

FINAL

TRANSIT ADVISORY BOARD SPECIAL (CALLED) MEETING June 5, 2024 MEETING MINUTES

TAB Members Present

Allison Bickers
James Darden
Walter Kolis
Ken Marlin
Connor Manthey
Forrest Shealy
Jeff Souther
Thomas Shibley
Matt Stigall

TAB Members Not Present

LaSandra Boykin
Cherie Newton
John Noe
Mark Riggans

Cobb County and Others Present

Morgan Simmons, DOT
Theo Letman, CobbLinc
Sean O’Leary, CobbLinc
Mark Lambert, CobbLinc
Eric Mercier, CobbLinc
Marcia Lankford, CobbLinc
Blanca Peralta, Transdev
Nelson Castro, Transdev
Caleb Groves, Cobb County Courier
Donald Barth, Public
Tracy Stevenson, Public
Rosser Southerland, Public
Leslie Davis, Public
Hunter Riggall, Marietta Daily Journal

I. Call to Order:

Chair Allison Bickers called the TAB Special Call Meeting to order at 6:32 p.m., with a quorum of 8 TAB members present, and stated the purpose of the meeting was to consider the Cobb County Board of Commissioners’ upcoming board action for the Mobility SPLOST referendum on the November 2024 ballot.

Mr. Manthey made a motion to read TAB M-SPLOST Resolution.

Mr. Stigall seconded.

Mr. Shealy posed a question to **Chair Bickers** for consideration that the meeting agenda be altered to move the public comment prior to the TAB New Business discussion.

Mr. Shealy made a motion to table the current motion and allow public comment before the TAB New Business discussion.

Mr. Kolis seconded.

TAB members voted unanimously to table the motion for the discussion of the Resolution after public comment.

Chair Bickers tabled the motion for the discussion of the Resolution after public comment.

Ms. Simmons provided the guidelines for public comments.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Donald Barth of Marietta stated that the bus is a problem on the infrastructure, and he expressed his disagreement with the MSPLOST and stated that there is no justification for a 30-year 1% sales tax, but the Board could propose a 10-year MSPLOST. **Mr. Barth** stated that buses needed in the future will be electric. **Mr. Barth** expressed dissatisfaction with CobbLinc’s management. He stated that he is not opposed to buses, but he is opposed to a poorly managed bus system. **Mr. Barth** asked if the bus system is going to be run by the ARC or by the people of Cobb.

Mr. Tracy Stevenson of Marietta expressed disagreement with the MSPLOST, stating that \$11 billion over the next 30 years which is \$13,750.00 for each man, woman, and child. Only \$4B goes toward capital expenditures, \$7B goes to fund operating loss which will be huge. The current budget is \$29M to operate the CobbLinc bus system. **Mr. Stevenson** stated that MSPLOST does not make fiscal sense and expressed that it is a waste of money and requested that the Transit Advisory Board not recommend the MSPLOST.

III. NEW BUSINESS

Chair Bickers advised TAB members that they each would have 2 opportunities to voice their comments. **Chair Bickers** reread the TAB M-SPLOST Resolution for reference and opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Shealy stated that he is a huge supporter of transit with a vision and transit is a public access. **Mr. Shealy** stated that he disagrees with the project list that DOT submitted to the Board of Commissioners as an agenda item on May 14, 2024. **Mr. Shealy** expressed that due to bad ridership data to support it. **Mr. Shealy** stated that he opposed the referendum and did not support the MSPLOST because the project list is strategically misaligned, without rail, without MARTA, and does not have regional and statewide connectivity. **Mr. Shealy** also opposed the referendum because TAB is in a bad place to make a long-term decision on a 30-year plan due to bad ridership data that undermines the ridership.

Mr. Stigall stated that Cobb County's bad data is partly due to poor competitive service which is due to lack of funding. **Mr. Stigall** stated that the transit system is not perfect and that he is also favor of Microtransit but that he is in support of a referendum in November to give voters, as well as himself, the opportunity to vote on an option to get around the County without using a car and to improve infrastructure.

Mr. Kolis reminded TAB members that the motion is to adopt the recommendation from the committee and to recommend to the Board of Commissioners to place a referendum for the MSPLOST on the November 2024 ballot for voters to make a decision, not to levy the 1% sales tax. **Mr. Kolis** expressed that he does not agree with everything on the project list, but **Mr. Kolis** stated that he supports adopting the recommendation to the Board to place the referendum on the November ballot. **Mr. Darden** expressed his disagreement for a 30-year tax but stated that a 5 or 10-year plan would be a financially better decision. **Mr. Darden** voiced that he does not oppose putting the referendum on the ballot and stated that TAB should consider the burden this 30-year tax would put on the taxpayers. **Mr. Darden** opposed the project list because Cobb is not ready for a 30-year tax, everything is not working properly with CobbLinc, and that it is not time.

Mr. Manthey expressed that he agrees with a lot of the concerns with the project list and MSPLOST, but he also stated concerns with the burden on the roads. **Mr. Manthey** stated that he supports the adoption of the recommendation.

Secretary Souther voiced the pros for the greater connectivity, the route service to Cobb cities, to major destinations, MARTA, Flex countywide, and movement of burden of funding from property tax to sales tax. **Mr. Souther** stated that the cons for him are the large amount of the money, the timing of the ask with current inflation, and parts of the plan. **Mr. Souther** added that the plan does not effectively address regional growth in Cobb County as well as going against the nationwide trend of decreased ridership. **Mr. Souther** stated that he would rather see the following improvements: accurate data, on time performance, reduced complaints, technology upgrades, bus shelters cleaned, removal of shelters not in service, build more community goodwill, and have bus system be the best it can be today. **Mr. Souther** stated that he will vote no on the motion today.

Vice Chair Marlin agreed that there were limitations of the project list and that a 10-year tax plan would be a better option. **Vice Chair Marlin** expressed that he would vote yes to the motion and that

he supported the referendum to remain competitive as a county and due to the needs of Cobb County, the growth in the county and in Georgia, and the needs of business.

Chair Bickers stated that she agreed that the project list is imperfect. **Chair Bickers** expressed that the resolution allows the County to respond more wisely with tax dollars and to increase transportation options to everyone. **Chair Bickers** said putting the referendum on the ballot is important to discuss as a county how the citizens want to grow. **Chair Bickers** stated that the 30-year number makes Cobb County much more competitive to access the Federal infrastructure dollars. **Chair Bickers** voiced that the time is right to expand transit access to attract more events and more businesses nationally and internationally and to position Cobb to receive the Federal funding. **Chair Bickers** concluded that it is important to put the referendum on the ballot in 2024.

Chair Bickers opened the floor for second round comments/discussion. **Mr. Shealy, Mr. Stigall, Vice Chair Marlin, Mr. Kolis**

Mr. Shealy restated that he opposed the referendum and reiterated the reasons why he would vote no on the motion.

Mr. Stigall restated that he supported the referendum and reiterated the reasons why he would vote yes on the motion.

Vice Chair Marlin restated that he supported the referendum and reiterated the reasons why he would vote yes on the motion.

Mr. Kolis restated that he supported the referendum and reiterated the reasons why he would vote yes on the motion.

Mr. Darden restated that he opposed the project list and the MSPLOST for a 30-year tax.

Chair Bickers followed up the comments by TAB members and commented that Gwinnett County had lost with their referendum in 2020 but have not moved backwards. **Chair Bickers** summarized that CobbLinc has been consistently underfunded but Cobb would be moving in the right direction to improve transit.

Mr. Shealy made a motion to close the discussion and **Mr. Kolis** seconded. With no further discussion, **Chair Bickers** closed the discussion.

Chair Bickers reread the TAB MSPLOST Resolution and called to question to adopt the Resolution. Of the nine TAB members present and with a show of hands, **Chair Bickers, Vice Chair Marlin, Treasurer Kolis, Mr. Stigall, Mr. Manthey, and Mr. Shibley** voted yay to adopt the Resolution. With a show of hands, **Secretary Souther, Mr. Shealy, and Mr. Darden** voted nay to adopt the Resolution.

Chair Bickers announced that Resolution to recommend to the Board of Commissioners that the referendum be placed on the November 2024 ballot passed by a vote of 6 to 3.

A. NEXT MEETING/ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, **Chair Bickers** adjourned the TAB Special Call meeting. The next TAB regular meeting is June 24, 2024.

September 23, 2024

Approved