SEPTA CAC plenary meeting
Via WebEx

May 25, 2021 5:30PM

Attendees:
[Mason Carter, Caroll Drazen, John Bartle, Raina Yancey, Michael Robinson, Alice Udovich, Al Aacht, Eugene Hsue, Domonique McClendon, Damien Warsavage, Paul Drucker, Tomika Anglin, Erin Busbee

Guests:
Cynthia Hayes, Norman Marcus, Nile Ward, Harley Cooper, Patricia Ellis-Dinatale, Leah Martino, Cassandra West

1. Review Minutes
   a. Discussion with Harley Cooper, Senior Operations Planner, Service Planning; and Cassandra West, Manager, CCT Program Eligibility and Regulatory Compliance
   b. Introducing SEPTA Owl Link: connecting customers to late shift employment opportunities in lower Bucks County.
      i. The first on-demand micro-transit for SEPTA. Launched May 10. A pilot service. Tech-enabled dispatch to request, schedule. Via is the software provider.
      ii. Uses CCT paratransit vehicles, and operator.
      iii. Uses a mobile app.
         1. Can book up to 7 days in advance.
         2. Check the app to find the exact pickup location and meet the driver.
   c. Employers hiring for shift work in the service area include Amazon, Peloton, Estee Lauder, Lower Bucks Hospital.
   d. 10:30 PM to 6 AM; every day of the year.
   e. Two vehicles
   f. Free with SEPTA Key. The passenger fare gets captured on the fixed route portion of the line.
   g. Employment landscape is moving towards 24/7 service and shift work. Especially the warehousing, distribution and logistics companies.
   h. Questions:
      i. Tomika asked about frequency: two vehicles running simultaneously available for pickups. Also asked if SEPTA charges fees to the businesses. A: No. We need to be able to demonstrate to the businesses
that there is a benefit to the businesses during the pilot. A fee was mentioned and now on the table in the long run.

ii. Damien: Scalability. A: Goal is currently to see if it’s viable. Scaling the service would come from bus revolution. Looking at whether this is cost-effective.

iii. Trubman: How is success defined? What’s the threshold for continuing this? A: looking at ridership, as well as a quantified value for employers, as well as customer and operator satisfaction with the service. Transit technology for low-density areas on the fringes of the network. Ridership goal estimated at 35-60 passengers per night, which they haven’t achieved?

iv. Raina Q: How many riders? A: Few. Partly because not much marketing in advance. They’d love some ideas on how to market. Many of the first riders were actually from smaller businesses.

v. Jake: Kind of feels like a subsidy to giant companies and an enabler of sprawl a la interstate ring roads. Are they providing funding for this? Is Bucks County contributing for this? Help lead development and not be totally reactive to it. - Suggest having the employers’ market to their employees? Yelp and Google can tell you who is open. A: These kinds of jobs have a hard time locating in the city because there are few industrial areas and the wage tax. She doesn’t see it as a subsidy. In the end, if SEPTA doesn’t respond to the requests, the workers get hurt, not the employer. This can help big companies understand the value of public transit.

vi. Domonique: Is there a potential to get the keycard mailed to the users? A: You shouldn’t have to travel far to get a keycard. The goal is to make it relatively accessible. Domonique: but right now, it’s not that accessible. Other cities will mail cards. A: there is a network, like supermarkets.

vii. Alice: if there is large demand for some of the large distribution centers coming to the city, would it make more sense to provide a bus route that services 24/7 shifts? A: if they could have served it with a fixed route, they would. Some other industrial zones get served via adjusted patterns.

viii. Caroll: Does the driver have to wait for a critical mass of customers? A: No, they just pick up dynamically as they come in.

ix. Al: [I missed the question]: A: the times that the trains operate don’t coincide with the shift changes. Al: Would you do door-to-door? A: No, just serving from a bus route stop. Al: He’d be interested in trying the service. How can he schedule it? A: download the app.

x. Eugene: Safety: as someone who does a lot late-night riding, he’s very aware of safety. Are there panic/emergency buttons by the stops? A: there are not. But these are not the most isolated areas where the
vehicles are making pick-ups. It’s a busy area even at night. Eugene: If there isolated areas, I’d suggest adding those buttons.

xi. Nile: Is there a way to track where an Owl link vehicle is on the app when you are on a fixed route bus getting ready to connect to the Owl Link and vice versa? In addition, I noticed that this is a separate app from the main SEPTA app. Is there a way to incorporate this into the main app so the user doesn’t have to switch between apps to get tracking info on their fixed bus route? A: Like Uber/Lyft, you can track your vehicle. Regarding the additional app, they can’t be one app, as the owl link app is a product of Via. But Via is working on incorporating the real-time data of SEPTA. Then it will be able to calculate your whole trip plan.

xii. Norm: Suggest adding alert boxes on all regional rail stations. Could be solar powered. If we could compete with uber and Lyft, this would be amazing. Harley: they’re interested in doing this in-house at some point. [Norm: Sorry I didn’t catch everything: I have a cold and am a bit fuzzy today]

xiii. Jake: Similar systems? A: LA and Seattle. Funded through an FTA grant and now scaled up beyond the pilot.

2. Subcommittee reports
   a. Regional Rail, John
      i. Jay Clayton presented about the extension of MARC service to Wilmington/Newark, which would connect it to SEPTA. It was the only stretch along the NE corridor not served by a commuter rail operator.
      ii. Discussed decreased ridership. Ridership is 12 to 15% of what it was pre-COVID. Mostly essential workers to hospitals. Not the office workers. They’re expected to change to 1 or 2 days a week, and not in accordance with old commuting patterns.
      iii. Some services are currently suspended.
      iv. Regional rail has a shortage of engineers, and trouble keeping engineers due to a lack of overtime opportunities.
   b. Transit, Tariem
      i. Presentation from Grant [Engel] and Noah Lee about seat availability data. Link: https://septa.org/seat-availability/
      ii. First for buses, then regional rail and trains.
      iii. Discussed capital budget and the process.
      iv. Flower show / Mask Force Philly

3. Announcements:
   a. Capital budget and operating budget comments. Please do.
   b. Vaccinated?
   c. Happy hour? Where could we meet? Maybe June or July.
Meeting adjourned at 6:55PMish.