

Working Group to Identify Lake County Paratransit Lead Agency

October 22, 2019

500 West Winchester Road, Libertyville, IL Room 2220

1:30pm

Meeting Summary

Working Group Members Present: Jessica Hector-Hsu, RTA (Advisory Member); Kathleen O'Connor, Libertyville Township; Mayor Leon Rockingham, Jr., City of North Chicago; Linda Soto, Lake County Director on the Pace Board

Working Group Members Absent: Steve Carlson, Lake County Board; Terry Wilke, Lake County Board; Bethany Williams, Lake County Partners

Other Attendees: Sally Ann Williams, Pace; Kisha Hearn, Pace; Mike Walczak, Transportation Management Association (TMA) of Lake-Cook, Dominic Strezio, Lake County Community Development; Jon Ashworth, Lake County Health Department; Emily Gelber-Maturo, Lake County Health Department; Jennifer Serino, Lake County Workforce Development; Linda Chamberlain, RTA; Shane Schneider, LCDOT; Kevin Carrier, LCDOT; Emily Karry, LCDOT; Stephanie Brown, LCDOT

1. Welcome & introductions

Linda Soto started the meeting at 1:44pm. Introductions were given of all members and the audience. The approval of the meeting minutes from the July 2019 meeting was tabled since the group did not reach a quorum.

2. Review of updated working group mission statement

Mission Statement: "The goal of this working group is to reach consensus on the most appropriate lead agency to advance paratransit coordination and service improvements in Lake County, Illinois and aid in developing a transition plan."

Ms. Soto asked who collected the feedback on the mission. Stephanie Brown stated that the group generally agreed to the printed mission statement at the last meeting, so no specific feedback was asked for. Ms. Soto read the mission statement and asked if everyone agreed with it. The group was unable to vote to approve the updated statement since they didn't have a quorum, but everyone generally agreed to the updated mission statement.

3. Pace presentation and group discussion

Sally Ann Williams gave a presentation for Pace titled Overview – Regional Paratransit Coordination Projects. The goal of the presentation was to present how other areas in the region addressed the lead agency role. Pace also looked at the first four phases of possible service expansion proposed in the Lake County Paratransit Market Study. The first phase was to incorporate Vernon Township and the Village of Vernon Hills into the Central Lake service area. Phase 2 would be to expand further to include Waukegan Township, the City of Lake Forest and the City of North Chicago. Phase 3 would expand into Warren Township and Phase 4 would be to coordinate the Ride Lake County Central and West programs to expand the service area even further.

Pace projected that implementing all four phases would cost about \$852K. Ms. Williams pointed out that this cost figure is different than the market study estimated, but Pace used a methodology that was slightly different than the market study. Pace assumed the utilization would be like other areas in the region. Typically, Pace has seen about 2.0 trips per hour in other areas. Ms. Williams noted that this will vary project area to project area.

Ms. Williams then showed maps of what the service area would look like for all four phases. She explained that every area is a little bit different with different ridership based on points of interest. Emily Karry added a point that the market study also included a final phase, which was not included in Pace's presentation, that covers expanding the Ride Lake County service to all of Lake County. Ms. Karry wanted to make sure the intent is known that coverage over the entire county is the eventual long-term recommendation of the study. Ms. Williams stated that Pace concentrated on the first 4 phases in their presentation.

Shane Schneider asked when the logical transition is to go from one phase to the next and if it is funding driven? Ms. Williams explained that it is partially funding driven, but the way the expansion is laid out in the market study makes sense to her. Expansion of service also depends on the willingness of partners. Linda Soto added that it helps to phase things like this into smaller areas to test things out and see how it is working. Ms. Soto added that if things are going well, then you can expand further and sometimes things go so well that you want to expand very quickly, but finance is a major driver. Ms. Brown asked if Pace's cost estimates assume general public riders can use the service or just senior and disabled riders. Ms. Williams said the type of rider hasn't been defined at this point and this was just a rough estimate of cost.

Mayor Rockingham asked how Pace determined the phases. Ms. Williams said that Pace didn't define the phases, but the paratransit market study did. Ms. Karry explained further that the phases were established in the market study by the consultant. She said that it was based on interest of the areas as well as the existing service and how easily it could be incorporated. Ms. Karry stated that some areas are content with the service they have right now and have indicated in the past that they may not be interested to join a larger system. She also noted that the future lead agency would need to engage communities in conversation and work through how an expansion to countywide service could evolve in the future.

Ms. Soto added that Pace decided to present a snapshot of service expansion possibilities and they don't want to spend too much time interjecting their own opinions on what the service should look like at this time. All of these phases would need to be revisited once a lead agency is established.

Ms. Williams outlined the current coordination projects through the region: Ride DuPage, Ride in Kane, MCRide, Will Ride, and Ride Lake County. She noted that all of them are a little different and that each project has different goals and is locally driven.

Ms. Williams explained that most of the other services in the collar counties combined their service with various project partners. They generally have an advisory committee that coordinates the stakeholders and sponsors and that advisory committee typically has bylaws that govern their committee. The advisory committees also have subcommittees that work under the advisory committee. For example, the services might have a marketing or operational subcommittee. Also, some of the subcommittees may identify grants or other resources to help make the program more sustainable.

Ms. Williams explained that sponsors are agencies that participate in the advisory committee but also purchase service for their area. They drive the service eligibility and keep up with registration and issues that their constituencies might have with the service. They also decide on how the cost allocation is done. The services in DuPage and Kane counties have a cost allocation that is the total cost of service divided up based on the mileage and trip utilization. They both have dedicated paratransit dial-a-ride service and taxi service. They take the entire cost of the project and allocate it based on mileage and trips. Mr. Ashworth asked Ms. Williams if she felt that the table of roles slide of the various services represents coordinated and comprehensive systems. Ms. Williams said that she would consider them to be coordinated and the involved agencies collaborate well with each other.

Ms. Williams then explained that the lead agency is different in each service system. The Association for Individual Development (AID) is the lead agency in Kane County. In DuPage County, the lead agency is the County's Department of Health and Human services. In Will County, the lead agency is the Will County Executive's Office. MCRide has McHenry County DOT as the lead agency. The lead agency for each of these programs helps to set the project goals and enter into agreements, facilitate grants and administer grants.

Ms. Williams then explained that Pace's role as the operator. Pace ensures that service operates daily and provides and maintains a central trip and scheduling database. Pace also procures and oversees service provider contracts. They maintain the Trapeze database system which helps them to continually improve their services. Pace maintains tracking equipment on the buses as well.

Ms. Soto asked how many meetings there are for these other systems. Ms. Williams replied that the lead agency and sponsors typically meet monthly with Pace staff. The lead agency and sponsors take information from the advisory committee which typically meets quarterly with Pace staff.

Kathleen O'Connor asked if there was a process that each group went through to decide on the lead agency. Ms. Williams explained that in DuPage County, the Health and Human Service Department led the charge. They were already doing taxi service but having issues and wanted to expand service. In Kane County, AID had the vision. AID is a non-profit for people with disabilities. They partnered with Kane County. As they brought in partners, they all agreed on the rider requirements for the service. MCRide was led by the county who got the other sponsors on board. Will Ride was also initiated by the county. Ms. Williams added that Pace has always committed to providing the current subsidy that was available for traditional service when the services consolidate into a larger coordinated/consolidated service.

Jessica Hector-Hsu asked about the funding structure for each service. Ms. Williams explained that for the other programs, the local entities have approached Pace asking for service. Pace commits to keeping any funding in place that already exists in the area. The lead agency augments the funding to purchase additional service. In DuPage County for example, for anyone that wanted to participate in Ride DuPage, they could use their historic Pace funding to purchase service. In McHenry County, the municipalities and townships had an agreement to share the historic Pace subsidy. Any Pace funding went into a general pot in McHenry County to purchase service and then the county, municipalities and townships also contribute to the service cost.

Ms. O'Connor asked if there have been any issues with any competing services, for example a township with an in-house service whose service area is covered by a coordinated system. Ms. Williams explained that Pace hasn't had that issue. Initially DuPage had some entities with in-house services, but those services have gone away.

Ms. Hector-Hsu asked if Pace tried to get additional partners in any of the services. Pace explained that they leave those decisions to the locals and don't get involved in finding partners. Their focus is on being the service provider. In Kane County, Aurora Township continues to provide some of the service for the Ride in Kane program, but that is because they wanted to continue to operate and keep their drivers employed.

Mr. Schneider asked if the Pace call center is where people should call if they don't know how to use the system, does Pace provide that mobility manager role. Pace explained that the sponsors are responsible for helping people understand the various services and are responsible for the marketing of the services. Each sponsor does it differently and it varies county to county. Ms. Karry added that in Lake County, staff has received public feedback that people want one location where they can get all their information and book a trip. Right now, they must call the Pace call center to schedule the trip but also need to make a separate call to figure out what service is available to them and how it works. In Lake County it typically requires at least two separate calls/two steps. Pace explained that they would initially refer people to the sponsor or lead agency for information and to register for the service if folks had called the call center looking for initial information. Although Pace added that they can and do help with some of the mobility management role on occasion, specifically if the requested trip may involve traveling across county boundaries. Ms. Soto added that there are new technologies that are being added that will help benefit these paratransit

services. Ms. Williams added that Pace has a very robust system that helps with coordinating travel plans. She noted that once you get to a more coordinated system, it will be easier to help people at the call center level because there are fewer boundaries to navigate.

4. TMA of Lake-Cook presentation and group discussion

Ms. Soto introduced Mike Walczak of the TMA of Lake-Cook. She explained that one choice for a lead agency is a 501c/3 similar to the model followed by the TMA.

Mr. Walczak gave some background on TMAs. He explained that a TMA is a Transportation Management Association that facilitates public private partnerships to improve mobility and air quality. Some TMAs are voluntary, and some are mandatory. The TMA of Lake-Cook is a voluntary organization founded in 1989. They have over 40 members. There are only 2 Chicago-area TMAs. The TMA of Lake-Cook is a 501c/4 organization. They have a lot of larger corporations in their membership such as Walgreens and Grainger. For private sector members, the annual dues are based on the number of employees and for the public sector the dues are a flat rate. The TMA has a board with a president, vice president and a treasurer. The TMA of Lake-Cook currently has one staff member (Mike Walczak) but they are looking to hire an additional staff person right now.

The TMA of Lake-Cook has a shuttle bus program that provides last mile service to Metra stations. They service 3 different Metra lines and have 12 different routes. Almost two-thirds of the riders are from Chicago. They service 1,000 daily passenger trips with the shuttle bus program. The program partners are Pace, Metra and the participating firms. 12 corporate firms participate in the shuttle program. The shuttle bus isn't exclusive to employees of the sponsoring company, however non-employees must pay full fare for their ride. Pace and Metra each cover 25 percent of the costs of the routes (except for the route 620 from the Yellow Line). The TMA member asking for the service then covers the remaining 50 percent. Shuttle bus participant firms are billed annually, and riders sign up through their participating employer.

Mr. Walczak gave a brief history of the shuttle bus service which started in 1994 and expanded in 1997-1998 due to its popularity.

Ms. Soto added that the lead agency in this example is the board of the TMA of Lake-Cook, so she asked how the TMA Board works and how they work with Pace. Mr. Walczak explained that the Board typically meets quarterly or as needed. The TMA Board's major decision points are related to contracts. The TMA board is responsible for entering into individual contracts with each firm/company involved in service and for entering into an overall consolidated agreement for shuttle bus service with Pace every year. The TMA staff meets with Pace staff every 2 months or so to work on the service and any issues. The staff works with both the Board, the Board instructs staff, and then staff works with Pace and serves as the liaison between the Pace and the Board. The TMA Board is elected.

Mr. Schneider asked how people find out about the shuttle bus service. Mr. Walczak explained that people usually find out about the service from their employer or the TMA brochures. He typically

doesn't deal directly with employees as they have a main contact at their respective company to work with, but they sometimes call to note service concerns or provide emails to the TMA. Mr. Schneider asked if they have other full-time staff, but Mr. Walczak said no but they are looking to hire another person.

Emily Gelber-Maturo asked if the TMA looked for other funding sources or applied for grants outside of corporation contributions. Mr. Walczak said they have applied for grants at times in the past and do look for those opportunities. They have partnered with the Village of Deerfield and Pace on some grants.

Ms. O'Connor asked who the public partners are beside Pace and Metra. Mr. Walczak explained they also have Lake County, IDOT, local municipalities, the tollway and others. These partners contribute a fixed membership fee that is lower than the corporate members.

Mr. Carrier asked if the general public can ride the service. Mr. Walczak said that anyone can ride the service along the Lake-Cook corridor. It is more common to have general public riders on the routes that go near multiple corporate centers of employment. A question was also asked about how new companies can participate, and it was explained that the TMA does outreach to find partners and set the routes once a year. Any company can approach the TMA to work with them to participate in the service.

Mayor Rockingham asked if the routes are morning and evening only and Mr. Walczak explained that service is just in the morning and evening and designed to meet Metra trains.

Ms. Soto stated that there are pros and cons of setting up a 501 organization to be a paratransit lead agency. With a 501 organization for paratransit, she mentioned that the players would need to be identified. Ms. Soto suggested that the county would need to be involved, as well as several townships, and possibly representatives of other not-for-profits and other agencies. She asked who would make up the 501 Board. Ms. Soto stated that a paratransit 501 organization would need both a director and a mobility manager like the TMA of Lake-Cook. Ms. O'Connor asked if every member organization of the TMA Board was a financial contributor to the TMA and Mr. Walczak responded that they were. Mr. Walczak clarified that there are membership invoices and services invoices sent out to the TMA participants. Ms. O'Connor then added that a prerequisite to being on the 501 lead agency board should be financial contribution to the service and that we would also have to get the sponsors to contribute up front to establish the 501. Mr. Schneider also echoed support for the 501 Board members being financial contributors.

Ms. Soto said she believed the Lake County area would need a new 501 organization set up to be the paratransit lead agency, if it was decided that a 501 organization should be the lead agency. She stated that it couldn't be taken on by an existing 501 organization.

Ms. O'Connor asked what the start up time was to create the TMA of Lake-Cook from concept to executing the service. Mr. Walczak said it was a multi-year process that occurred between 1994 and 1996. The core group of members was initially focused on the shuttle program and shuttle

participants. Ms. Brown asked if there was an initial champion of the program. Mr. Walczak said there wasn't one company that he knew of, but it was generally employer driven in the beginning.

Mr. Ashworth commented that great presentations were provided today. He asked to clarify why Pace has stated that they couldn't be the lead agency. Ms. Williams said that it's because the lead agency is the local representative and leads the initiatives which isn't Pace's role. Pace's role is to implement the services. Ms. Soto stated that the challenge is that (dial-a-ride) paratransit isn't currently a dedicated service. For Pace to be the lead agency, Pace believes that a legislative change would be needed to define paratransit as a dedicated service, similar to fixed route service. If that occurred, Pace would be in charge for the entire RTA region which would change all the services that currently exist. The benefit of individual services is that each area has local control to decide what to provide and how to provide it. Pace is the operator, but the locals have control over the service. Ms. Williams added that Pace is a huge resource that is available to local folks. Pace puts a lot of resources towards helping to make the paratransit services work well. Pace is only required to provide ADA paratransit, but they are committed to being responsive to local community needs by providing other services such as dial-a-rides. Mr. Walczak added that the shuttle bus service probably wouldn't exist without the partnership of the private companies.

Mr. Carrier asked if the lead agency needed to have all the functions identified in Pace's roles and responsibilities slide. He noted that the Ride Lake County services are set up currently where the LCDOT is the middleman for some of the functions, such as facilitating IGAs. Could Pace provide some of the staffing functions that are currently listed under the lead agency column? Ms. Williams said that the lead agency in other areas does a lot of goal setting and making sure the service meets the goals. The lead agencies also analyze ridership and provide information type functions like GIS mapping to see travel trends. She mentioned that lead agencies also try to assist with finding grants. Each lead agency is different within the region and the locals need to decide the lead agency's role depending on what they want to achieve.

Ms. O'Connor interjected that this group didn't have a quorum today and she wanted to make sure that what was discussed today was captured and shared with the missing members prior to the next meeting so everyone is on the same playing field. Mr. Schneider suggested looking into making the audio of the meeting available.

5. Future meeting schedule and suggested agenda items for the next meeting

Ms. Soto suggested having 1 or 2 guest speakers at the next meeting in November. Potentially, one speaker from DuPage County and one from another county to give their side of their local paratransit program. Ms. O'Connor asked if the group could create a summary for the members not present since many of the group might not have time to listen to the audio. Ms. Williams offered to return to the next working group meeting and give a summary version of her presentation again. It was decided that Mr. Walczak did not need to return to the November meeting but that a copy of his presentation would be shared with the working group.

Ms. Karry clarified changes in Lake County DOT staff roles and updated calendar invite information that will be forthcoming to the members. Ms. Karry also attempted to summarize the dialogue about the desired items to be addressed at the upcoming November meeting. Sally Ann Williams from Pace will provide a version of the Pace presentation and it is anticipated that there will be additional discussion among the group. Ms. Williams could also potentially provide written a summary of her presentation at the next meeting. Lake County DOT staff will provide a written summary of the meeting for the members in advance of the next meeting. Lake County DOT staff will ask staff from Ride DuPage to come give a presentation at a future meeting. Ms. O'Connor commented that it would be interesting to see a presentation from a private-public partnership involved in coordinated paratransit services. Lake County DOT staff will also reach out to AID/Ride in Kane for a potential presentation at the January meeting. At 3:25 pm, Ms. Soto had to excuse herself from the meeting to attend the Pace 2020 budget hearing in Waukegan and she transitioned the role of chair to Ms. O'Connor.

6. Public Comment

Ms. O'Connor asked if there was any public comment. Jennifer Serino commented on the importance of having this process locally driven.

Mr. Ashworth commented on the importance of recognizing the structures within the other counties that made the lead agencies for their services possible. He noted that we will need to adapt our conversations regarding who could be the lead agency to how our county is structured. Mr. Ashworth stated that we need to be careful to understand the context of how any other lead agency was able to lead the coordination and be the lead agency prior to adapting the examples to Lake County. For example, Lake County doesn't technically have a Department of Health and Human Services, which by definition has a much wider scope and mission than a Health Department.

Ms. Karry commented that there are other 501 organizations within Lake County that have expressed interest in learning more about becoming the lead agency for paratransit in Lake County and that we should not dismiss existing organizations to becoming the lead agency without additional conversation. Additionally, Ms. Karry noted that the conversation at the meeting today was about how Pace coordinated paratransit services are currently being run in our area, but we know that Pace is working on their long-range and strategic plans which may change service in the future. She noted that we need to be mindful of Pace's work, how their plans evolve and how that may impact paratransit service in the county.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:33 pm.