

Houma-Thibodaux Metropolitan Planning Organization

Travel Demand Management Working Group

Wednesday, March 2, 2021 at 10:00 AM

South Central Planning and Development Commission
5058 West Main Street, Houma, LA 70360

MEETING MINUTES – DRAFT

Present: Cassie Parker, SCPDC; Hester Serrano, Dept. of Corrections; Joshua Manning, SCPDC; Logan Borne, Fletcher Technical Community College; Pat Gordon, SCPDC; Rebecca Boquet, Goodwill; Shannon Edgeron, SCPDC; Wendell Voisin, Terrebonne Parish.

The meeting was held using the Zoom video conferencing platform.

1. **Roll Call and Introductions:** Joshua Manning called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. He asked everyone to introduce themselves and their agencies, and also asked everyone to type in their name and agency into the chat box to help record attendance.
2. **Adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes:** J. Manning stated that there are no previous minutes since this is the first meeting. However, this will be a standing agenda item for any future meetings.
3. **Discussion: Define Problem**

J. Manning started the discussion by explaining SCPDC's roll in this project. He explained the agency has received funding from the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to explore various Travel Demand Management strategies, primarily Vanpools and Carpools. Through this process, they have been made aware that students enrolled in the Terrebonne Adult Education Program have a transportation barrier to access the programs offered at the Fletcher's Thibodaux campus. He

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explained the purpose of this particular group is to develop a narrative and help find funding to implement a vanpool program with the campus.

Marilyn Schwartz with the Terrebonne Adult Education Program explained that, in the past, they had approximately 25 to 30 students a year attending Fletcher's programs at the Houma campus. Since the programs have moved to Thibodaux, they now have zero students attending. She believes, however, that this goes beyond her program to other underserved populations in Terrebonne Parish that have also have transportation barriers. She says the Terrebonne Parish Government and Houma-Terrebonne Chamber have made no comment, but there may be concern from them from an economic development standpoint as well. She also stated that she understands there may not be enough students solely from the Adult Education Program to justify funding for a new vanpool program, however by looking at the entire underserved population and advertising any future available services she believed there would be enough potential riders.

J. Manning asked what data is available that can be used to help draft a narrative. M. Schwartz stated she will send enrollment numbers from past years showing the number of students who were dual enrolled in both programs.

M. Schwartz stated that this type of program could also help expand Adult Education Services in general as providing transportation to individuals living in the Bayou communities to Houma could also help them access education programs.

Hester Serrano with the Dept. of Corrections explained that they also have a data reporting center for reentry just down the road from the Fletcher Campus in Thibodaux. While they have purchased 9,000 bus passes, they still have students outside the reach of the bus routes that cannot take advantage of these services. There are also issues with their grant from Goodwill aiming to get students to driver education classes – these trips also cannot be made in a timely manner via public transportation. She further explained that the Reentry Center at the Lafourche Jail in Thibodaux is funded with a Department of Labor grant to provide inmate training at Fletcher prior to release. However, some inmates are released before training is complete. In those cases, they often have to drop out of the program due to unavailability of transportation. She also

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indicated a need for medical appointments.

Rebecca Boquet with Goodwill talked about the difficulty of getting clients to job interviews as well.

Wendell Voisin with Terrebonne Parish/Good Earth Transit asked H. Serrano if she knows where the people she is describing are living. She replied that there is not one area in particular, but they live in both urban and rural areas throughout the region in areas not adjacent to urban transit routes.

W. Voisin stated there is a need to understand if these individuals are in urban or rural areas. If they live in rural areas in Terrebonne Parish, they potentially could use the Council on Aging's services, though coordination would have to take place.

He also mentioned a study GET is undertaking to serve the underserved/unreached areas of the parish. H. Serrano asked if these populations could be included in the study and if there could be some justification for expanding the bus service times.

M. Schwartz stated that the current rural system through the Council on Aging would likely be helpful for appointments such as medical and job interviews, but they will likely be hesitant to commit to help with a steady, regular schedule like a M-Th welding class. She also stated Workforce will pay individual people for training. This money goes to individuals to help pay for job training and can also be used for transportation. Workforce will not directly pay for transportation costs, but indirectly through direct payments to the individuals.

W. Voisin stated that capital cost could likely be worked out, but the operating costs are the largest barrier and that fares are very important in this regard. He stated that these types of trips – education and jobs – are within the mission of Good Earth Transit to provide. If an efficient way to pick up enough riders and bring them into the regular system is identified, then GET can adjust the schedule of the system to get them to class on time. However, they need the ridership/fares to help offset the increased operations cost. He also mentioned that driver recruitment and retention can also be a problem with needing CDLs.

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J. Manning mentioned that if using minivans or smaller vehicles, then they won't have the CDL problem with getting drivers.

M. Schwartz asked if the Parish or Chamber of Commerce have any type of study on transportation needs. She also inquired if the Census collects this type of data. She indicated she may be able to get studies or data from Workforce.

J. Manning explained that Census Bureau does have transportation data from the American Community Survey. The most useful data sets for this would be population by vehicles per household and primary mode choice to work. He explained that the Houma-Thibodaux area has a lower percentage of the population using public transportation than both the US as a whole and other urban areas in the state, and a higher percentage using single-occupancy vehicles and vanpools. The area also has a higher percentage of the population using taxicabs, bicycles, and "other" forms of transportation than in the U.S. and across the state.

J. Manning then stated that perhaps we don't have hard numbers, but we should have some figures that can be used for estimates. He asked if agencies on the call could provide how many people in their programs would qualify for this type of program. These numbers overlaid with the Census data could begin to tell a story.

Logan Borne with Fletcher stated that they could provide some enrollment numbers and what areas students are from to see what areas may be under enrolled.

J. Manning stated he will be in touch with everyone to get the discussed data to add to the narrative. He then began to discuss various alternatives identified in the discussion: primarily supplementing Good Earth Transit or developing student-run vanpools.

J. Manning stated using Good Earth would likely be the best solution, but private vanpools would be the solution if GET cannot provide the service. He stated that solutions would need to be identified to purchase vans and provide to students. Or if some students already have a van, providing for operating costs. The model that is ultimately selected may be dependent upon who is the fiscal agent and ultimately responsible for the grant applications. He also indicated the group would need to identify who is responsible for operations and maintenance.

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W. Voisin discussed the idea of using Enterprise's turnkey solution. J. Manning stated he remembered that conversation/meeting but will need to get in touch with Enterprise to see, again, who would be the responsible party for funding.

M. Schwartz said usually with Enterprise-type vanpools Industry is involved and employees are well paid to assist with the costs.

L. Borne requested that the grant guidelines be shared with her so that Fletcher can determine if they would be the appropriate party to apply. J. Manning stated they are looking at multiple grants but he will send the one most recently looked to the whole group. He said he will continue to look for future grants, but that others in the group should be looking for grants from an education or workforce development perspective also.

4. **Any other business:** There was no other business.
5. **Next Meeting Date:** The next meeting was set for April 14th at 10am. J. Manning stated he will attempt to have a narrative drafted by that meeting.

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