

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MEETING DATE: April 16, 2014

SUBJECT: Henderson County Transit Station/Transfer Center

PRESENTER: Matthew Cable, AICP, Transportation Planner

ATTACHMENTS: Staff Memo

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

Henderson County's Apple Country Public Transit provides three (3) fixed route bus lines which currently transfer at the bus lane on North Grove Street. In FY 15 the system is projected to carry 110,000 customers with 38,000 passing through the transfer site, and roughly 22,000 (20%) beginning their trips at the transfer site.

In 2009, staff proposed a new transit station to be located at 4th Avenue East between the CNG station and Jackson Park for purposes of acquiring state and federal funds. State and federal funds are available to cover a significant portion of the design and construction costs of a transit station at the identified site. The County's existing transit fund for capital projects will provide the required local match.

Staff reviewed the proposed transit station location, project purposes, funding requirements, existing transit system use, and transit ridership data and would currently recommend the County not utilize the existing state and federal funds for the transit station project as proposed in 2009 (see attached memo). Customer preference for the current transfer site's location is reflected in recently requested increased stop frequency at this location. Seeking alternatives to the original transit station proposal could afford the County significant cost savings, alleviate federal funding regulations and be of greater benefit to the transit customers and overall transit system.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

Currently awarded STPDA funds must be used beginning in FY 15, therefore Staff requests the Board of Commissioners determine its intentions with regard to STPDA and FTA funds.

Suggested Motion:

I move Board authorize staff to:

1. Request the MPO amend the NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) to adjust the release of STPDA funds to FY 16 to provide for further consideration of the transit station project, project scope revision, and alternative use of the STPDA funds for transit improvement purposes.
2. Seek reallocation of existing FTA grant funding sought for the transit station project as described in 2009, with the understanding that funds for these purposes could be requested in a future grant cycle if needed.

3. Proceed with the identification of alternative office space in the Development Services Building to be developed using existing transit funds should the Board authorize the improvements.
4. Develop a project to include secured transit vehicle parking and holding and possible CNG slow fill stations at 4th Avenue East, which will use existing transit funds and STPDA funds should a revised STPDA project scope to include transit vehicle parking and alternative fuel components be approved.



Planning Department
Transportation Division
100 North King Street
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MEMORANDUM

TO: John Mitchell, Business & Community Development Director
FROM: Autumn Radcliff, Senior Planner
Matthew Cable, AICP, Transportation Planner
DATE: March 28, 2014
SUBJECT: Staff Recommendations Regarding the Existing Transit Station Proposal

Current Transit Operations

Transit routes originate from and transfer along North Grove Street, in the bus lane southeast of the intersection of 4th Avenue East and North Grove Street. The contracted provider (WCCA) uses its own office space, meeting rooms, break rooms, and secured parking located at the corner of Ashe Street and 7th Avenue. The County reimburses WCCA for the cost of these facilities through its contract. Customers can acquire transit brochures from holders inside each vehicle, WCCA's transit offices, and the County Planning Department. WCCA operators (drivers) and office staff sell passes on transit vehicles and at WCCA's offices.

Existing Transit Station Proposal: 4th Avenue East

Based on existing grant applications a transit station will provide: (1) a central location for customers to transfer between routes, acquire information/passes, waiting areas, and restrooms; (2) office space, dispatching facilities, meeting rooms, break rooms, and restrooms for our contracted provider and its employees; and (3) securable parking/holding facilities for eight (8) buses. The transit station would result in improved customer service, reduced costs of contracted services through reductions in reimbursements for WCCA owned facilities, and an overall more competitive bid process in future fiscal years (as non-local agencies would more easily compete to operate the system) . A site at 4th Avenue East between the CNG station and Jackson Park was identified for purposes of pursuing grants.

Awarded Funding and Local Match Requirements

The County pursued and was awarded \$1,672,000 in NCDOT Surface Transportation Direct Attributable (STPDA) funds with a required \$418,000 local match. STPDA funds are directed to the FBRMPO and are recurring funds the County is eligible to seek in future cycles. The current awarded funds become available October 2014 and NCDOT expects the County to begin accessing these funds immediately. The County may request the MPO amend the NCDOT STIP to release these STPDA funds in a future year (FY 2016 or 2017). Should the County not proceed with the project and choose to rescind the funds, the funds would remain in the region and could be accessed for other eligible Henderson County projects through the regional competitive project selection process to be conducted in the coming months. The funding application specified this project would be constructed at the 4th Avenue East site and include an office building. Modifications to this project scope will require reconsideration by the MPO.

The County pursued and was awarded \$98,154 in FTA grant funds for architectural and engineering services with a required \$24,539 match. FTA funds are accessed by the County on an annual basis. Should the County not proceed with the project the current awarded funds could be redirected to other County transit projects including capital costs of contracting and acquisition (shelters, vehicles, signage, etc.). These funds are not tied to the location at 4th Avenue East.

The County's established transit fund includes over \$750,000 in funding for transit capital costs (construction, vehicles, shelters, operations, etc.).

Construction Costs and Concerns: 4th Avenue East

To complete the project at the 4th Avenue East site the County will need to: (1) request a rezoning through the City of Hendersonville and be granted the request; (2) enter into an agreement with NCDOT to ensure compliance with NCDOT and Federal Highways (FHWA) requirements; (3) engage consultants to perform NCDOT/FTA required pre-construction studies including, but not limited to, Title IV Environmental Justice/Equity Analysis and Environmental Analysis; (4) conduct FTA compliant bidding for engaging an architectural and engineering firm for station design; (5) work under the guidance of NCDOT Local Programs Management Office during the planning and design phase of the project; (6) engage NCDOT Division 14 during station construction; and (7) engage consultants to work with NCDOT to ensure record keeping is compliant with FHWA requirements for the anticipated audit.

Actual costs not provided for in the grant funding include: (1) City of Hendersonville application and permitting fees; and (2) engaging consultants to perform NCDOT and FTA required studies and monitor FHWA compliance. Concerns include project delays or loss of grant funding should the site be infeasible.

The site would not be feasible if: (1) the City of Hendersonville denied the rezoning request; or (2) an NCDOT or FTA required study eliminates the site as a permissible location.

Should FTA, NCDOT, or FHWA determine the County violates any of its regulations, requirements or guidelines these entities could suspend the project or recall any or all of its awarded funding following project completion. Planning staff understands that transit facility construction in other Western North Carolina counties were burdened by these requirements which caused costly project delays.

Staff Recommendations Based on Transit System Needs

Staff reviewed current transit system operations and the original transit station proposal to determine needs. Staff recommends the County not relocate the existing transfer site from North Grove Street because the site is well established, highly visible, convenient, and well frequented by a growing base of transit customers. Staff suggests locating transit offices immediately adjacent to the transfer site is not vital to the success of the transit system.

Staff continues to recommend the County establish and own both: (1) a convenient location for customers to acquire information/passes with office space, dispatching facilities, meeting rooms, and break rooms for its contracted provider; and (2) a securable parking and holding facility for the existing fleet (seven (7) buses and two (2) paratransit vehicles) of which 7 vehicles are County leased/owned.

Addressing these needs would improve customer convenience, provide better security for County vehicles, reduce contract costs attributed to provider supplied office and parking space, and potential cost savings through a more competitive bid process in future fiscal years.

The County should consider alternatives to meet transit system needs. Staff recommends using vacant office space in the Development Services Building for transit offices, the building which currently houses the County staff responsible for oversight of the transit system. Office space, meeting room, and break room facilities for our contracted provider would be available with minimal interior modifications at a significantly reduced cost to new facility construction. This site is also convenient to the existing transfer site and is located along all three (3) transit routes. Though it is not currently recommended, should the

County desire to relocate the transfer site at this time, exterior modifications at the Development Services Building may accommodate a transfer site.

The County should consider constructing off-site parking for secured transit vehicle storage and holding. The site at 4th Avenue East would be appropriate for this type of secured facility. This site would also be appropriate for development of a CNG slow fill fueling component for the overnight refueling of transit vehicles.