

## **Working Group to Identify Lake County Paratransit Lead Agency**

**July 30, 2019**

**600 West Winchester Road, Libertyville, IL**

**1:30pm**

### **Meeting Minutes**

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

**Other Attendees:** Lorraine Snorden, Pace; Kisha Hearn, Pace; Gary Scott, Pace; Jon Ashworth, Lake County Health Department; Jennifer Serino, Lake County Workforce Development; Eric Foote, Lake County Community Development; Shane Schneider, LCDOT; Kevin Carrier, LCDOT; Emily Karry, LCDOT; Stephanie Brown, LCDOT

1. Welcome & introductions
2. Shane Schneider started the meeting by asking for introductions and those in attendance gave self-introductions. Mr. Schneider offered a thank you on behalf of Lake County Board Chair Sandy Hart by thanking everyone for agreeing to be a part of the important effort to improve Paratransit in the County.

Mr. Schneider explained that the overarching goal of the working group is to transform the complicated paratransit system into something much simpler. This new working group is made up of representatives from various backgrounds to help identify a lead agency for paratransit service in Lake County. There are representatives from the Lake County Board, a township, a municipality, a non-profit, Pace, and the RTA. Each representative looks at Paratransit with a unique perspective.

Mr. Schneider further explained that back in 2005, the Lake County Coordinated Transportation Services Committee (LCCTSC) was formed to guide paratransit coordination efforts in the County. Since then, LCCTSC has been the face of paratransit with Lake County government as a partner and Pace as the service provider. He added that it's time to move forward to help recommend the appropriate lead agency for Paratransit. And ultimately, Lake County and other involved parties will be here to support whoever becomes the lead agency.

Mr. Schneider mentioned that he is going to help facilitate this first meeting but the first order of business for this group is to elect a chair and vice-chair. The primary role of the chair and vice-chair is to run the meetings. Staff will be available to provide support services.

3. Selection of Chair and Vice-Chair for the working group

Terry Wilke asked if Kathleen O'Connor would like to be chair. Ms. O'Connor said she thought it would be best if someone with a regional perspective served as chair. Steve Carlson nominated Linda Soto to be the chair. Ms. Soto asked Ms. O'Connor if she would be the vice-chair. Mr. Carlson then nominated Ms. Soto as chair and Ms. O'Connor as vice-chair. Mr. Wilke seconded the motion. A vote was called, and all members voted in favor of the chair and vice-chair selections.

4. Review of working group mission statement

Mr. Schneider read the mission statement that was included in the County Board resolution that formed the working group to those present: "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. "

A question was asked if the mission statement should be expanded to a larger role. Mr. Schneider explained that this was a good starting point to help bring everyone together. Ms. O'Connor added that the task of the new lead agency would be to help implement the findings in the Paratransit Market Study. The group discussed changing the mission statement to include not just the selection of the lead agency but the transition to the lead agency. The following change to the mission statement was made by the group:

"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 announced that Pace cannot be the lead agency. She explained that there must be an oversight or government agency overseeing this effort and it cannot be Pace. Mr. Schneider explained that it is going to be a team effort. There will be a transition period to establish a new model for the lead agency and then there will be the lead agency running the new model.

Mr. Carlson then gave an overview of the process used to create Lake County's 211 service and how that service involved a lot of organizations and agencies and is a good model to consider for Paratransit. Mr. Carlson stated that the County would be reluctant to run a transit system but would be happy to help fund it.

The group decided to vote on the official mission statement at the next meeting. The group decided to email out the mission statement to the group and a revised mission statement will be voted on at the next meeting.

5. LCDOT presentation on Paratransit Market Study

Emily Karry of LCDOT gave a brief presentation on the Paratransit Market Study. The LCCTSC and the County hired a consultant to prepare the Market Study. The purpose of the study was to develop a sustainable, implementable plan for improving mobility options.

As part of the study, the team performed a significant public outreach effort and obtained a lot of feedback. Many of the same feedback themes were repeated throughout the study such as the need to make services easier to find, understand and use.

Ms. Karry displayed a service area map of paratransit in the County that shows the complexity of the existing system. This complexity makes it difficult for the public to understand. She mentioned that section 3-1 of the market study report has additional detail on the services.

The next slide showed the transit propensity index. A Transit Propensity Index was developed as a part of the study to provide a composite measure of all groups that have the potential to use or are likely to rely on public transportation in Lake County.

This index factors in the individual densities of total population, older adults, individuals with disabilities, people living with an income less than 150% of the poverty line, and households without access to a private vehicle. The Transit Propensity Index is based on the potential to use transit. While there is the potential for more people to use service in the Waukegan area, it doesn't mean that people in other areas of the County wouldn't use transit. The figure shows that the fixed route service Pace provides aligns with the transit propensity index. Additional information can be found on page 11-6 of the market study report.

Mr. Schneider explained that density is the main driver of transit use. A comment was made that the need for paratransit services is growing. Mr. Schneider noted that with limited dollars and resources, agencies try to maximize spending where it is needed most.

The next slide showed the employment map that depicts the locations of employers in Lake County with 100 or more employees, as provided by Lake County Partners. Lake County has over 400 employers with more than 100 employees.

Ms. Karry noted that in general, the Pace fixed route and On Demand transit system today aligns with where the greatest need is – near the denser areas of target users and jobs. This is not to say that there aren't gaps or needs in other parts of the County, but where there are existing Pace fixed route services does make sense. Additional information regarding the Lake County Large Employer Overlay map can be found in the report on page 11-7

Bethany Williams mentioned that employer information is constantly in flux and never completely correct but it's the best available information and gives a good general idea of employer locations.

Ms. Karry explained that the information on the Transit Propensity Index and Employment Overlay maps was considered by the consultant when making recommendations in the market

study. The study recommendations were developed in concert with the project study team and stakeholders. They were informed by public outreach efforts and include multiple strategies to meet the many transportation needs of the Lake County Region.

Ms. Karry reviewed the study recommendations, which are grouped into governance changes and service strategies and then categorized into short, mid and long-term strategies. Initial recommended governance changes include establishing a working group to investigate and recommend the appropriate lead agency for the initiative of improving service in the Lake County area (which is where we are starting today). Once a lead agency has been established, it is envisioned that LCCTSC will be dissolved and a Ride Lake County Committee could be formed by the lead agency to help future implementation of the recommended strategies.

Ms. Karry noted that a high-level summary of final study recommendations could be found in the report under the Executive Summary on page ES-3 and additional details are in Chapters 12 thru 16 starting on page 12-1.

All of the strategies were listed on a slide along with an idea of a potential timeline for implementation (short-, mid-, or long-term). Examples of recommendations include potential short-term strategies such as the increased marketing of existing services or possibly a taxi/TNC (Uber/Lyft) pilot program to a longer-term strategy such as a Countywide Coordinated Paratransit Service.

Ms. Karry explained that the strategies outlined by the study are designed to work in tandem to improve overall transportation options, mobility, and connectivity in Lake County. Not all strategies may be implemented immediately, as appropriate leadership needs to be identified and sustainable funding sources should be further explored, especially for larger-scale and long-term recommendations. It is important to note that when viewing the timeline associated with the strategies, the intent is not for the lead agency to wait to implement long-term strategies, rather long-term means that those strategies will likely take several years of effort to get in to place once initiated.

Mr. Schneider explained that the region could come up with a template for Countywide service quickly, but getting it done will probably take a long time.

Ms. Karry explained that a champion, or a lead agency, needs to be identified as an initial step to help bolster support for the implementation of strategies and to lead coordination efforts. This working group has been established to identify and recommend the appropriate lead agency for paratransit. Even with a lead agency identified, it is important to note that many strategies will require the support of multiple agencies, as well as community support, for implementation and continued success.

#### 6. Discussion of the possible roles and responsibilities of the Lead Agency

Mr. Schneider opened up the discussion on possible roles and responsibilities of the lead agency.

Ms. Williams mentioned that people have been surprised about how many people use the current paratransit system to get to and from work. She asked what the goals of Paratransit are since we need to all agree on the goals before deciding on a lead agency. Currently, the 40+ different providers in Lake County all have different goals and the service strategies outlined in the market study also have different goals.

Ms. Soto explained that there are a couple of tiers of paratransit. Some users need door-to-door service. Others with disabilities can navigate a more mainstream service, especially with the new technology happening. Pace is just starting to update their short- and long-term plans. The last update was almost 20 years ago. There has been an explosion of technology since the last plan. Pace is looking at all their dedicated routes and their other on-demand services. They will know more at the end of the year what their recommendations are.

The group discussed that technology will help develop an all in one system. Mobility should be a goal for the lead agency - specifically, the mobility for all people.

Ms. O'Connor mentioned that educating elected officials on transportation and paratransit in their community was an important role of a lead agency. There are examples of local systems, like Vernon Hills that have systems only for specific users like the senior population. She said we need to focus on education and finding out where people are going. There are currently limited options for people to get places.

Jessica Hector-Hsu added that the lead agency should have the power to make tradeoffs between services. There is a huge cost to all these services, and somebody must make the decision on how to allocate resources. They need to maximize opportunity for all users and some areas may not get the services they want.

Mr. Schneider explained that it will never be a perfect system with unmet needs, but we still need to take steps forward in the process.

Mayor Rockingham added that people are looking at how to get to work and the time it takes to get there. He explained that the agencies need to figure out how to blend together to help riders have better service.

Ms. Soto added that everyone needed to advocate legislatively and that paratransit services need to find funding that is long term, otherwise it is hard to plan long-term. Relying on grant money is not a good way to run transit. Given 50 percent of the riders are using it to get to jobs, we want them to be able to get to work.

Ms. Hector-Hsu added that on the federal side there is a lot of competition for these different pots of money. If the grants were to become more open in the future, then it would allow the locals to decide how to spend the money.

The group discussed that it is difficult to find dedicated funding and the current complexity of the system makes it difficult for the users. The example of formula funding was given as a past potential funding model. The group also added that grant funding is difficult because it's not a guaranteed long-term funding source.

Jon Ashworth from the audience asked if the lead agency would be the coordinating fiscal agent for Paratransit. The group felt that the money would go through the lead agency. Ms. O'Connor stated that currently, there are funds being spent on services in the County that are not coordinated. The lead agency could also assist with continuity on service descriptions as a user needs to understand many different services to know which system is the best fit for a ride.

The group discussed that a lead agency needs to have conversations with partners to see what the barriers are to a coordinated system and identify potential solutions. The lead agency needs to show them that the service area would be larger than it is right now, and it would be more efficient. To make a seamless service, somebody needs to add funding to help fill in the gaps in service.

Mr. Schneider added that the lead agency also needs to perform analysis to identify the costs and best service model. He stated that the County does not have the expertise to do this kind of analysis for transit services.

Mr. Carlson said that the coordination and consolidation of Paratransit is very similar to the 211 service that is starting in Lake County. The 211 solution was to add a new call center. If a new Paratransit centralized call center was started, then data could be gathered from people calling in to help improve the system. He would like prioritization of a centralized resource since it improves the service and documents the unmet need. Mr. Carlson believes that data collection to identify the unmet needs is a priority.

Mr. Wilke added that the lead agency needs a dedicated funding source.

Lorraine Snorden of Pace mentioned that Paratransit ridership is growing. Any money dedicated to Paratransit will be spent and you need to figure out how to control the demand or the service will run out of funding.

Ms. Hector-Hsu asked if the lead agency would match people with services and how to get around. Mr. Schneider responded that the lead agency should house a mobility manager(s) to help people get around to match people with the appropriate service.

The group discussed that if there is too much demand for the service, they may need to restrict service to begin with and/or charge different fares. Alternatively, you could get service running in certain areas near employment centers to begin with and then add to the system over time. The group has often heard from employers that they have difficulty finding employees who can get to work so there is an unmet need in the area of transportation for work.

The group added that a goal of the lead agency should be to educate. Many private companies locate their business without thinking about transit service to the location. Also, private companies aren't always great long-term funders since they can often cancel their funding if they don't see the benefits. Some companies and developers, however, prioritize access to trains or buses when selecting their location. For example, recently Caterpillar specifically chose an office space near a Metra station.

Pace asked what the plan is to bring the mobility manager on board. Mr. Schneider said that would be done by the lead agency.

Ms. Williams asked if best practices of other areas have been looked at. Mr. Schneider said that the market study gives extensive detail on best practices and the 211 model is another good example of consolidation.

Ms. Soto asked if we should start with a pilot program and then move to expand it. Ms. O'Connor mentioned that the current Ride Lake County Central and West services have been good examples of consolidated service pilots. But they have been hindered to expand further because there is no single decision maker. A lead agency could work with municipalities and townships to add new services and the lead agency would be the ultimate decision maker regarding services.

Ms. O'Connor added that having an existing non-profit or 501(c)(3) become the lead agency could be a concern because their mission may not match with the mission of developing Countywide Paratransit services. She added that we could also start from scratch in developing a new non-profit or 501(c)(3).

Ms. Snorden asked how the ¼ percent sales tax collected by the RTA works in Lake County. Mr. Schneider said that Lake County dedicates it all to transportation. A portion of that money is dedicated to Paratransit. Mr. Schneider added that the County could potentially give the Paratransit-dedicated money to somebody else to help run Paratransit.

The group discussed that the Transportation management Association (TMA) of Lake Cook is an example of a non-profit providing a transportation function. Ms. Soto mentioned that there is a Pace shuttle bus program run by the TMA and that the organization was created by the private companies along the Lake Cook Road corridor because an entity had to be formed to facilitate the service. Mike Walczak is the current executive director of the TMA.

Ms. O'Connor stated that Lake County DOT isn't interested in the lead agency role for Paratransit. They are currently functioning as a fiscal liaison that passes through grant money. Ms. Hector-Hsu stated that the fiscal agent isn't a trivial role and wanted to understand why the County is reluctant to be the lead. Mr. Schneider said the DOT could be a funder, but DOT staff aren't transit experts.

Ms. Snorden added that the RTA and Pace could provide technical support, but somebody has to step up and take the lead.

Mr. Carlson added that a case would need to be made to the County Board for the need of the Paratransit service, or the County won't want to participate in funding the system. Ms. O'Connor said that the ride data for the Ride Lake County services shows that 50 percent of the trips are work trips, which changes the conversation. People perceived that public transportation was used to go to trivial appointments, but it is taking people to work. She added that part of the role of the lead agency would be to educate elected officials and the public on what public transit is being used for and to lead the effort to consolidate.

Mr. Schneider added that that the DOT envisions a new lead agency that would set up committees for the Ride Lake County services. All the stakeholders that provide funding would be on the committees. The committee members could then hold the lead agency responsible for how the money is spent. The County could potentially sit on the committee to see how the County's money is being spent.

Ms. Snorden stated that Pace will not be the lead agency because they don't have the presence in the County that Lake County has in the county. Pace would support the lead agency. Ms. Hector-Hsu added that Pace is a service provider and does not need to be the governing agency. She added that mobility is being able to move around fluidly and if a regional agency runs the transit system, then you would lose local control over the system.

Mr. Carlson asked if there was a way to identify the amount of help and assistance that Pace would require from Lake County to be the lead agency or vice versa. Ms. Soto said that Pace could provide a couple models or concepts for how much it would cost to have countywide system. Ms. Snorden asked if the market study had cost information on all of the existing services and staff responded that the market study includes some information on the existing services in Lake County but not all of the information since not every provider shared that level of detail.

Roughly, the County estimates that a few million dollars is spent yearly on paratransit services. As a part of the market study, the consultant estimated that roughly \$10 Million per year is needed to expand to countywide service. Currently, Lake County government spends between \$200,000 - \$300,000 on Paratransit.

The group discussed that the Paratransit system in McHenry County requires participating agencies to pay on a per capita basis. Not all villages participate in the system, so their residents are not in the service area and can't use the service. DuPage County currently has 17 entities that contribute to their Paratransit system.

The group discussed how they need to establish what the roles are of a lead agency and then discuss who is best able to take over that function. For example, Ms. Hector-Hsu mentioned that the RTA may be in the best position to lobby for legislative changes.

Gary Scott with Pace suggested looking at the other suburban counties and other models and looking at the resources each one has. For example, Mr. Scott stated that Pace doesn't have the staff capacity to take on more responsibilities. Mr. Schneider responded that we shouldn't look at it as a capacity issue, because additional staff can be hired by Pace if they received more funding.

Mr. Ashworth added that a new department or agency could be created in any organization and there could be a new division established in any existing organization.

The group agreed that no agency currently has the capacity to take on this work and nobody can be asked to do it without additional funding.

#### 7. Discussion of known challenges to paratransit in Lake County

Mr. Schneider noted that this item was mostly covered in the previous group discussions under item 5.

The group identified another challenge, which is that nobody wants to take on the lead agency role and nobody is currently volunteering to become the lead agency. The group asked the question "What would it take for an agency to take over this huge initiative?".

Ms. Soto stated that Pace is not set up to take on the lead agency role. Legislative changes would be needed along with additional funding. If Pace takes it on, then other counties would look to them to do the same thing.

The group also added that the TMA of Lake Cook is a non-profit that advocates for transportation and that it likely isn't set up to run paratransit in Lake County.

#### 8. Future meeting schedule and suggested agenda items for the next meeting

Ms. O'Connor asked if there is a target end date to this working group. Mr. Schneider stated that hopefully it will be finished within six meetings and the group would meet every other month.

The group discussed the next meeting. Mr. Schneider suggested the second or third Thursday of the month starting in September and going every other month (September/November/January). The group decided that it would be easiest to send out a doodle poll to members with proposed dates to find ones that work for everyone.

Staff mentioned that the calendar of meetings for the rest of the year needs to be published.

The group proposed the following presentations for the next meeting:

- A Pace presentation on other coordinated Paratransit systems in other suburban counties.
- Mike Walczak of the TMA of Lake Cook could provide information on how they function and what their funding source is and how they work with Pace.

The group discussed that, in future meetings, maybe McHenry County could present on lessons learned in their area.

9. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned