



TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

May 22, 2024

5:30 p.m.

VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM

Present: Rama Balakrishna (Chair), Paula Walsh, Chris Brandon

Absent: Zhengyu Huang (one open position)

Select Board Representative: Jim Snyder-Grant

Invited guests: Nirupama Velankar - Council of Aging Liaisons; Franny Osman- Acton Exchange; Andreas Kinzlmaier-Potential TAC member

1. Opening

Chair Rama Balakrishna opened the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

2. Regular Business

- A. Approval of Meeting Minutes – Review of minutes will be postponed until the next meeting.
- B. Council on Aging Update:
 - a. Niru shared a terrible experience with the taxi service that occurred earlier today. One week ago, she arranged for a taxi ride for 1:30 today and this was confirmed by the dispatcher earlier that morning. The taxi still had not arrived by 2 pm and the dispatcher was unable to help stating once they gave the information to the taxi service, it is out of their control. She unsuccessfully tried to find alternative transportation at the last minute and the taxi finally arrived at 2:30 pm. There was consensus from TAC that Julie Pierce should be made aware of the incident. Rama will inform her and hopefully we will learn how future incidents could be improved upon.
 - b. Alice Training: There was emergency response training known as Alice Training (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) held at the Acton Senior Center as a proactive response to a violent threat or active shooter situation.
- C. Select Board Update: Transportation remains a short-term goal for the Select Board.

3. New/Special Business:

A. Citizens' Concerns:

- i. Glen Cote of Strawberry Hill Road expressed a desire for more van and CAT services in town and better dissemination of information regarding transportation options that are available. A lengthy discussion was held describing the role TAC plays in supporting these



services and identifying issues related to roads, bike paths, sidewalks, and van services.

- ii. Town Website: Discussions ensued on what is currently on the Transportation section of the website and Franny concurred that the website is not clear, and that people have expressed to her that they cannot clearly understand what is available. At one time, there was a downloadable app which tracked the CAT van, this was particularly useful as the van only runs once per hour. She suggested that arranging for a table on Parent's Night at the various schools could be used to distribute brochures, timetables, and links for accessing services. Rama will contact Julie Pierce and see how she wants to manage this and offer TAC's assistance with putting content together. Starting with clarifying the information on the town website will be the initial focus before looking at other outreach mechanisms. Franny recommends having Julie attend a TAC meeting and update the committee on the current services available and any funding information available.
- iii. Providers' (TransAction) Website: There is confusing information on their website as well, for example, they list all the available van services in such a way that people assume they must know which van to request. In fact, all they need to know is to call the dispatcher to schedule a ride and it is the responsibility of the dispatcher to determine which van service will best meet the rider's needs. If the rider is looking for information on the fixed route CAT van, that information should be readily available on the website. The Town website and the TransAction websites should have matching information.
- iv. Google searches: Acton's services are not populating when there is a Google search. In addition to getting the Google search to correctly access available services, Glen C suggested that the online information could be enhanced by maps showing the CAT route and by creating a Facebook page dedicated to Acton Public Transportation. The ability to flag down the CAT in between scheduled stops, some of which are a mile apart, would make it more accessible to residents. Rama explained there is a real-time trip updating program used by Google, GTFS (General Transit Feed Specification) which is only useful for fixed routes (CAT) and could not be used for tracking the other van services Acton uses.
- v. Vans for Work Rides: Paula shared a complaint she received from a potential rider seeking transportation from his Acton home to his job in Maynard. Need to find out the status of the funding for the Vans for



Work program and whether it has ended. Chris shared that he is aware of at least three riders that use the services for work, so it is unclear why this individual was denied services.

- vi. CAT signage: Chris raised the issue of signage along the CAT route. There are still signs in place around the old CAT route and no new signage along the current route. Chris will provide Rama with the locations of any additional outdated signs he notices beyond the mentioned ones at the West Acton Pharmacy and 68 Windsor Ave.
- vii. Rail Shuttle: Discussion around why the Rail Shuttle has not been reinstated post-covid despite the need. Pre-covid, the shuttle ran from West Acton and Mt Calvary Lutheran Church to the Rail Station with an early morning shuttle service from Avalon in North Acton. The early morning service was not well advertised and poorly utilized. Franny noted that the transit provider tended to under-promise with hopes of overachieving. They wanted to avoid rider disappointment of missing a train connection.
- viii. Micro transit: Julie Pierce is known to have applied for the Transit Innovation Grant for micro transit, but Franny does not know if she has heard back from them yet. This grant could fund taxis which would run beyond the hours that the vans are now in operation but really is intended for a rider to be able to request a van and the system would automatically reroute a van to the caller. Franny recommends inviting some micro transit companies to a future TAC meeting to explain their services. In addition, these companies may be willing to help in completing paperwork for available Grants. Historically, our Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) funded presentations by micro transit companies to the local planning area (MAGIC).
- ix. Select Board: Glen Cote stated he plans to attend a Select Board meeting and raise the issue of lack of clarity on the websites for the current van services as well as the need for expansion of the program. He encouraged representatives of TAC to also attend a meeting and encourage the Select Board to keep the improvement of transportation services as a short-term goal but to also ask what has been done in the past year towards this goal, although TAC is fortunate to have Jim Snyder-Grant as the Select Board liaison who maintains good communication between the two.
- x. Representatives: Franny is the Rider Representative to the LRTA (Lowell Regional Transit Authority) Board with a nominal 1% voting capacity. Mike Gowing continued as the Acton Representative to the



LRTA after his term on the Select Board ended; he has a 4% voting capacity.

- B. Emerson Hospital: Rama attended a recent Emerson Hospital Transportation meeting and was asked about what services Acton is currently providing. He intends to research the current services and get back to them on that.
- C. Sidewalks: Rama wrote to Travis Pollock asking what TAC should be doing to put an action plan into place but has not received a response yet. It is possible that to meet deadlines, TAC may need additional meetings. Sidewalk funding was briefly discussed, specifically whether there was additional funding available with the recent override vote. Sidewalk funding was included in the vote to fund Capital Projects, however, the amount needed to complete all sidewalks on the priority list (\$15-18 million) exceeds the current funding.
- D. Crosswalks: Regarding the High St Crosswalk requested by the sight impaired resident, the requisite study for a crosswalk at that location previously had been completed but no crosswalk was ever created.

At 7:10 pm, A motion to close the meeting was made by Paula Walsh and seconded by Chris Brandon. Roll call was done, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Acronyms:

ADA= Americans with Disability Act

ARPA= American [COVID-19] Recovery Program Act

Boston MPO= Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, the part of MassDOT that disburses federal transportation funds

BAG= Bicycle Advisory Group (formed January 2021)

CMAQ= Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality

COD= Commission on Disabilities

COVID= Novel Coronavirus 2019 causing a worldwide pandemic in 2020

CTPS= Central Transportation Planning Staff, within the Boston MPO, within MassDOT

**Landline= a signage and wayfinding project to connect communities by bike and pedestrian, by MAPC and MassTrails of MassDOT.*

MAGIC= Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination, which is our 13-town subregion of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council

MAPC= Metropolitan Area Planning Council

MassDOT=Massachusetts Department of Transportation

MBTA= Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

NRG=Nashoba Regional Greenways Coalition

SATSAC= South Acton Train Station Advisory Committee

TAC= Transportation Advisory Committee

TMA= Transportation Management Association