



Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board (TDLCB) Meeting

Marion County Growth Services Training Room
2710 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala, FL 34470

March 6, 2025

10:00 AM

MINUTES

Members Present:

Matthew McClain
Jeffrey Askew
Gisela Ruiz (*alternate Emilio Santiago*)
Tiffany McKenzie
Tracey Sapp (*alternate Nicole Brickhouse*)
Susan Hanley (*arrived at 10:05am*)
Jeannette Estes
Andrea Melvin
Anissa Pieriboni
Tom Duncan
Carlos Colon

Members Not Present:

Iris Pozo
Angela Juaristic
Donnie Mitchell
Elizabeth Alacci
Jim East

Others Present:

Rob Balmes, TPO
Shakayla Irby, TPO
Elizabeth Mitchell, TPO

Brandon Palermo, Center for Independent Living
Joseph Bartolomeo, Marion Senior Services
Herman Schulz, Marion Senior Services
Karen Williams, Marion Senior Services
Clayton Murch, Marion Senior Services

Item 1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Matthew McClain called the meeting to order at 10:00am and led the board members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Item 2. Roll Call

Secretary Shakayla Irby called the roll and a quorum was present.

Item 3. Proof of Publication

Secretary Shakayla Irby stated that the meeting had been published February 27, 2025 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 February 27, 2025 edition of the Ocala Star Banner.

Item 4. Consent Agenda

Before the approval of the consent agenda, Chairman McClain recognized Mr. Jeffrey Askew for his dedication and many years of service to both the TDLCB and Marion County. Mr. Askew, who would be retiring, was attending his last TDLCB meeting. He gave brief comments, thanking everyone for their daily contributions and for the opportunity to serve on the TDLCB.

Mr. Colon made a motion to approve the consent agenda, which was seconded by Ms. Pieriboni. The motion passed unanimously.

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 (60 and above), 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 reported that the TPO found all required policies and procedures, performance standards, quality standards, and safety standards were being adhered to. All drivers received training with continual updates and were retrained as necessary.

All vehicles were in good working order and maintained according to preset maintenance schedules.

A zero-tolerance substance abuse policy was enforced, including pre-employment drug and alcohol testing, as well as background checks. No recommendations were made at this time.

Overall, the system was well-managed, and riders received quality service. Marion Transit's drivers were carefully selected and monitored, demonstrating professionalism, care, and safety. Marion Transit continued to maintain a high level of rider satisfaction.

The TPO commended Marion Transit, its drivers, and staff for their dedication and service.

Ms. Mitchell thanked the volunteers who assisted with the call-in survey and ride-along.

Several TDLCB members praised Marion Transit for its service and congratulated them on a job well done. Ms. Mitchell highlighted comments from Mr. Carlos Colon of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), who shared his observations via email. He noted that during the ride-along, he was outside the bus with the driver and observed all drivers conducting their pre-trip inspections. He commended this as excellent work, noting that the inspections included checks of fluids, tires, ramps, lights, horns, and more.

Chairman McClain expressed his appreciation for Marion Transit's dedication to its mission of caring for people, emphasizing that this commitment was truly special.

Ms. Melvin moved to approve the CTC Evaluation. Ms. McKenzie seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Item 6A. Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology

Mr. Brandon Palermo, representing the Center for Independent Living, provided an overview of FAAST (Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology). He explained that FAAST was established in 1993 and offers various services to support individuals with disabilities across Florida. There are 11 regional demonstration centers statewide, including one operated by the Center for Independent Living.

Mr. Palermo highlighted the four core services FAAST provides:

- Information and Assistance – Educating individuals on available assistive technologies, including whether they are free or require purchase.
- Device Loan Program – Allowing individuals to borrow assistive technology to test and determine its suitability.
- Training and Education – Offering guidance on how assistive devices function and how they can improve daily life.
- Financial Loans – Providing low-interest state-level loans to individuals who may not qualify for traditional bank loans, such as those on Social Security or with low credit scores.

He also talked about various assistive technologies available through FAAST, including:

- Bluetooth amplifiers for enhancing phone call clarity
- Voice-activated remotes for emergency contacts
- Reader pens that scan and read text aloud in multiple languages

Mr. Palermo noted that new technology is continuously being acquired, and ongoing training ensures that FAAST remains up to date with the latest advancements.

Ms. Melvin added that FAAST offers a wide range of assistive equipment, from high-tech devices to simple yet highly effective tools. She mentioned a low-tech device designed to assist individuals with limited mobility in scrubbing their backs. This device features a long handle with interchangeable attachments, including a loofah and a mirror. The mirror is particularly beneficial for individuals with conditions such as diabetes and neuropathy, allowing them to check the bottoms of their feet for wounds they might not feel.

She also highlighted other useful tools, such as a magnifier app for smartphones, which helps individuals read small text in dim lighting or on pill bottles.

Additionally, Ms. Melvin noted that FAAST provides technical assistance to businesses in need of assistive technology for their offices.

Item 7A. Subcommittee's Updates: Community Affairs and Health Affairs

Community Affairs – The committee did not get an opportunity to meet.

Health Affairs

Ms. Pieriboni provided an update on the committee's recent meeting, where the focus was on addressing ongoing issues with medical providers and the need for prompt responses to medical verification requests. The committee discussed hosting an annual breakfast to engage the community and proposed an awards program to recognize outstanding drivers and agencies.

The group also talked about supporting each other through better communication, with Ms. Mitchell handling flyer submissions and working to ensure timely information distribution via a single monthly email.

Regarding guest speakers, the committee is planning to rotate speakers from various local agencies and explore a presentation from United Way's 211 system. Ms. Pieriboni will follow up on scheduling and will collaborate with Ms. Mitchell to consider adding agency information to the committee website.

Finally, the committee is exploring alternative communication methods, such as radio and TV, to reach individuals with visual impairments or limited internet access.

Item 8. Comments by TDLCB Members

Ms. McKenzie shared her positive experience with the ride-a-longs, stating that she always enjoyed them and echoed praise for Marion Transit.

Mr. Colon encouraged TDLCB members to participate in the ride-a-longs with Marion Transit when given the opportunity.

Mr. Duncan announced that SunTran had a new General Manager, Elizabeth Suchsland.

Ms. Melvin announced that the Center for Independent Living would host its 8th Annual Marion County Emergency Preparedness Expo on March 25, 2025, from 8:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the College of Central Florida, Ewers Century Center.

Ms. Estes shared with the Board that recent state-level appointments led to several position changes, including Senator Rubio's appointment as Secretary of State and Ashley Moody's appointment to the Senate. These shifts resulted in further reassignments within the governor's administration. She also informed the Board about a bill (tentatively 1050) that proposed consolidating the Division of Blind Services and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation under the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, elevating it to a department-level agency. She noted that the bill had strong support and was awaiting legislative approval.

Mr. Santiago attended as an alternate for Ms. Ruiz and shared that the governor had been very supportive of recent changes, including efforts to secure funding for expansion. He informed the Board that in his role certifying new providers for the state, he ensured that organizations were aware of available resources. He emphasized the importance of understanding and addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities and compliance-related matters. He noted that while he primarily covered Volusia and Orange counties, he had previously worked with Marion County and commended the Board for its efforts.

Several Board members echoed praise for the outstanding work Marion Transit continued to do in accommodating its clients.

Ms. Pieriboni expressed appreciation for the professionalism and responsiveness she experienced from Marion Transit and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). She shared that they aimed to announce their ribbon challenge for preschool to grade two by the next meeting in June, though the process had taken longer due to their meticulous approach. She also noted that they were undergoing a national accreditation process, which was intensive and coincided with their triennial review.

Additionally, she mentioned that her visit to the legislative delegation was well received, and she planned to contact local delegations for involvement. However, Tallahassee officials advised waiting until after May 6th. She also requested to meet with the Health Subcommittee after the meeting to schedule their next meeting date.

Item 9. Comments by TPO Staff

Ms. Mitchell informed the Board that the CTC's contract, which is renewed every five years, would expire in June of this year. She stated that the renewal process was underway and noted that the contract would be up for approval at the next meeting. She encouraged everyone to be on the lookout for it.

Mr. Balmes informed the Board that the TPO was working on the 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan and was seeking public feedback through a survey. He noted that the survey aimed to gather input on areas of emphasis, community needs, and project locations. A QR code was provided for access, and he encouraged members to participate or share it with others. The survey would remain open until March 28th, and results would be shared once the assessment was completed.

Item 10. Comments by CTC

Mr. Murch expressed appreciation for the kind words from board members to Marion Transit and took the opportunity to highlight the key staff members who contribute to Marion Transit's success. He recognized the transit managers who oversee the drivers and ensure they meet high standards of care. He also acknowledged the staff responsible for scheduling to ensure timely transportation for clients.

He provided an update on fleet improvements, noting that five new buses had been received and were undergoing adjustments before being put into service. An additional five buses were being prepared for delivery, with a total of ten new buses expected in the system within the next few months. These buses were expected to enhance the rider experience.

Mr. Murch also recognized a transit driver as the Driver of the Quarter, highlighting years of service and significant contributions, particularly in client transportation and wheelchair trips.

Additionally, he shared year-end ridership statistics, reporting a 15.1% increase in ADA transport, a 3% increase in 5311 service, and a 10.8% increase in TD service.

He emphasized that overall ridership had grown consistently by approximately 10% annually, reflecting a continued demand for services, which Marion Transit would strive to meet.

Item 11. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Item 12. Adjournment

Chairman McClain adjourned the meeting at 10:53am.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Shakayla Irby, TPO Administrative Assistant