

CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE MINUTES

October 22, 2019

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in a conference at 5:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room on the 22nd day of October, 2019, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and the Norman Public Library at 225 North Webster 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Bierman, Carter, Hickman, Holman, Petrone, Scanlon, Scott, Wilson, Mayor Clark

ABSENT: None

Item 1, being:

UPDATE FROM MARION HUTCHISON, THE CITY OF NORMAN'S REPRESENTATIVE TO THE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE PROJECT(S).

Mayor Clark introduced Mr. Marion Hutchison, the City of Norman's Representative to the Regional Transportation Authority of Central Oklahoma (RTACO). Mr. Hutchison said he has been working on a Regional Transit System (RTS) for over 12 years and Norman is closer than it has ever been to creating a RTS. He said Norman has led the way from the beginning and the other participating cities have followed that lead.

Mr. Hutchison said many cities already have an intermodal regional rail transit system in place, such as Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Salt Lake City, Utah, etc. He said the City of Norman can review all of these systems to determine what works and what does not work. He said an RTS is essentially a comprehensive transit system to serve the mobility of an entire region that includes light rail, commuter rail, modern streetcar, enhanced bus, and rapid bus transit. He said an Intermodal Hub provides a central connection between modes and the transit system is typically operated by a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) created by participating local governments.

Mr. Hutchison said intermodal transit is the seamless movement of passengers from one mode to another through a central hub. The whole purpose is to provide efficient transportation options for the public because people will ride the systems if it is effective and will get them to their locations faster than what they can drive. He said one of the biggest factors is transferring from one mode to another offering connection between a set of origins and destinations and although intermodal transportation is possible, it does not necessarily occur. Intermodal transit is the movement of passengers or freight from one mode of transport to another, commonly taking place at a terminal specifically designed for such a purpose. Mr. Hutchison said intermodal hubs provide a central link for a RTS connecting with commuter rail, light rail, modern streetcar, and bus systems to provide efficient passenger transfer between transit modes.

Light rail is a smaller, lighter rail vehicle with faster acceleration and electric powered motors using overhead wire systems. Light rail operates within its own grade-separated right-of-way (not Federal Transit Authority approved for use in mixed rail traffic) in the street and has a shorter distance operation with more stations closer together and less passenger seating capacity with no restrooms or work tables. Light rail systems can cost \$100 to \$200 million per mile.

Commuter rail is a larger, heavier rail vehicle typically with a separate locomotive engine and passenger coach vehicles. Commuter rail has a diesel/electric powered motor with slower acceleration, but higher speeds. Commuter rail operates in existing freight rail right-of-way on existing at-grade tracks with longer distance operations and fewer stations spaced further apart. Commuter rail provides more passenger seating capacity, restrooms, and work tables. Commuter rail systems can cost \$25 to \$50 million per mile.

Mr. Hutchison said street cars are now in operation in Oklahoma City and it is important to consider how these street cars will serve the regional system. He said in a regional system, a person should be able to step off the train and step onto street car that will be going to that person's destination. He said this is known as the "last mile" component where a person may have to walk a block or two to their final destination, but the transit system should be able to get a person as close as possible.

Benefits of rail transit include providing a safe, energy efficient transportation system; generating economic growth; enhancing quality of life; reducing Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) and ozone emissions; ensuring economic competitiveness with peer cities in attracting and retaining businesses, jobs, and residents; and protecting our economic and transportation future with high fuel costs and time wasted in traffic. Mr. Hutchison said there has been strong public support for a rail system over the last eight years.

Quality of life benefits include providing affordable, efficient transportation options for traveling to work, school, entertainment, medical offices, civic facilities, and other public destinations; improving personal mobility and freedom for all citizens; saving on fuel and maintenance costs by lowering vehicle miles traveled; reducing time spent in traffic; allowing more time for work, personal interests, or relaxation; promoting better health by encouraging walking, biking, and daily exercise; easing traffic and congestion; improving air quality, health, and the environment by lowering emissions; and reducing stress related to transportation.

Economic benefits include stimulating transit oriented development; generating economic activity; raising property values; increasing local and state tax revenues; enhancing business, retail, and entertainment districts; accelerating urban renewal and core area revitalization; attracting new residents and businesses; and providing valuable cost savings for transit users. Transit oriented development increases business revenue, property value, and tax revenue, and improves quality of life.

Mr. Hutchison said economic development is about people. The better we move people, the more business we generate and economic success in the 21st Century requires making our region

attractive to an educated workforce. He said corporations have discovered that a good transit system is essential to recruiting such talent.

National trends on housing and transit project that over the next 20 years, the housing market will be dominated by retiring Baby Boomers and a younger labor force with a preference for smaller households and access to transit. Transit system availability will become increasingly important in meeting the mobility needs for aging Baby Boomers and Generation Y and Millennials have lower rates of car ownership and show a strong preference for urban style housing served by an effective transit system. As the United States labor force shrinks with the retirement of the Baby Boomers, availability of transit will be an important factor in retaining and attracting this young labor force, which will be critical to the economic success of businesses and cities.

Mr. Hutchison said public transportation saves people time and money. The American Public Transportation Association studied urban areas where both bus and rail service are available to commuters and they observed that, per year, riders saved 4,400 miles of driving, 223 gallons of gas, 273 hours stuck in traffic, and \$10,000 in fuel and maintenance costs.

Transportation system benefits provide valuable transportation options, and improves mobility, and increases transportation system capacity without creating additional traffic and congest. It does not replace automobiles and roadways, but is an effective means to address traffic and congestion issues related to population growth. He said growing cities with premium transit have slower rates of growth in vehicle miles traveled (VMT), especially during peak travel periods. He said reduced VMT growth translates into more efficient use of transportation modes.

Mr. Hutchison said a model system is the Salt Lake City Utah Transit Authority (UTA), which is a similar, western type geographic location and size of the proposed RTACO. He said the UTA was created in 1970 with a 15-member board appointed by municipal and county officials. They have a dedicated transit sales tax of 0.68375%. Their transit system consists of 131 bus routes; one bus rapid transit line; 373 buses; three light rail lines; 16 light rail trains; and one commuter rail system (88 miles from Ogden to Salt Lake City to Provo). The system has an intermodal hub in downtown Salt Lake City and directly serves Hill Air Force Base with annual ridership of 42,806,000 million riders.

Mr. Hutchison said in 2012, Mayor Mick Cornett of Oklahoma City brought Mayor Ralph Becker of Salt Lake City to give a keynote speech for the Mayor's Round Table and Mayor Becker said Salt Lake City's light rail streetcar and its integration with a commuter rail system serving outlying areas of the City and suburbs was particularly important to spurring private development. The linked rail and streetcar system helped inspire growth that also included people moving to downtown Salt Lake City about as fast as the City could handle. The ridership projections doubled and rail transit is making a huge difference in where people concentrate their economic investments, but also by relieving congestion and providing a pretty clear path to what the future of surface transportation will be.

Mr. Hutchison said public support continues to grow for all modes of transportation. He said studies show that business locations near high quality urban settings with clean, efficient rail are a

priority for the young workers. He said Oklahoma is ranked last out of 50 largest metropolitan areas as best prepared for \$4 per gallon gasoline and ranked 84th out of 100 metropolitan cities in serving the transit needs of its workforce and the reason is the lack of a RTS.

Mr. Hutchison said to make the RTS work, public, political, and business support is needed, an RTA needs to be established (completed), a regional transit district needs to be defined, and a dedicated funding source is needed to develop an intermodal hub, community rail, streetcar, and bus systems.

Councilmember Wilson asked if the RTACO envisioned how the driverless car will impact the RTS and Mr. Hutchison said the technology is there, but do people really think that everyone will be in driverless cars in our lifetime? He said it is more likely that driverless vehicles can assist in the last mile mode. Councilmember Holman said driverless cars do not solve the problem of congestion so the same number of cars will still be on the street, if not more.

Mr. Hutchison said one of the challenges is density, because the Central Oklahoma region is spread out; however, the primary transit corridors will be in much more highly dense areas. He said Oklahoma has a spoke type system where existing rail corridors pass through Central Oklahoma and can be easily connected to a central hub. He said Oklahoma is fortunate to have these existing corridors that will hopefully be accessible.

Mr. Hutchison said transit is not all about trains. He said a comprehensive bus system is the backbone of the RTS and a bus system expansion will be required first to provide connecting service when rail transit operations begin. He said buses have to be at the rail stations on time and it is easier if one operational entity is coordinating all of that.

In 2005, the Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority (COPTA) with Oklahoma City did the very first fixed guideway study where commuter rail corridors were identified. Mr. Hutchison said light rail is very expensive so at that time commuter rail was deemed the best transit solution; however, since that time huge strides have been made. He said in 2009-2010, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) developed framework for a RTA and Regional Transit District; in 2011, ACOG completed an Intermodal Hub Study; in 2014, Oklahoma City acquired Santa Fe Station for a hub; in 2014, ACOG completed the Commuter Corridor Analysis; in 2014, House Bill 2480 signed by the Governor allowed for RTAs; in 2015, Oklahoma metro area cities authorized a RTA Task Force to develop a RTA; in 2017, Oklahoma City developed 6.9 miles of a downtown modern street car system; and in 2019, Oklahoma City, Norman, Moore, Midwest City, and Del City created the Regional Transportation Authority of Central Oklahoma.

Mr. Hutchison highlighted benefits of creating an RTA as creating single government structure for managing development and operation of RTS; formalizing collaboration among cities in regional transit decisions, funding, operations, and maintenance; providing transit services in an efficient, seamless manner; focusing on regional transit perspective, rather than city by city, for a robust metropolitan-wide system. Facilitating the implementation of a regional dedicated funding source for transit; improving ability to successfully compete for federal transit funding; coordinating

planning for development near transit stations; and providing single point of contact to work with large business, developers, universities, sports teams, and other major activity generators to enhance visitor experience with additional mode options.

The Santa Fe Intermodal Station in Oklahoma City is ready to service a RTS. The Oklahoma City streetcar system is the first modern rail transit system in Oklahoma and connects to housing; employment; retail; entertainment; and public facilities. The streetcar system services Deep Deuce; Bricktown; Santa Fe Station; Scissortail Park; Chesapeake Arena; the Convention Center; Myriad Gardens; Oklahoma Memorial; St. Anthony Hospital; Central Business District (CBD); Heritage Hills; and Automobile Alley.

Mr. Hutchison highlighted RTACO activities as follows:

- The RTA is a seven-member board (includes a member from each participating city) with former Governor Brad Henry as the Chair;
- RTS is currently funded through 2021 by member cities contributions;
- ACOG is providing staff support until permanent funding is established;
- Legal and Planning consultant is under contract with RTA;
- Working with Federal Transit Administration to qualify RTA to receive federal funding grants;
- Discussions are taking place with the Burlington, Northern, Santa Fe Railroad regarding commuter rail options;
- Preparing to update RTS plans and cost analysis;
- Coordinating with member cities and chambers of commerce about funding initiative; and
- Possible vote on dedicated RTA funding source to be held in two to three years.

Councilmember Bierman asked if the transit vehicle will be Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accessible and Mr. Hutchison said yes, that is required under federal regulations. Councilmember Bierman said the need for paratransit service could be reduced if a comprehensive intermodal system provides services needed by ADA citizens. Mr. Hutchison said the goal is to have really good equipment that serves the entire public.

Councilmember Petrone asked how much sales tax would be needed and Mr. Hutchison said that is still being considered, but at least one half of one cent is anticipated.

Mayor Clark said this program is very exciting and this is an excellent opportunity if the proposed one-eighth percent sales tax in Norman is passed to commit early on to regional transit, which would be a game changer for Norman. She said this will also be an economic driver for the community.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, “Regional Intermodal Rail Transit Systems, Ensuring Our Economic and Transportation Future”

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The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor