

Berkshire Flyer 2.0 Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

December 17, 2018 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 1 Fenn St. Pittsfield, MA 01201

Staff Attendance

X	A. Koirala		L. Schmid	X	C. Kus
X	B. Lamb		B. Steiner	X	K. Pink

Member Attendance

X	T. Matuszko (Co-Chair)	X	Eddie Sporn		
X	J. Butler (Co-Chair)		J. Green		
X	R. Malnati		K. Chittenden		
	Senator A. Hinds		Z. Fleury		
	E. Kerns	X	F. Heming		
X	D. Ruffer	X	K. Christenson		
	C. Hoyt				
X	N. Henebury				
X	B. Keane				

Other Attendees: A.J. Enchill (Senator Hinds' Office), Jon Gould (Senator Hinds' Office) Peter Frieri (MassDOT), Brian Butterworth (member of the public), Sheila Irvin (Berkshire Regional Transit Authority Advisory Board), Lisa Fletcher-Udel (Representative Farley-Bouvier's office).

Heather Bellow (Berkshire Eagle) was also in attendance.

Call to Order - 3:02pm

1) Introductions

- J. Butler noted that Eddie Sporn will be joining the committee as a voting representative.

2) Administration

a) Approval of Meeting Minutes from October 29, 2018

- Motion: D. Ruffer
- Second: E. Sporn
- Motion Carries (no abstentions)

3) Review of Existing Rail Service Models (A. Koirala)

- A. Koirala shared the findings of her research related to the Vermont Shires Connector, an existing rail service that connects Albany, NY to Manchester Center, VT. The service consists of two outbound and two inbound trains daily. It began in 2017, and is a collaboration between the State of Vermont, Amtrak, and Premier Coach/Vermont Translines.
- A one-way ticket costs a maximum of \$20, with 80% of that fee going to the transport company (Premier Coach) and the other 20% going to Amtrak for integration services. Vermont DOT subsidizes the cost of this service using Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding. Ridership for the month of October 2018 amounted to 616 one-way trips- the subsidy covered 87% of this cost, but increased ridership should see the subsidy decrease as ticket revenue begins to make up a larger percentage of the cost.

- Premier Coach utilizes a 14-passenger lift-equipped van for this service. Passengers can purchase shuttle service at the time they book their train ticket. Premier Coach receives live rider information through the phone app from Amtrak, which the driver also uses to scan their ticket.

4) Last-Mile and Local Transportation Options (A. Koirala)

- A. Koirala pivoted the presentation to focus on existing and potential local transportation options.
- Transport The People is willing to provide shuttle services. These services would be coordinated with Amtrak to offer a seamless single-ticket purchasing system, which would be facilitated by a contract between Amtrak and the service provider. This would be a guaranteed door-to-door service, taking riders to their ultimate destinations North or South of Pittsfield on Friday evening, and returning them on Sunday afternoon.
 - Amtrak typically has two styles of contract for this type of service:
 - “Interline” service involves an existing carrier providing service in a region, and Amtrak can sell tickets to a specified number of seats in that carrier’s service. The service provider sets the fare and Amtrak sells tickets for the service at that fare price through its service platforms. Amtrak receives 20% of the revenue in exchange for operating the ticketing service. Interline contracts can be executed within 1-3 weeks, as long as the carrier has appropriate insurance and contract language is accepted.
 - “Dedicated service” exists where no existing carriers offer a service, which results in Amtrak issuing an RFP for that service. Because the RFP involves bidding, this process can take months.
 - Transport the People is the only service provider that has been interested so far, but other service providers could theoretically get involved as well.
- Enterprise has indicated a willingness to make rental cars available, parked near the Intermodal Transit Station. They will need to coordinate with the City about how many parking spaces will be needed, and where they might be located. ZipCar has not been responsive to attempts to reach them to determine their willingness to expand their presence in the County to support Berkshire Flyer riders.
- J. Butler noted that the most successful outcome will likely be a variety of solutions, including a dedicated, guaranteed service alongside a variety of informal services, including car rental, Uber and Lyft drivers, and other options. He further noted that a good portion of the Flyer’s intended ridership demographic prefers not to use cars, and may instead prefer to utilize other modes of transportation, and that the pilot will help inform transportation options once a sense of what riders end up doing when they arrive in the Berkshires.
 - E. Sporn noted concern that a point-to-point service is a good solution to get people from the Flyer to their lodging locations, but leaves them without a transportation option from their lodging to other destinations, as rideshare and taxi service may not presently be adequate to handle the influx of people who will need transport. Additionally, he believes that passengers who have just had a four-hour train ride will likely prefer not to get on a van that may stop several times before ultimately depositing them at their destination. He indicated that he believes the priority should be placed on last-mile transportation options that provide users with a much larger degree of autonomy. He indicated that ZipCar has a relationship with MetroNorth, which offers an example of this sort of partnership. A. Koirala indicated that ZipCar is typically most economical when used for a few hours, and is less suited for rental for a whole weekend.
 - D. Ruffer suggested that pre-judging Uber/Lyft infrastructure to be insufficient now may be premature, and that it is important to give the marketplace time to respond (for example, seeing more people become rideshare drivers once they become aware that pilot service will be happening). She also asked whether BRTA might offer a fixed-route service that could benefit Flyer riders as well.

- R. Malnati explained that BRTA has requested funding for additional routes. The funding is not a sure thing, but a decision should come by the end of this month. If so, this service would cost approximately \$25,000 to run for 20 weeks. It would be available to Berkshire residents as well as Flyer passengers, but as a fixed-route service, it would not be door-to-door. It would potentially be faster than Transport the People's service, but may also mean that travelers would need to take an additional travel step to get to their final destinations. The cost would partly be borne by communities the service travels through. Further investigation will be undertaken to determine the exact nature of the approval needed, as the difference between a simple BRTA board approval and earning the approval of the legislative bodies of several communities could be several months.
- D. Ruffer expressed her belief that BRTA fixed-route service should at least be explored in the report, and although it may not be a perfect solution for the pilot, it has the potential for real long-term benefit. Achieving 7 days per week public transit service for the region is important for the County.

5) Developing a Marketing Strategy (J. Butler)

- J. Butler provided an update on the marketing strategy. At the next meeting in January, there will be a thorough presentation of branding work. This committee issued an RFP for Flyer marketing in October, and the winning proposal came from a firm called Brigade, which has done work for Ramblewild and other sites in the Berkshires.
- There is a subcommittee for marketing this effort, including Eric Kerns from Tourists/Bright Ideas, Jody Joseph from Mass MoCA, and Margot Hotchkiss from the Normal Rockwell Museum along with the 1Berkshire Marketing Team. This subcommittee will meet on January 4 to evaluate two different brand concepts from Brigade, which is presently arranging focus groups and collecting survey data. By the end of January, there should be a brand concept and proposed marketing plan.

6) Field Trip to Albany/Rensselaer Amtrak Station

- On Thursday, December 13, several members of this committee were transported by van (via Transport the People) to Albany's train station. This visit was arranged by BRPC and Amtrak, and included a presentation about train operations at the station and a tour of the facility. Approximately half of the group was able to ride back to Pittsfield on the Lake Shore Limited train, which was an hour late arriving in Albany but on time from Albany to Pittsfield.
 - K. Christenson indicated that there is a legal ruling at this time that complicates the rights of passenger rail operators to claim service priority over freight rail operators. E. Sporn notes that this should not be an issue between New York City and Albany, but may be a factor between Albany and Pittsfield. However, it is possible that an agreement could be reached with CSX to coordinate rail usage to prevent competition with the Flyer. R. Malnati asked whether the Lake Shore Limited service would compete with the Flyer (both use tracks between Albany and Pittsfield), but J. Butler noted that the committee's representatives from Amtrak are best-positioned to answer that question, and they may not yet have answers until the pilot gets closer.
 - J. Butler noted that Amtrak typically markets the "picnic" aspect of riding the train, and this may end up being part of the marketing plan as well.

7) Next Meeting date - Monday, January 28, 2019

8) Other Items not Reasonably Anticipated by the Co-Chairs 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting

9) Opportunity for Public Comment

10) Adjournment

Motion - K. Christenson
Second - N. Henebury
Motion Carries (Unanimous)
Adjourn - 4:14pm

The next meeting will be held on Monday, January 28th at 3:00 PM – BRPC Offices, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield.