allocating funding.

It was noted that regardless of source, all federal funding was limited to 80% of project costs. The remaining 20% would be the responsibility of the sponsor. These “match” funds could be provided by a local or state government, or private entity.

Due to the timeline for funding needs for a Fall 2019 pilot project, federal funds were considered not to be an option. It was noted that alternate funding (non-federal) would likely be required to fund a pilot program operating in 2019.

Draft Recommendations: Mr. Piper presented four draft recommendations for consideration by the Task Force. It was suggested that the Task Force Members might review the recommendations within each respective organization, and provide feedback at the next Task Force Meeting. These recommendations are:

1. Recommend approval of the pilot project, based on the Alaska Railroad plan developed last year, and that it be refined into three levels – optimal, basic, and minimum – with a 2019 start-up target.
2. Recommend the Governor’s Task Force become the interim governing sponsor for the pilot project, and that entities discuss with their legal teams the basis and details of a pilot project charter.
3. Recommend the goals of the pilot project be to:
 - a. Demonstrate approximate level of public interest, based on ridership, price points.
 - b. Develop a working model for dispersing and gathering commuters from and back to the Anchorage depot
4. Outcome of the task force report to include a strong conceptual model for a sustainable service, to be used as the basis for application for FTA funding.

Community Comment: A period was afforded for public comment. One community member voiced support for commuter rail and reinforced the need for alternate transportation especially during non-peak hours. A reminder to identify ones-self when speaking was also given, so that individuals joining via conference call might better follow the meeting. It was noted that not all members were present, and no agenda was provided.

Action Items

	Item	Responsible	Status
1	Review of draft recommendations within each TF Member organization	All	Draft recommendations were emailed to members following the meeting on 4/20, and are listed above
2	Graphic showing schedule of funding needs	Colleen	A graphic showing funding points will be distributed with these minutes

Next Meeting

The Task Force agreed to convene again on May 4th at 1pm in Palmer, hosted by the Mat-Su Borough.