

RTCC Meeting Notes

10-14-21

Attendees:

Misty Hendon (HOTCOG)
Russell Devorsky (HOTCOG)
Gary Luft (HOTCOG)
Dan Dalton KFH Group
Ken Hosen (KFH Group)
Carey Amthor (HOTR – MHMR)
Serena Stevenson (General Manager for Waco Transit Systems)
Annette Polk (Waco MPO)
Susan Baker (Bosque County Senior Services)
Keith Vandiver (Bosque County Senior Services)
Susan Wilson (Director of Head Start - EOAC Waco)
Debbie King (Executive Director Meals on Wheels for Falls and Hill counties)
Chelsea Schultz (Interim Director for Waco MPO, senior planner)
Julie Talbert (HOT Workforce Board, Childcare Services Program)
Commissioner Will Jones (McLennan County)
Judge Jay Elliott (Falls County)
Judge Justin Lewis (Hill County)

Call to order @ 10:04am

Read open meetings act

Misty: Asked Gary if he had an update on the names we wanted added to the list that will represent the health and human services portion of our committee.

Gary: Does not have that information right now but will provide it shortly.

Commissioner Jones: Asked that Heather Travers be added to our mailing list (done).

Misty: Asked Ken to provide an update on where we are with the analysis.

Ken: KFH and HOTRTD jointly conducted 6 open houses spread throughout the service area – The needs of the citizens were all noted. They also met with a variety of transit providers and human services agencies and met with RTCC – outreach itself netted 33 meaningful interactions – where there was discussions where info was exchanged – for a coordinated plan that was really good – service to Waco – service to larger communities like Mexia, Groesbeck, Hillsboro, and Marlin – more service to rural areas to get people into the towns and into Waco – there are still needs in Falls County into the Temple area and especially for veterans –

Gone through the needs and done a demographic review and there are no surprises – identifying all communities of 500+ people where 99% of the people live – if we can capture most of those then we can grab the rest on a fixed schedule basis which we'll touch on next time

Also reviewed and are almost completed with the existing services and not a lot out there but something interesting and extremely unusual is that there are parts of or all of the 5 county service area – that are actually two different rural transit districts operating service there (just the 5 counties – not looking at McLennan County) – HOTRTD and McLennan Rural is providing some medicaid and commuter service from Falls County, from Marlin, and that is highly unusual and it duplicates efforts and splits the available local funding. Medicaid is considered local match for rural transit systems – so it takes away a lot of the potential rural match for HOTRTD and it kind of duplicates service – so that's the biggest issue we found regarding coordination.

Commissioner Jones – This information is incorrect. We worked hard on setting up the McLennan County so that they would get more money. Asked Serena to clarify this.

Serena – Medicaid is a contracted service – McLennan County receives those trips assigned by the contractor – they have no control over who those trips are assigned to – so they are available for that service in addition to the rural service they provide based on availability and what the providers have been able to provide historically is basically how the contractors have divvied up the trips and they have no control over that side on the trip distribution as far as the contract goes. Their service is demand response so individuals can call to meet the unmet need in McLennan County rural area – with respect to the contracted trips they are a local match for both of us and neither of us have control over how they are distributed.

Ken – So y'all are providing services in the 5 counties – is that correct – providing medicaid service in the 5 counties?

Serena – Yes.

Ken – As opposed to just in McLennan County?

Serena – Right.

Ken – And y'all are providing service in Falls County – starting from Marlin with a destination to Waco?

Serena – Yes as a connector, commuter route.

Ken – These are services we're referring to – not necessarily saying HOTRTD should be operating all those services, but we may at some point make that suggestion. If nothing else the service needs to be coordinated and right now it doesn't appear to be. From their research it's highly unusual for one rural transit district to be operating anything in another rural transit districts area. So, this is what we want to look at in terms of coordination. One way to deal with this would be to continue how we're operating and with agreements and boundaries and make sure all services are coordinate – another way would be

to give one operator to operate everything and gain coordination benefits of that – KFH is not the decision maker but will lay the options out there for us to decide.

Other alternatives they're looking at is related to operations in the 5 counties and funding – in terms of operation we're looking at 3 different types of service: 1 is service to more rural, isolated areas where there's shopping, medical, dialysis and providing services to those outside areas as efficiently as possible; 2nd in town service within Marlin having immediate micro transit, dial-a-ride, where it can pick you up within 30 minute and drop you off at the shopping center or wherever and it's very popular in all size communities especially those with 5, 10, 15 thousand people – doesn't cost more money other than the capital to get the new software – and there's a lot of money available for that. You can use existing vehicles and existing drivers – it's just done in real time so someone doesn't have to call a day in advance you can just call same day; 3rd is the inter county service with emphasis on Waco – much of the demand is for getting to Waco for medical, shopping, etc. Then once inside Waco the best way to negotiate the service area so we'll need to do some coordination with Waco Transit to enhance people's options – so those are the 3 pillars of operations they're looking at. KFH recently completed for RTD a comprehensive operation analysis which gets into more details about all of these things and about some of the solutions, so we'll be borrowing from that to put into this. The last thing is the funding – specifically getting local funding. In addition to grants we can get federal money at a local level – and there has been success with the private sector like Walmart and HEB supporting transit services. Local hospitals and oncology centers have been known to sponsor transit systems. Paris Texas has had success with that. There are opportunities to work with local shopping centers so riders don't have to go out of county to do shopping. So, these are what we're looking at – strictly in the discussion and exploratory stage. They will be happy to talk with Serena and Commissioner Jones on some issues to make sure we're on the same page.

Julie – Wants to add comments regarding the duplication in Marlin and remind people of the history and the beginning of that service which began with our first regionally coordinated plan which was when the bill was passed about 10-12 years ago.

Ken – He wrote that plan.

Julie – I was the lead on this project for years on the workforce side and that was the most successful project that came out of our initial coordination. We brought together both of our institutions of higher learning to support the service as well as Falls County contributed to it and supported it and many businesses in Marlin, including the hospital. But this has been a successful coordination that helped the use of Falls County to access MCC and TSTC for education, employment, and medical services. Sometimes the best type of project comes out of coordination and maybe we might see it as duplication, but they have runs multiple times a day and have brought in so much additional funding that wouldn't have been possible without this service. They have had 3 dart projects that were approved – brought money to the region that would not have been available – and Serena will confirm the rural transit funding for 3 successions on 2-year grants that came.

Serena – Also have some partnerships with employers that benefit from bringing those individuals in from the rural communities into Waco – recognize may see it as a duplication but she’s meeting an unmet need.

Ken – Doesn’t necessarily see it as duplication but sees it as a potential for duplication and thinks there are ways to enhance the service. As far as the service itself there’s no problem with that. That provides a lot of ridership – perhaps there’s ways to better coordinate with service that HOTRTD operates from Falls County as well – maybe one set of schedules so rider can see they have more options – actual administration and management coordination is one thing but would like to see more operational coordination.

Serena – Agrees. They are open to meet with anyone – and any way they can meet unmet needs. When she spoke with the consultants - spoke about creating a seamless fare option – go out on coordinated calls together with more service and less travel times. Very open to creatively and collaboratively work together to provide best service in the region.

Ken – Having the 3 transit systems work together and put a grant together just enhances our potential for funding. Want to see detailed discussion with HOTRTD and find ways to get seamless services with fares and service. We are already coordinated in maintenance. KFH will be providing a wide range of suggestions. Mentioned that they’ve had a lot of interest in the micro transit. It enhances ridership and makes life easier for the customers. They’ve seen a pilot program in Bastrop and their ridership is starting to jump dramatically. Very hopefully that this will be a solution for the small counties going forward. Anyone have any questions?

No questions from group.

Misty – The next item on the agenda was regarding small project ideas – anyone have anything to add to that?

No responses from group.

Misty – We’ve accomplished everything on the agenda. We’ve previously discussed only doing quarterly meetings instead of monthly meetings.

Judge Lewis – Let’s discuss that subject at the next meeting. This has taken a long time to get this reset at this point and we’ve had several aborted attempts to get this off the ground and it’s very important to our rural counties to take care of what we got. I’ve listened to Waco and listened to what they have to say and that’s great, but they don’t care about Hill County and the transit coming in and out of it. I need to make sure this council – this coordination council – is meeting more often than it has in the past so we can have those conversations with Waco Transit, with McLennan, with the City of Waco, with our four partners in the rural districts that surround McLennan County. I need this to happen more than just once a year or once every two years – so he’d like to set a date today for our next meeting.

The next thing he wants to do is to confirm what our governance is because this is a reset since it had been so long since we'd done anything. Need to determine who will run this particular meeting and make sure we're in compliance with open meetings act.

Judge Elliott – Agrees with Judge Lewis. They appreciate that McLennan County comes in with the contract piece. With the rural transit part, they have gotten to pick up with lots of medical. Biggest concern is that McLennan uses the rural counties to get more money to provide “x” services and they're minimized on those services and bigger on the money in McLennan County. He hasn't seen it happen but wants to make sure it doesn't happen. Wants to make sure that their county is taken care of and not forgotten. (portions inaudible)

Serena – McLennan County funding can only be used in the rural area – it can't cross over to Waco. So those are two separate things. Doesn't cross over to 5307 funding. Maybe we can sit down and go through the different funding elements and see how its used and its dissected out. She is open to having that discussion and being transparent in how they do it. If there are needs that they can better coordinate they are about the service and performance. She doesn't know historically what happened but wants to make sure McLennan County rural works with Rep and they have a good relationship. This is not territorial on their end – it's about the performance they can provide and how can we meet unmet needs that are out there in McLennan County and the other counties they are able to cross over to.

Judge Lewis – Agreed that it's not territorial.

Commissioner Jones – McLennan County Rural Transportation District meets in an open public meeting 4 or 5 times a year and that's governed by the open meetings act. They post and everything is open to the public (mic cut out).

Judge Lewis – We stand open to talk – it's not territorial. This is about providing services in their communities. They have historically not been a target for those services for your organization or others to our south. Many years ago, when McLennan took their services and left, they left the other 5 counties to do what they have to do. They have to make sure their operations can stand on their own. That being the case in this matter, the rides that go out to other districts – aka yours – that takes away money from rides that go into ours. Not saying he wants to take away rides that their services are giving but would rather see that coordinated better than it is currently. Glad Serena has a good relationship with Rep but would like to meet separately at another time so they can look at funding streams and how it's been coordinated to this point and how we can improve that.

Russell – More than willing to coordinate for the medicaid trips that originate in our region – we're more than willing to work with Waco Transit and the medicaid provider to let those trips originate with us.

Serena – We have no control over who the contractor assigns those trips to. We download the trips they give us. If they say the service couldn't be met by a different provider then they'll call us and ask if we'll accept a trip as she's sure they do to other service providers. The contract itself is out of their control. The trips they receive are generated by SafeRide and Modivcare, they are not generated by Waco Transit or McLennan County. We both get whatever the Medicare contractor sends our way and they

don't refuse any trips because that medicaid trip helps with match for federal dollars. Don't know if there's an issue with capacity – but as far as McLennan County goes, they have the capacity to provide the trips so they assign them to us. That's a conversation for CTAA on how the medicaid contract is going. Don't know if we're a part of that group but there is an open communication with regards to the contract and how the state is managing it and if they say someone else can't take it or refuses it and they call them then they will take it.

Russell – We agree about service. Encroachment is one issue, but they aren't reaching out to us to provide any service and since the trips originate in our area according to the law they should be reaching out to us so we want to engage and start a conversation with that.

Judge Lewis – If any of the contractors refusals have been documented he wants to see them because he doesn't believe they are reaching out to us at all.

Serena – That's outside of her area of control – it would be a SafeRide/Modivcare conversation – it's not the system – it's about how the contractor chooses to assign their trips.

Ken – Might request that the contractor only assign you trips that are generated in McLennan County that's typically done all over otherwise everyone would be encroaching on everyone else. The originating location should determine which rural operator handles service otherwise what's to stop HOTRTD from providing service in Waco and McLennan County and then everyone is competing with everyone else.

Russell – At the end of the day we want to serve our citizens.

Serena – Understands, just saying it's not her decision and it should be discussed with the contractor. She doesn't know how they document refusals. They have other small shops that provide medicaid trips because the contractor is allowed to do that. There are other providers that are taking these trips not just McLennan County and Waco – it's all on the contractor decision – if she's contacted then she will never refuse a trip.

Judge Lewis – Has Waco Transit or McLennan County ever reached out to the contractors and told them “Please don't assign trips to us that originate outside of our boundaries – please assign trips that originate outside of our boundaries to those entities outside of our boundaries and then if there are needs that the others can't provide, then please provide documentation of that?” We don't want to step on your toes and we don't like our toes stepped on either, but your help and coordination is paramount. We'll reach out to the contractors but we need you to assist to let them know that there are boundaries that we need to delineate and follow.

Serena – Would like to have conversation. Doesn't know if we already have contracts in place or know if we've gone through the credentialing process. Let's have an open dialogue and discuss these issues.

Ken – Will reach out to get a mini group together to work on solutions to keep everyone happy and do that in the next few weeks.

Russell – At our next meeting lets have some sort of governance structure proposed that would move forward with this committee.

Misty – Discussed meeting dates options.

Group – Agreed on the next meeting being held on November 16th at 2:00 pm.

Adjournment.