

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Council Work Session of the North Mankato City Council was held in the Council Chambers on December 14, 2020. Mayor Dehen called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm. The following were present remotely through Zoom for roll call: Council Members Oachs, Norland, and Mayor Dehen, City Administrator Harrenstein, Finance Director McCann, Community Development Director Fischer, City Planner Matthew Lassonde, and City Clerk Van Genderen. Citizen monitoring was available through a conference call.

### **North Mankato Transit Service**

City Administrator Harrenstein reported the Director of Mobility Advancement from Bolton & Menk, Brian Lamb, would present a memo reviewing North Mankato Transit and proposed options.

Mr. Lamb reported transit would have dramatic changes in the next few years, as new technology becomes available. He stated a review of the history of transit in North Mankato would provide context for moving North Mankato forward. Fixed-route transit service in North Mankato has been provided by the Mankato Transit System (MTS) since at least 2003. During that time, the annual ridership has been consistently between 12,000 and 16,000 total passengers. In 2019, the fixed route carried more riders with 17,015 passengers. Over the 17 years, North Mankato was served by several route configurations. In mid-2018, the two fixed routes were combined into a single route, and part of a larger service expansion paid through a one-year new service expansion grant funded by the state. North Mankato's fixed service nearly doubled, going from six trips a day to eleven. The route operates hourly from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm, with a round trip of approximately one hour. The service hours increased by 83%, but ridership only increased by 23%. In 2019 a boarding and alighting data collection effort showed that ridership clustered around higher density locations such as South Central College, multi-unit housing, and the major employment sites in North Mankato. Mr. Lamb stated the fixed-route service could be streamlined and simplified to concentrate on the city's major employment sites with a round trip travel time of slightly less than 30 minutes. This change would offer several advantages. It would reduce the total customer trip travel time to or from the Cherry Street station by an average of 50%. The second benefit is the streamlined routing will allow a much better match for employer AM work-start times. The tradeoff includes a reduction of inline stops to six and rerouted a portion of the route.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibited discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for persons with disabilities. This means that when public transit agencies provide fixed-route service, they must also provide "complementary paratransit" service to people with disabilities. In mid-2018, with the fixed-route expanded hours, the mobility service's operating service hours increased from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm on weekdays, and ridership grew 90% in 2019 over the 2017 pre-expansion base. A community may offer other kinds of transportation services such as fixed-route and ADA complementary paratransit services. In 2019 MTS started a new Kato Flex service for parts of Mankato that were not directly served by fixed-route transit. The MTS director reported that the Kato Flex service is averaging 2-2.5 passengers per hour. The City of North Mankato has questioned if the fixed-route and mobility services were adequately meeting the community transit needs. A survey conducted concluded that 70% of ridership was from outside North Mankato to access school or employment destination. North Mankato was interested in reasonable transit options for city residents who wanted to travel between North Mankato neighborhoods and non-downtown locations in Mankato.

In July 2019, the City started a pilot service with Ruby Ride providing curb-to-curb service with unrestricted pick-ups throughout the City for an eleven-hour service day during weekdays. Ruby Ride was in operations for eight months before operations were suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19. Questions concerning Ruby Ride include if the small business can solve some of the

larger issues. Ruby Ride is still working on the on-demand portion of their rider services, and time will tell if they will be able to adapt and meet the demands of the market.

Mr. Lamb reported that the City of North Mankato's annual fixed-route hours increased from 1,530 to 2,805 between 2017 and 2019. Mobility services also increased from 477 to 903 between 2017 and 2019. However, the local North Mankato cost for the service hours decreased from \$55,378 in 2017 to \$27,265 in 2019. In large part due to two MNDOT program initiatives. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) are providing economic assistance to communities and transit systems impacted by the pandemic. For North Mankato, these funds are expected to offset all existing operating expenses and lost fare revenues for the transit service from March until the end of 2020. In 2020, the North Mankato annual expense should be less than \$20,000. The CARES Act funds are available until expended. MTS' budget forecast includes having sufficient CARES Act revenues to offset all non-growth operating costs and passenger fares for the entire 2021 year.

The City of North Mankato is currently negotiating a one-year service agreement for 2021 with the City of Mankato and MTS. North Mankato would use 2021 to determine the most viable transit system to provide ridership for North Mankato. The agreement includes the continuation of the fixed-route service with reduced trips to target peak demand times for the industrial and educational hubs. The City would also utilize the Kato Flex route system, which typically requires reservations one day in advance for the desired service. The proposed agreement also opens up the mobility service hours, ensuring residents with disabilities from North Mankato are served outside the fixed-route service hours.

Council Member Oachs stated she approved the plan but wanted to notify North Mankato's ridership.

Council Member Norland reported she like the ability for residents to have options.

Mayor Dehen requested clarification on Ruby Ride and Kato Flex and if they would work together or in competition.

City Administrator Harrenstein reported they would work in competition. Ruby Ride is door to door and very flexible, but with COVID-19, they were unable to continue services. MTS kept their buses running, but Kato Flex is not door to door, and some riders may need to travel up to ¼ of a mile to get to a stop. Ruby Ride is still working on its immediate demand response service. He did note that the City does not have a contract with Ruby Ride. Instead, they will be finishing a few months of the pilot.

Mayor Dehen requested clarification on if business shifts were taken into consideration when creating the new fixed route.

City Administrator Harrenstein stated the new streamlined route is down to 30 minutes, and the system will be monitored to determine if the timetable is working. He mentioned that the on-demand system might work better for shift differentials.

City Administrator Harrenstein stated the new agreement and the transit plan is a victory for resident, they provide a better-fixed route option and more mobility options. Without any concerns voiced, he would execute the agreement with the City of Mankato and MTS.

### **Discuss Proposed North Mankato Recreation Trail Names**

City Planner Lasonde reported the City requested citizen feedback on naming six recreation trails in North Mankato. He stated the City received a wide variety of names, but none stood out.

Council Member Norland stated she was interested in naming the trail by Benson Park the Gulliver Trail after the dog who was rescued from Benson Park.

Mayor Dehen reviewed the proposed trails and stated the proposed trail names: Prairie Loop, Brickyard Trail, North Ridge Loop, Commerce Trail, North Mankato Loop, and Caswell Trail. He stated the North Mankato Bicycle Commission met to discuss the proposed trails and offer two alternative names. First, name the Caswell Trail Dakota Canku. The trail is around Benson Park, where the Sitting Bull statue has been set. Canku is the Dakota word for roads or streets. Second to change the name North Mankato Loop to North Mankato Gran Fondo. Gran Fondo is an Italian term meaning "big ride" and is well known to avid bicycles.

Mayor Dehen stated the goal would be to put the maps out in the bike kiosks and include QR codes so visitors can navigate through the trails. He mentioned there might be SHIP Dollars available to sign the trails. The trail system will provide new riding experiences for bikers, and the system will connect to the Mankato trails and regional bike trails.

Council Member Oachs moved, seconded by Council Member Norland, to close the meeting at 12:50 pm.

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Mayor

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City Clerk