



**Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) Meeting**

Marion County Growth Services Training Room  
2710 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL 34470  
March 14, 2024  
10:00 AM

**MINUTES**

**Members Present:**

Emilio Santiago  
Jeannette Estes (*alternate Elizabeth Watson attended*)  
Andrea Melvin  
Steven Neal  
Elizabeth Alacci  
Susan Hanley (*alternate Jackie Rosko attended*)  
Tracey Sapp  
Carlos Colon  
Anissa Pieriboni  
Donnie Mitchell  
Michelle Stone  
Angela Juaristic

**Members Not Present:**

Tiffany McKenzie  
Iris Pozo  
Lauren Debick  
Jeffrey Askew

**Others Present:**

Liz Mitchell, TPO  
Rob Balmes, TPO  
Shakayla Irby, TPO  
Sara Brown, TPO

Clayton Murch, Marion Senior Services  
Herman Schultz, Marion Senior Services  
Joseph Bartolomeo, Marion Senior Services  
Karen Williams, Marion Senior Services

### **Item 1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Chairwoman Stone called the meeting to order at 10:04am. Secretary Shakayla Irby called the roll and a quorum was present.

### **Item 2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairwoman Stone led the board members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Item 3. Proof of Publication**

Secretary Shakayla Irby stated that the meeting had been published March 7, 2024 online on the TPO website and Facebook and Twitter pages, the City of Ocala, Belleview, and Dunnellon websites. The meeting was also published to the March 7, 2024 edition of the Ocala Star Banner.

### **Item 4A. Presentation by the National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM)**

Ms. Enjoli Dixon, Project Associate with the NCMM gave a presentation to the board highlighting the NCMM. Ms. Dixon was the Liaison to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Region 4 which included Florida. The presentation included the following:

The National Center for Mobility Management is a national technical assistance center funded through a cooperative agreement with the Federal Transit Administration and operated through a consortium of three national organizations—the American Public Transportation Association, the Community Transportation Association of America, and Easterseals Inc.

#### **What is Mobility Management?**

Mobility management encouraged innovation and flexibility to reach the “right fit” solution for customers. Plans were made for sustainability, striving for easy information and referral to assist customers in learning about and using services. Customer feedback was continually incorporated as services were evaluated and adjusted.

Some key roles for mobility management professionals included informing and connecting customers to transportation options that were most responsive to their needs. They excelled at staying informed about existing community transportation services, sharing that knowledge with customers, and helping them connect the dots in using all appropriate services.

Mobility managers empathized and advocated for their customers, sharing their knowledge with partners and articulating the relationship between transportation and the success of individuals and community agencies.

They also convened and facilitated partnerships and collaborative efforts, including transportation providers, planners, and other community stakeholders, often taking the lead in facilitating teams, meetings, and public engagement sessions.

Some of the key roles for mobility management professionals included:

- Inform and Connect
- Emphasize and Advocate
- Convene and Facilitate
- Design and Plan
- Launch and Sustain

When a mobility management practitioner, whether an individual or an agency, along with partners, designed a new service or extension of a service, they took several steps to ensure its launch was successful and sustainable:

- Assumptions about what parts would work and why were tested.
- The new service was designed to meet customer expectations and definitions of usability, was operationally feasible, and could be shown to be financially viable.
- A limited launch began, testing a small-scale version of the service in real time, and soliciting feedback from a small group of end users.
- The service was modified based on feedback, and when satisfied, scaled up to a full service.

During the presentation Ms. Dixon also mentioned the following apps during the presentation:

### **BlindSquare App**

GPS-app developed for the blind, deafblind and partially sighted. Paired with third-party navigation apps, BlindSquare's self-voicing app delivers detailed points of interest and intersections for safe, reliable travel both outside and inside. Open the doors to enhanced independence with BlindSquare.

#### **How it works:**

- After determining your location, BlindSquare gathers information about your surroundings on Foursquare and OpenStreetMap.
- Algorithms determine what information is most useful to you such as popular cafes, post offices or libraries.
- Shake your device to hear your current address and details about the nearest intersection and venues around you.
- BlindSquare will track your destination and periodically announce the distance and direction you're headed.
- Mark your position if you'd like help finding your way back later.

- Filters can be applied to provide only the information you're looking for so you're not overwhelmed by details on your surroundings.
- Mark your saved places and Foursquare venues as Favorites and BlindSquare will always notify you once you reach them.
- Favorites will be saved in iCloud and synced to all iOS devices for device consistency.
- BlindSquare uses Acapela voices in many different languages to announce information about your environment even when your device is tucked away for a hands-free experience.
- If you enjoy using Foursquare independently, authorize BlindSquare too access your account so you can check into your favorite venues by simply shaking your device.
- Share your check-ins on Facebook, Twitter, or keep them private if you wish.

### **Aira App**

Aira is the sole commercially embraced solution that connects blind and low vision individuals with certified Visual Interpreters, delivering a secure and reliable service. Our 24/7, globally accessible on-demand platform is empowered by a proprietary dashboard seamlessly integrated with your mobile app. By simply using your smartphone's camera and our app, a highly-trained Visual Interpreter will be at your side, providing comprehensive visual interpretation of your environment. From vivid descriptions to reading, from clear explanations to expert navigation, they're here to assist you with whatever you need, all in a safe and secure manner.

At the conclusion of Ms. Dixon's presentation Chairwoman Stone thanked her and invited her to attend a TDLCB meeting if she was ever in the area.

### **Item 5A. Community Transportation Coordinator Evaluation**

Ms. Liz Mitchell presented to the TDLCB and said that the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged designated a Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) for each county/service area. The CTC was responsible for coordinating and/or providing transportation services to individuals who are transportation disadvantaged.

Citizens were considered "transportation disadvantaged" due to age, income, or a disability, unable to drive, or do not have access to other transportation options.

Access was provided to medical appointments, employment, educational and other life sustaining services, including, groceries, shopping, meals, and social events, to those who are eligible.

Pursuant to Chapter 427 Florida Statutes 427.015(2), the performance of the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) shall be evaluated based on the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) approved evaluation criteria.

TPO staff evaluated the TDLCB Community Transportation Coordinator to assure that their performance met the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged criteria.

TPO staff conducted the evaluation during the month of February and included an analysis of all relevant elements within the operations of Marion Transit Services. Examples include:

- Vehicle Operations & Maintenance
- Grievance Procedures
- Budget
- Contracts
- Driver Certification & Training
- Performance Standards

The evaluation encompassed management, operations, service, safety, vehicle maintenance, drivers and training, performance standards, grievance/complaint procedures, and quality assurance, utilizing the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged CTC Evaluation Workbook.

Ms. Mitchell said that the TPO found that all the required policies and procedures, contracts and contract management, grievance/complaint procedures, performance, quality and safety standards were in place and being adhered to. All vehicles were on a maintenance schedule and in good working order. The drivers are trained with continual training updates. There is a zero-tolerance substance abuse policy enforced complete with pre-employment drug and alcohol background checks. The riders speak highly of the overall system and feel that they are being provided a quality service.

Ms. Mitchell mentioned that last year, the TPO recommended that Marion Transit install sealed comment boxes, and they did. However, many of the riders could not see them due to their placement. So, this year's recommendation was to install signage to indicate the location of the boxes, which would also serve as a reminder that we encourage rider input.

Additionally, according to statute, the vehicles were required to have Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) helpline and complaint numbers posted. Marion Transit had them posted near where the driver is seated; however, riders could not clearly view them. Therefore, it was suggested to have them posted in larger size and potentially positioned down the sides of the buses.

Ms. Mitchell mentioned that Mr. Murch had signage present at the meeting, showing the larger numbers to be installed on the buses.

The TPO commended Marion Transit for their awesome service and dedication to their riders mentioning that a lot of the riders saw Marion Transit as “family”.

Ms. Mitchell also thanked volunteers that took time out of their work schedules to call TD riders for a quick survey and/or a ride-along.

Chairwoman Stone mentioned that it was very humbling making calls to riders and hearing some of their stories and great experiences with Marion Transit and also commended their service.

*Ms. Pieriboni made a motion to approve the CTC Evaluation. Mr. Colon seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.*

### **Item 6. Consent Agenda**

*Ms. Melvin motioned to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Carlos seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.*

### **Item 7A. Subcommittee's Update**

#### **Education & Communication Subcommittee**

Ms. Andrea Melvin filled in for Ms. Debick while out on maternity leave.

Ms. Melvin said that the Education and Communication Subcommittee did not have a chance to meet due to her increased workload.

#### **Future Infrastructure, Service & Road Expansion Subcommittee**

Mr. Jeffrey Askew, the lead of the committee, was unable to attend the meeting due to a scheduling conflict. However, Mr. Balmes shared comments from Mr. Askew, expressing his desire to see a shift away from infrastructure and road expansion. Instead, Mr. Askew emphasized the importance of focusing on serving the disadvantaged in our community and prioritizing accessibility infrastructure improvements. He also highlighted the significance of education, stating that it should be a high priority to ensure that everyone in the community is aware of the services provided by Marion Transit.

Mr. Murch mentioned that Commissioner Curry had recently reached out to him regarding the need for information for veterans regarding connectivity to the VA Hospital in Gainesville. In response, Marion Transit created a one-page informational sheet, and they would continue the effort as directed.

Chairwoman Stone mentioned spreading the word through possibly “A Marion Moment” podcast and social media.

Ms. Pieriboni said that the Education & Communication Subcommittee talked a lot about spreading the word of services through public service announcements and using Public Information Officers in all jurisdictions.

Ms. Juaristic inquired about a flyer that could be sent out to clients as they reach out for services.

Chairwoman Stone inquired about a budget for public informational resources.

Mr. Balmes explained that there was very limited funding and the TPO was not able to undertake public relations initiatives. Instead, the TPO's role was limited to educating and informing the public.

Ms. Juaristic mentioned the Hope for Florida program, which serves as a connection point for community collaboration between the public and private sectors, faith-based communities, and nonprofits. She suggested reaching out to them, as they could also assist in spreading the word.

Chairwoman Stone asked about a budget for educating or educational materials.

Mr. Balmes stated that educational materials could be developed; however, the TPO could not engage in advertising.

Chairwoman Stone requested the TPO to investigate whether it was permissible to create educational materials.

### **Funding Subcommittee**

Mr. Steven Neal served as the lead.

During the meeting, Mr. Neal requested to step down from his role as the lead due to his increased workload and a staff of just two. He apologized for the inconvenience and expressed his willingness to remain on the committee, though not in a leadership position.

Chairwoman Stone expressed understanding of Mr. Neal's decision and suggested that the Funding Subcommittee could regroup at a later time.

### **Item 8A. Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) Members Chart**

Ms. Mitchell provided the board with a TDLCB Members Chart, which included all the seated members on the board, their respective organizations, roles, and contact information. She requested that the board review the chart and submit any changes or additional information to her.

### **Item 8B. Workshop Topics**

Ms. Mitchell said the June meeting required a workshop and she wanted to get input from the board.

She provided a list of her ideas

1. Current Safety Issues
2. Current Legislation Updates
3. TDLCB Roles and Responsibilities, Rules, and Regulations with a possible trivia game
4. Bus Ride and Tour of Marion Transit Facilities

Mr. Murch expressed that Marion Transit was willing to facilitate a tour, but there were concerns regarding the back-and-forth transportation and the time-consuming nature of a workshop also.

However, he suggested that if the meeting could take place at Marion Transit, it would be more convenient, provided there was advance notice to make necessary arrangements.

Chairwoman Stone inquired whether Marion Transit could confirm if the proposed date of the June meeting would be suitable for hosting the meeting.

Mr. Murch agreed to inquire and coordinate with Ms. Mitchell.

### **Item 9. Comments by TDLCB Members**

*There were no comments by TDLCB Members.*

### **Item 10. Comments by TPO Staff**

Mr. Balmes gave brief comments about a formal **2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Kick-Off Meeting** on **April 23, 2024 at 2:00 PM** at the County Commission Auditorium. The kick-off meeting will be open to the public, and for all elected officials and partner agencies. The regularly scheduled TPO Board meeting will follow at 3:00 PM.

The Kick-Off Meeting will include opening leadership remarks, a project overview session and summary of the project schedule. TPO staff will send out save-the-date and public notices in the near future for this meeting.

The TPO's LRTP is a federally required strategic document that identifies current and future transportation needs and outlines transportation investments over the next 25 years. The next long-range transportation plan (2050 LRTP), is scheduled for adoption in November 2025. However, the development of the LRTP is a multiyear process that includes many milestones for partner and public participation, including a community workshop later this year in September.

### **Item 11. Comments by Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC)**

Mr. Murch gave the following comments:

- Marion Transit was 9 days incident free and 97 days injury free.
  - The most recent incident was a hit mailbox.
- The Triennial Review for Marion Transit occurred on February 13th, providing valuable information and insights. Marion Transit eagerly awaited the formalized document and feedback resulting from the review.
- Mr. Murch shared a quote from Hannibal, "I shall either find a way or make one." Despite the flat or decreased funding for the Transportation Disadvantaged (TD), trips continued to increase, and Marion Transit was on track to surpass last year's trip count. Despite these challenges, Marion Transit remained committed to seeking funding opportunities. Carlos Colon and FDOT informed them about the 5310 Grant, which specifically targeted seniors and disabled individuals. Unlike the 5311 Grant, the 5310 Grant did not have a



low-income component, but it would significantly assist with many of the TD program trips and help bridge the gap caused by diminishing TD funds.

Chairwoman Stone suggested discussing funding during the meeting at Marion Transit and exploring additional ways to support the organization through potential brainstorming sessions.

**Item 12. Public Comment**

*There was no public comment.*

**Item 13. Adjournment**

Chairwoman Stone expressed gratitude to the board for their and reminded everyone that the next meeting is scheduled for June 13, 2024 with details to come. The meeting was adjourned at 11:09 am.

Respectfully Submitted By:

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Shakayla Irby, TPO Administrative Assistant