

Specialized Transportation Plan Update

Stakeholder Advisory Committee – Meeting #2
Tuesday, April 9, 2024, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. MT

Overview

Mountain Metro Transit (MMT), in partnership with the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG), held its second Specialized Transportation Plan Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting on Tuesday, April 9, 2024. Stakeholders were identified and invited based on the plan's boundaries to represent a cross-section of specialized transportation providers, riders, and social services.

The meeting objectives were to:

- Share a brief recap of the first meeting.
- Discuss current Specialized Transportation issues, potential near-term strategies, and long-term solutions.
- Understand stakeholders' priorities related to the draft strategies.
- Preview Open House materials and discuss what else should be included.

This document summarizes the presentation delivered and the themes shared by meeting participants. The accompanying PowerPoint presentation is available for review upon request and includes enlarged maps. Please see page 3 for a summary of the strategies shared with the committee.

Welcome & Introductions

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West), meeting facilitator, introduced project team members, reviewed the agenda, meeting guidelines, and invited participants to introduce themselves. A table of participants is included in Appendix A.

While reviewing the stakeholder committee roles, Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) encouraged participants to help promote the upcoming 2050 Regional Transit and Specialized Transportation Plans Open House by encouraging others within their networks to attend the event.

Before discussing the draft strategies, Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) shared a short recap of the first meeting.

- The Specialized Transportation Plan is a chapter of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).
- The existing conditions show several gaps in the system and where growth is expected over the next 15 years in Colorado Springs.
- The Advisory Committee discussed what is currently working well, what could be improved, and examples of improvement projects.

Draft Strategies to Meet Needs

Ezra Pincus-Roth (Nelson\Nygaard) introduced the 2050 vision for regional transit in Colorado Springs (Figure 1). Under this vision, the ADA Paratransit service area would increase 67%. The draft 2050 Transit Vision includes the following:

- Increase the frequency of services in proven Transit Corridors
- Expand routes in growing areas
- Enhance speed and reliability improvements
- Designate on-demand Transportation zones

In response to the vision and increased fixed-route transit service, stakeholders shared that expanded fixed-route services would improve their quality of life by providing them freedom to travel to areas currently not accessible. At the same time, stakeholders expressed concerns that this expanded service would not improve door-through-door services or address the resource challenges on Specialized Transportation providers.

Ezra Pincus-Roth (Nelson\Nygaard) described the current challenges for service providers in the context of projected growth in population (including older adults) throughout the region. The 2045 LRTP made progress to increase equitable access to services and the ease of accessing those services, but barriers still exist, and growth will bring more demand for these services. Providers must do so much, from client intake to policy setting. Stakeholders were prompted to think through how to create efficiencies as providers, while prioritizing current riders, future riders, and the overall riding experience.

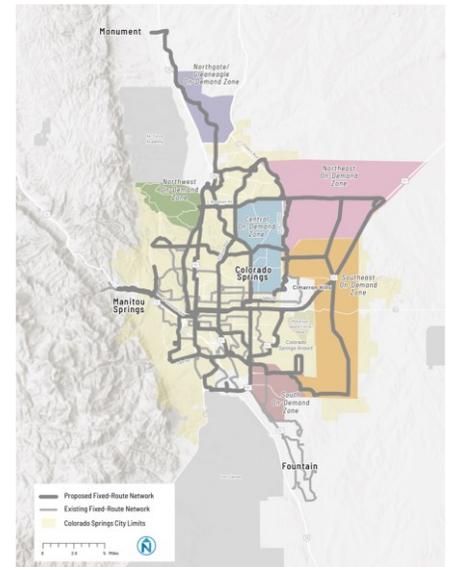
Providers' shared operations are being streamlined through updating of dispatch software and the launch of a shared service to improve ride reservations. Additional training of drivers to build capacity is underway or planned. Sharing training resources was also discussed between stakeholders. Fleets are being diversified with smaller more comfortable vehicles to complete single-user rides. While providers shared the additional trainings staff are receiving, stakeholders discussed the value of coordinating training across providers and involving users or the Independence Center to participate.

The ZEB service was cited by the audience as an example of a successful local program that accommodates shoppers, seniors, and riders with disabilities in Colorado Springs.

When considering ways to improve service or create efficiencies, stakeholders shared one of the largest barriers is

2050 Transit Vision

Map 1



Map 2

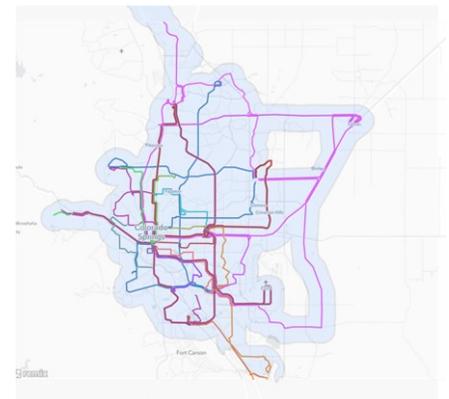


Figure 1: Maps show a DRAFT proposed 2050 Transit Vision concept (Map 1) and the increased ADA paratransit service area that would be necessary if the draft vision were fully implemented (Map 2).

that of grant funding compliance. For example, a certain grant may have geographic or service-specific requirements that each provider must track and report. To overcome this challenge, stakeholders recommended a centralized system to distribute resources could address funding and compliance barriers but implementation brings its own challenges. Other innovative programs, like car trade-ins for aging populations, are successful in areas with mature transit systems.

During the discussion on how providers are addressing challenges, a stakeholder asked how Medicaid is factored into providers operations. Providers shared challenges in referring Medicaid patients to the appropriate service. Medicaid riders are required to use the lowest cost of transportation and may end up returning to service to meet that requirement.

Ezra Pincus-Roth (Nelson\Nygaard) reviewed the draft issues, near-term strategies (for consideration over the next five years), and long-term solutions (for consideration to help realize a vision for 2050).

- **Issue:** A lack of understanding of the available specialized transit and paratransit networks, how they are different, and how each can potentially help riders.
 - Short-term Strategy: Go through a process for developing specific standards for a more consistent and easily navigated network.
 - Long-term Solution: Maintain a single regionwide brand and delivery design for all specialized and demand-response services as a condition of using public funds.

A stakeholder shared that understanding additional benefits, like the opportunity to socialize, is important when selecting a service.

- **Issue:** Riders are expected to navigate a system that is unnecessarily complicated and unsatisfactory in meeting everyday travel needs.
 - Short-term Strategy: Develop an easy-to-use website or similar tool for riders with a centralized information from providers.
 - Long-term Solution: Establish a mobility management program dedicated to trip coordination among providers.

A stakeholder asked if this solution would develop a single portal to book a ride. Ezra Pincus-Roth (Nelson\Nygaard) clarified that the mechanism could be a portal or a single database for providers to access. By centralizing passenger information, providers may increase efficiency of matching riders needs and requests with the appropriate service. A centralized database of information would still help others, like senior center employees, schedule rides, reduce 'deadhead' rides, and increase efficiencies.

The stakeholders discussed the challenges for older-aged consumers to use new technology. A stakeholder shared that riders have such a variety of needs that must be addressed and that using generative Artificial intelligence (AI) may also help increase efficiencies in providing information to both riders and providers.

- **Issue:** The only immediate service (or even a service reserved within a couple days) is via the private market.
 - Short-term Strategy: Provide riders with a fixed maximum study for short notice rides and study other solutions.

- Long-term Solution: Coordinate service needed through a mobility management program dedicated to trip coordination among providers.
- **Issue:** Riders must go through multiple processes and inquiries before finding a ride due to data being siloed by organization and different eligibility requirements between organizations.
 - Short-term Strategy: Develop a common eligibility form and consolidated database of riders shared across providers.
 - Long-term Solution: Create a single entity responsible for multiple services including database management, eligibility, information, and brokering.
- **Issue:** Bus driver shortages.
 - Short-term Strategy: Invest in centralized year-round driver training center accessible to all transit, specialized, volunteers, and school providers (including drug/alcohol, disability sensitivity, small vehicle, et. al.).
 - Long-term Solution: Develop a bus operator apprenticeship and mentorship program, discuss opportunities to improve the job with drivers regularly, and ensure pay keeps up with the cost of living.
- **Issue:** Traditional specialized transportation vehicles can be stigmatizing and uncomfortable for riders, and expensive to purchase and maintain.
 - Short-term Strategy: Require grant applications for vehicle purchases demonstrate good faith efforts in coordinating with other entities to share existing underutilized vehicle fleets.
 - Long-term Solution: Begin real-time monitoring of specialized transit riders per vehicle to strategically right-size vehicle fleets.
- **Issue:** Riders may be uncomfortable or unable to access fixed-route bus stops which drives them to use paratransit or specialized services.
 - Short-term Strategy: Prioritize the paving and lighting of current and future bus stops and coordinate paratransit eligibility with Colorado Springs Public Works once improvements are made.
 - Long-term Solution: Build a foundation of regular transit riders through the convenience of frequent fixed-route service.

Jacob Matsen (MMT) added during the discussion of accessibility to bus stops, as ridership for MMT fixed-route service went up, the ridership for ADA paratransit went down. As more investment was put into bus stops and additional operational freedom for riders there was a greater degree of ability for paratransit users to use fixed-route which won't eliminate paratransit but would help reduce the reliance/resources on the system. The project team also shared that access to the existing system has been a feedback theme from the ConnectCOS planning process.

Ezra Pincus-Roth (Nelson\Nygaard) reminded Stakeholder Advisory Committee members that in the long run, the plan should build support for diversification of potential new local funding sources, help deliver mobility as a service for people who need it, and continue putting the rider first.

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) then facilitated a round robin to hear stakeholders' priorities as it related to short-term strategies or long-term solutions. Stakeholders were also asked to share if there were other priorities they agreed with (represented by the number in parenthesis following with strategy, Figure 2).

- Create a centralized call center for all ride reservations (1).
- Integrate Specialized Transportation into the healthcare system (1).
- Increase on-demand travel capacity and capabilities.
- Create a portal for riders to easily book and change ride reservations.
- Reduce or eliminate fairs.
- Increase training for customer intake and service.
- Expand or increase funding available to providers and identify areas to share resources to increase efficiency.
- Develop a regional approach to planning that considers Specialized Transportation needs.
- Integrate Specialized Transportation needs into community planning and development.

2050 Regional Transit and Specialized Transportation Plans Open House Preview

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) previewed the 2050 Regional Transit and Specialized Transportation Plans Open House, scheduled for Tuesday April 30th 4:30 – 6:30 p.m. at the City Administration Building. The Open House looks to achieve the following:

- Inform and educate the community about the planning process, existing services and route conditions, and how feedback will be incorporated into the final plan.
- Collect input that can be incorporated into screening criteria and ultimately inform outcomes and recommendations.
- Consult with attendees to help prioritize proposed transit improvements.

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) reviewed the Open House format and stations. The Open House will be a 'choose your own adventure' meeting format with several topical stations with boards for participants to browse at their leisure. If someone is only interested in a specific topic, they may only visit that station. In addition to providing information, the Open House will also seek feedback from the public through various interactive activities and questions and answers to the project team. The planned Open House stations are:

1. **Welcome and Sign-in:** Orient participants to the meeting.
2. **Process and Plans Overview:** Contextualize how the Specialized Transportation and Regional Transit Plans are a component of the LRTP.
3. **Existing Conditions:** Provide an overview of the current transit system.
 - a. **Participant Exercise:** Share where you live and where you like to travel on a map of Colorado Springs.

4. **Regional Transit Plan:** Present the draft 2050 Transit Vision and different vision elements.
 - a. **Participant Exercise:** Prioritize the transit vision elements – which three draft transit vision elements would you prioritize?
5. **Specialized Transportation Plan:** Present the draft strategies and how they address the specialized transportation needs.
 - a. **Participant Exercise:** Prioritize the draft strategies – which three draft strategies would you prioritize?
6. **What We've Heard:** Summarize key feedback themes and outreach activities conducted thus far.
7. **Next Steps and Comment:** Review next steps in the process and share your feedback via a comment card.

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) concluded by asking members to share if they would be able to attend the Open House. A majority of stakeholders raised their hand to show that they plan to attend. In addition to attending, Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) encouraged stakeholders to promote the upcoming open house. A digital promotional toolkit, which includes the flyer and drafted promotional language, will be shared with Stakeholder Advisory Committee members.

Stakeholders were curious to understand if this would be the only open house. Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) clarified that there would be additional open houses as part of the LRTP process, but the Open House on April 30th is solely focused on the 2050 Regional Transit and Specialized Transportation Plans, a component plan of the LRTP.

Next Steps

Angela Jo Woolcott (Kearns & West) closed the meeting by thanking those who could join the final stakeholder meeting. Stakeholder Committee members can expect more information on the Open House in the coming weeks.

Appendix A: Meeting Participants

Stakeholder Committee Members – In Attendance

Name	Organization
Sharon Thompson	City of Fountain
Sean Martin	Goodwheels
Sharon King	On-Demand Transportation Group
Raquel Dominguez	Resource Exchange Center Board
Jason DeaBueno	Silver Key
Valerie Anders	Silver Key
Kathy Lowry	Teller Senior Coalition
Roni Gordon	Teller Senior Coalition
Scott Land	The Independence Center
Phil Young	The Independence Center
Tom Lathrop	YMCA Colorado Springs Senior Center

Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members – Not in Attendance

Name	Organization
Eric Esch	Envida
Gail Nehls	Envida
Aaron Simerone	Silver Key
Edgar Morales	The Independence Center

Project Team

Name	Organization
Laura Crews	PPACG
John Liosatos	PPACG
Danelle Miller	PPACG
Jared Verner	PPACG
Jacob Matsen	MMT
Lan Rao	MMT
Allison Burns	MMT
Tara Evans	MMT
Ezra Pincus-Roth	Nelson\Nygaard
Jonathan Mosteiro	Nelson\Nygaard
Thomas Wittmann	Nelson\Nygaard
Zach Barr	Kearns & West
Angela Jo Woolcott	Kearns & West
Caitlin Sheridan	Kearns & West