

# **Jefferson Transit Authority Board**

## **Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, August 3, 2010, 1:30 p.m.

Mountain View Commons

1925 Blaine St., Port Townsend, WA

### **CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME**

The Meeting was called to order by Jefferson Transit Authority Board Chair Catharine Robinson at 1:30 p.m. Other members present were John Austin, George Randels David Sullivan, Phil Johnson and Pam Thompson.

### **STAFF PRESENT**

Peggy Hanson, Rachel Katz, Patty Perry, Tammi Rubert

### **CAC PRESENT**

Tim Caldwell

### **OTHERS PRESENT**

Scarlett Sankey

Steve Patch, Port Townsend Leader

Charlie Bermant, Peninsula Daily News

Brenda McMillan

Robert Komishane

John Reynaud

Rick Jahnke

Debbie Jahnke

Cass Peters

Todd Wexman

Ludwig Becker, Transit Operator

Burt Langsea, Transit Operator

Charlene Buckley, Transit Operator

Barb Boelling

Mack Boelling

Patricia Perreault

Frank Hoffman

Greg Aten

Darrell Conder

Lyle Courtsal

Ron Ryan, Transit Operator  
Tim Nolan, Transit Operator  
Gordon Neilson  
Jim Todd  
Margaret Lee  
Brian Aston  
Gloria Bram  
Richard Talbot  
Roger Jackson  
Caroline Culbertson  
Hannah Russell  
Kendall McKee

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The meeting was opened to public comments at 1:33 p.m.

- Scarlett Sankey asked if the Board members have the right to prevent the voters of Jefferson County to decide on the future of transit. She spoke about the future of the community if there is no transit system available for those who need it to get to work, shopping, etc. Choice riders will abandon Jefferson County for more thriving communities. She spoke about the positive changes the new General Manager can make, if given the opportunity.
- Todd Wexman read a statement regarding his opinion of the actions of the county Commissioners at the last meeting of the Jefferson Transit Authority Board, as well as his recommendation that the board support the visions and the actions of the new General Manager by voting to place the initiative on the ballot.
- Hannah Russell asks the board to fully support the General Manager and transit operators by voting to place the sales tax initiative on the November ballot. She spoke about the vital role that public transit plays in the life of the community. Russell offered her check for a new yearly pass and challenged others to do the same.
- Robert Komishane quoted George Randels in last week's Leader article when he stated that those who need transit are the ones with the greatest need. He also stated that transit is interconnected with the other issues that the commissioners need to consider in the future of the county.
- Jim Todd seconded Sankey's remarks and spoke about how the commissioners were in favor of the Climate Action Committee, which is in favor of a viable transit system that will help reduce vehicle emissions in our county.
- Brenda McMillan reminded the board that they are responsible for the condition the transit is now in. She reminded them that this is an environmental issue as well as well as a financial one.
- Richard Talbot stated that transit is important in the community of this size. He stated that the problem is not that the General Manager is not asking for .3%, it is that the

commissioners have higher priorities than transit. He thinks voters should be given the opportunity to vote on the importance of transit. He also advised that the commissioners spend more time in Olympia working to change the tax system.

- Lyle Courtsal recalled the massive tax cuts/subsidies of the 80's for the auto industry. He stated there should be subsidies at the state and federal levels for transit. He stated that currently, 7% of the state transportation budget is used for transit, and that it should be raised to 25%. He would like to see later night and better weekend service on all Jefferson Transit routes.
- Roger Jackson stated that he personally is being "taxed out of town", but believes Jefferson Transit should be able to increase their revenue through a sales tax increase. He recommended that the board put the initiative on the ballot.
- Kendall McKee commented that .2% would merely be meeting status quo and .3% is needed to move forward. He also said that he hoped that the board would allow the General Manager to do her job and she can't do so without adequate means. A set-aside for the future is needed now.
- Mack Boelling stated that it would be short sighted not to request the sales tax increase. Signs of recovery on Wall Street are not translating to Main Street and consumer confidence is very low right now. He reminded the board that there was a 17% increase in ridership the last time gas prices went up to \$4.00 per gallon and believes we will face similar conditions in the future. The General Manager needs to not only maintain but improve the system. He believes the commissioners have sabotaged transit's ability to ask the voters for an increase.
- Gordon Neilson is the public transit representative for the Skokomish tribe and a local businessman. He stated he doesn't believe .3% is enough. He encouraged the board members to think more aggressively in terms of future planning. He referred to the Nelson Nygaard study for the Peninsula Regional Transportation Planning Organization (PRTPO) which characterized public transit riders in Jefferson County as disadvantaged and poor. He requested that this board think of their ridership in a different way, as they are all kinds of people who use public transportation, many of whom are employed and use it to get to work.
- Gloria Bram stated that she will not always be able to drive herself. She strongly urged the board to do whatever they need to increase transit funding. She stated she doesn't worry about the sales tax she pays and is confident that the state will eventually address tax reform.
- Lud Becker, executive representative from the transit union, spoke in behalf of the tax increase. He reviewed the letter from the ATU 587 President last month, who also spoke in favor of a tax increase and his commitment that the union and management would continue to work in a collaborative relationship. Becker stated that he is proud to be part of an organization that provides dignity to citizens who can't get around on their own.
- Charlene Buckley stated she is a transit operator and that our passengers represent all kinds of people. She asks that the board allow the citizens to make the decision about the future of transit and all the people they serve. The only responsible decision is to vote in favor.

- Caroline Culbertson reinforced all that she heard others say in support of the initiative. She has lived here for three years and will have to move if the system can't be improved. She currently takes five buses to work and she will lose her job and her home if transit services are cut.
- Margaret Lee referred to her own letter and stated that she hopes that all the members of the board should consider the best interests of Jefferson Transit over other concerns when they are meeting as the governing body for Jefferson Transit.
- Robert Komishane referred to Initiative 1098 which proposes to tax wealthier Washington residents at a higher rate, as well as other tax reform strategies.
- Gloria also spoke about Bill 1098 and the support that has received so far.

Public comments ended at 2:05 p.m.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

#### **a. Adopt Resolution 10-14: Authorizing Jefferson Transit Authority to place on the ballot a proposition to increase local sales tax collection**

**Staff report:** Hanson provided a summary of Resolution 10-14. She stated that she appreciated her early conversations with board members and community members who spoke about the importance of public transit in this community. She spoke about the reality of Jefferson Transit's economic situation, reiterating her statements at the July meeting. The premise of the .3% recommendation is based on sound analysis and represents her commitment to sustain, restore and build Jefferson Transit's services, planning for the continued vitality of the system.

**Discussion:** Sullivan stated that a legislative change in 2010 is that the public safety tax can be used for existing programs, which is one of the reasons it's being considered by the County. He acknowledged the aging population and the necessity of transit for people who are or become disabled. He spoke about the importance of building reserves. He also stated that the commissioners did not anticipate the length or severity of the economic conditions nationally. He said that state law dictates that the public safety sales tax initiative has to be on the ballot of a general or primary election. Cuts to the services affected by this segment of the sales tax also affect the character of the community.

Austin stated he is in favor of citizens having the opportunity to vote on a sales tax increase that would support transit, but he is concerned about the timing. While he believes that everyone in the room would vote for both sales tax initiatives, he does not have the same confidence in the population at large. He believes that most would feel they had to choose. He stated that the transit tax initiative would have success at a later date.

Randels commented that he finds it impossible to completely change hats when in discussions like this. There will always be overlap with other municipal concerns. He stated that Washington is a progressive state with a backward government. A transit tax initiative has more flexibility in terms of timing than others, including the public safety tax. He is persuaded that a February election for transit could succeed. He also fully supports the statements made by the General Manager.

Johnson stated the commissioners are forced into an untenable position by being asked to wear multiple hats simultaneously. He supports transit but feels the board should hold off until February. He also acknowledged the regressive tax system in Washington.

Robinson stated she would not force a vote on the board because she does not want a split vote. She stated that if we don't state our case, we won't get the vote. She would like to see all the districts in Jefferson County present a community budget, but that is not currently the case here. The current condition is that the different entities feel they are forced to compete with each other for funding.

Sullivan spoke about how almost everything in local governments involves partnering. The result of cutting anything results in a ripple effect. An advantage of waiting until February would be more campaign time. Having such a short window for the November election could have negative effects on a campaign.


Randels commented that Jefferson Transit has been better than our neighbors when it comes to supporting continued transit service, the lack of Sunday service in adjacent counties being a case in point. He feels that this issue should definitely be addressed at the November meeting. The deadline for filing a resolution for the February election is December 24.


Johnson commented that the commissioners have been very active in trying to make changes to the current taxing methods at the state level. He asked why an initiative to serve various public needs is referred to as a money grab when another to serve other various other public needs is not.

No action was taken.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 p.m. The next Regular Meeting will be held at 1:30 p.m., August 17, 2010.

  
Rachel Katz, Clerk of the Board

  
Date