



Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) Workshop

Marion County Senior Services
1101 SW 20th Ct., Ocala, FL 34471
June 5, 2025
10:30 AM

MINUTES

Members Present:

Anissa Pieriboni
Carlos Colon
Eric Ostanik
Gisela Ruiz
Jeannette Estes
Matthew McClain
Susan Hanley
Tiffany McKenzie
Tom Duncan
Tracey Sapp
Casey Griffith

Members Not Present:

Andrea Melvin
Angela Juaristic
Daisy Diaz
Donnie Mitchell
Elizabeth Alacci
Iris Pozo
Jim East

Others Present:

Liz Mitchell, TPO
Rob Balmes, TPO

Shakayla Irby, TPO
Tom Duncan, City of Ocala
Clayton Murch, Marion Senior Services
Herman Schultz, Marion Senior Services
Joseph Bartolomeo, Marion Senior Services
Chuck Varadin, Marion County
Ken Odom, Marion County

Item 1. Call to Order

Chairman McClain called the workshop to order at 10:32am.

Item 2. Roll Call

Administrative Assistant Shakayla Irby called the roll and a quorum was present.

Item 3. Proof of Publication

Administrative Assistant Shakayla Irby stated that the workshop had been published May 29, 2025 online on the TPO website and Facebook and X pages, the City of Ocala, Belleview, and Dunnellon websites. The workshop was also published to the May 29, 2025 edition of the Ocala Star Banner.

Item 4A. Brainstorming Exercise for the New Upcoming 2025 to 2030 Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP)

Ms. Mitchell provided a refresher on the TDSP. She explained that the Florida Commission for Transportation Disadvantaged is the primary state agency overseeing the program. The Commission designates a Designated Official Planning Agency (DOPA), which is the TPO, to manage the procurement process and recommend a single Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) to the Commission.

She noted that the Commission contracts with the selected CTC for a five-year term via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which had just been approved. Both the TPO and the CTC are responsible for developing a new Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP) within 120 days after the new five-year term begins on July 1st. The plan presented in the meeting was the previous version.

Ms. Mitchell emphasized that the Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) guides, reviews, and approves the TDSP. She introduced the day's agenda item to brainstorm ideas and provide guidance on community needs and improvements to help Marion Transit better serve the public in the upcoming plan.

Ms. Mitchell provided sticky notes for the group to write down their answers during a brainstorming session. The exercise was divided into two parts: a self-assessment of current services and a vision for future improvements.

Participants were asked to identify gaps, challenges, and strengths in current transportation services. Key points raised included funding shortages limiting service expansion, insurance and staffing challenges, and a limited pool of qualified drivers, many of whom are older and approaching retirement. Recruiting younger drivers was noted as a challenge.

The group discussed strict requirements for drivers such as CDL licensing, background checks, drug testing, and how some offenses may be waived on a case-by-case basis.

A significant concern was issues with Medicare and Medicaid transportation services—clients often face unreliable service, missed or late pickups, and limited trip availability. Complaints and grievances are filed but sometimes perceived as ineffective. The group stressed the importance of properly directing complaints to managed care providers' complaint hubs, which can be responsive.

The conversation highlighted the value of sharing complaint contact information with clients and emphasized the board's role as a connector to assist clients with transportation issues. They also noted the need to identify and prioritize underserved populations, such as veterans.

Overall, the session aimed to gather input to improve Marion Transit's service and better address community needs.

There was a discussion about the barrier's riders face, such as affordability, availability, and access. It was noted that on-demand transit services have potential but present challenges because not all riders have the flexibility to schedule rides in advance. Budget constraints also limit service expansion.

A key point raised was the need for better coordination between the two main transit organizations operating in the county. Although both organizations serve the area, their services are not fully integrated, creating gaps for riders. Collaboration could improve connectivity and operational efficiency.

It was highlighted that Marion County is large and rural in many areas, which complicates transit planning. Fixed-route services must be complemented by flexible options, especially for rural communities. The county is growing rapidly in certain areas, and transit services need to adapt accordingly.

Connectivity with neighboring counties, such as Alachua and Lake County, exists but is limited. There was mention of existing inter-county routes and the potential for expanded on-demand or microtransit services that can provide door-to-door rides. These services tend to be more costly but are valuable for certain rider groups.

Financial challenges remain the primary obstacle to expanding service. Operating costs, including driver wages and fleet maintenance, require consistent funding from municipalities. The cost-effectiveness of transit investment varies depending on population density, with urban areas yielding higher returns.

Efforts to modernize and expand the fleet, including acquiring electric buses, were underway. The transit system aims to improve route frequency and reliability to better serve riders.

Finally, a suggestion was made to form a dedicated transit subcommittee involving stakeholders from the various agencies and experts. This subcommittee could focus on coordination, service improvements, and strategic planning to optimize transit in the county.

There was concern about how the 2030 census might impact funding and transit services. It was noted that after the 2020 census, Gainesville lost its small urban status, which led to significant reductions in their transit services due to decreased operating budgets from the state. This raised awareness that changes in census data could similarly affect their own funding and service levels after 2030.

The group acknowledged the importance of being mindful of these potential changes while planning, to avoid creating ambitious transit plans that might become unsustainable if funding is reduced. This “chess game” of funding sources and operational realities needs careful consideration.

Discussion then shifted to the current goals and objectives in the Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP). Participants were encouraged to review these and provide feedback on what to keep, change, or improve. Partnerships and sponsorships were discussed as potential funding or resource sources. For example, some local Walmart managers provide sponsorship funds to nonprofits, which might be tapped for transit-related grants. The idea of building partnerships to extend grant money and community support was emphasized.

Further ideas included incorporating transit-friendly designs in new developments, such as ensuring drop-off areas for small buses near medical facilities and commercial centers. Working with city and county planning agencies during the development process was suggested to better integrate transit access.

Community engagement was highlighted as a key area for improvement. There was interest in strengthening connections with faith-based organizations and other community groups to identify resources and needs. A resource list of local faith-based organizations was mentioned as something that could help improve outreach.

There was also discussion of emerging communities growing rapidly, with a need for transit planning and engagement in those areas. Some communities lacked the infrastructure for formal associations but showed high interest and turnout at meetings, which indicates a strong opportunity for engagement and service planning.

Finally, microtransit or flexible transit services were noted as promising options for reaching walkable but underserved neighborhoods.

Overall, the conversation blended strategic funding awareness, partnership building, transit-friendly development, and enhanced community engagement as priorities moving forward.

Item 5. Comments by TDLCB Members

There were no comments by TDLCB Members.

Item 6. Comments by TPO Staff

There were no comments by TPO staff.

Item 7. Comments by Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC)

There were no comments by the CTC.

Item 8. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Item 9. Adjournment

Chairman McClain adjourned the meeting at 11:22 am.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, TPO Administrative Assistant