

TRANSIT PLANNING AND OPERATIONS WORK TOGETHER IN THE PHOENIX URBAN AREA

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●ON MARCH 1, 1971, the Phoenix city council took the necessary bold action to ensure public transportation service without interruption for the citizens of the Phoenix urban area. The stage was set for this action in August 1970 when the Arizona Corporation Commission, which exercised regulatory authority over the Phoenix Transit Corporation, granted permission for this privately owned and operated company to discontinue service on March 1, 1971.

Public bus transit service in Phoenix has followed the national pattern of rising expenses and declining patronage that necessitated service cuts and fare increases.

The City of Phoenix entered into a management contract with the Phoenix Transit Corporation, a subsidiary of American Transit Corporation under which the transit company continues to operate on behalf of Phoenix for a negotiated fee. The American Transit Corporation has performed most cooperatively and effectively under this agreement.

To put Phoenix in perspective, let me summarize some of its predominant characteristics. The Phoenix urban area has a current population of about 1 million people. There are 14 incorporated cities and towns in the Phoenix urban area of some 1,200 square miles. Maricopa County, the SMSA, contains over 9,100 square miles. Phoenix has a population of about 701,000 in about 270 square miles. We have only 1 square mile within the entire city with over 9,000 people. The Phoenix urban area has an average density of about 800 people per square mile and can be characterized as a modern, low-density, dispersed development with a very high quality of open western living. This high quality of living, and a solid economic base, is in fact attracting people in ever-increasing numbers to our Valley of the Sun. Of course, it is this same dispersed life-style that makes providing the level of public transit found in more densely populated cities more challenging for Phoenix.

The Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) is our council of governments. It is a county-wide organization with 18 cities and towns plus the county government. The Regional Council has elected representatives from the county and each city and town. For transportation matters, the Regional Council is joined by a representative of the Arizona Highway Department. Under the Regional Council is a management committee, which is composed of the county manager and city manager, or clerk, from each incorporated city or town and the director of the state highway department on transportation matters. Several operating committees report to the management committee. Two of these that are important to this discussion are the planning committee and the transportation committee, about which we will have more to say later.

The transit situation can be summed up by saying that there are approximately 13,000 paid fares per day on the system, of which about 4,000 are students. The 13,000 riders represent approximately 0.5 percent of the daily person trips in the valley. We operate 89 buses on some 484 route-miles. The annual revenue passenger count declined from about 9.3 million in 1960 to 4.1 million in 1970. The transit service area encompasses an estimated population of 410,000 people in Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Glendale.

I would say that, as the demise of the privately owned and operated transit system service became clear, many state and local groups and individuals became concerned about transit, and they talked about it. But the Phoenix city council saved transit by its action.

DEVELOPMENT OF A FIVE-YEAR PROGRAM

In fall of 1970 when it was clear that action was needed to preserve the transit service, it was also clear that a short-term public transit improvement program for the Phoenix urban area was needed.

In December 1970, the City of Phoenix, acting as an agent for the Maricopa Association of Governments, obtained a technical studies grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. In January 1971, the City of Phoenix, in behalf of MAG, hired De Leuw, Cather and Associates to make a study of the present transit services and usage patterns, to develop alternate test transit route systems and areas of coverage, and to develop a 5-year capital improvement program. The study was also to investigate alternate means of financing, organization, and ownership of the system. All of this was conducted with dispatch and a report was presented by De Leuw, Cather and Associates on July 12, 1971.

All the cities within the Phoenix urban area and Maricopa County participated in the local share of the cost of the study. Further, there was a transit subcommittee, appointed from the management committee of MAG, that gave broad attention to the study. The City of Phoenix was the contracting agency and worked most closely with the consultant. The consultant also received data and assistance from the Maricopa Association of Governments Transportation Planning Program, at that time called the Valley Area Traffic and Transportation Study (VATTS).

The prompt response of UMTA to the needs of the City of Phoenix and the Phoenix urban area for this study was most helpful and sincerely appreciated throughout the valley. Further, the ability of the consultant to promptly complete the assignment was most helpful. The speed and timeliness of the entire function are a good demonstration of local-federal-consultant cooperative efforts and considerable hard work.

The results of the transit study were given widespread attention in the local media and were presented to a number of civic organizations. Several of the organizations participating in the discussions were

1. Chamber of Commerce;
2. Public school administrators of Maricopa County;
3. Valley Forward Citizens Council;
4. Civic Plaza Business and Professional Association;
5. Arizona AFL-CIO;
6. Leadership and Education for the Advance ment of Phoenix, an antipoverty program;
7. Project for Aging; and
8. Numerous civic clubs and groups.

Further, during the course of the program, two public hearings were held. Needless to say, the recommendations of the study and the entire subject of public transportation received a great deal of interest in the community with opinions ranging over the entire spectrum of totally divergent viewpoints.

ACTION BY CITY COUNCIL

The city council devoted several months to intensive studies and discussions of the level of public transit service to be provided. During these deliberations the level of service and cost to achieve the proper balance were carefully weighed. The council had the benefit of extensive community discussions and recommendations of a number of organizations and individuals. Based on all the available information and thorough deliberations, the city council took the following actions July 1, 1972, to improve public transit.

1. Eliminated the 5-cent transfer fee;
2. Increased the size of the base 35-cent fare zone to eliminate the multiplicity of fare zones, thus reducing the cost of riding for many people;
3. Made a few detailed minor adjustments to existing routes to improve efficiency as previously recommended by staff;

4. Established special fare structures for the very young and those over 65 as follows: (a) retained free ridership for children under 6 years old, (b) new 15-cent fare for children 6 to 11 years old, new 20-cent fare for those over 65, and continued half-fare policy for students, extended to summer recreation activities; and

5. Expanded efforts to merchandise transit: two hostesses hired by the transit company, increased advertising, new schedules published, and information sent to each home with a city water billing mailer.

The estimated cost of those actions in the current fiscal year will be approximately \$185,000, making total public support for transit operations approximately \$383,700 this fiscal year.

The results of the action program are encouraging: Ridership increased about 6 percent in the last 5 months of 1972 as compared to the same period in 1971. This is the first significant upturn in recent history.

In addition, the city submitted an application to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration for a capital grant for 55 new buses to upgrade more than half of our fleet and make other improvements during the next 5 years. I am delighted to be able to report that just this month UMTA approved this capital grant for \$1.9 million with a matching local share of approximately \$960,000.

The above recommendations for transit improvement all follow the master plan laid out by the De Leuw, Cather public transportation study. They are the first phase of our improvement program and are within our fiscal capability.

Further, the city council directed the staff to create a new position of Public Transit Administrator. This was done, and Tom Evans reported for duty on November 1, 1972. The Public Transit Administrator reports to the Deputy City Manager for Community Development and Transportation. The Community Development and Transportation area includes the Planning Department, Building and Housing Safety Department, Airports Department, Traffic Engineering Department, Advance Transportation Planning Team, street programming functions, and public transit. This forms a highly desirable unit for ensuring the total integrated planning of all modes of transportation with all aspects of urban development.

CONTINUING PROGRAM

The Public Transit Administrator, working with the local manager of the American Transit Corporation and city staff, will continue to update and follow through on the implementation of the short-term plan developed by De Leuw, Cather. Further, the city is committed to a program that will constantly monitor and adjust the routes and schedules in order to achieve maximum service with minimum tax dollars. Toward that end, the Public Transit Administrator is developing a program that will analyze route-by-route usage, revenues and costs, schedule adherence and need for improvements, and adjustments or reduction in service. The city has two existing groups that will be most useful in this program: The operations analysis section of the Budget and Research Department is well equipped for the analysis phase, and the special projects section in the city clerk's office is well trained in public contact work.

In short, the City of Phoenix carries the responsibility for overall direction and surveillance and pays all costs of the management contract with American Transit Corporation at this time. This has been a pragmatic approach to continuing public transit service for citizens.

LONG-RANGE PLANNING

I have so far concentrated on the operational aspects and would now like to discuss the long-range planning pertaining to transit. The Maricopa Association of Governments Transportation Planning Program had its beginning in 1965 with the formation of the Valley Area Traffic and Transportation Study. The program is multimodal in concept and intent. All phases of the Transportation Planning Program are based on the land use, population density, social and economic data, and urban form forecast by the urban planners of the valley.

In 1960, the City of Phoenix pioneered with the establishment of an Advance Transportation Planning Team. This team has full-time representatives of the City Planning, City Traffic Engineering, and City Engineer Departments and is augmented as necessary with architects and airport experts. The Public Transit Administrator now brings additional transit input and expertise. This team is intended to provide transportation answers for management and works closely with the MAG Transportation Planning Program.

The City of Phoenix developed the regional transit element for the 1972 National Transportation Study and submitted it to MAG. The team and the Public Transit Administrator have this responsibility for the 1974 study. The data developed for the region by the MAG planning committee are used by this group so that there is total integration of the planning process and data. Thus we utilize the best expertise for each part of the planning process while carefully coordinating for the total valley's need.

Intensified transit planning is being built into the MAG Transportation Planning Work Program. Of course, the City Advance Transportation Planning Team and Public Transit Administrator will contribute significantly to this program. I might add that the MAG Transportation Planning Program pioneered the development of an annual regional capital program several years ago. MAG has now published 5 annual 5-year major street and highway programs. The intent is to incorporate transit into this annual 5-year capital program. The development of this program is keynoted by the fact that each jurisdiction submits its own program, which is related to reasonably anticipated availability of funds. Further, each jurisdiction bases its own annual program on the total regional plan, thus achieving a maximum of coordination within the fundamental concept of the home rule.

I believe it would be of interest to this group to know that the transportation committee, which has representatives of the various jurisdictions, was recently augmented to bring a broader input to this committee.

SUMMARY

The Phoenix city council accepted the responsibility to keep transit service for the valley. The city is providing all public support funds necessary to provide the service at this time. Further, Phoenix is budgeting matching funds for the capital improvements under the capital grant approved by UMTA.

We have a strong planning and transportation capability in Phoenix and are working closely with the long-range planning capability of MAG and the MAG Transportation Planning Program.

MAG is developing a work program to include transit and the study of all realistic, economically feasible transport systems to serve the dispersed urban form as envisioned by our planners. We are planning for a horizon year of about 2.5 million people. This local commitment to a total transportation planning program is being assisted by a technical studies grant by UMTA. The UMTA funds are being combined with HUD, FHWA, and local funds to achieve the desirable total integration of land use, urban form, and transportation planning.

We need to be realistic in the total transportation system planning inasmuch as the basic facilities, streets and freeways, are seriously deficient or nonexistent. For example, we have only 28 miles of freeway open to traffic in the urban area of about a million people. Phoenix has more than 150 miles of critically deficient major streets. Even with growing traffic congestion, people still choose the personalized transport provided by the automobile. Because of the present street deficiencies and lack of an adequate basic freeway system and because of our limited capital resources, we must be very careful that we do not start down the path of a theoretical billion dollar venture without having solid input based on factual experience to test the potential use and economics of such a commitment. Thus, the program of careful surveillance and monitoring is intended to develop an economically viable bus transit service. Concurrently, we will continue to study future transit components and keep abreast of developing technology.

We believe we are organized for results: to serve the public. We have both short- and long-range planning capabilities and short-range improvement programs. The responsibilities are clear-cut and well understood and accepted by the council of governments. Additional levels of transit planning do not appear necessary unless operating and funding responsibility are desired at the state level.

The UMTA study grant provided us with a practical 5-year program, and we have implemented the first-phase improvements. The UMTA capital grant will materially assist in the modernization of our fleet. This assistance has been and will be most helpful to Phoenix and appears to be a very constructive role for the federal government.

Our goal is to plan for and develop a total transportation system that will provide a high level of mobility commensurate with the high-quality western way of life we enjoy in Phoenix.