

**MINUTES
TOWN OF CONCORD
CITIZENS TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
Tuesday, June 7, 2012
7:00 PM-9:30 PM
Clock Tower Room
Harvey Wheeler Community Center**

Present: Lisa Bergen, presiding
Louise Haldeman
Mark Hanson
Kate Damon
Abraham Fisher
Rick Anderson - Also present at table and participating in some discussion but not yet sworn in.

Absent: Ray Bruttomesso

Citizens present: Maureen Spada, chair of CPS, David Allen of Concord, and Mathew Knight of Carlisle

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 by Chair Lisa Bergen who introduced the two newly appointed members of the CTC, Kate Damon and Rick Anderson. Both were warmly welcomed by the committee.

2. The Minutes

The minutes of May 24 were approved with the following notations, corrections to the spelling of the surnames of Mr. Hanson and Mr. Bruttomesso. There was also a question sent from Mr. Bruttomesso as to the meaning of the citizen's comment in item 5 of the minutes which no one could answer and the maker of the comment was not present. Copies of the minutes were then made available to the audience.

3. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

4. Chairs Report

Ms. Bergen reported that the School Committee agreed to appoint two Concord members to CTC as previously requested although not all of the school committee had supported the idea. The School Committee is also proceeding with the appointment of its own committee and Ms. Bergen has been asked to serve on that committee.

The School's Transportation committee (TAC) will be concentrating on sites although they will not consider using the regional school property as per their vote of May 22, 2012. There are also emerging issues of groundwater conservation and how much of the regional property can be covered by buildings and pavement. For the next year the buses will be parked at the Sanborn School and part of that property is being paved to accommodate them. It is not clear whether this is being considered as a possible long-term solution.

5. Citizens Comments

Mr. Allen commented that having two committees doing the same thing did not seem sensible. The two committees may come to very different conclusions. The CTC needs to be very clear. In response to the comment, a member pointed out that the two committees, while respecting the difference in charges, expect to work as collaboratively as possible to present the Town with workable options.

6. Reports and Issues for discussion

Ms. Bergen suggested that since the TAC would be concentrating on sites that the CTC turn its attention to the other issues in the charge; safety, cost and "intangibles". These are the criteria by which possible sites and solutions should be measured.

a. *Safety:*

Mr. Hanson reported that he continues to look into some of the safety issues raised at the previous meeting. He plans to do a further examination of the police records in Concord and will also ask to see Carlisle's records. Checking for similar information on private bus companies is more difficult but it may be possible to check the police records in town where such companies currently operate.

Maintenance records and driver training are also very important to overall bus safety and CTC will be looking in to these matters for in-house as well as private companies, as possible.

Mr. Hanson is looking into the question of safety on the bus. How does the transportation department deal with bullying or unsafe behavior by students, how does this compare with the policies of private companies who are possible bidders? Mr. Knight, member of the audience and a graduate of CCHS reported that he never experienced any problems on the bus, at most a driver might have to raise his/her voice to ask the students to quiet down.

Mr. Hanson would like permission to observe the buses in operation as they deliver the students in the morning and pick up later. Ms Bergen will help arrange this, and all CTC members were welcome to participate.

Still to be explored is the role that school buses play in emergency response within the Town. On at least one occasion, possibly after a major fire, a few school buses were made available to transport residents to a safer location although they were not ultimately needed. Mr. Bruttemesso is researching this and Mr. Anderson also expressed interest.

b. *Intangibles, renamed as Social Factors:*

Both Mr. Fisher and Ms. Haldeman had looked at these and while using differing methods to describe them, had come to similar conclusions. Chief among these intangible values are the local control of the buses and the fact that all the bus related employees are employees of the school system and are part of the general school community. Drivers feel a certain sense of ownership of “their” buses and the maintenance standards are very high.

Since the buses are locally based, the management is familiar with the roads and is able to design and redesign routes as patterns of ridership evolve. As the buses are nearby they are very seldom late and can respond in an emergency. There is also a certain amount of flexibility. Should the buses need to come from a greater distance, even if they were still owned by the town, some of the flexibility as well as scheduling could well be affected. Parents feel confident that if they have a question or an issue it will be responded to promptly.

It is certainly possible that a similar sense of security can develop when buses are out-sourced particularly if there is a long term relationship with that company but the need for a local clerk of the works who can handle customer service issues would very important.

Ms. Damon pointed out that the sense of community works both ways. The community does not want to see the drivers treated unfairly. What happens to the driver’s pensions etc. if we outsource? It was suggested that an answer to this question be sought for those who have incurred benefits.

c. *Cost analysis of the options:*

Comparing costs between an in-house system and outsourced ones begins with how the services are paid for. There are two main types of service, routes and trips. Routes refers to busing students to and from school. Trips refers to busing students to and from events. A review of the bus driver contract will be made to provide a better understanding of the costs for routes and trips.

Ms. Damon suggested that the public may see the driver as being “paid for not working” and suggested that a thorough explanation of how a driver’s day works would be very important.

Setting routes is also an expense. Of necessity a longer route is going to be more costly than shorter one simply because of gas mileage etc, but how a private company would compute the cost needs to be explored. It was noted that a neighboring town which does outsource has saved several thousands of dollars by doing their own routing rather than having it done by the vendor.

The two maintenance workers and the transportation manager and coordinator are also licensed school bus drivers so extra hands can be called in an emergency. For example, should a bus become disabled, one of the other licensed drivers can bring up a spare bus and allow the original bus and passengers to transfer. Private bus companies may or may not be able to do the same but it could incur extra expense.

It was pointed out that Concord regularly places student safety ahead of minimum requirements when it comes to designing bus routes. For example, many of Concord’s roads are narrow and do not have sidewalks, in these cases students are picked up at their driveways and not expected to walk to group bus stops, although the law would allow for group stops. Could we afford to do this with a private contractor?

The question of fees was raised. Some communities, Lexington, Wellesley and perhaps others have instituted a fee schedule for those students who are not eligible for transportation. This is an effort to cut down on the amount of private car traffic at the schools and is viewed according to anecdotal comments by some parents in those communities as a great convenience. However misunderstanding is common. If Concord were to consider bus fees, it would be of vital importance that everyone understand that a fee could not be applied in the case of students who are eligible to be transported under state law.

d. *Possible future sites:*

While the CTC will let the TAC take the lead here for the time being, there was discussion about what would be needed for a site. The schools not only own buses they own other necessary vehicles. A parking space for the drivers, office space, and a "ready room" for the drivers are necessary, as is an on-site maintenance facility. The ability to secure the site against theft and vandalism is important. Should a reasonably permanent site be found, a combination maintenance facility and office site might be considered. This would be advisable only if site could be certain for the foreseeable future.

Ms. Bergen pointed out that it is critical to make sure all the requirements are known and included, pointing out that in a recent meeting with the Director of Finance and Operations parking for drivers had been overlooked when considering size of site.

Ms. Haldeman expressed her concern the Town and the Schools were missing a chance to look at the long term public works needs of both, likening the situation to the rivalry of the Yankees and the Red Sox.

e. *Dates for forum presentations and School committee reports:*

No final date set yet but one needs to be set soon. The committee wishes to hold at least one hearing before its report for the school committee but needs to finalize what information to present.

f. *Final format of the report :*

g. There is more research to do not just on content, which will follow the issues already set forth, but also on the best way to present. A preamble will need to be written and a variety of data and tables will need to be included. Although the schools do not wish to consider keeping buses at the high school, the CTC will include a discussion of the subject so that the public understands all the concerns.

h. *School Committee Transportation Advisory Committee:*

i. The TAC has a longer time frame and the charge was not finalized at the time of this meeting. It was earnestly hoped that the two committee would communicate with each other as it is in the interest of all the citizens of Concord that their work is based on sound, independent research and not merely on rumor.

7. Action items

It was determined that each member would continue with their areas of research. In addition, Ms. Damon will join in the cost analysis efforts and expressed a desire to work on Social Factors, and Mr. Anderson will work with Mr. Hanson on safety issues and with Ms. Bergen on cost analysis.

Mr. Hanson and Mr. Anderson will meet with Officer Monahan on June 11th to review Concord police records for bus accidents.

At the June 21st meeting the committee expects to set a date for the first public hearing. It was also noted that the July 5 meeting may be rescheduled because of the July 4th holiday.

8. Citizens Comments

None

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30. The next meeting of the CTC committee will be Thursday June 21.

Respectfully submitted
Louise S. Haldeman, clerk