

Working Group to Identify Lake County Paratransit Lead Agency

May 13th, 2020

Meeting Was Held Through Zoom

1:00pm

Meeting Minutes

Working Group Members Present: Steve Carlson, Lake County Board; Jessica Hector-Hsu, RTA (Advisory Member); Kathleen O'Connor, Libertyville Township (Working Group Vice-Chair); Shane Schneider, Lake County/LCDOT (Alternate Member); Linda Soto, Lake County Director on the Pace Board (Working Group Chair); Bethany Williams, Lake County Partners

Working Group Members Absent: Mayor Leon Rockingham Jr., City of North Chicago; Terry Wilke, Lake County Board

Other Attendees: Emily Gelber-Maturo, LC Health Department; Jennifer Serino, LC Workforce Development; Eric Tellez, LC Planning, Building & Development; Sally Ann Williams, Pace; Shirleyann Russell, Dimensions HHC; Linda Chamberlain, RTA; Fluturi Demirovski, RTA; Georgeann Duberstein, Village of Hainesville; Kisha Hearn, Pace; Kevin Carrier, LCDOT; Mike Klemens, LCDOT; Joe Surdam, LCDOT

1. Call to Order & Introductions

Linda Soto called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

2. Agenda Changes & Announcements

Linda Soto asked the Working Group for any agenda changes or announcements. No changes to the agenda or announcements were raised.

3. Approval of the Meeting Minutes from March 11, 2020

Linda Soto asked for a motion on the approval of the meeting minutes from March 11th, 2020. A motion was made by Kathleen O'Connor with a second by Steve Carlson. On a unanimous voice the meeting minutes were approved.

4. LCDOT presentation on Countywide Paratransit Service in Lake County

Kevin Carrier is the Director of Planning and Programming at Lake County Division of Transportation (LCDOT) and gave a recap on the recent developments that have taken place among the Working Group. The initial thought after the March Working Group meeting was to have a meeting with Pace Director Rocky Donahue and their leadership team to bounce some ideas off them. Prior to the planned meeting the COVID-19 response occurred, resulting in postponement of the meeting with Pace. LCDOT proceeded forward to show their thoughts to the Working Group at today's meeting to garner feedback, featuring a recap on existing paratransit services in Lake County and a discussion on roles and responsibilities for the model that LCDOT believes can be a good fit for Lake County.

With the possibility of modifications, Kevin Carrier brought up the idea of looking into the overarching question on whether the Working Group could support moving forward with the proposed paratransit model.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *History of Paratransit in Lake County* slide of the presentation. In 2005, Lake County Coordinated Transportation Services Committee (LCCTSC) was formed to help with the coordination effort in Lake County. From 2005 to 2020, the latest developments involve the Working Group who have been tasked with identifying a Lead Agency. LCDOT is hopeful that coordination can begin amongst the existing paratransit services in the County to better serve the region with the Working Group identifying a Lead Agency.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Existing Paratransit and Local Bus Services* slide of the presentation. The map shown depicting all the services that are available in Lake County, ranging from 40 to 50 services, was pulled from the Paratransit Market Study and is an example of the complexity and confusion of the current system.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Ride Lake County Breakdown* slide of the presentation. Providing a background on Ride Lake County services, Kevin noted that there are two services, Ride Lake County West and Ride Lake County Central are coordinated in Lake County. Ride Lake County West originally began as Northwest Lake Pace Service in the northwest portion of the County. In 2008, the Northwest Lake Pace Service branded into the Northwest Demo Service. When Ride Lake County Central was created in 2016, the Northwest Demo Service was rebranded into Ride Lake County West. Kathleen O'Connor added that for the Ride Lake County Central Service, the Village of Libertyville, Mundelein, and Libertyville Township had been in place for 30 years. When the Village of Libertyville, Mundelein, and Libertyville Township originally began operating paratransit service, it was an example of what a coordinated system could look like. The original service from 30 years ago was different from the Northwest Demo Service through how coordination was handled and how their Pace funds were utilized. Ride Lake Central continues to be slightly different than Ride Lake County West and that the goal of the service through LCCTSC initially was that any expansion would follow the original model of where Pace funds were being used to expand service. Kevin Carrier described the current administration of the programs, LCDOT holds agreements with six townships participating in Ride Lake County West and collects funds from each of them, essentially serving as a middleman. LCDOT holds a subsidy agreement with Pace for Ride Lake County West as well. In regards to Ride Lake County Central, LCDOT believes the 30-year service is still continuing in the background, where locals have their agreement still with Pace for the local service while the County has an agreement with Pace for the regional trips outside of the service area that is funded through a grant. Kathleen O'Connor added that the grant also covers trips occurring outside of the original service hours. The grant covers funds for geographical expansion and hours of service expansion. Kevin Carrier stated the key takeaway is that there are two distinct models within the County for coordinated services and that they aren't all administered in the same way. Sally Yates followed up adding that additional capacity is available through the grant. If traditional Dial-A-Ride services are at full capacity, the transitional capacity transcends into the grant portion of the service.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Market Study Recommendations* slide of the presentation. Through the Paratransit Market Study, three types of recommendations were formed revolving around Governance Changes, Mobility Management, and Service Strategies. The Governance Changes recommendation is somewhat where the County currently is at. Kevin Carrier noted that before Lake

County can get into service change or expansion of service there will need to be a good governance and administrative structure to build upon.

Following the identification of a Lead Agency, the next step would be to dissolve LCCTSC and come up with a Ride Lake County Committee or similar group to oversee the service. The Mobility Management recommendation involves cleaning up the trip information, marketing, and adding a Mobility Manager for the Lake County region. The Service Strategies recommendation features a variety of short, mid, and long-term strategies. Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Market Study Recommendations Continued* slide of the presentation to give reference to the various service strategies that were put together in the Paratransit Market Study. Kevin Carrier continued that LCDOT's vision is to get the Lead Agency identified, get the structure defined, and have the identified Lead Agency or committees pick and choose which direction paratransit will go in including additional services and expansion.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *What We Like From Other Counties* slide of the presentation. In reference to the presentations that were given by the surrounding counties, Kevin noted that administrative and financial components of their paratransit systems were established slightly different than how Ride Lake County was established. From an administrative perspective, LCDOT took away a component of Ride DuPage in that the County was set up as an Executive Sponsor. As Executive Sponsor, DuPage County had more of an effort up front acting as a political change agent when the service first began, coordinating the service and recruiting sponsors, municipalities, and townships. As the years went by, DuPage County did not have as much of an effort as a political change agent due to the paratransit system having a good sponsorship level and less changes taking place. DuPage County continues to function as an Executive Sponsor administering and having agreements with Pace for their county-sponsored services including regional trips and trips to the county government center. Kevin continued that local sponsors sponsor their local trips under the Ride DuPage service, leading to villages and municipalities contracting with Pace to provide the service. The villages and municipalities would serve as the front line in dealing with their residents in terms of registration, inquiries, and complaints. Regarding mobility management, LCDOT would like to see Pace provide more assistance for the Ride Lake County service including situations where an entity would like to join the existing service, expansion of the service, and putting together ridership projections.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the financial component of the surrounding paratransit systems. LCDOT took away a component from MCRide within McHenry County in that they put in a lot of effort in convincing everyone to roll their subsidies and legacy subsidies into one large pot for the whole service. Legacy subsidies currently exist in Lake County creating a situation where some entities are receiving subsidies for the Ride Lake County service whereas some do not have any subsidies. An additional component LCDOT took away from MCRide was their standardized fare structure that is based off per capita. Steve Carlson asked who would be responsible to tell a township to accept less when joining the service regarding MCRide's strategy of equalizing the funding. Kevin Carrier responded that whoever is the Lead Agency would be responsible and added that if the County is the Lead Agency, county staff could handle that. Shane Schneider followed up that LCDOT would first have to discuss with Pace to get their agreement on this and believes this is where people will be looking to the County to show leadership and to act a political change agent using their existing relationships with municipalities and townships to accomplish this. Shane Schneider added that Pace will likely want to have assistance with accomplishing this and that the County needs to be willing to show support if we truly are going to reinvent the system and come out the other side with

something more efficient. Shane Schneider continued that ultimately, we are going to have to market and sell this change and to mark the change on equal footing so that everyone is getting the same deal when coming into the system to be treated equally. Steve Carlson followed up with a comment about the County Board buying into the proposed change. Shane Schneider agreed that we will need the County Board to buy into the new model for it to be successful and hopes that we can get to a point where everyone feels good about the model and wants to support it. Linda Soto followed up noting that once the County and Pace come to an agreement on how to proceed, Pace would be supportive and that the transition would be a team effort. The County would be the lead on getting the message out and Pace will also support in communicating the message of the new model. Linda Soto added that there may be a silver-lining to fast-forwarding to the radical changes with the COVID-19 climate and financial challenges to be had. Kevin Carrier followed up noting that in McHenry County they had sponsors who bought in right from the beginning with MCRide and the County used the fact they had sponsors bought in right away to get other entities to buy in with the understanding that if they wanted their residents to be able to use the service and be able to travel to other parts of the County, they had to be willing to roll their subsidies into one large pot to receive the benefits of the service. Kevin Carrier noted that this took time to get everyone to buy in and get to a point where the service is running smoothly as well.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Proposed Administrative Structure* slide of the presentation. The chart shown on the slide includes potential administrative structures for multiple entities. Pace would be the service provider helping with mobility management duties such as trip coordination and Lake County would be the Executive Sponsor. Committees would be put in place reporting up to the Executive Sponsor and setting up the guidelines and framework of the service. The Ride Lake County Committee would be made up of either service providers or those who have financial skin in the game such as the County, local sponsors, townships, municipalities, private businesses, and healthcare entities. Entities that are on the Ride Lake County Committee would be involved with forming the service in Lake County. The Executive Committee would include those involved in County sponsored services and would be made up of various County departments. Examples of County sponsored services include trips to the County Health Department and County Court. The makeup of committee members featuring county departments would be involved in making guidelines and putting together a framework for county sponsored services as well.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Proposed Roles and Responsibilities* slide of the presentation and noted that the roles and responsibilities listed for Pace is something that will have to be discussed with them. In general, the roles and responsibilities for Pace include managing sponsor agreements, billing, and providing the service and call center which Pace mostly partakes in currently. As the Executive Sponsor, Lake County would be serving as a political change agent and manage the agreements with Pace for the County sponsored services. For the Ride Lake County Committee, the committee would be responsible for advancing coordination of paratransit services, defining where the service areas are, setting up sponsorship levels, helping local sponsors with outreach of their services, and addressing inquiries from their residents.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Next Steps – Structures and Roles* slide of the presentation. Next steps involve LCDOT still planning on having a meeting with Pace to get their concurrence, coming back to the Working Group to get a recommendation, and taking the recommendation to the PWPTC and County Board for approval.

Kevin Carrier transitioned to the *Transition Timeline* slide of the presentation. Kevin noted the timeline presented is just an estimate and that the transition may take longer than estimated with trying to pull in local sponsors to buy into the service. Ultimately, LCDOT is estimating two years for the transition for obtaining several sponsor letters, determining service areas, and setting up a funding model. In 2021, LCDOT is hopeful to get buy in from the sponsors and to start the framework for the agreements with Pace. Potentially in 2022, the service may be able to start coordinating for Lake County.

Kevin Carrier concluded the presentation and opened the meeting for discussion and feedback.

Sally Yates opened the discussion believing that McHenry County's paratransit system parallels most with what Lake County is trying to accomplish due to McHenry County coordinating all their resources into MCRide. No other Dial-A-Rides currently exist in McHenry County. Entities that were previously receiving Pace subsidy had transferred their subsidy into McHenry County's model. McHenry County augmented the funding transferred from the entities that were receiving Pace subsidy to try and implement a countywide system. Sally Yates noted that there are still some entities waiting to determine if they would want to participate in MCRide.

Sally Yates continued with stating that DuPage County's system is different than any of the other coordinated projects because they wanted a model so that they could access to purchase service. The County had their own funding and utilized their Pace subsidy they kept in addition, she also noted the County's Pace subsidy was limited and that most of the trips for service were purchased by the County. The County had transportation-to-work programs for years before implementing Ride DuPage. The County eventually folded the transportation-to-work programs into Ride DuPage and had access to JARC funding for many years. DuPage County always managed their resources, creating a situation where Pace basically serves as the operator of the service.

Kevin Carrier agreed with what Sally Yates shared and that the proposed Lake County model aligns with MCRide. Kevin added that one takeaway was that McHenry County administers all their services including managing all the billing and holding all the agreements and contracts whereas for Ride DuPage, one takeaway was that the managing of the billing and holding agreements and contracts was all localized. The local sponsors of Ride DuPage were able to directly deal with residents more themselves in terms of mobility management assistance as well. This was one of the key takeaways from Ride DuPage county versus McHenry County. Kevin Carrier added, in general, Lake County did like a lot of what MCRide had to offer.

Sally Yates followed up noting that with DuPage County, they are very involved with their local communities and more so than McHenry County is. The County's subsidies are minimal and that majority of the local expenditures are incurred by the local entities. The County does their own analysis to see where they want to go, where they want to expand, and they recruit other municipalities to join the program.

Kathleen O'Connor followed up noting that the only thing about the DuPage County model she had reservations about is that on some level it seems that it is complicated in terms of rider experience and pointed out that McHenry County's model is much cleaner in terms of how a rider could engage a service. An issue that frequently occurs is people don't know where to go. If that issue is viewed in terms of a benefit from DuPage County, it's potentially a benefit administratively from the County's perspective and a benefit in terms of improving public communication and awareness. Kathleen

O'Connor added that her concern about the Ride DuPage model is that Lake County won't be addressing the issue.

Kevin Carrier followed up that LCDOT envisions the service would all be one service from a riders perspective meaning riders wouldn't know that they are riding on a local service sponsored by a township versus a regional service and added that this would be a question to bring to Pace. All the services would be considered as Ride Lake County regarding branding and communication, but the local services would help with local billing, holding agreements, and registering riders if possible. Kevin Carrier added this is the vision Lake County has so that it won't be viewed as a bunch of separate services and instead would be viewed as one regional service, like how Ride Lake County Central works.

Sally Yates followed up stating that would be a decision Lake County would need to make but under that model for Lake County, locals will need to assume other responsibilities as they do in DuPage County.

Kathleen O'Connor followed up stating that is what she meant to get across in reference to her original comment and added that is a concern of hers. Ride Lake County Central currently does not handle registration, which is handled by Pace, and added noted that Ride Lake County West does have registration handled locally. The registration component handled by Pace was one of the selling points that is used when engaging other public partners to join Ride Lake County Central, selling to them that they don't have to take on that administrative task. Kathleen O'Connor believes this component doesn't have to be addressed right now because it is an execution component, but believes that whoever is involved in the execution of it should consider the administrative component, since it has been one of the prevailing concerns from the beginning and how complicated all of it is. Kathleen O'Connor added she believes that if you're going to direct people to their individual local unit of government, you're going to have to assume that everyone will be directed the same exact way with all the other local units of government. If not directed the same way, the same challenges being faced today will continue.

Sally Yates followed up stating the other thing DuPage County is different is that they don't rely heavily on the grant. The grant accounts for a very small portion of their overall budget and is a huge factor when it comes to billing. Sally added DuPage County's model doesn't parallel to how Lake County is set up financially. Billing would have to take place at the County level or Lead Agency level, or whomever manages the grant.

Kevin Carrier asked if there were any more comments or thoughts from the Working Group. No comments immediately followed. Kevin brought up Kathleen O'Connor's concerns, and asked when registering local riders in Ride Lake County Central, if that is done by Pace. Kathleen O'Connor confirmed that it is the case. Sally Yates followed up noting Pace doesn't deem people eligible when they call in and was decided that it was okay for people to self-certify when it came to eligibility. It is the responsibility of whomever manages the grant to assure that people are qualified for the service. Self-certification was in the terms of agreement as well, whereas it is different under the DuPage County model. DuPage County does have an eligibility component requiring people to go through their local unit of government, village, or township.

Kevin Carrier thanked everyone for the comments and feedback.

Shirleyann Russell asked if the Working Group would have the same Zoom identification number for the next meeting. Georgeann Duberstein answered each time a zoom meeting is created, a different identification number and password will be created as well. The Working Group will receive notification of an identification number and password for the next meeting via email from Joe Surdam. Information pertaining to accessing the next meeting will be available on the meeting agenda and meeting notice as well.

Linda Soto followed up stating as the Working Group digests the presentation given at today's meeting and noted a future meeting with Pace executives will take place, the purpose of the Working Group is to make a recommendation on a Lead Agency and believes it looks like it will be Lake County. Linda Soto added that there seems to be some concern as to what the County would be committing too and mentioned Steve Carlson had some concern on this as well. Before a recommendation is made, she asked if the meeting with Pace executives needs to take place to provide further feedback to the Working Group or is the Working Group ready to make a recommendation without the meeting.

Kathleen O'Connor followed up believing the meeting with Pace executives and what Lake County would be committing to is an execution issue and that the Working Group could go ahead and make a recommendation. There are other existing issues that need to be resolved going forward, but the Working Group is not responsible for this. It would be the responsibility of the next committee that is put in place along with moving things forward, examining resources, and financial limitations. Kathleen added it may be premature to start working on the other existing issues, but the Working Group could potentially start identifying what unknowns exist along with the recommendation.

Linda Soto followed up agreeing with Kathleen O'Connor's comment and asked Steve Carlson what his thoughts were.

Steve Carlson followed up stating that if he were a County Board member who doesn't have any idea about what the Working Group is doing, what would scare him is the fact that Lake County would be the Lead Agency. The Lead Agency needs to be very well defined and to have the responsibilities be made clear as possible politically and financially.

Linda Soto followed up asking Shane Schneider and Kevin Carrier to expand on one of her observations from the previous Working Group meeting and today's presentation, in that the Lead Agency is a scary title and with the Executive Sponsor, they are looking to change some of the dynamics. Linda believes the Executive Sponsor role is one of the key reasons for meeting with Pace executives. Linda added she believes she would be in favor of approving Lake County in the role as Executive Sponsor and asked if she was on track with describing the County's role as Executive Sponsor.

Shane Schneider followed up noting there is an important distinction between Lead Agency and Executive Sponsor because on the execution side, if we get no other participants that want to join the service in this venture nothing will move forward. Lake County is not moving things forward by itself. The County will be the Executive Sponsor providing leadership and acting as a political change agent. If no one steps in to join the effort, then nothing will move forward. In reference to Steve Carlson's point, Shane noted that this needs to be a team effort with all local government agencies across the County in order to make an improvement to the transportation system and to help all residents and mobility in the region.

Kathleen O'Connor asked if the proposed model would revert to the current system in reference to Shane Schneider's comment. There still seems to be some role clarification in terms of the 5310 grant. She asked if the County would still be the fiscal agent for the grant if the proposed model reverted to the current system and added that the Working Group should look at what they were charged with originally and that the language centered on Lead Agency. Kathleen O'Connor suggested there could be a caveat saying we're not in a position as a County to identify a Lead Agency, but after six months of discussion through the Working Group, the Working Group would encourage the County to pursue filling the role as Executive Sponsor using the parameters outlined and have a statement saying a critical component could be to build countywide support. Kathleen added she doesn't know how this could be done if execution phase isn't addressed.

Shane Schneider followed up believing the Working Group could provide a recommendation on Lake County serving as Executive Sponsor and bullet out the responsibilities. Steve Carlson agreed. Shane Schneider stated the existing system will continue to operate as is until there is an executable plan in place for a new model. Shane Schneider added this would be the next step.

Steve Carlson followed up stating depending on how the COVID-19 situation evolves, the proposed Lake County model will be very low on the priority list and noted if the County is going to take the financial hits that are anticipated, the Working Group and putting together the proposed model needs to be carried out quickly in terms of timing, financially, and politically. Steve Carlson added there are numerous things on County's plate currently that are going to be in the minds of many Board Members that are more urgent than the proposed model.

Linda Soto followed up reminding the Working Group that the process of getting to the proposed model is not going to happen overnight and believes that the two-year timeline estimate is likely too quick given the COVID-19 situation. The proposed model may not happen until 2023 or further out. She added that in the recovery phases at both the state and federal level, we don't know what's going to happen to mass transit. Significant changes can amount to funding and how services are provided. Some of these changes may be dramatic, abrupt, radical, and even launch us into more 21st century type of services which would aid us in the mission and potentially remove services resulting in some residents not being happy with. Linda Soto added that the Working Group and County needs to go ahead with planning because when the recovery moves occur at the state and federal level, we need to be ready with what we want. Mass transit will be key and noted ridership is down significantly on buses. Buses are being used by many essential workers, people are riding for free, and Pace has had to add buses as well. Pace is operating additional buses so people can practice social distancing and noted this trend will continue for some time into the future. Linda added that it is going to be a harder road for Metra and asked depending on what they can and cannot provide in the future, will buses become more needed and will there be an extension on the deluxe bus service.

Shane Schneider followed up believing that a couple tangible next steps that could be taken include the Working Group committee drafting a letter of recommendation, recommending Lake County as Executive Sponsor, itemizing what we want the Executive Sponsor to do, and meeting with Pace executives to talk through some of the more granular things in regards on who would do what and discuss a good model for going forward. Shane added one of the first things the Executive Sponsor could do is start communicating with all the municipalities and townships in the County, layout the framework of the plan, and ask people to submit a letter of interest. Once there is a gage on who's

interested in joining, partnerships can start to form. Shane added he believes these are some of the steps that can be made over the next one to two years.

Bethany Williams asked if a motion for the letter of recommendation is needed. Kathleen O'Connor responded that there is nothing on the agenda that allows for a vote on this.

Linda Soto asked who will write the letter and suggested for it to be distributed to everyone for input. Shane Schneider responded he will work with his staff to craft some language to send around to the Working Group Committee for input and added the possibility of scheduling a special meeting to vote on the letter.

Bethany Williams agreed that there should be a draft of the letter that the Working Group can react to.

Linda Soto asked the group if there is a consensus on the letter and the mission of what the letter will be addressing. A consensus in agreement from the Working Group followed. Linda added that the plan is for Shane Schneider and his staff to draft a letter and get that around to the committee and to give a timeline for feedback and asked if the Working Group wants to set a meeting date today. Kathleen O'Connor followed up suggesting giving a timeline for comments and once the letter goes out then can we schedule a tentative meeting date.

Shane Schneider agreed with Kathleen O'Connor and Linda Soto's suggestion and noted that is a reasonable approach.

5. Suggested agenda items for the next meeting

6. Public Comment

7. Reminder

The next Working Group meeting is set to take place on July 8th, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom.

8. Adjournment

Linda Soto made a motion on adjourning the meeting with a second by Steve Carlson. On a unanimous voice the meeting was adjourned at 2:03 p.m.