

**GRAND JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL
FRUITA CITY COUNCIL
AND
MESA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON
PROPOSED TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

August 6, 1997

The Grand Junction City Council, Fruita City Council and Mesa County Commissioners convened on the 6th day of August, 1997, at 5:00 p.m. in the City/County Auditorium at City Hall. Those present from the Grand Junction City Council were Councilmembers Cindy Enos-Martinez, Gene Kinsey, Earl Payne, Jack Scott, Mike Sutherland, Reford Theobald and President of the Council Janet Terry. Those representing the City of Fruita were Mayor Lyle Baldwin, Mayor Pro Tem Vi Sis, and Councilmember Gordon Vetter. County Commissioners present were Doralyn Genova, Kathy Hall and Jim Baughman. Also present were Jeff Pulis (consultant), and Cliff Davidson, MPO Coordinator.

Council President Terry called the meeting to order. She introduced those seated at the Council table. She read into the record background information written by Elizabeth Rowan, Mesa County Administration, which listed TDP committee members. McDonald Transit was selected to serve as the consultant on the project. Previous meetings have taken place at Two Rivers Convention Center. After considering options, the committee has selected a preferred alternative for public transit in Mesa County for the next five years. A Plan must be completed and adopted by early September, 1997. There will be no final decision made at this meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to solicit public comment.

Jeffrey Pulis, McDonald Transit, gave a brief presentation. The TDP Committee has put forth a preferred transit alternative for consideration. The Committee considered those who needed transportation in the Valley and prioritized those needs. The critical priority is to continue to meet the needs of those with mobility impairments and the elderly, then expand to include low income people, particularly those on welfare needing to transition into the work force. In doing the analysis, they looked at a census block group analysis which indicated large clusters of households with low incomes in Clifton, Orchard Mesa, central Grand Junction and scattered into

Fruita. The Town of Palisade was invited to participate, but declined. They can join later. Another group are those currently being served by MesAbility and those receiving services from Social Services. The MPO has plotted on the map areas to match with services. The cross on the map includes 90% of such groups. The Committee has recommended an incremental growth of the transit system that is affordable. It is recommended the community first return to the 1996 levels of service. MesAbility's service peaked in 1995 because of grants received from governments and foundations. Those grants are now gone and the budget was severely reduced in 1997. The number of trips provided by MesAbility has been reduced dramatically. The Committee recommends the local governments find funds to make up for lost grants and foundation money. In addition, they recommend expanding user side service (taxi cab) subsidy program. Beyond that, TDP recommends the incremental expansion of the transit system. The routes have not been specified yet. The general aspect is to connect Clifton through the downtown area and out to Mesa Mall on an east/west corridor. A north/south route would then connect Orchard Mesa up through the downtown area, going to the hospital district, and perhaps to employment opportunities along Horizon Drive and up to the airport. Implementation of a fixed route system would be accomplished in two phases. It would begin with the purchase of vehicles required in 1999. In 2000, after extensive planning and public input, the operation would begin. It requires more money from government entities. In 1997, local governments were putting in \$117,800 in local match (Mesa County 72%, Fruita 5%, Grand Junction 23%). The number of trips have dropped off this year. A return to the 1996 levels would require double funds from local governments, and triple funds to expand user side subsidy. The large increase is due to the need to replace vehicles. An amount of \$563,000 of local match would be needed by 2002. Peer cities contribute approximately the same amount with no need to increase sales or property tax. He asked for public comment at this time.

Mayor Janet Terry reiterated the first step would be to increase subsidies to MesAbility or other providers. At the same time the user side subsidy would increase for 1998. After that fixed routes would be set up in two corridors.

Mr. Pulis said setting up the fixed route would free up some of the currently used MesAbility vehicles for feeder routes, etc. Councilmember Sutherland asked if they expect to continue using the three vehicles for MesAbility which would be freed up. Mr. Pulis said yes. Councilmember Sutherland asked if the limited fixed route would run only Monday

through Friday. Mr. Pulis said Saturday and/or Sunday service are options that could be added for an additional cost. Councilmember Sutherland asked for numbers for costs for additional service. Mr. Pulis said one of the reports provide such information. No additional vehicles are required, only operators.

Mayor Terry requested comment from the audience at this time.

Mr. Joe O'Conner, Fruita, a mental health professional and member of the Para Transit Coordination Group, said this community needs an expanded transportation system. It will be costly. A cost effective plan is needed, and a public/private partnership must be developed to fund it. Public transit systems are not known for the profit margin. He suggested twenty routes to supplement the program with twenty investors operating privately. The amount SSI pays out goes down if you get people to the jobs. Young people need successful role models in the home (parents who go to work). In 1890, there was a horse-drawn trolley to Fruita to serve the public. The system worked at the time. He suggested the system be made attractive and unique, and give the people the mobility to succeed.

Ms. Gretchen Sigafos, Director of Nursing, Mesa County Health Department, said often they are unable to deliver services to clients because the clients can't get to an appointment. She was happy with the plan, and felt it is needed badly. She encouraged the board to think bigger. More routes going farther out to serve more individuals would be a great help.

Mr. D.J. Beam, a concerned citizen, said he has obtained different information from different groups. He was concerned with the economic impact on the community. If we can get people to move, we can get money to move. We can attract more prosperity. Currently, over 50% of the local industry is service and retail. We are sprawled out, though. That is one of the problems with public transportation. It needs to fill everyone's needs. If we can make the move, no matter how slight, it will help. It will benefit many areas. It needs to be initiated.

Mr. Jeff Jackson, Clifton, said many kids from Clifton can't get to activities in town.

Mr. Steve Brown, Mesa County Partners, Inc., said youth are not on the priority list, and felt they should be given the tools to get where they need to go.

Ms. Lisa Beam, Grand Junction, said she is legally blind and can't drive. MesAbility and the local taxi service have been wonderful, but limited. She asked for help to improve the existing system. A fixed route is necessary. She would like to go to the Mall, but it is difficult when one must rely on others for transportation. It hurts independence. She requested initiation of this plan, and to take action now.

Ms. Marilyn Mackey, a local realtor, said people from other areas are very surprised we don't have public transportation. Kids need to be able to get where they are going. It is critical. Something needs to be done now.

Ms. Lynn Haller, 925 N. 8th Street, Grand Junction, spoke representing the Center for Independence. She uses all the options available. She supported all options presented tonight.

Ms. Jane Quimby, thanked the Board for taking time to examine the plan. She was pleased to see it is directed to those needing it the most. There is a large number of people in the area that desperately need a system now. She was pleased to hear from the young people tonight. She compared this plan to the formation of the Riverfront projects which were built one step at a time. This plan seems to be the first step to be taken to improve the quality of life for the citizens of the community.

Mr. Fred Boyle, Mesa, urged the perspective be broadened and noticed that other municipalities are scrapping bus systems and going to rail systems. He would like to see the very core of Mesa County's transportation involve light rail. It was extremely popular in Grand Junction before automobile manufacturers put it out of business.

Mr. Pat Olson, a 7th Street resident, said everyone would benefit from a transportation system. In choosing routes, he asked the Council to bear in mind the historical efforts in preserving the 7th Street historical area, and not add to current traffic problems in the area.

Ms. Michele Foster, worked with the Mesa County Community Health Assessment three years ago. Issues that came up in the health assessment relating to transportation were: (1) physical health - 55% of the population do not exercise, (2) people can't access the new park (Canyon View), (3) mental health, and (4) homeboundness due to taking away driver's licenses (elderly). She said 72% of the people are

concerned about growth in the Valley. It can't be stopped but can be planned for. A long term solution is needed. Air quality is another concern, particularly in the winter. She felt we need to move quickly. A system is no good unless it is actually used. She thought the system will be used because it is being requested by the community, not the leadership.

Ms. Gayle Berry, State Representative from House District #55 in Mesa County, commended everyone for the study. As a result of the mandate for welfare recipients to get back into the work force, people need a way to get to work. She was pleased with the community going forward with the plan.

Ms. Renee Landry, a nurse with the Mesa County Health Department, said her job is to work with low income families in Clifton, Collbran, DeBeque, and Mesa areas. She felt the transportation issue is vital, but was concerned that only a small area is being addressed for the need for low income families. They need transportation for doctor appointments, for basic care for their children and themselves. Taxi service is limited. A 24 hour reservation is required and emergencies must be a medical need.

Ms. Debra Hess, Easter Seals coordinator, said MesAbility does an incredible job but the need greatly exceeds the availability of service. She was glad we are at this point, and hopes the Board will take the next step and make it happen.

Mr. Roger Zumwalt, administrator at Community Hospital, echoed comments made previously by Gretchen Citibuse. The hospital receives 1000 to 1500 people per day for health care. He commended Gayle Berry for the legislative work. This study does not go far enough. It needs more routes and buses, and should include more people. He would like the committee to consider a taxing authority for more routes. It is hard to do it out of general fund money. He supported and applauded efforts so far, and requested the Board take it a step further.

Ms. Marilyn Wood, spoke on behalf of Mesa Developmental Services, and as a concerned citizen. She said the 500 MDS clients obviously have a need for transportation. MDS's goal is to have them independent in the community. Independence via their jobs, and access to the community, is denied the clients unless MDS provides the transportation. MDS employees also need transportation. A lot of entry level jobs dispersed through the community need their own

transportation since no public transportation is available. She applauded the efforts thus far.

Mr. Chris Cameron, a private business owner, said the college in Ft. Collins is used as a portion of their transportation funding. Students pay a fee per semester for the bus system. There are large employers in this area, and such a plan could be considered. The amount of growth taking place in Mesa County has been overlooked. The amount of road development is overwhelming. Millions of dollars are being spent expanding roads that aren't needed if alternative transportation can be provided. We don't need the pollution, congestion, or safety factors, etc. The school's expensive bus system could be subsidized with public transportation.

Ms. Janet Murphy, United Way of Mesa County, said she has compiled information for the past four years for the Information Control Program through United Way in Mesa County. People are coming up short for money for rent, utilities, and food. They are trying to maintain a vehicle which takes away from available food and utility money. It would relieve some of the pressure on Social Services and other service organizations. A volunteer at her office is gaining office skills, hoping to secure a job, and get herself off welfare. She lives in Clifton and her car often breaks down. She has no way to get to work. She would lose a regular job in this case. Getting individuals to jobs is the most important issue.

Mr. Glen Hertel, Kannah Creek, said there are senior citizens on fixed income who are being taxed to death. He won't get any use out of a transit system. He felt the transit system should pay for itself.

Ms. Jackie Garber, Fruita, said MesAbility needs 24 hour advanced notice. She said her taxes are steep too. She works out of her home. She felt a sales tax increase would be fair. She opposed an increase in property taxes. The system is a way to go to work, and go to town once in a while. She is currently trying to form a National Federation for the Blind in this community. Transportation is desperately needed to accommodate the blind people in the community.

Ms. Carol Courtney, Grand Junction, Director of League of Women Voters, said the League in Grand Junction has been studying growth in Mesa County. One of the main issues is transportation and air quality. The League's position is that a balanced system needs to expand to other areas and

counties, support carpooling, development of mass transit alternatives, encouragement of new construction with access to biking and walking paths, long term parking to use mass transit. Mass transit should include access to housing, jobs, shopping, medical care, government services, efficient routes, and non-pollution mass transit vehicles. Marketing techniques need to be used to motivate people to use public transit. This plan goes a long way toward the League's goals. They recommend the use of energy efficient vehicles which will affect the air quality,

Mr. Vonnie Pearson, Oxbow Subdivision, said he has always subsidized public transportation. Roads are built with taxpayer dollars, the trucking industry is subsidized by building the roads to handle the trucks. It is a social responsibility for the people of this area to provide transportation, and have enough routes to use it efficiently.

Ms. Laura Schumacher, has a 7 year old child, and spends a lot of time driving him around. Kids would use public transportation if it were available. She wants her son to grow up with public transportation so he has some sense of independence from her.

Mr. Gary Sasser, Belford Avenue, is on a fixed income, and MesAbility and Sunshine Taxi are costing him in excess of approximately \$60/month. He is unable to access this transportation on the weekend because he has used all of his allotted taxi tickets. He was unable to go to the park because he had no transportation.

There were no other public comments.

Mayor Terry thanked everyone for their input. The point of tonight's discussion between the sitting Board and other elected officials is to direct the TDP Committee regarding the Public Transportation Development Plan.

Commissioner Genova asked if the TDP Committee looked at the number of private institutions that move people besides MesAbility? Mayor Terry said yes, the Committee recommended a combination effort, working toward a cooperative plan. She didn't recall the number of agencies, although it is sizable.

Mary Locke, Civic Forum, said 23 agencies are currently either users or providers of para-transit. They are beginning to coordinate services. It is important when

requesting federal funds to show you are coordinating services.

Councilmember Gordon Vetter said the issue is coordinating what is already out there.

Councilmember Payne asked if School District #51 and Mesa College were included. Ms. Locke said the school district was, but not Mesa College.

Mayor Terry said the college has been involved in some of the surveys because the students would be users. They are an important player.

Commissioner Baughman said the school district contracts for transportation with Laidlaw. He asked if Laidlaw has been contacted to use school buses when they are not in use. Ms. Locke said yes. Laidlaw was part of yesterday's first workshop, and they said they would cooperate in any possible way. They received the same commitment from MesAbility to offer services such as contract development, purchase of automobiles, drug testing, maintenance, and coordinating training. They are bringing in everyone that can possibly be involved in this coordination.

Commissioner Genova thanked everyone on the TDP committee. She said the needs of the community must be considered. Any plan can be very expensive. It was requested the plan be done in small increments so it can be developed over a period of years, and do it right. It needs to be brought back up to the levels of service in 1996.

Councilmember Scott asked if the County has enough money to do it right, or will taxes need to be raised. Commissioner Hall said the general fund can't be tapped at this point. In order to do anything at all, a five-year plan must be looked at. Each individual group must look for funds during its budget process.

Mayor Terry said the TDP committee needs to be directed to either proceed with this plan and bring it back in final form within two weeks, or say no on the plan and give reasons.

Commissioner Genova liked tonight's direction.

Councilmember Payne said we can't have the perfect plan in place right now. The perfect plan is unknown until ridership and fees, etc. are determined. He felt we should proceed with this plan.

Councilmember Gordon Vetter said the priorities selected here (handicapped, elderly, low income, students and young people) are on target. That portion has worked out nicely, That's the direction we want to go. He did not want to miss the two week deadline.

Councilmember Sutherland said a perfect plan will never be found because things change constantly.

Councilmember Kinsey was concerned that we're committing to a lot of money over the next five years. He supported returning to the 1996 levels of service, and supported expanding the user side subsidy. He questioned ridership on a fixed route system. We will end up adding more feeder routes. By applying for federal money, we are committing ourselves to a federal partnership and a lot of federal regulations. He said the method of funding is quite vague. Grand Junction and Fruita residents pay as county residents and as city residents as well. If something is done as a County wide solution, a county-wide taxing program is needed.

Commissioner Genova clarified that if it is decided this plan is not what is needed, the Board has the right to amend the plan.

Councilmember Kinsey said once money is spent on buses, the F.T.C. owns the buses. A lot of capital is tied up, so we really are committing for a five year period.

Commissioner Baughman said when getting into public transportation, the federal government could possibly eliminate or cut back on the funding considerably. The community has then become accustomed to public transportation. Then the local governments will have to make up the difference in costs. Councilmember Enos-Martinez said governments face that possibility all the time with a lot of programs. If that happens, the private sector will have to be approached.

Councilmember Sutherland said whatever option is chosen, it will cost the community some money. He thought we can afford the plan. Some priorities must be set. If federal funds are lost in the future, we would have to implement a taxing district or entity. It is hard to commit future councils and commissioners. The commitment can't be taken lightly.

Mayor Terry agreed. A transit system won't remove cars off the road, but tonight's message is that there are more in

need of the system than she realized. The taxing entity will be up to the citizens. She supported the plan.

Commissioner Genova said we can't afford not to do it.

Councilmember Enos-Martinez said there is a federal mandate welfare reform. If transportation is not provided, how can people be forced to go to work.

Mayor Terry asked if there was consensus to direct the TDP committee to draft the plan for final adoption.

Mayor Baldwin said this is the most responsible way to go about it. It is easier to tackle fiscally than many other programs. Fruita is in favor of the plan, but is the least likely to be able to afford it. He felt this is the right plan to consider at this point.

Commissioner Hall said she believes this community has the ability to solve its own problems. She supported moving forward. We have been mandated to put people to work. We are linked to the federal government through transportation, The MesAbility contract will have to go to bid. There are opportunities put forward by the federal government to our communities to provide services. We have a responsibility to follow Congress in putting people to work. She felt the plan is a conservative approach. If anything changes in our economy, it can be changed. It is not in stone. The plan is a workable plan that the three entities can jointly figure out how to fund it.

Commissioner Baughman supported returning to the 1996 levels of service and local taxi service. He could not support a fixed route system to get kids to the mall to play video games. He said the facility will not serve those in outlying areas (Gateway, Collbran, DeBeque, etc.). Councilmember Kinsey agreed.

Councilmember Scott said a system is needed, but agreed with Commissioner Baughman. Palisade is also paying into the system and not getting anything out of it.

Councilmember Sutherland suggested a Park n' Ride system. He supported proceeding tonight but if the system is not being used in five years, he will support bagging it.

Commissioner Genova said before purchasing any vehicles there will be a lot of tracking. But we need to move forward with something in place at this time in order to

have a road map as to where we will be going into the next century.

Mayor Terry said it is the consensus of tonight's representatives that the TDP committee go forward and work on this proposal.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

Stephanie Nye, CMC/AAE
City Clerk