

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

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**CITY COUNCIL LUNCH-AND-LEARN JTA MEETING MINUTES**

**Lynwood Roberts Room, 1st floor, City Hall**

**January 22, 2018**

**12:00 p.m.**

**Location:** Lynwood Roberts Room, City Hall – St. James Building; 117 West Duval Street,

**In attendance:** Council Members Danny Becton, Aaron Bowman, Lori Boyer, Katrina Brown, John Crescimbeni, Al Ferraro, Bill Gulliford, Tommy Hazouri, Jim Love, Joyce Morgan, Sam Newby, Scott Wilson

**Also**: Paige Johnston – Office of General Counsel; Kyle Billy and Carmen Martin – Council Auditor’s Office; Carol Owens and Jessica Matthews – Legislative Services Division; Jeff Clements – Council Research Division; Nat Ford and Lisa Darnall - JTA

**Meeting Convened**: 12:07 p.m.

Council Member Newby called the meeting to order and introduced Nat Ford, CEO of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, to discuss the JTA’s Connexion Paratransit service. Survey results showed an 84% customer good or high satisfaction rate in 2015, 86% in 2016 and 83% in 2017. On-time performance declined noticeably in 2017 and remedial action is underway to correct that. Salaries paid to Connexion drivers are substantially under the industry norm for commercial drivers and hiring and retention is difficult because of competition from parcel delivery companies (UPS and Federal Express) for drivers.

Lisa Darnall, JTA’s Vice President of Transit Operations gave an overview of paratransit service requirements under the federal Americans With Disabilities Act. Connexion has two divisions – ADA and transportation disadvantaged (TD). 81% of all trips provided are ADA trips (which must be provided in the area served by fixed route bus service, regardless of funding availability). Transportation Disadvantaged is targeted at riders who are age 65+, disabled and low-income. The TD program receives state and City funding. ADA service is door-to-door (not just curb-to-curb as required by federal law). Trips must be scheduled in advance and there is a 5-minute waiting time for a rider to arrive at the pickup point. Federal law allows the provider to charge twice the rate of the standard bus fare for ADA trips – the current charge is $3.00 for ADA and $3.50 for TD trips (which can be to any destination in the county, not just within ¾ mile of a bus line as for ADA).

The average age of Connexion riders is 62, with 64% being women. 1,200 rides are provided daily on average. Approximately 44% are for medical trips. Connexion represents 14% of the JTA operating budget and 3% of its total ridership. Ms. Darnall explained the differences in eligibility standards for the ADA and TD programs. The ADA program requires a functional assessment of the client’s inability to ride a fixed-route bus, which must be re-certified every three years. The TD program does not require a functional assessment but does have numerous other restrictions based on age, income and access to other transportation resources. TD eligibility must be recertified every year.

Ms. Darnall discussed the trip scheduling software and reservation system and the automatic vehicle locator equipment mounted on all JTA vehicles. The mobile data terminals (MDTs) provide real-time vehicle location information for riders, and that functionality is being extended to an app that can be used by taxis and transportation network companies (TNCs such as Uber and Lyft) who are now or soon will be providing rides for Connexion passengers.

Ms. Darnell discussed the changes over the years in the JTA’s service contract with MV Transportation for reservations, scheduling, dispatch and trip provision. JTA is responsible for oversight, customer satisfaction, rider eligibility, and vehicle maintenance and fueling. The same drivers and vehicles provide both ADA and TD trips. She discussed the performance standards in the current contract and the penalties for violations, which did not exist in prior versions of the contract. The performance standards include less than 2.5 preventable accidents per 100,000 miles driven, less than 3 complaints per 1,000 boardings, and 90%+ on-time performance. The system schedules an average of 1,300-1,400 trips per day and actually provides about 1,200 per day because of customer cancellations. She noted the difficulty in coordinating the schedules of so many people going to so many different locations in constantly changing conditions (weather, traffic, bridge openings, etc.).

She reiterated the difficulty in hiring and retaining drivers with the low unemployment rate and tremendous competition from other companies hiring drivers with commercial driver’s licenses. JTA had the same problem hiring and keeping drivers for its fixed route service. JTA has held the contractor to terms of its contract and the contractor has responded by raising wages, increasing recruitment efforts, hiring new dispatchers and borrowing drivers from out-of-state to supplement local personnel. The efforts begun in November 2017 are beginning to have a positive effect since the system experienced its worst problems and performance in October of 2017. JTA continues to be vigilant in monitoring the contract performance. Ms. Darnall recounted the Connexion system’s response to an incident recently brought to the City Council’s attention regarding a passenger from Pine Castle who took an excessively long time to transit home. A second vehicle has been added to the Pine Castle service to eliminate this client’s problem situation.

Ms. Darnall answered questions from council members about particular circumstances and problems. Council Member Ferraro noted the importance expressed to him by Connexion riders of getting accurate information from the dispatcher about vehicle progress. He has heard complaints that the information provided from the dispatch office by does not match the reality in the field. Nat Ford said that he would provide information to Mr. Ferraro on the various costs of the Connexion system and its budget. In response to a question from Council Member Katrina Brown about any changes to the contract with MV Transportation as a result of the driver hiring problem, Mr. Ford said that to date the JTA has held the line with the original contract but is preparing to renegotiate in recognition of the new realities of the improving economy and driver hiring difficulties. However this has implications for potential protests from other competitors for the contract MV now holds who bid a higher cost that has turned out to be more in line with the current labor market. Ms. Darnall said that a recent City Auditor’s Office audit has caused some changes to be made to ensure proper reporting of on-time performance. In response to a question from Council Member Morgan, Ms. Darnall and Mr. Ford explained the increasing use of taxis for both the paratransit and fixed route services. It appears that JTA’s service needs exceed the capacity of the taxi industry to provide all the needed trips at this point. JTA is also looking at TNCs (Uber/Lyft) as an option as well, but noted that their business model is very different from taxis. Ms. Darnell explained the difference in fare payment requirements between certified care providers accompanying eligible passengers (fare waived) and other types of companions (fare charged) for ADA customers. In response to a question from the audience, Ms. Darnell said that the cost of providing a trip via taxi is much lower than the cost in a Connexion vehicle, but the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis is very limited.

**Meeting adjourned:** 1:20 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

1.22.18 Posted 2:30 p.m.

Tapes: City Council Lunch-and-Learn meeting – LSD

1.22.18