

MINUTES

**PLANNING COMMISSION**  
City and Borough of Juneau  
**Mike Satre, Chairman**

SPECIAL MEETING  
**January 7, 2014**

**I. ROLL CALL**

- Swear in of new Planning Commission Members:
  - Paul Voelckers
  - Bill Peters

Mike Satre, Chairman, called the Special Meeting of the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) Planning Commission (PC), held in the Assembly Chambers of the Municipal Building, to order at 6:00 p.m.

Chairman Satre swore in new two of the three new Commission members, Paul Voelckers and Bill Peters. He thanked outgoing Commission members Jerry Medina and Nathan Bishop for their service.

On December 17, the CBJ Assembly renewed the Commission term of member Ben Haight, but elected not to renew the terms of members Jerry Medina and Nathan Bishop, filling those seats with Mr. Jackson and Mr. Peters. Mr. Voelckers was appointed by the Assembly to fill the remaining year yet to serve by former Commission member Marsha Bennett, who recently resigned from the Commission for personal reasons.

**Commissioners present:** Mike Satre, Chairman; Dennis Watson, Vice Chairman; Bill Peters, Ben Haight, Paul Voelckers, Dan Miller

**Commissioners absent:** Nicole Grewe, Karen Lawfer, Gordon Jackson

**A quorum was present**

**Staff present:** Hal Hart, Planning Director; Ben Lyman, Senior Planner; Laura Boyce, Senior Planner; Sarah Bronstein, Planner I; Rob Steedle, Deputy City Manager; Kirk Duncan, Director of Public Works; John Kern, Capital Transit Superintendent

## II. REGULAR AGENDA

CSP2013 0009: Planning Commission Review of and Recommendation to the Assembly regarding the 2013 Capital Transit Recommended Service Scenario.  
Applicant: City and Borough of Juneau  
Location: Borough-wide

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward the Draft Recommendations of the 2013 (2014) Transit Development Plan to the Assembly with a recommendation for adoption prior to the completion of the Final Transit Development Plan.

### BACKGROUND

Mr. Lyman told the Commission that the Transit Development Plan is a standard plan that is done roughly every five years. It helps not only in identifying what is needed for funding in the areas of capital improvements and buses, but in acquiring funds from the state through the federal government for purchasing new equipment.

This is a multi-stage process, said Mr. Lyman, with the comprehensive operations analysis which is basically a snapshot of the existing operation. The goals and objectives of the plan were set at that time. This was reviewed by the Commission and Assembly at a joint Committee of the Whole meeting last fall.

Based upon the feedback from that meeting, the project management team, composed of: Rob Steedle, Deputy City Manager; Kirk Duncan, Director of Public Works; Hal Hart, Director of Community Development; John Kern, Capital Transit Superintendent; Mr. Lyman, and the consultant team of Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates Inc. and Sheinberg Associates, have been working to come up with recommendations to meet the identified goals and objectives for the planning process.

### RECOMMENDED SERVICE SCENARIO

The team was tasked to do this without any increase in operational funding requirements for the system, said Mr. Lyman. They were to try and serve new areas such as south Riverside Drive, the Ferry Terminal, and the Lemon Creek industrial area with access to jobs near Costco and Home Depot. Ultimately, the findings were that these areas could not be served without an increase in funds. In fact, said Mr. Lyman, the system is working so well currently, that if additional funds could not be raised, the recommendation would be that the system not be fundamentally changed at all. There would be some marketing improvements and improvements in how the schedule and information is presented to the public, but ultimately without additional funds, there would be nothing to gain by adjusting the system as it currently exists.

### SYSTEM STRENGTHS

The team found the existing system has a lot of strengths, said Mr. Lyman. It is a high-

performing system rated good to excellent service in most areas. There are traditionally half hour “headways”, which determines how often the bus comes by at a given stop. There is express service between UAS and Auke Bay, and between the Mendenhall Valley and town. There is relatively late evening service on both the Valley and Douglas routes.

There are timed transfers between the Nugget Mall and the Federal Building, which means that a bus can be ridden from the Valley, for example, to the Nugget Mall, and at the same time the bus from the Valley pulls up at the Nugget Mall, an express bus to town is ready to depart from Nugget Mall. The same scenario is played in reverse from the Federal building, said Mr. Lyman.

Two routes serve the downtown loop, which circulates basically from the Main Street intersection to the library, up Franklin Street to Fourth Street and the State Capital, and down Main Street to the transportation center, said Mr. Lyman.

There is relatively high ridership when compared to peer cities, said Mr. Lyman. For its investment, the city is getting an incredibly high return on its dollar in terms of the number of riders served, and in terms of the relatively low subsidy that the public is paying towards each ride. Onboard surveys indicate a high degree of community satisfaction with public transportation.

#### WEAKNESSES

Increased traffic, development and ridership adds to the length of time it takes the busses to reach their stops. In a sense, said Mr. Lyman, the success of the bus transit system is leading to some failures, and the inability to stay on schedule. At times of the day schedules are stretched thin, buses are behind schedule, they are missing some transfers, and the express bus doesn't have time to make it to the Downtown Transportation Center. Instead, it turns left from Egan southbound and stops at the Archives building, said Mr. Lyman.

There is overcrowding on some routes. Some significant demands are not served. For example, said Mr. Lyman, south Riverside Drive and the Lemon Creek industrial area, primarily for access to jobs in that area. The Auke Bay Ferry Terminal is a reoccurring theme which the team would like to be able to serve. The Auke Bay Ferry Terminal area incorporates worker transit to and from the Alaska Glacier Seafood plant, to Allen Marine for the summer tourist season, and residents and employees closer to the Lena Point Park area.

It is currently difficult to get to work during earlier work hours via bus before 8:00 a.m., and it is not possible to get to work by 7:00 a.m. by bus with the current schedule.

There is also bus service to areas where they are not being served to their full capacity, such as the Back Loop road, between Glacier Spur and Auke Bay, and on the North Douglas route.

#### OBJECTIVES

The team has also been working with a study advisory group composed of members of the

community such as the Chamber of Commerce, the University, and the federal government, who have been identifying the objectives:

- *Improve on-time performance*  
The bus schedule is not very useful if the buses do not show up when the schedule says they will
- *Maintain time transfers*  
They make it much more convenient to travel long distances in Juneau
- *Make the service simpler and easier to use*
- *Provide service to areas with high demand*  
South Riverside Drive, Lemon Creek industrial area, and Auke Bay Ferry Terminal area
- *Maintain existing service coverage in terms of geography even where demand is low*  
Back Loop and North Douglas
- *Implement downtown circulator*

#### OBTAINING OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Improving on-time performance can be implemented immediately, said Mr. Lyman, as soon as the plan is put into action.
- ✓ It will not be possible to maintain all of the time transfers, he noted, because the route takes too long now. The team has focused on the peak direction of travel and maintained those time transfers at the expense of the opposite commute. A commute against traffic will therefore take considerably longer. The Douglas/Hospital and Douglas/Lemon Creek time transfers were not maintained.
- ✓ Making the service simpler and easier to use can be accomplished fairly quickly, said Mr. Lyman.
- ✓ Providing service to areas of high demand can be accomplished on south Riverside Drive right away. However, they could not find a way to provide service to the Lemon Creek industrial area or the Ferry Terminal within the existing budget without the addition of substantial additional resources, said Mr. Lyman.

- ✓ They wanted to maintain service coverage even where demand was low, so both the Back Loop and Douglas service has been maintained in both the short and mid-term scenarios.
- ✓ In neither the short or midterm scenario were they able to implement a downtown circulator. Additional funding would be required.

Mr. Lyman told the Commission that additional improvement objectives included providing more user-friendly information, implementing technology improvements and upgrading facilities. Short term improvements would include an update of the website, improvement of the maps and schedules, and initiation of the process for Google Transit. Google Transit could take three to five years to start the process once the system was in. Once it was approved and in the system, real-time changes could be made to the schedule, said Mr. Lyman.

Upgrade of the facilities, such as the Nugget Mall into a super stop would require additional capital investment, said Mr. Lyman.

#### SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

System-wide short term service recommendations include rebranding all routes with numbers and names. Every route would have a number and a name, said Mr. Lyman. The information would be published on Google Transit as soon as this was possible. A system map and a single brochure would be published depicting all routes. The website would be upgraded.

The Valley local would be changed to resolve the on time performance problems. It would operate on Riverside Drive, providing earlier morning service. A bus would need to be added for the express route during the peak morning and evening periods to resolve running time problems. The service could be extended to Montana Creek and to the Downtown Transportation Center, as well as adding an earlier service.

To compensate, the midday frequencies which are currently every 30 minutes would have to be reduced to every 60 minutes to offset the cost of the additional bus. Currently there is fairly low ridership on the midday express trips, said Mr. Lyman.

There would be minor changes on the North Douglas route, with the midday trip being discontinued, which is the least busy bus in the system, with two riders on it the day of monitoring.

Additional service commuter runs would be consolidated into a new route, having its own schedule and map.

Mr. Watson asked a question about additional traffic lights. He said he was aware of a traffic light on Whittier, and on Riverside, and at the Costco intersection. He wanted to know if he was overlooking any other relatively new lights.

Mr. Lyman said the system's routes were originally laid out in or before 1987. He said there are a lot more stop lights since that time period, which impede the progress of the busses. He said the routes have been running the same course since then.

There would be a new route created called "Mendenhall Valley to Downtown" which would get its passengers to town by 7:30 in the morning. The express which currently stops at the archives building, then at UAS, would be added to run out to Montana Creek before it turned around. This bus would deliver its passengers to the Downtown Transportation Center, not just the Archives building, said Mr. Lyman.

Weekend service would be added between Montana Creek and the Nugget Mall. Since this bus would be running seven days a week, it would also provide transit service to the airport seven days a week, said Mr. Lyman. The airport is currently served Monday through Friday by the express bus which concludes its service at about 6:00 p.m.

A drawback of the proposed schedule is that while service would be provided later to UAS, but not later to Auke Bay overall, said Mr. Lyman.

Mr. Voelckers asked if there was a functional difference between an express bus and a regular bus once the service had been rebranded, such as a fewer number of stops.

Mr. Lyman answered that the bus in question would act as a local bus while in the Valley, turning into an express bus once it reached Nugget Mall.

The Douglas bus remains essentially the same, maintaining the downtown loop. There is a Douglas express morning trip that would be incorporated into the schedule.

There would be timed transfers, but only for travelers going in the peak direction, said Mr. Lyman. The idea is to serve the majority of the people in the direction that they are flowing at that time. All of the schedules have been adjusted so that they will arrive at the destination with adequate time before the start of the hour or the half hour, so there is adequate time available to get to work or get to class, said Mr. Lyman. The schedule has also been shifted so that after work or after class there is time to run a quick errand or speak with a professor before it was time to board the bus.

The additional service commuter run functions as an express bus while on Egan Drive, said Mr. Lyman. Once it arrives in the Mendenhall Valley it becomes a local. It travels the same route in the Mendenhall Valley as the local does, turning back into an express once it reaches the

Nugget Mall. This would only be in operation during the peak commute times. The Lemon Creek express run is lost in the scenario.

With these short term changes, the on-time performance issues would be resolved, with equal or better service provided for most but not all riders, with service reduced to once every 60 minutes for midday express riders. For night-time Auke Bay riders, the service would end at 9:30 p.m. instead of 11:30 p.m., and the midday North Douglas route would be eliminated.

Once this framework was in place, said Mr. Lyman, if there was demand for additional service, it would be relatively easy to allocate additional resources once those resources were available, to fill those gaps in the system.

This results in an operating cost impact of about \$200,000 per year, said Mr. Lyman. This figure is based upon how much it costs to operate the buses and how many additional hours it would take to run this service.

Mr. Watson asked about the revenue captured off of the additional route. He asked if the \$200,000 figure was a net or gross figure.

Mr. Lyman said that Juneau recovers about 15 percent of its operational costs through its fare box. He said that roughly 15 percent of the \$200,000 figure could be paid by the bus fares. The figure could be \$170,000 the City would need in funds. Mr. Lyman added with the new routes existing riders may be lost and new riders gained, so the final figure is just an estimate at this time.

#### MID TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Lyman told the Commission that midterm recommendations would include service to the Lemon Creek industrial area, the Auke Bay Ferry terminal, earlier and later service beyond the short term recommendations, all of the technology improvements, and the facility improvements.

Service to the Lemon Creek industrial area would require the addition of one bus. The operating cost for this service would be about \$540,000 a year. About 80 percent of that figure would be personnel, said Mr. Lyman.

The most cost effective approach to provide service to the Auke Bay Ferry Terminal is to double the frequency of the service that goes to Montana Creek, with every other bus going all the way to the Ferry Terminal, said Mr. Lyman. This service is estimated to cost \$450,000 per year, he said. Again, 80 percent of that figure, or around \$360,000 would go to personnel costs.

Mr. Voelckers asked if the buses did double and alternate between Montana Creek and the Ferry Terminal, if all of those busses would stop at the University, placing it back on 30 minute a day service.

Mr. Lyman said that he believed the UAS stop would be accomplished on the Ferry Terminal run, because it was a higher speed route.

Earlier and later service would be accomplished, with first arrivals in town to service 7:00 a.m. work schedule individuals. Workers could arrive in town by 6:50 a.m. under the midterm recommendations at a cost of \$35,000 a year.

At a cost of \$15,000 a year, the Douglas to downtown bus could get riders to town before 7:00 a.m.

Buses departing town would be extended an additional three hours in the case of the Montana Creek, Auke Bay, and Nugget Mall route, enabling individuals who work late at night more opportunities to take the bus home from town when they get off of work. This would cost \$100,000.

Technology improvements such as automatic vehicle location and computer-aided dispatch would allow knowledge of the location of the buses in real-time. Scheduling could be automated with scheduling software to produce more efficient schedules in a timely manner. This includes automatic passenger counters to count ridership on an ongoing basis. In addition there would be automatic fare boxes to handle bus fares, with the result of real time information provided to the riders who could look on their smart phones or the display at the bus stop for the most current update on the bus they are taking.

#### FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Cost of facility improvements include Nugget Mall transfer hub upgrades at \$500,000. The recommendation is to upgrade the stop to a "super stop". This is the highest ridership stop outside of downtown Juneau. The facility is minimal and substandard for such a major transfer point, said Mr. Lyman.

The addition of shelter lighting at unlit or poorly lit locations is recommended, said Mr. Lyman. This is at an estimated cost of about \$1,000 per shelter for a solar-powered light that would turn on when it became dark.

#### SUMMARY

Mr. Lyman said the team found that Juneau is currently served by an impressive transit system. Capital Transit does a phenomenal job. The demands have outgrown the capacity of the system, especially at certain times of the day. Mr. Lyman said there are a lot of new demands that can only be met with a relatively small increase in operating costs. However, said Mr. Lyman, the transit system as it stands cannot serve all of the needs of the community with its

current budget; including the Auke Bay Terminal Ferry area, the Lemon Creek industrial area, and service cannot be provided as early and as late as the public requested without additional funds.

#### QUESTIONS

Mr. Watson said based upon his knowledge of GPS systems used for buses, that he was trying to rationalize the cost for the number of buses in Juneau and compare it to the basic GPS systems that he is familiar with. He said he was trying to understand why the system under consideration for Juneau would cost so much.

Mr. Kern answered that the system under consideration for Juneau actually disseminates the information to the public.

Mr. Watson asked if there was currently a tracking process in place that can measure efficiencies.

Mr. Kern said there was not such a system currently in place.

Mr. Watson asked if there would be enough room on Riverside for a bus to pull over for a bus stop and allow traffic to pass.

Mr. Kern answered that on north Riverside up until Melvin Park the bus would be stopping in the traffic lane. Once the bus arrived at Melvin Park and was southbound, it should be able to obtain three more stops including the existing pull-out at Dimond Park. He added there would be some stops within the traffic lane and some stops outside of the traffic lane.

While noting that snow removal was a real problem, Mr. Watson asked if there had been further discussion between Mr. Kern and Public Works on improving the accessibility to the bus stops for passengers.

Mr. Kern said they try to work with the State on its right-of-ways. He added that the State does try to maintain the pull-outs, but of course it did not maintain the bus shelters. For the past couple of years, said Mr. Kern, the City has fully funded a position that cleans and plows the bus shelters. He said Davis Road, Lemon Creek and Riverside are given a priority in terms of snow removal by the CBJ Public Works Department, including the sidewalks, so that the shelters can be accessed.

Mr. Voelckers asked if the staff could elaborate on how potential service routes were determined by population density. He asked specifically if they had GIS information or the density of the Montana Creek area or Douglas, compared to potential ridership that may be picked up if there was a Ferry Terminal or Lemon Creek extension.

Mr. Lyman responded that they looked at the number of housing units that were within a quarter mile of the various route alignments. Currently, the existing bus route is within one quarter mile of 9,168 households. Mr. Lyman showed how all three of the service scenarios formerly under consideration led to 1,400 to 1,800 additional people within a one quarter mile walk of the proposed routes. Mr. Lyman added that those differences were considered when the proposed routes were formulated.

Mr. Voelckers said the conclusion was that by picking up Montana Creek and maintaining service to North Douglas that the ridership counts are optimized.

Mr. Lyman concurred. He said there were about 163 housing units that are more than a quarter mile away in the Lemon Creek area, but over 1,000 households picked up on Riverside under the proposal.

Mr. Haight asked as capital costs are implemented, how much impact they have on operating costs, and which ones bear the best return.

Mr. Lyman said he knew that the scheduling software and the electronic fare boxes would cut administrative costs significantly once they were up and running.

Mr. Kerns answered the savings could be considerable. However, on-street maintenance for the additional shelter lighting, etc. would be an incremental increase in maintenance costs.

Mr. Haight asked what point in the future would the budget be enlarged to compensate for the additional ridership.

Mr. Kerns answered hopefully every year during the budget.

Mr. Peters asked if there was a time frame recommendation as to when the midterm proposals should be implemented.

Mr. Kern said the goal in this planning effort was to adopt a five-year plan. The short term would be as soon as it was adopted, and the midterm would be three to five years out. In five years the process would begin all over again, he said.

Mr. Watson asked what impact the May through September visitors have on the bus ridership.

Mr. Kerns said they have no specific information. He added that typically transit systems such as Juneau's experience a lull in the summer, but the summer is a high point for Juneau. They attribute that to the influx of tourists. He added they also receive a large increase in ridership in January when the legislature comes into session. It all adds to a system that has a level

ridership throughout the year, said Mr. Kern. He said they average around 100,000 to 120,000 passenger trips every month with the exception of October through December.

Mr. Satre asked Mr. Lyman to expand upon why the staff brought this report before the Planning Commission prior to its submission to the Assembly.

Mr. Lyman responded that the Comprehensive Plan since at least the 1980's has included a "Transit First" policy. Since the Planning Commission is in many ways the steward of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission is acutely aware of what transit means to Juneau. As issues such as housing affordability and livability are addressed, said Mr. Lyman, in addition to other issues, transit begins to take on an important role.

The project Management Team recognizes that the Planning Commission has a vested interest in that transportation/land use connection, and how transit plays into land use and the future of our community, said Mr. Lyman. Ultimately, added Mr. Lyman, this will affect where reductions in parking requirements may be made, and where development may be focused under the new bonus eligible area provision in the Comprehensive Plan. This is an integral part of issues the Commission will be addressing in the near future, said Mr. Lyman.

**MOTION:** *By Mr. Watson, that the Planning Commission pass the draft recommendation on to the Assembly with the comments from the Commission shared with Mr. Lyman this evening.*

Mr. Satre said that it is a real credit to Mr. Kern and all of the staff that outside consultants look at the system and comment on the quality of the system in terms of ridership versus the population. He said the staff has done an amazing job with limited resources. He said the transit system needs to be looked at just like the sewer and water system, and road maintenance. This is part of the puzzle the Commission has to consider when considering affordable housing in this community, said Mr. Satre.

Mr. Satre said the Commission does not have to look at the balance sheet; that was the Assembly's job, and he appreciated having Assembly members at the meeting. He said the community found ways to invest in the buildings it needed, and it needed to do the same with its transit system. Mr. Satre said if the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Commission to increase density and foster development in our community are to be realized, then there needs to be a viable transit system. It needs to be attractive to people to live in certain areas without a vehicle, said Mr. Satre.

Mr. Satre said the Planning Commission looks forward to conversations along these lines with the Assembly, and that the recommendations presented this evening make it into future budgets.

Mr. Satre said he hopes this does not amount to window dressing for the Capital Transit System. He said it is fine to invest money into dispatch systems, and the ability to see where

the buses are on your smart phone, but somebody who is climbing over a four foot snow berm to sit in the middle of a puddle and get splashed by vehicles waiting for that bus is not really going to care where that bus is on that dispatch system. They want good, well-lit transit stops, said Mr. Satre. They want those buses in the centers of housing, education and commerce, he added, and it is going to take a concerted effort to get there.

The motion passed with no objection.

### III. **OTHER BUSINESS**

- Election of Officers and Planning Commission Committee Assignments:

**MOTION:** *By Mr. Haight, that officers retain their seats on the Commission for the next year.*

The motion passed with no objection.

The Commission Chairman makes assignments to open seats on the committees.

- Current Planning Commission Officers:
  - ✓ Chairman, Michael Satre
  - ✓ Vice Chairman, Dennis Watson
  - ✓ Clerk, Dan Miller
  - ✓ Vice Clerk, Nicole Grewe
- Planning Commission Committee Assignments:

#### **Wetlands Review Board**

- ✓ New member: Gordon Jackson
- ✓ Two members
- ✓ Meet once per month on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday
- ✓ Current Member: Dan Miller (Chair)

#### **Auke Bay Steering Committee Liaison**

- ✓ Gordon Jackson

**Subdivision Review Committee** *(was a four seat committee expanded by Chairman Satre to a five seat committee leaving three open seats to be filled)*

- ✓ New members: Karen Lawfer, Bill Peters, Paul Voelckers
- ✓ Five members
- ✓ Meetings upon request of CBJ Planner as applications come in
- ✓ Current Members: Ben Haight, Chair; Dennis Watson

**Public Works & Facilities Liaison**

- ✓ One member
- ✓ Meets Mondays, as scheduled by the CBJ Engineering Department
- ✓ Current Member: Dennis Watson

**Title 49 Committee** *(Expand to five members)*

- ✓ New members: Dennis Watson, Bill Peters, Paul Voelckers
- ✓ Five members
- ✓ Meetings upon request of CBJ Planner
- ✓ Current Members: Nicole Grewe (Chair), Karen Lawfer

**Juneau Commission on Sustainability Liaison**

- ✓ One Member
- ✓ Regular meetings 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of each month
- ✓ Work sessions 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of each month
- ✓ Current Member: Ben Haight

**Lands Committee Liaison**

- ✓ Karen Lawfer

**IV. REPORT OF REGULAR AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.