ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION FEE COMMITTEE

Friday October 13, 2017,   12:00pm   VU 460

Members:

Present: Annie Gordon (AS VP for Student Life), Ana Ramirez (AS VP for Governmental Affairs), Carol Berry (Transportation Program Manager), Bianca Smith (Director of Public Safety designee), Brian Burton (Financial Manager for the Alternative Transportation Fee), Greg McBride (Assistant Director of VU Facilities), Saige Wilde (Residence Hall Advisory Representative), and Kay McMurren (Student Transportation Program Assistant).

Absent: AS Alternative Transportation Coordinator (position vacant)

Secretary: *Chloe Callahan (AS Board Assistant for Representation Committees)*

Annie Gordon called the meeting to order at 12:02 PM.

I.   **Introductions**

Annie Gordon started the meeting by asking the committee members to go around share their names, pronouns, position held and how they are affiliated with this committee.

II.   **Discussion Items**

a. **Orientation and Committee Expectations**

Gordon introduced Carol Berry stating that she will be giving a short overview of the committee. Berry stated that the mission of the student transportation fee committee is to provide students with viable transit services, and encourages sustainable transportation practices through student engagement in education and advocacy. The fee is currently $26.25per quarter per student, was originally $25, but can be increased by 5% annually without a vote of the student body. More than 5% increase needs a vote from the student body. The fee must be renewed every five years, at a minimum, by the student body. The vote to renew the fee was voted on last spring and the next required vote will be 2022. The fee includes the WTA bus pass and the late night shuttle for every student. Any vote to change the program needs to be student driven. The day to day operations of the fee are handled through the professional staff. Student ridership has been very high and when the fee is put to a vote, of the students that vote, typically the fee is renewed at 80% or greater. The expected revenue for the 2017-2018 school year is over $1,000,000. Berry noted that for each students fee of $26.25; 74% goes to the WTA, 17% goes to the late night shuttle, 7% staff, 1% reserves and 1% marketing and office expenses. Berry explained that because they have a

new contract and the new contract is based on Full Time Equivalent, how many students are enrolled, they will pay a certain amount per student to the WTA. Since they have not received that FTE for this fall, they can only estimate what the cost will be. She stated the budget will be altered when they receive those numbers. Currently, the committee has a healthy fund balance because there was a fee increase and reserves that went into a bus replacement fund. The reserves would allow them to pay for any increases in the WTA contract and increases in shuttle expenses without having to assess a higher fee for students. Berry stated she felt pretty confident that they will not have to increase the student fee for up to three years. The revenue is expected to increase this year because of an increase in students. The committee will be informed once the numbers are more firm. Carol went over how the student's money is incorporated into the WTA budget. Most of the WTA's budget comes from sales tax revenue. Fare Box Revenue makes up about 10% of the WTA budget. The students pay about 31% of the Fare Box Revenue. When Western is in session there are more students on the buses than other individuals, about 45-55%. The viable transit service they offer students includes a late night shuttle. Flowever, Western cannot have the late night shuttle going at the same time as WTA buses. So they must make sure the shuttles are not conflicting with WTA's schedule. Not as many students ride the late night shuttle, as the WTA system. The fee also pays for the staff such as, Program Support Supervisor (Kay McMurren) and AS Student Transportation Coordinator (position open).Berry said the students that created this fee wanted part of this fee money to go into student jobs. In the past, they have hired students to program the bus passes. Flowever, the new system that is in place for the bus pass cards, took away student positions because they don't need to recode the cards. Berry said that they are looking into how to offer more jobs to students in the future. The office also has backup provided through the university, the Sustainable Transportation (Jillian Trinkaus) and Program Manager (Carol Berry). Berry played a big part in getting the 80X to Mt. Vernon route started, which is now the highest used bus and took the most cars off the road. They also work with a lot of campus partners: Western Card Office, Facilities, Public Safety, Student Accounts, the Registrar, Administrative Computing, Contracts & Purchasing, Environmental Health and Safety, Student Life, Office of Sustainability, WTA, Airporter Shuttle and the EOO. This committee consists of the VP for Student Life, VP for Governmental Affairs, Student Alternative Transportation Coordinator, Student at Large, RHA representative, Sustainable Transportation Program Manager, a representative from Public Safety and a Financial Manager. The committee provides oversight, and evaluation and doing research to see what they can do for students. Next fee renewal will be required in 2022, but the vote can be brought to the student body sooner than that. The fee goes away if not voted on. The contract also needs to be renewed in 2020. Sometimes the ridership is so high that it cannot be accommodate it. A lot of community resources go into students not having to drive a car to campus. The shuttle service and a safe ride home and improvements there need to come from

the students. There have been discussions with the new dean of the graduate school who is interested in energy and sustainability. He is also interested in opportunities for graduates to do research and this might be a good fit for a student. Berry asked if anyone had questions. Saige asked how often this committee meets. Berry said as often as needed, but at least once a quarter. McBride brought up that these are public meetings, which means that students might want to attend committees. And since they deal with student funds they need to post the proper documents and notes. He then stated that the AS Alternative Transportation Advisory Committee is a different committee and is an internal students that updates a document about transportation broadly, safe walking patterns, lighting and more. Gordon stated that that committee is not currently active and something the committee would have to decide if they want to bring back. McBride stated the committee goes in and out of hiatus based on whether the transportation document needs to be updated. Gordon could call this committee back up and it is the AS mechanism to providing feedback for the environmental health and safety plan.

b. **Charge and Charter Review**

    i. Gordon introduced the next discussion item stating that the Board of Directors passed and approved the updates to the charge and charter for this year. The Director of Public safety and our financial manager can both now send designees.

III.   **Information Items**

a. **Real Time App for the Late Night Shuttle**

    i. Annie introduced Kay McMurren to discuss the potential for a real time app for the late night shuttle. McMurren had been looking at the possibility of real time information on the late night shuttle for about a year. McMurren had been in conversation with two companies. Translock, which stated they would send a quote and never did. Also, when she asked about including ridership counting they said it would have to be added separately. McMurren then went to Ride Systems. They were easier to work with and provided her with quotes right away. Ride Systems will put tablets on the late night shuttles and then the drivers would input data on the tablet. The company will program the tablets to the committee's needs. The students get an app with schedule and a map to see where the shuttle is because the package includes GPSs on buses. The students get immediate notifications if the bus system is canceled due to road conditions. Right now students are informed through their voicemail and twitter. McMurren would plan to do a lot of marketing so students are aware of this app. McMurren went through the Ride Systems proposal document. The startup cost is about $2,460, monthly cost of about $560 and annually would cost $5,600. Since they only operate the buses nine months out of the year, Ride Systems would not charge them for months Western doesn't use the shuttles. McMurren shared the ridership statistics because they have a problem. Ridership on the late night shuttle is declining. She believed this app could do two things. Either boost our

ridership because it will be more convenient. This is month to month, deal so the committee is not committed to a long term investment. In 2013-2014 ridership was 42,000 students. By 2015-2016 it reduced to 27,000. During that time the students wanted to add service to Happy Valley. The route design they wanted was too complicated for the program, but was implemented. The route was revised the next year to be simpler. At first McMurren thought the reduction was caused by that service, but 2016-2017 the ridership was 17,800 students. Smith clarified if the ridership lost because the times might have changed with WTA. McMurren said that this was not the cause. McMurren stated potential factors could be behaviors and perception of service. She has reached out to students, taxis and shuttle drivers, taken input about ridership. Easy for students to use an Uber, students share it and for a few dollars are dropped off right to your door. One of the taxi drivers that McMurren talked with thought there were not as many students downtown. His suggestion was that student culture of what they do is changing. McMurren said they have some things to look at in how the committee serves the students. She wanted a consensus from the committee to see if it would be worthwhile to implement the real time app onto the late night shuttles and see if ridership improves. Ride Systems is a company that they could also use for a potential dial-a-ride service, which is a whole different way of providing service. The benefit might be that they could expand their service areas. Instead of buses running in a circle and only picking up a few student, they could pick up students in many areas and take them home. McMurren wanted to know if this would be a good option now. Gordon said it would be nice because they can try it out, examine the ridership and cut it later depending on the results. This could act as a test. Gordon said that she had heard from a lot of students who want this. McMurren stated she thinks it is an expectation nowadays because everyone has a smart phone and wants to receive information that way. Smith asked if they would consider providing the students a survey about their transportation habits. McMurren stated they expect to do a survey in the future. Berry said there has been talks about a full scale research project on the shuttle system. Maybe a larger project could be made to look at other options, student needs and perceptions. Berry believed this would be an affordable option and touch on the safety aspect it would have for the students. Public Safety could also use this information. Burton stated he thought this makes sense. Given the data about ridership we need to understand what students are expecting and what they are most interested in using. McMurren said they are still operating on the same fixed route and system as 10 years ago. Burton asked who the late night shuttles belong too. McMurren said they belonged to Western Washington University. Ride Systems would probably send the tablets and GPS systems and we would have Airporter install them along with the maintenance they do for them already. McBride asked if Ride Systems provides data on app usage, how many people use it, for how long. McMurren didn't know the answer and said that she would ask them. Burton stated location specific information would be interesting to see where people use it most. McBride said it would help tell them

know whether it is the app or the service. Gordon recapped by saying that this system could be great, but more research on it would be helpful. Also she clarified that heard no dissent on waiting to implement. She asked if the committee want to act in an advisory role and the professional staff takes action. Or do they feel that they need to take a formal vote. Gordon felt advisory role was enough. Smith agreed. Burton recognized different fees have different requirements. McBride stated that this one is in the gray area. If it is within normal operating cost then it might be more advisory role, but if it will have implications to the fee long term they might need to vote because of the potential impact. He asked if the $5000 is within the current operating budget or will it down the line change the fee. Berry stated that the researched annual cost, doesn't look like a tremendous effect on the costs for what could be a big benefit. McMurren said that she does not believe it has a big impact, but they are adding something to the cost of the shuttle. She states that everyone probably thinks it's a good thing because it is what students want, especially the safety aspect on knowing where and when the bus will show up. She said the financial fee is small. The committee has a lot more unknowns on potential increases. Burton said that for the standard 15,000 students, it is maybe .35 cents a student. It is about .5% of the fee. He doesn't believe it is a material increase and doesn't think they needed a formal vote. Maybe try it for a year and see how it goes in the context of future. McBride asked for an implementation timeline for the late night shuttle. McBride is hoping for as soon as possible because they are close to winter. When she gives the go ahead, Ride Systems would begin create the map and a program that includes all our stops. Ride Systems would mail the GPS units, we would train drivers on the tablets, which will make it easier for the drivers. The information is more accessible. McMurren thought this could be implemented within the next couple months. There will be more updates the next meeting. Gordon clarified that for now they have consensus that the committee will go forward with the real time app for the late night shuttle. Gordon thanked everyone for being there.

Annie Gordon adjourned the meeting at 1:03 PM.