

RTCC Meeting Notes

04-06-23

Attendees:

Alisha Alvarez (TxDot)
Carey Amthor (MHMR)
Danila Gallegos (Waco Transit)
Debbie King (Executive Director Meals on Wheels for Falls and Hill counties)
Donnis Cowan (HOTCOG)
Heather Travers (McLennan County)
Jana Svacina-Waldrop (Waco Transit)
Johnathan Mize (Texas Workforce Solutions)
Judge Justin Lewis (Hill County)
Julie Talbert (HOT Workforce Solutions)
Judge Cindy Vanlandingham (Bosque County)
Judge Jay Elliott (Falls County)
Kari Davis (McLennan County)
Misty Hendon (HOTCOG)
Russell Devorsky (HOTCOG)
Rep Pledger (HOTCOG)
Serena Stevenson (Waco Transit)

Call to order 11:01 am. Location HOTCOG Fishbowl room.

Judge Lewis: Thank everyone for being here. Discuss usage of the remaining funds from the current RTCC budget.

Rep: TxDOT, This year we have \$35,000 for continuation of the RTCC plan after it was set up. It's now set up. What Misty and I did was set it up for meetings to have meals and go that way with it. What we're going to have to do is everybody is going to have to put their collective minds together and decide how we want to start spending the rest of that money to make sure it gets spent by the end of August.

Judge Lewis: What are the eligible expenditures?

Rep: Of course, there's the meals, you could do surveys, it pays a little bit of Misty's salary, the hours she works on it. Anything really to do with the continuation, we could go out and have meetings in other locations. We kind of talked about that in the last meeting. We want to keep everybody close and off the phone. The one thing I do have to figure out, is this month's board meeting have the other meeting after it or is that next month?

Russell: It's this month.

Rep: Ok so May there's not another meeting after the board meeting?

Russell: Correct.

Rep: So next month's meeting will be immediately after that?

Russell: Correct.

Rep: Ok I'll get that set up and take care of that so that way you aren't traveling back and forth and keep everybody there and about.

Russell: To let the judges know, as you're aware we have HOTCOG, then every other month we have HOT ED, that gap month now you'll have HOT ED after one meeting and have RTCC after the other meeting. Since y'all are already here it just brings everybody together.

Rep: I'll get a better list of what the funds can be spent on and have Misty send it out to everybody so we can look at it and see what we want to do and how we want to spend it. And it may be a big survey to everybody in all six counties to get everything covered that we need to get covered. If that's the case, I'm going to come back to the group and ask the group to come up with the questions. What do we want to see on the survey so we're not just putting something out there. It doesn't do me any good to sit back and write it down and it not be the questions that somebody wanted to ask. I will get that in depth list of things it can be spent on and we'll go from there.

Judge Lewis: I just don't want to cross any lines or step on any toes and find out we spend money on an expenditure that wasn't allowed.

Russell: Can it be used for educational outreach or for advertising?

Rep: Education and outreach, those pamphlets you pass out, yes. Advertising I'll have to check on.

Russell: That would be something you could use, local newspapers aren't going to give you anything that you're not paying for. They're in the business to sell, not provide. So once a month if you bought an ad and you gave the number and schedule, that might help.

Judge Lewis: I find it interesting the number of people, even after all these years, tell me that they just heard about this rural transportation. So, the advertising is something that we could possibly spend and allocate money towards that would be useful.

Russell: We had the Marlin Democrat call last week and wanted to do an interview because they found out about bus service in Falls County and they want to know how long it has been there and I tell them since 1972.

Judge Lewis: I gave the State of County speech over in Whitney back in the beginning of March and it's the same thing, so I brought up this and it's part of what's done and the people say, "oh I didn't have a clue. How long has it been going on?"

Russell: They've noticed the blue bus. While they've had the rural transportation buses for a while, they recognize the blue bus as being "new", so it's actually doing what you want it to do.

Judge Elliott: The blue bus stands out. The white buses blend in. As they drive by, the only thing they're going to see is a little bitty circle with a Texas thing on it and they can barely,

and again I know what they are, but if that bus is driving by, and again I'm driving or just sitting there, it's, unless you're paying attention, you barely catch the rural transportation. But again, here's my thought, most of the time people think it is something else other than what we do.

Russell: It looks like a hotel shuttle, nursing home shuttle, dialysis shuttle. It's not unique. It just blends in.

Judge Elliott: They think it's for dialysis only, "Rural transportation, they only take medicals". They only do XYZ and I think that's what they look at because, you know, one of those that, because the buses that came around, and I'll just use Falls County, were at Waco on that loop route they weren't, they were Waco Transit, or a McLennan County bus, and I go, and they knew ok that was the loop bus. They knew the loop bus. But the blue bus pops. We have the flyers out and people have been taking them like candy.

Judge Lewis: Just to poll the rest of the group, what are your thoughts? You're listening to us speak but we're only seeing things from this level. You guys are probably a little more in-tune to day-to-day. What do you feel like maybe the best expenditure for these funds would be?

Debbie King: I would like to get some of those flyers for Falls County on that just to send out to our clients that live there and then whatever you can do for Hill County because a lot of our clients probably don't know that those things are available.

Judge Lewis: Do you know if your drivers have access to the 211 Area Agency pamphlets?

Debbie King: We do.

Judge Lewis: Do they hand those out to clients?

Debbie King: Yes, but I will tell you that I believe most of our clients call our staff and say, "I can't find this/that" and so my staff ends up going back to look it up. It's not easy for the people that have reading issues. They can't figure it out. My staff spends a lot of time teaching them how to use the book.

Judge Elliott: That's another reason we need to keep Meals-On-Wheels.

Judge Lewis: Any input on what we might want to spend these funds on from your position?

Russell: Spanish.

Debbie King: We don't have many Spanish speakers outside of McLennan County.

Heather: Social media marketing. Kari manages our social media marketing at the county for our department and that's like QR codes for information on tutorial videos. We talked at the last meeting about people just not knowing how to utilize the system and having folks come out to events and actually demo. It seems really simple but it's the basics. So, if we can have some type of social media marketing that people, when they're sitting in a lobby they can watch on screen, we have found in our world that that's the most helpful. Tangible things are great, but that generation of

people wanting something tangible is going away. Everything is on the phone. We do both, but that's my thoughts. That's the only thing I haven't seen much of.

Rep: I have to ask. When you say that is going away, so we're getting more younger people?

Heather: I don't mean that to reference age, I mean that is way of the world now.

Russell: Like a phone book.

Heather: Everyone has cellphones, indigent or not. Reality is they all have cell phones.

Debbie: We still have a lot of flip phones in the senior population.

overlapping speaking

Russell: It's done as a book and we also have it on the website.

Heather: Even in the books we're seeing more QR codes as a means for advertising. You're getting other platforms. Even with the QR code you can link them to videos where even if a case manager is sitting with a client then they can encourage this and actually take them through and show them videos and familiarize themselves with how it works, how to use the app, or how to organize it.

Judge Lewis: We're seeing a lot of late adopters to technology as well. The clientele we had 10 years ago, a lot of the same folks fortunately, instead of being reliant on just the handouts, they do have the ability to learn some new tricks or they have a family member that's helping them out with that.

Heather: Most case management programs that have case managers, they're working with the clients and they're also using that as a tool, through your iPad or whatever. So, they can incorporate that into their skills training sessions.

Carey: I would agree with that. I think that's where it needs to go, to social media marketing. I agree with everything she said.

Johnathan: On the advertising platform with social media, like with our customer base, customers with disabilities with Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation, if you guys have something on the advertising side of that, say like in your six counties, you may already have some space with HOTWorkforce.com with the HOT Workforce, but if you had some information advertising on that space, a lot of times our counselors will steer our customers to that site about the rural transit and then you'd also have something like with the Waco Transit program. We may have customers that live in West and they may have to use one particular type of transit source to get to their work or medical appointment but then we may have somebody that lives in Riesel and they need to get to an appointment in Mexia and they're going to need the rural transit, so a way they can get to that is the social media, or digital space. We've had to go to it slowly because our cars got the fun seal and then we've got the QR codes. Then we've got family members, and some may not know how to use QR codes, then some may help show them how to use it.

The pamphlets are still valuable, if we could get a stack of those, we could get them out to our customers regularly.

Judge Lewis: I'm hearing a lot of uniformity in advertising and letting folks know what our program is. Also, a lot of talk about focusing on social media or video media at least that we can send out. We acknowledge that the paper pamphlets are still helpful and doing those in both English and Spanish.

Debbie: Is Hill County doing the blue bus yet?

Rep: Yes, we are. It's still a big thing in Falls. We just got an email from Shah yesterday saying that they've pushed the app to us so now we have the app for us to learn before we do anything with it. In Falls County we have Gene over there just driving around and if he sees someone walking, he stops and asks them if they need a ride. Surprisingly we get more no's than yes's. The app is up now and we're learning that. Hopefully by the next meeting I can tell y'all that we've pushed it out.

Debbie: If you post something on social media then we can put it on our Meals-on-Wheels site because we have people from all three counties that use that as a way to find out information.

Judge Lewis: We post that to the county's website as well.

Carey: When we talk about doing surveys too, we've got to push those through social media. Regarding past surveys, who has created those? Have they been professionally created or are they just based on what we want?

Rep: No, we just sit and talk and the last one created for us was about two years ago. We just put some questions together and looked at some other surveys and pulled some questions from those and did it that way.

Carey: I don't know if we want to look at spending money to get something professionally done that's really going to get the information that we can use.

Russell: We have an opportunity where we have some additional monies. The transit program has always operated on a shoestring budget. It's easy to say "let's spend \$100k on social media", but if you can't pay your drivers or pay your gas then that is really irrelevant. The transit programs.. I'm not speaking for Serena, but these things are bare bone operations.

Serena: They have a lot of different transit agencies like APTA that have resources for us as transit agencies so where you think it's just us throwing together some information just based off of what we know. We really do have a lot of outlines and information that we can use industry wise and then tag team and make it your own so it's really not just something we just generically make. We don't ever reinvent the wheel, we just always use somebody else's stuff and put our logos on it but that's what transit does because our budgets are all about that operating expense. Sometimes those other areas where private agencies could use those funds, we have to put those funds back into the streets.

- Johnathan: Regarding newspapers, it's possible just talking about the rural transit benefits side, another organization we're working with here in town, Central Texas Christian Counseling Services launched and it was in the "Tell Me Something Good" segment on KWTX. Perhaps KXXV and KCEN might do this. We've had good luck with that one story and that might be a venue to talk about this on the TV media side.
- Russell: We'll reach out to them again but we reach out to them on a regular basis and if there's other things more important than we're the last one on the list. We've got to get into our local rural newspapers. We've got about 20 different local papers but probably owned by the same three companies and guaranteed they all have different advertising rates.
- Debbie: Somebody just bought the McGregor paper and they're going to keep it running as a true local paper.
- Russell: I know that Limestone and Freestone County, Madison and Leon are all the same company. All they do is change the front page.
- Debbie: Does Hill County get the TV stations from the Waco area?
- Judge Lewis: We do, but they don't normally pay attention to us. We're in a bit of a major media market black hole. If I hear from Dallas or Waco, it's usually trying to make us look like hicks. It's not usually a pleasant thing for us. If it's Waco, then it's "How backwards is Hill County" to make McLennan County feel better about themselves. So, we don't usually go after those routes. We have two newspapers, one prints twice a week and one prints once a week. They service part of your county as well. And we have an AM news station that's pretty good about keeping up with the news but as for media what we find that works for us in the last 17 years as county judge there, is getting out and meeting people where they're at. So, I joined the board of local food bank a couple of years ago trying to make sure we get more of this information out to the crowd we're searching for. The event we held last year was great, hopefully we can look forward to doing that again, just showing people that we're all social services and having them at one time in one place. With social media, with what we had 10 years ago it wouldn't have been a great platform is now a wonderful platform.
- Heather: So, when we talk about spending the remaining money, is the objective that we're wanting to focus on advertising? I'm just thinking if we decide what the objective is then when can target the method.
- Russell: I think our objective is to see what you all want.
- Judge Lewis: So, if the general idea in this room is advertising, and it doesn't conflict with anything that are rules about the spending, then I think we go forward and flesh out that idea of what that advertising looks like. Whether it's social or local. The other thing is I would like to have an alternative from this group in case for some reason there is some prohibitional on spending this money for advertising. What would be the other thing you might find usable, or what are we missing that we could concentrate more resources to.

Unidentified: Could we give out free tickets?

Russell: I think McLennan County did give free tickets out to Waco Transit a few years ago and the majority of them went unclaimed.

Serena: That's correct. Because they generally don't know how the service runs, so while you're offering them a free opportunity to utilize it and get exposure, it's really more about "I'm not comfortable so I'm not going to venture out". But maybe if we did it again and promoted it, it would be something like a partnership program where you can take a person with you for free, somebody that you feel comfortable with, maybe it's something you push one day for that exposure. Unless it's somebody that uses on the regular, then they want all the free passes they can get. But to try and engage new riders, sometimes it's just that intimidation factor. They don't use it, they're used to their daughter or son or family member taking them and so just getting out there without having that kind of travel trainer with them, it's just intimidating.

Russell: I don't know that cost is an issue that we really run into.

Rep: 9 times out of 10, if somebody walks up to us and says have the money, we still let them ride.

Russell: I was on the Waco MPO for 23 years and we talked about the bus routes and had public hearings and you'd have people that would say they didn't want to walk the two blocks to the bus stop because it was too far. They have no transportation but walking two blocks was an impediment for them. How many people in here ride the bus?

Serena: I do it because I want to see the people out there.

Johnathan: That's why I do it too, to see what's happening.

Serena: When people see me, they might tell me something that's going on. We also encourage our staff to use it. They do ride it and they do surveys. Sometimes I don't get the exact same feedback from a driver that the passenger might say to like service development or to finance because they're like, ok you ride the bus and here's your survey and they might ask them like "how's your experience" and so my staff will provide that feedback to because you know drivers are going to tell you what they want to tell you and sometimes they'll see somebody different with a badge and they're like "oh you work here? Let me tell you about this driver." You kind of get that one-on-one. Then I'll go down to the terminal and they'll be like, "hey boss lady", and they'll just want to talk. I just really think it's about engagement. When you let them know that you're out there and want to hear them, then we can all make it better. In theory I can say let's do this, let's do that, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it works for that actual user. It's just about engaging drivers, passengers, stakeholders.

Judge Elliott: For me, for rural. The signs we had out there for the courthouse, I just sat there and went, I would need 3 and that would be two for HEB because they have two exit doors and I have one entrance and exit door at our other grocery store. That would

be all the grocery stores in Falls County. The sign will pop up because of the color, they'll look up and go "oh I didn't know" and it'll have the QR code and some other stuff. Again, I don't know if they would let me put that in there but again it's a business opportunity for HEB because if I have people that can get on the blue bus and make it to HEB more regularly, which is good for the person and good for the business. Especially if it's used. Like at the dialysis place. If we don't have advertisement at the dialysis place, even if they get brought there by their daughter, then one day when they can't make it, they'll try the blue bus. If we're trying to build clientele, those are more likely to use it.

Judge Lewis: With the advertisement being something that we all agree on, is there a secondary source that the group as a whole can say we'd like to explore this as well and bring it back to see which way we're going to go? And what's our deadline for spending these funds?

Rep: End of August 2023.

Russell: Regarding advertising, y'all are more interested in digital advertising. Is that what I'm hearing?

Judge Vanlandingham: Not for Bosque County.

Judge Elliott: Not me. I'm good with QR codes. They can't keep those on the clerks desk. I still have the 211 for 20-21 and I need to pick up more.

Russell: In y'all's rural counties, we were talking about the TV, I can't think of the last time I remember watching TV and they had a story on Meridian. Now when Norwegian days come out and they buy the ad, they'll give you a little news story, but our media market is McLennan County, centralized. Chanel 6 will do Temple, Belton, and Fort Hood. Chanel 25 and 10 will concentrate on us. 44 seems to be good about going around to different places, but they have a lot lower viewership.

Heather: In there with the media, not so much the news media, but every lobby you sit in now has a TV that you watch that just shows ads. We have them in almost all of our lobbies in McLennan County. So just having resources scrolling across, people watch that when they're sitting in a doctor's office or a county office. Just thinking about those, if we can get that digital ad to those folks to stream on their TVs then you're reaching a lot more.

Judge Lewis: I think it's a great idea. I will tell you though that our smaller counties and offices, there are very few adopters of those yet. Not that it isn't happening, we're just a little further behind. I still think it's a wise use of the money because there are enough folks sitting in the doctor's office that will see that. I can definitely see a split between digital and traditional media styles if that's the way we go. Again, we keep coming back to advertising, so if TxDOT comes back and says no advertising, what other things do we want to do?

Russell: In McLennan County, do you charge? Or if someone brings you something, do you just put it up?

Heather: We just put it on. Like I said, Kari manages all of our social media for McLennan County and we kind of spearheaded that in our department. It wasn't really a big thing within the county and now it's kind of been contagious. But people send Kari stuff and she converts it to what's needed.

Kari: We have Waco Transits "how to" videos on how to ride the bus going on in our lobby because our clients were scared to get out, so we went and did it ourselves and then we advertised the "how to" videos.

overlapping speaking

Judge Elliott: I understand because I would sit there a while and look to make sure I got on the right bus, looking at the loop because if you get on the wrong bus, you don't know where you'll end up and then once you end up somewhere you're going ok but how do I even get home.

Russell: The other thing we have to remember now is we can't target McLennan County riders.

Serena: What we could do is partner and figure out how we can work together to put out a message about how we connect. My focus is how do we meet those unmet needs and fill those gaps and talk about how we're more connected in what we do instead of how we're working in silos. We need to brainstorm and if I need to have a link on my website, I don't have a problem with that. Rep's bus comes to my yard every day and drops people off. We're working together more than people believe. If I've got people that are on medicaid and in your area and if I have your materials on there and that helps them be able to find his resources and it helps them meet that gap, then why not?

Russell: We all have people that live in different counties. At the end of the day, word of mouth is the best and most efficient advertising.

Serena: We can put your link on the website. It's not an issue for us. I think the connectivity helps all of us to get additional funding because the ridership is what's the main generator. So if you can bring them to me and I can bring them to you and we can figure out a transfer point for people who are trying to get to this location because I necessarily don't have the operators at this time because we're still dealing with operator shortages and if there's a transfer point that I can say on this day you can catch Rep's services and we can advertise that and Rep knows that on this day people are coming in from McLennan County to this point so I don't have to go away to Killeen because it's this type of trip, why can't we just try to figure out how to make that work instead of trying to figure out how to stay how it used to be.

Johnathan: Our team can benefit from, and we have about 18 people down the road, and can bring in some of the folks from Temple, too, that have customers in McLennan and the other counties around McLennan, word of mouth works. If you guys can provide benefits of use training to our staff. Julie Talbert and I used to do that a while back, prior to 2020. We did that about once or twice a year at HOT Workforce Center with our staff where they represent customers with severe disabilities in the six-county

area. They're needing to understand the program where they can ask questions and when they hear something that connects or even the partnering thing. Then you guys may even want to ask questions of our rehabilitation counselors and ask if you have a customer that lives in Groesbeck and they need to go to work at this place then here's how this service can help, but then they have a doctor's appointment somewhere else, you'll get those questions in the training that I can't answer. I think they would be ecstatic. I don't know if we could use those funds for those types of things, or like a lunch-and-learn. With our team I think we may get 70-80% participation.

Serena: Jana, what was that group we went to see?

Jana: Kiwanis Club.

Serena: Maybe we could present to groups like Kiwanis Club or something else that we may not necessarily be in but we could go and talk about the connectivity of it because a lot of times, their family members might need our services and those are opportunities for us to get the word out.

Russell: Rotary Club, Lions Club, Kiwanis Club.

Judge Lewis: Traditionally that's who we go to to get our word out so I'm glad you guys are doing the same. I agree wholeheartedly that finding those groups or even the 4H kids, that get out in the community and tell others about it. Any opportunity where we can get a crowd of people in front of us, we try to bring forth our message on what services we provide our constituents. I agree, interoperability and interchangeability between the organizations and even others that are outside this room would be beneficial to everybody. I have some veterans that have to go all the way down to Killeen to get certain VA services.

Johnathan: Yes.

Judge Lewis: That gives us a couple of ideas. Ok, the next item on our agenda is the presentation by Serena Stevenson.

Rep: What I asked is for Serena to come in and talk about the 5310 program. We do not apply for 5310 funds here at the COG, but they still do at Waco and McLennan County. To give an idea of what 5310 is.

Serena: Instead of just focusing on the funding, I want to focus on partnership. I want to focus on how it's allowed us to enhance the service delivery for people with disabilities, for people who are elderly, and I just want to say "thank you" to Ms. King because they are our subcontractor of this program. Our teams work really well together. Communication is really key with any partnership. So I'll tell you a little bit about what the program is but I really want to focus on showing you guys the numbers as to how these partnerships enhance and meet that gap that we at Waco Transit and McLennan County at times just based off of ridership and just based off of demand at certain hours we have certain rules. Under the federal program it has to be an hour before their requested time or we can negotiate times based off of rules and regulations but sometimes that doesn't necessarily work for the passenger

and so the passenger experience is key and that's where Debbie and her team comes in to help us provide excellent service to the community.

So again, 5310 is a program that provides federal funding for the purpose of assisting private and non-private groups and meeting the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provider is either unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting those needs. For us, again, it's about focusing on the gap.

Since 2017, Meals on Wheels, CTSM has been a partner with Waco Transit. That 53 funding is awarded bi-annually. In 2022 we received \$253,000 for this program and again it's bi-annually so we have to apply again. We currently do have a 5-year contract with Central Texas Senior Ministries, so in the event we continue to get the funding, because we keep applying, because again it's for the community of McLennan County and Waco and it helps us, especially with the shortage in operators, it helps us make sure that we don't have a deficiency in service delivery. In 2017-2018 we received \$275,431 under this program and then we were awarded an additional amount of money we went out for and we received that. So it's really a total for that year \$298,384. And in 2017, which is the first year that we had our contract with CTSM, that year we were awarded \$269,086 from TxDot and we used it and we were also awarded local match funds, TDCs, it's like a form of money, but it's not money, but we can use it to match so we don't have to use our local dollars to draw down those funds. So, we will continue to pursue these funds to enhance the mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities in our area. And again, these funds are allocated all to CTSM. Waco Transit System cannot perform those trips, nor can McLennan County, we contract that out, but we do provide, we receive a service fee for scheduling, invoicing, billing, and paying them out, so it is a small fee associated and our tablet use because they use our tablets, we schedule in our Ecolane software, they get the tablets, they're able to see those electronically, they can manage their trips, they can go into our system and cancel, which really helps us in our billing side, so again it's all about partnership, communication so we can provide an effective and efficient service.

I did a little thing about Meals on Wheels, and again right here we've been together since 2017. They actually have 8 vehicles that they focus on our service and helping us provide that delivery. Again, they help us in Waco as well as McLennan County. She has some very experienced operators, they've done this service with us for years. Her staff in house is very experienced. They communicate, they let us know what we can/can't do. And again, our contract has like "you work when we work" and all these different things, but I do believe as a partnership, sometimes the dynamics of what WTS and McLennan County does is different than in the dynamics of what Meals on Wheels does. Her staff, there are certain days that are holidays that are dictated that her office is closed and my office is open so on those days we don't provide those services under the 5310 program, we just encapsulate those trips and provide them under our general services, because again, that funding is specific to Debbie's program and we do pay them a per-trip rate.

Again, I want to give y'all a little history. In 2017, for WTS they provided 2,801 trips and they, in 2018 our ridership grew significantly and there were 12,308 trips provided in that program. We all know in 2019-2020 covid starts setting in so for WTS we dropped down to 6,958, 2020 we moved back up to about 7,086 through this program, 2021 there was 6,470 trips provided and then in 2022 there was 5,191. Again, I believe we have a drop in those trips because again we lost some more ridership, covid hit, people getting reacclimated to what we do in public service and feeling safe with it, in some of those we're rebuilding slowly, but again it's coming back together I believe for all of us.

For McLennan County she provided 1,441 trips in 2017, 4,238 in 2018, 4,716 in 2019, 4,029 trips in 2020, 3,303 trips in 2021, and 2,992 trips in 2022. So again, in 2022 we were up for a RFP and so there was about 4 months in there where trips were not provided, so I do want to clear up that may be an impact on why the trip numbers were lower, because the ridership was there but until we got the contract executed through the city and all that red tape that you have to go through with the procurement process it kind of impacted her. Again we were able to roll that money over and still allow her to have that funding in that next budget year. It wasn't like she lost the money, we just rolled it over because it was still awarded to us. So she was able to gain that revenue back as this year goes and she takes on additional trips.

Again, my focus for this was more about the partnership, what we do, how can we do things as a team to partner because where there's a will there's a way. When there's positive attitudes you can make it happen. Sometimes it's just about compromise. You figure out what you need to do to make sure the relationships stay strong. I feel like we have a strong relationship sometimes we have ups, sometimes we have downs, but we talk through it and in the end it's just about respect and integrity and making sure that in the end our focus is about the service that we provide, it's not about anything else.

Russell: So, let me ask you a question. I don't want this question to be morbid, but it is morbid. So, when our ridership went down, there's a natural transition just through death, people using our services, and when they're the senior services these people pass away. Are they being replenished as the aging population is moving up, or are we missing a gap? Are we losing the older ones that are passing away and the newer old people aren't using the system? Or do we have that data?

Serena: I think the trend is more about the conflict of getting back on to public transportation. There was a lot of miscommunication with regards to covid. Now it's passed, we had an aggressive campaign about how we use our disinfectant, how we had these spray machines to spray the vehicles down to spread that message. When McLennan and the city went down to essential services only, that impacted people having to find other alternatives, they had to find a way. If it wasn't dialysis or medically needed, then the trip was essentially optional as far as the public transit. We didn't provide service during our same traditional work hours because as you know the order came out and we had to work within those parameters. So, whatever those people found in the interim to continue with their quality of life, a

lot of them are continuing with that method. We have to figure out how do we recapture them, how do we show them the benefits of public transit. Again, I think it's about talking to your community, talking to CTSM and MPO and talking to the workforce centers so people know we're still here, we're a safe option, and we're back to our normal hours. I don't necessarily think we, again you know we lost some people, but I think our primary for dialysis, adult activity centers, Friends for Life, those type of populations are there and they're going to continue to be there. They are a primary user of our paratransit service. So again, being more present in the community as leaders and telling our story about how we do it and that we do it together and I think that will bring us back our people. You know, we lose people every day on that service because it's elderly and disabled, so we just have to keep pushing it and promoting our program at the dialysis centers. Friends for Life and those types of groups, they'll take up your whole ridership and take up your whole vehicle if you let them.

Jonathan: For the workforce centers, those conversations would be beneficial. We have, I think, ridership lowering. Disability population hit 2020-2021 because whether county representing in here, even in Travis County of Austin, I serve that area too, the first to be laid off and the last to be rehired still in 2022 are people with disabilities. Our society, unfortunately, and I hate making that statement, I've been doing this work for 28 years and I'd like for that statement to go away, but that's why I still have a job, because that still happens with a lot of companies. So we had some folks who are working and in 2020 hit, we had a lot of folks connect back to our program. They were employed, they got laid off. They're not going to work getting rides if they can't get hired. When companies had to trim back those things, they were pulling our customers first and across different industries, we're getting people connecting in more now. And that's another thing training benefits, to help our folks and also the welfare-to-work, with the workforce center as well because these customers are ready and have the skills to get back in to work but our, I remember from a few years back like CTSM. I need to know more, like how do we, if you had somebody in examples, if we had a training that would be great. Let's say you have Jane in McGregor and she has a job in North Waco that she can get, that job is going to be there for her, but Jane doesn't have a car because with gas prices and things she gave up her car. She can work but she has to get there, what would she use? Would she do the CTSM? Does she do the Waco Transit? Who does she connect to to get to work? And then you have an example like Fred in Waco got a job in West but he needs this transportation. When we get those examples or situations like that to our staff and our workforce center down the road, that would be the sweet spot, because I think we'd get more ridership in that. Then our counselors can tell the story and help their customers. They don't know how to connect them to presentation methods.

Serena: I think we need to sit down and schedule some times, do some meetings, tell the story, figure out some scenarios that you guys have experience with, work those scenarios up, provide the documentation. Provide a walk-thru, let them ask some questions. We map it out, do kind of like a travel training and invite anyone to come, as well as we can train your staff. If there's a situation that they have that's

unique then they reach out to us and we figure it out. I work with MCC on a lot of unique situations and we figure it out. Sometimes it just takes calling Rep or me and then all of the sudden the barrier that the front line person was having just kind of disappears. I think it's really about knowing who to call and from there training people and calling us and we'll go out and we'll do the work to educate the people.

Judge Elliott: I would say, more than likely, if you've been just in McLennan County, if you've used it before, you probably have a better understanding of the rural to Waco if you've used it. Here's where I think we have a rub too on the workforce, you're more likely to have a just out of the county guy, which hits him, going into the county, McLennan, then once in McLennan it throws him (Rep) out and puts her (Serena) in.

Serena: It depends on what they're doing. If he (Rep) brings a person in to Waco or McLennan and he brought them from a point of origin that's outside of McLennan, he's well within his rights to pick that individual up within that county and take them back, but if they want to do something within McLennan County and we're talking and it may be a more seamless effort as a transit provider I have the right to say he can provide that service. It's not a, the law says we can coordinate and if there is an issue like that, we can coordinate. It's not black and white here.

Judge Elliott: Right, but what I was saying is like I go to work, I have a doctor's appointment, and I go hey the best one is. So I can get to the doctor's appointment in McLennan County, I go back to work, then I hit Rep, like I normally do, or start doing, and then he takes me home. It's one of those, that's what I'm saying. The going back and forth to work is relatively easy I say from a Blue Transit aspect, but it's the spider web that potentially in McLennan County that going to a doctor's appointment just knowing the two I call.

Judge Lewis: I think that's something we use with our people is how to interact with Waco and McLennan County rural transit and what services they can provide in addition to the services we provide within our county. It's just how do those COGs mesh together. I think that's a simple training thing.

Jana: We can create a simple business card with all three phone numbers on it that's a shared cost and it goes in your wallet and that's an easy reference for them to pull out.

Serena: Even if Rep's person is coming in and he has a doctor's appointment in McLennan County and he was there to provide that service and that person wasn't going back to work, Rep can schedule that trip in my county and take that person back. He knows that I'm not going to be this territorial person that. It's really about knowing that while the rules are there, they're always open to coordination. That's what the state wants us to do, that's what we need to do, and we need to make it about the passenger experience because either way it goes, without the passenger, neither one of us wins.

Russell: And it's all about ridership in the end and providing that service.

- Serena: And we both got a little something out of it instead of that person saying, "I'm so frustrated I'm not going to go at all."
- Johnathan: It's just the rider needs it to be seamless behind the scenes where they have a day, they're going to work, maybe an 8-4 and they have a doctor's appointment at 10 o'clock with a specialist by Hillcrest and they don't want to take off work the whole day, but they live in Personville and they come here to work and there they are. They don't want to go home right after that doctor's appointment because they have some work they've got to do the rest of the afternoon, they think they can do it, other staff have done it and don't have to do a public transit means, driving their car. They're wanting to find out can I go in my job a couple of hours, can I find a way the resource can pick me up and take me back to work and I know how I can get from work back to home, that's going to be their dilemma.
- Serena: I don't know if you have the mobility component here but we have the mobility management component at Waco Transit and for McLennan County so that's when, I don't know how your software works, but like in our software it can red tag the counties that are not ours and at that point we can facilitate the call to get the trip scheduled with Rep's individuals and then what we're communicating with to the passengers is ok Waco Transit is going to be here at this time, Rep's individuals will be there at this time, they will return at this time, and then Waco Transit will return you. We have the capability to in our systems to book that and make that as seamless. It's just about our frontline staff utilizing each other, reaching out to each other, and not just saying, "hey that's not my area so you're going to have to call Waco Transit." We have mobility management money that can make that happen. That is an option I believe under an eligible expense that you could use in this manner.
- Russell: That was part of our big plan. We just did that big plan, it was mobility management. Sometimes even the customer is unique. Sometimes their desires and demands are not something that can be met easily. Rep had one that was a dialysis patient who rides all the time, live in a multi-family unit. The mom lived in the front and the bus would pull up and pick up the mom then they traded houses and the mom was in the backside of the property with a lot of trees and you couldn't back the bus up in there and the daughter would not bring her mom down to the front house so that she could get on the bus so it created an issue. So we had to send out specialized vehicles to pick up the lady for dialysis and the daughter said to just back under the tree that she didn't care and we told her we didn't want to tear up our buses and I don't want to tear up your trees. It's not that we don't want to meet that need, but the demands that the customer put on are not acceptable and so we had to go back and work out another route to take a different type of vehicle to that person. We had to use one of the minivans and she wanted the big bus. Those are just not reasonable requests so those are the things you have to work with. We can't tear up equipment to help one. We mentioned the federal guidelines element. The federal guidelines on covid were state guidelines and we have to meet those. I know you're (Serena) the same way, you're limited on your drivers. You don't have

20 drivers just sitting around waiting for you to say, “hey what am I doing to do today?”. It’s not an Uber system.

Serena: I think that’s why it’s more important for us to figure out how do we get that mobility management component in and figure out how internally your person knows who my person is, they can talk when those unique situations come up because it does happen. To let them know that the option is here and we will work it out and maybe we have to call them back because we have to reach them. We used to use the same software but they don’t use our software so when they were in our software it was a lot easier. We can work that out. We can send over, we can communicate, they can know the times to communicate and we can do the same, but often times I don’t have people really traveling too far out unless they’re medicaid and that comes from a whole different policy, that’s not even public service. So if I’m not using that, I’m using not in the other counties, you know, but not to say if I did and somebody was asking that of us, my staff knows they need to call Rep unless they meet that 5310 age requirement and then they would go to.

Debbie: Let’s be clear that they would call your office.

Serena: Yes, everything comes through our office so the seamlessness is there. But the work on the backend is what we do in-house. All they know is that a vehicle is coming and there’s a time.

Russell: There’s a lot of work that’s done on that backend that nobody sees.

Debbie: So, I do want to say one thing that we talked about last meeting was the idea of making sure there’s a one pay ability. Like if everyone had a card even if they’re in Falls or Hill and they come to McLennan, they don’t have to keep changing the tickets or whatever they have. I think that if we had this extra money that might be a good way to spend it, to do some of that research and find a way in the surrounding counties and use the same payment system.

Serena: I know that we are doing some, I’ve got a couple of different calls, our staff is working on an RFP, I’m visiting with Rep on which direction would really be best across the board because again, with that, it comes with equipment, it comes with training.

Debbie: And if we have that \$35k that we can’t advertise with, that might..

Serena: Yes, but then you have to see what’s called for, is it a capital cost or is it, what was it allocated for, so there’s a lot that, it’s not just free money that you do what you want to do. A lot of times it’s how the grant was written. We could request an amendment and hopefully TxDOT will work with you, but a lot of times how we lay it out initially and based off the time frame we’re doing a procurement RFP, that’s 90 days or so, but then itself based on the type of money you’re using, so it’s not always as easy as if you were a private person that you can spend your money how you want to. There’s a lot of red tape sometimes. In theory it’s great but sometimes you get down to it and our RFP we started that back in November but how long did it take just to get it executed.

Jana: Four months.

Russell: Just the lowest and best bid. Just because it's the cheapest doesn't mean it's going to be the best and if you're doing capital equipment, you want to be sure whoever you're getting it from is going to be in business to carry out that guarantee.

Serena: So, they don't let y'all use even if you can justify using it. You can get a higher rate if a lot of times you justify it, you get what you pay for.

Judge Lewis: Lowest and best standards.

Russell: You don't have to take the lowest bid. The subject is if you don't take the lowest bid and they want to be an open records warrior, you go back and just take everything that you've done.

Judge Lewis: You've just go to document it.

Judge Lewis: That's very informative. At this point we have our public comment session. Is there anything that anybody wants to talk about that wasn't on our agenda or that we need to address?

Daniella: I'm Daniella with Waco MPO. We just wanted to let everyone know that the carbon reduction program is still under way. Deadlines for those projects is May 1st. Then also anyone needing help applying for the CFI, or is interested in, or any government entities are eligible.

Judge Lewis: Anything else?

*no response.

Judge Lewis: I'm going to entertain a motion to adjourn.

Judge Elliott: So, moved.

Judge Vanlandingham: Second.

Misty: If you haven't signed in, please do so.

Meeting adjourned at 12:10pm.