

To: Craig Blewitt and Andy Garton, MMT
From: Scott Baker and Mark Schofield, AECOM
Date: 16 July 2010
Re: **Summary of Key Ideas Heard in the One-on-One Interviews**

Introduction

During the weeks of June 7-11 and July 7-9, we met in one-on-one interviews with over two dozen Colorado Springs community leaders representing a range of organizations – business and economic development, environmental, special services (for the poor, elderly, or disabled), educational, historical preservation, and more. A full listing of the interviewees is provided as Attachment A. The community leaders were not selected for their specific knowledge of transit in the region, although many did provide valuable information about Mountain Metropolitan Transit (MMT) and the Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority (PPRTA). Instead, the leaders were chosen based on their broader understanding of the political and economic situation in Colorado Springs and how transportation relates to the needs of the region's citizens and businesses.

AECOM developed a guide for the interviews, which is provided as Attachment B. In many cases, the guide was not needed, as the community leaders provided thoughts on the key topics without prompting. Each one-on-one interview lasted approximately one hour, and interviewees were told that no comments would be directly attributed to them unless they specifically requested it, which none did. In general, we found the community leaders to be very candid in their responses, and many of the interviews ranged into topics beyond transit. However, for the purposes of this summary, we have only included comments that related directly to the issues in our transit governance and funding study. Where appropriate, we also asked the interviewees to distinguish between their own personal views on a subject (e.g., the most appropriate funding source for transit) and what they perceived to be the views of the group they represent or the community at large.

The key issues on which we attempted to draw out information and opinions from the community leaders included the following, phrased here as questions:

- What **funding sources** are most appropriate for transit?
- How **independent** should transit governance be? Would you like to see transit as part of the City, County, PPRTA, an independent district (like RTD in Denver), etc.?
- What level of **support for transit** do you perceive in the region? What **opposition** do you foresee to changing the governance or funding of transit, if any?
- What do you think is the "**right**" **level of transit service** for the region, and do you think there is a willingness to fund that level of service?
- If you had to promote transit, what **benefits or characteristics** would you emphasize?

Responses from the interviewees on these key issues are summarized below. Some responses touched on multiple issues, so the categorization is not absolute – the content of the response itself is more important. As noted above, no responses are attributed. In general, we also have attempted to indicate whether the comment was voiced only by a single person, by a few people (two to four), or by many people (five or more).

Funding Sources

- A concern from many (though not all) is that the tax base in the City is too low to provide quality services (not just transit).
- The 1% PPRTA sales tax rate is capped, but RTA may have other funding options.
- Some respondents asked about hotel or rental car taxes – would be paid mostly by visitors, not residents, but acknowledged that Broadmoor and others would oppose.
- Many respondents said they thought property taxes were very low, especially relative to other areas they had lived in, but they understand that many voters prefer the current system of relying primarily on sales taxes rather than property taxes.
- One respondent was strongly opposed to “single source” funding for transit – emphasized that multiple funding sources provide stability/resiliency during poor economic times
- One respondent emphasized the need to distinguish between short-term “budget fixes” and long-term sustainable funding in this study.

Independence of Transit Governance

- *Perceptions of the City of Colorado Springs:*
 - Nearly all respondents said that the City Council of Colorado Springs has lost credibility with the voters. There is very little trust that the City will “do the right thing,” and this applies to many areas, not just transit.
 - As a result, many respondents said that removing transit from the control of the City would be a good change.
 - Many respondents said it is difficult to predict the near future (politically) in the City due to the turnover coming on City Council and the potential change to a “strong mayor” system.
 - A few respondents brought up the much larger question of a potential unification of the City and County.
 - However, one respondent felt that having transit in the City, with the City’s “weight” behind it, was a positive.
- *Perceptions of the PPRTA:*
 - Many respondents had a positive assessment of the PPRTA. This included positive views on:
 - the public outreach effort that led up to the PPRTA ballot referendum;
 - the prioritization process (through CTAB) that identified the roadway capital projects that would be undertaken;
 - the decision to allocate the 1% sales tax across roadway capital, roadway maintenance, and transit;
 - the performance of the PPRTA Board; and
 - the fact that the PPRTA has delivered the projects it promised on-budget and with no scandal.
 - Overall, a feeling of competence and trust has been developed.
 - Many expressed a desire to pursue transit funding in coordination with the PPRTA
- *Perceptions of El Paso County:*
 - Many respondents had criticisms of the County, but overall felt that it had more credibility with the region’s citizens than the City.
 - Some felt that the County has been largely absent from discussions on transportation.
 - Some respondents felt that the City’s decision to move facilities to Garden of the Gods Road (from downtown) showed a lack of concern about transit accessibility.

- *Taxing districts:*
 - Some feeling that the region already has lots of special taxing districts (schools, libraries, PPRTA, new developments out east along Powers, etc.).
 - Many respondents saw the RTD in Denver as a good example of an independent district
- *Overall view of governance as an issue:*
 - Many respondents thought governance would not have much “resonance” – that the quality of the service (both perceived and actual) is much more important. However, that feeling was not universal – some respondents thought governance would be important to voters.
 - Some respondents felt that it would be good to take the “political” aspects out of transit by moving it from the City to an independent agency.
 - Some respondents emphasized the need for “consistency” – regardless of the governance, transit needs consistent support, leadership, and funding. This will be especially critical to attracting choice riders.
 - One respondent noted that the Federal Transit Administration seems to prefer independent transit agencies.

Support/Opposition to Transit

- Many respondents noted that transportation (broadly speaking) is always a key issue for local Chambers and economic development bodies, but not always transit.
 - However, many respondents noted that “young people,” corporate headquarters, and high-tech businesses look at transit when choosing where to locate
- Nearly all respondents noted the general opposition to tax increases in the Colorado Springs area.
 - The success of PPRTA and TOPS (open space) were noted by many, however.
- In addition to general anti-tax sentiment, some respondents expressed a feeling that it is hard to convince retirees, especially military retirees, of the value of public transit.
- Some noted that existing riders don’t have a political voice or deep pockets

The “Right” Level of Service

- There was no consensus on the “right” level of transit service, and many respondents said they simply were not sure what the right level of transit service is for Colorado Springs.
 - When asked more specifically whether the right amount was less than the current level, at the current level, at the level 2-3 years ago (after PPRTA and before the recent service cutbacks), or more than the level 2-3 years ago, many still were unsure. Many others indicated that the recent cutbacks have caused hardship in the community, indicating at least that the current level is too low.
 - Some respondents indicated surprise that the Fort Carson route was cut.
- Many respondents said that the perception of “big empty buses” running up and down the streets hurts transit’s chances in the region – that people think the transit service is not being run effectively and will be unlikely to vote for additional funding support without service changes.
 - Many respondents noted that the typical travel time on the bus is highly uncompetitive relative to the automobile and wondered if improvements could be made.
 - One respondent specifically said that the region should not spend additional money just to get the system back to how it was.
 - Some respondents asked, in essence, “Why bother at all?” if the transit system is only going to exist at a “subsistence” level.

- Overall, transit funding was seen as “easy” to cut in the recent budget reductions, and there has not been a widespread push to get it back.
- Some respondents asked whether a much larger “demand response” or “dial-a-ride” system could be implemented in Colorado Springs, using smaller vehicles with fewer fixed routes.
- The need for good Springs-to-Denver transit was emphasized by many respondents.
- Many respondents emphasized that service after 6pm and service on weekends is desperately needed by riders whose jobs are not “9-to-5.”
- Some respondents asked whether the system could be “privatized,” so that the public sector had essentially no role in it. They also asked whether such an option would be presented to the steering committee.
- One respondent said that at the outset of the process, the committee needs to decide if it is trying to keep the current system going, or if it will try to pursue “visionary” change

Benefits or Characteristics of Transit to Emphasize

- Respondents noted a number of different possible characteristics to emphasize:
 - Obligation to provide transportation to those who cannot drive
 - Congestion mitigation
 - Pollution reduction and other environmental concerns
 - Energy security
 - Desire to support different land use patterns
- Some respondents noted that a single transit system might have difficulty delivering on all the characteristics noted above.
- *How to address lack of choice riders on transit?*
 - Many respondents attributed lack of transit ridership to a “Western mentality” – people wanting to drive their own cars and not be tied to a transit schedule.
 - At the same time, many respondents discussed the economic factors in the region that make transit a less competitive mode – relatively uncongested roads, relatively easy/cheap parking, low-density land uses, and uncompetitive bus travel times.
- Many respondents said that any transit referendum or public outreach effort must emphasize “what can transit do for me?” to the average citizen who right now is not using transit. The message cannot be simply “paying for other people’s transit” – there needs to be a “return on investment” from transit.
- Many respondents said that a “stand-alone” transit ballot initiative would very likely fail, particularly if it only focused on bus transit
- Some respondents asked whether major transit capital investments (such as a streetcar) could be included in the “next round” of capital projects in the PPRTA reauthorization.
- Some respondents said they would like to see a 30 or 50 year vision pursued, but understood that it’s difficult to get voter support for things so far in the future.
- One respondent said that the study and steering committee “process” would be critical, in order to convince the public that the recommendations are valid.

Other Issues

- *Coordination and interaction with special services transportation*
 - Lots of cross-jurisdictional special service transit (e.g., Mountain Community Transit transporting people into Colorado Springs and Denver).
 - Special service providers are joining together (led by Silver Key) to pursue a federal grant to develop a coordinated scheduling and dispatching system.

- Despite importance of special service providers, need to recognize that MMT transports more seniors (because there are only 60,000 annual trips on Silver Key vs. 3 million on MMT).
- Right now, regular public transportation exists as a “safety net” underneath the private automobile, and special services are a “second safety net” underneath that.
- Feeling that people in the region under age 60 with no auto transportation are at a major disadvantage.
- *Transportation and Education*
 - Transit is critical for some high school students – reach choice/magnet schools, after school jobs, sports/arts – also important for their parents.
 - Service cutbacks hit some college students in the City hard as well.
 - CC and UCCS would very much like to see improved transit to their campuses.
- *Additional responses regarding the Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority (PPRTA)*
 - Questions raised about whether PPRTA could own/operate transit services – heard different responses – need to speak with PPRTA attorney to understand specifics of:
 - State RTA legislation
 - “Master” intergovernmental agreement (IGA) referenced in ballot question
 - IGA between PPRTA and City of Colorado Springs for PPRTA to fund MMT
 - Many respondents noted that the capital portion (0.55%) of the PPRTA sales tax will sunset in 2014. (The 0.35% for maintenance and 0.10% for transit do not sunset.) There was no consensus among the respondents about how to address a potential “reauthorization” effort for the 0.55%. Some respondents wanted to see a reallocation of the 1.0% tax among the three uses, while others were concerned that any changes could put the whole tax at risk.
 - Many respondents expressed unhappiness that the City had not maintained its funding commitment to MMT and that PPRTA is now funding the majority of the transit provided by MMT.
 - Concern about a possible “death spiral” for transit
 - Concern that a regional transit system might collapse when the City has financial problems
 - However, also acknowledgment that PPRTA needs the City and cannot “go out on its own” – it would lose Federal grant funding and currently has no staff or facilities of its own

Attachment A: List of Community Leader Interviewees

Richard Skorman, Director	CS Conservation Corps
Brian Binn, Military Affairs	CS Chamber of Commerce
Annie Oatman-Gardner, Reg Dir	PP Office/US Senator Michael Bennet (and SNAPP)
Dave Munger, President	Council of Neighbors & Organizations
Ron Butlin, Executive Director	Downtown Partnership, Downtown Development Authority
Ray Krueger	Disability Services Inc./Amblicab Board; Quality Sys for Public Personal Rapid Transit VP and Board; Green Cities Coalition steering group & Transport. Working Group
Dan Stuart	Sustainability Funding Committee Chair
Stephannie Finley, Gov't Affairs	CS Chamber of Commerce
David Schaffer	Silver Key Senior Services
Jim Stewart, Chairman	Black Chamber of Commerce
Lynn Hopeman, Exec. Dir.	Pikes Peak Partnership/Amblicab
JD Dallager, Exec Director	Pikes Peak United Way
Lynne Telford, COO	Pikes Peak United Way
Mike Kazmierski, Exec Director	CS Regional Economic Development Corp
Jane Ard-Smith	Sierra Club and Pristine Energy
Andy McElhany	Former state senator
Dave Van Ness	Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce and T59 program
Karla Grazier, Exec. Dir	Goodwill Industries
Rob MacDonald, Exec. Dir	PPACG -- took place by conference call
David Schaffer	Silver Key
Dave Lippincott	Pikes Peak Historic Street Railway Foundation
Joe Woodford, retired	Woodford Industries
Mike Poore, Deputy Superintendent	School District 11
Les Gruen	Urban Strategies
Christopher Juniper	Natural Capitalism, Inc.
Linda Kogan, Director	UCCS Sustainability
Steve Saint	Peace & Justice League, Green Cities Coalition
David Buttery	City of Woodland Park – planned for conference call

Attachment B: Interview Guide

Background Information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountain Metropolitan Transit (MMT) system supports a growing, regional population of 700,000 and provided 3.8 million one-way public transit trips in 2008. • Transit operating budget has been cut by more than half in last 24 months. • Municipalities/counties throughout the region share in the need for increased mobility services. • As in most metro areas in the U.S., jurisdictional boundaries are not dictating regional travel patterns and transit demand. • Many metro areas have responded by delivering transit service through regional rather than municipal transit systems. • In Colorado Springs, much of the <i>municipal</i> transit operating budget is funded with <i>regional</i> sales tax funds, yet • MMT operations are governed/administered by the City Council of Colorado Springs. 	
Interviewee	
Name	
E-mail / Contact	
I-1)	In which communities do you live and work?
I-2)	What is your involvement with transit?
Funding/Financial Questions	
II-1)	How much service do you think the Pike's Peak region is willing and should be willing to pay for? (High level – Austin, TX Moderate level – Jacksonville, FL Low level – Hampton-Newport News)
II-2)	In general, would you suggest changes in the structure for providing or funding transit in the Pikes Peak region?
II-3)	Should the region use sales tax, property tax, payroll tax, or other to pay for transit?
Organizational Structure Questions	
III-1)	How independent should governance of transit be? a) remain a city department b) an agency or comm'n of the city c) an agency or commission of PPRTA d) a new authority