

Transportation Task Force

Minutes of the meeting on April 15, 2004, Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

Present: Cheryl Byrd (Dare County Commissioner, Transportation Advisory Board Chairwoman), Sandi Morrison (Sandy Beach Tours), Nancy Bellantine (OBX Pathways), Kevin Schwartz, (Association of REALTORS®), Jody Crosswhite (Chamber of Commerce), Norma Mills, Dare County Attorney

Called to order at 9:10 by Chairman Crosswhite.

1. Approval of minutes -- C. Byrd noted a correction of spelling to N. Bellantine's name.
2. C. Byrd introduced Attorney Mills' role in advising the task force on structural issues and potential conflicts of interest that might arise in task force membership of those who might someday be potential transportation vendors and discussion of possibly forming a separate transportation authority in the county.
3. J. Crosswhite reported that the workforce transportation subcommittee of the task force, formed at the last meeting, had been unable to meet since the last meeting. He concluded that it was too late to produce any tangible programming or pilot transportation program in conjunction with the 2004 visitor season. He reviewed that the point of the task force working separately from the Transportation Advisory Board was to try and develop transportation alternatives that would take traffic off the roads. Other issues and the many good ideas that town representatives brought to the table at previous meetings were mostly DOT-related and outside of the scope of the task force to deal with. The members agreed that the focus should continue to be workforce transportation.
4. K. Schwartz reported on a beach trolley system serving a beach route in St. Petersburg, Fla., that he had used while on vacation and gathered additional information about, including budgets and other operational issues. The characteristics of the area are very similar to what is needed here: a trolley bus system that travels a single road route - part two-lane and part four-lane - along a 30 mile stretch of beach (similar to Whalebone to Corolla), 50 percent of whose riders are residents commuting to work in areas where parking is scarce and/or they can not afford to live. The operating budget of the 10 bus system is \$800,000 a year. Each bus costs \$300,000. State and federal grants are available. It takes 6-7 buses on the route at a time. The three-year-old system had more than 400,000 riders its first year.
4. There was a full discussion with Attorney Mills of the conflict of interest issue and other legal issues including the eventual use of public and/or private funds. Attorney Mills concluded that there was no conflict at this point with S. Morrison, a transportation provider, continuing to serve on the task force. As a quasi-public entity, the task force has the right and obligation to seek expert input from the private sector to solve a public problem. It is enough that there is awareness on the task force's part that she may someday enter into a business relationship born out of this effort. But since the task force itself is not going to be the entity determining how public funds might be expended, the work the task force was doing and the way it was doing it was not in question, and she noted that it was good to show sensitivity to the issue.

5. Attorney Mills discussed the pros and cons of creating a transportation authority as an independent governmental agency that was only beholden to its funding agency versus a governmental body designating transportation management as the primary governing body's function. She also discussed how a separate authority could operate by simply contracting out all of its necessary functions such that the authority itself did not have employees, and payroll and overhead or require offices. She offered to research the matter further by contacting the Public Transportation Division of the DOT and other county transportation authorities such as the Triangle Transit Authority.

6. J. Crosswhite asked what the task force's next step should be. C. Byrd suggested that the task force should seek to raise the public awareness of the issue with a public interest meeting. That led to a discussion of using the Chamber's 2001 symposium on affordable housing, which eventually spawned the CDC, a housing agency, to attract people to a meeting on workforce transportation issues, which could support the need for a transportation authority. N. Bellantine suggested recruiting retirees with public transportation experience elsewhere should a volunteer executive director of a continuing effort be needed. Attorney Mills suggested the resources of N.C. State University, which has a curriculum in transportation, might be a resource that could provide assistance for a study or in other technical ways much as they had done for the town of Manteo in the past. It was agreed that Attorney Mills and K. Schwartz would seek a meeting with Chamber President John Bone to discuss the resources and planning involved in the 2001 housing symposium with the goal of emulating such a meeting in August. J. Crosswhite added that he would seek to report on the task force's committee to the Dare County Tourism Board.

7. K. Schwartz reported on the effort to gather information from property management companies about the travel patterns of their guests and the assessment as to whether or not an advertising and PR campaign targeted to visitors could be successful in reducing peak traffic on US 168/158 and NC 12. He reported that DOT planners had agreed to help with the analysis, and that preliminarily they felt a reduction of peak traffic by 10 percent, which they considered 5,000-6,000 vehicles on an in-season Saturday, would positively affect someone's trip. It was agreed that reduction was attainable with the properly planned and executed campaign.

8. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 a.m. with the next meeting scheduled for 9 a.m. on May 13.