

**Southwest Colorado Transit Coordinating Council**  
**Kick-off Meeting Summary**  
**Thursday, September 30<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM**  
**Conference Room, La Plata County Road & Bridge, Durango**

**I. GETTING STARTED**

Welcome/Background. Laura Lewis Marchino introduced the Transit Coordinating Council (“Council”), and the Council’s Facilitator, Rick Evans.

The Region 9 Economic Development District of Southwest Colorado promotes economic development in the five-county region of Southwest Colorado. Transportation is one area through which Region 9 pursues this mission, and the Council is the next step in that effort. Region 9 commissioned the Southwest Colorado Transit Feasibility Study in 2008 and completed the study in 2009. Transit services are not new to Southwest Colorado, but collaboration at regional and local levels has failed to gain the support necessary to make such services sustainable. Region 9 supports the Council because functioning transit systems for localities and the region will promote healthy communities.

Rick Evans is a transit consultant with RAE Consultants, Inc. He serves as the Facilitator for the Northwest Colorado Council of Government’s Coordinating Council, and provides technical assistance for Coordinating Councils across Colorado through the state Department of Transportation.

Meeting Goals, Key Issues and Agenda. Rick Evans introduced the idea and history behind Coordinating Councils, particularly the effort within Colorado, and the goals/issues of the meeting.

The goals and key issues for the meeting are as follows:

- 1) Information on current activities/challenges
- 2) Determine level/areas of interest (why are you here?)
- 3) Review planning efforts
- 4) Consider possibilities for LCC
- 5) Preliminary discussion on to how organize
- 6) Identify next steps/gaps

**II. INTRODUCTIONS**

Name/Organization/Brief overview of programs—What is your organization’s biggest *transportation* challenge?—What would you like to get out of an LCC?

Self-introductions were made. Members identified their organizations and discussed the challenges they face, and what they would like to see the Council accomplish. The following providers and partner organizations were present, listed with their comments. The group was provided with a list of organizations invited to the meeting.

*Christina Knoell, San Juan Basin Area Agency on Aging.* The AAA serves senior centers and non-profits who work with the elderly in all five counties in Southwest Colorado. The AAA is interested in transit because many of their clients use transit. Transit is also of interest because it is a struggle for parents to get their kids on the bus, and riding the bus should be cool again. The AAA would be interested in seeing the Council implement regular service between Pagosa Springs and Durango.

*Nita Purkat, Dolores County Senior Services.* Dolores County Senior Services is under the AAA for some funding, as a county organization it makes use of a mill levy, and there is some 5304 (FTA transportation planning) and Medicaid funding. They transport seniors and persons with disabilities through a demand-response system, and do not currently offer any fixed-route services. The Feasibility

Study identified DCSS as an organization that needed to provide transit from Dove Creek/Cahone to Cortez/Durango, especially for medical trips. The DCSS trips have tripled in the last couple of years. The organization uses Medicaid funds to travel 3 days/week to Cortez. DCSS sees the Council as a support for implementing their 5304 plan to expand their services to the general public. Most folks need to get to Durango for shopping, medical trips, and other appointments. DCSS has applied to CDOT for funding to get another van, increasing their fleet to 3 vans, and will apply for a bus the year after. The Council can give transit providers another voice on the Transportation Planning Region board and work to ensure the Council's priorities are in the TPR plan. The Council can also operate as a sounding board.

*Laura Lewis Marchino, Region 9 EDD.* Laura staffs the Regional Transportation Planning Commission, the mandated group working with CDOT. If anyone would like their organization to be on the list of considered projects, let Laura know because that body prioritizes projects for funding and presentation to CDOT. The TPC rotates communities for funding, and organizations should talk to their representative to see if they attend the meetings. The TPC's larger role is to send regional representatives to the monthly Statewide Transportation Advisory Committee meetings to make sure CDOT doesn't change funding from a lane miles to population multiplier. Ninety percent of their projects are related to highway construction and maintenance, funded under the Federal Highway Administration.

*Becky Levy, Towns of Mancos and Rico.* Becky serves on the town staff for Mancos, and is the mayor *pro tem* of Rico. Mancos is in the process of revising its comprehensive plan, of which transit is an element. She would like the Council to identify transit issues for the region. Neither Mancos nor Rico currently offer direct transit.

*Martha Mason, Southwest Center for Independence.* The SWCI serves persons with disabilities, who also often qualify as low-income. Their clients tend to be isolated in rural areas, where affordable housing is at a premium. All of her clients speak highly of the existing transit services they use (Road Runner and Durango T). She lives in Red Mesa and wishes her family could ride buses to school and work. It takes her children's school bus 1.5 hours to get to the school. The timing is good for the SWCI because they just received \$5000 in stimulus funds to spend on transit for persons with vision disabilities.

*Roy Peterson, Durango T.* Durango T will plan for the future with the things that come out of the Council. His organization faces challenges, definitely. They offer 6 fixed routes and 2 trolley routes, which they plan to continue. The organization uses FASTER, FTA 5311 operating funds, 5309, 5304 planning funds for their multi-modal efforts, and 5316 funds. This will be their last year using 5316 funds. There are gaps in getting people to Durango, and they want the new transit center to be a regional hub. Durango Mountain Resort, Road Runner, and Greyhound currently use the center. The providers and Council need to fill the gaps to areas without local services and regional service. The Council should also attend TPR meetings.

*Randy Sipes, Durango Mountain Resort.* DMR is a private company that offers fixed and demand services for their clients to and from the DMR campus, throughout the Durango area and Southwest Colorado as a whole. He is attending the meeting to see where transit may be headed in the region. They also offer a program for Durango 9-R students.

*Teresa Malone, Southwest Colorado Community College.* The college has two campuses (Durango and Mancos) with two sets of needs. There is a parking shortage in Durango, and the college is buying passes with Durango Transit. There are 480 students who use the Durango campus, and more than half indicated they would use public transit. The college is also interested in a Park and Ride for out-of-towners. At the Mancos campus, where the college has its career and tech ed classes, students struggle because the campus is in the middle of nowhere. High school students from Cortez and Durango travel to the Mancos campus every day, although Cortez stopped offering a bus to the campus in the morning because

everyone drove. The Durango school district runs their bus in the afternoon. The college is interested in services between Cortez and the Mancos campus, and Durango and the Mancos campus, or a service from Cortez to Durango that stops at the Mancos campus. The Durango campus is across the street from the Durango T transit center. She has not contacted Montezuma County's transit service.

*Musetta Wollenweber, Archuleta County Senior Services.* The senior center is a county entity that also uses FTA 5310 funding. One of their challenges is the size of the bus, and they have a need for a smaller wheelchair van. They charge as much as \$35 to take someone to the doctor. To keep down costs, they have volunteer drivers and work with Mountain Express whenever possible or needed. Transit is identified as an unmet need in their 4-year plan, and specifically they identified the ability to get people to Durango to go to service appointments (SSA, DMV, doctor, etc.). They estimate one trip per month would be sufficient at first. The county stopped routes to Durango for shopping in 2007. They also struggle for ongoing funding and insurance to offer transit services.

*John Egan, Archuleta County Transportation/Mountain Express.* John runs the local Pagosa Springs/Archuleta County bus system, which goes from Pagosa to Turkey Springs and back. They have 3 buses, and have 1 bus out at a time, switching monthly. Each day, the bus runs two shifts, one in the morning and one in the evening. The county commission is up to speed on the transit situation, and unfortunately the organization is facing funding difficulties. The entity's goal for the Council is to facilitate getting transit between Pagosa Springs and Durango. Right now he has no reasonable way of getting this done, and he would like to see the Council identify a set of goals and get the job done. The providers on this Council are in the people business, not the transit business. He has requested a new, diesel hybrid bus, because the first representative of the town visitors see is the bus. The organization is also trying to run a route in the middle of the day, and set up a transit center, hopefully to attract a Greyhound stop. The site for the center is already picked out.

*Ed Dingledine, Durango 9-R School District (arrived late)*

*Peter Tregillus, SUCAP/Road Runner (arrived late)*

*Conor Wakeman, Region 9 EDD*

*Rick Evans, RAE Consultants*

### **III. EXISTING PLANNING EFFORTS**

Conor Wakeman gave a presentation about several studies conducted since 2008 that addressed transit in Southwest Colorado. **The following handouts accompanied the presentation:**

- 1) "Southwest Colorado Transit Coordinating Council"; a copy of the PowerPoint presentation.
- 2) "Transit Coordinating Council Resources"; transportation, transit study and funding resources.
- 3) "Feasibility Study Service Recommendations"; recommendations from two transit studies, including a financial plan from the Feasibility study.
- 4) "Geographic Service Gaps", "Service Type Gaps"; two maps highlighting service gaps.

The presentation offered three studies (Southwest Colorado Transit Feasibility Study, the La Plata County Regional Transit and Future Land Use Plan, and the Southern Ute Transit Service Development Plan 2008-2010) as resources for the group. He presented the studies' recommendations, which included potential service plans, designating transit corridors, governance options, and demand estimates. The Feasibility Study presents background on regional transit efforts and offers possibilities for coordinated service at the regional level. The La Plata County plan presents background on local transit efforts and offers recommendations for service alternatives at the county level. The Southern Ute plan presents background information on the organization (SUCAP) and offers possibilities for how organizations can enact change internally that may allow for coordination and increased service. Conor discussed the Feasibility Study's preferred service plan and the region's transit dependent groups. He also gave a brief overview of the work he has done since joining Region 9 June 1.

#### **IV. COORDINATION BACKGROUND\***

Local and/or regional council overview—Activities to be considered—Levels of coordination—Real world examples

Rick Evans gave a presentation that summarized coordinating councils, including potential members, possible activities, structural choices, and success strategies. He included a handout of the presentation and of commonly used acronyms in transportation. In his list of potential activities, the Council was drawn to: identifying obstacles, setting up a call center and information network, applying jointly for grants, sharing training opportunities, and advocating for regional priorities. He articulated the three general levels of coordination, and identified the Council as between a Working Group and a Simple Coordinating Council. The Council has no formal structure and at this point has only shared information and identified priorities during meetings, and so looks more like a Working Group. However, because members would like the Council to advocate for regional interests, and has engaged in joint goal setting and problem solving, the Council has begun moving toward a Simple Council. The members will discuss formalizing the Council structure at future meetings. Rick presented characteristics of success and success strategies for the group, as well as series of questions to answer as the Council becomes more defined. He discussed how the goals of the members will drive how the Council is structured, and the advantages and disadvantages of more formal structures. He also noted two out-of-state examples of Coordinating Councils for group members to research, if desired: Cedar Rapids and Dubuque, Iowa.

#### **V. LUNCH AND DIALOGUE**

The group took a break for lunch from 12 to 12:30 PM.

#### **VI. IDENTIFY KEY ISSUES**

Service gaps/issues—Prioritization of key issues

This discussion took place as an open discussion between the members of the group. Rick led the discussion, and Conor took down the members' suggestions. **First, the group identified a number of "priority ideas,"** meant to be broad categories for the Council to consider when later identify specific projects to address:

- Driver training
- Funding
- Information sharing among Council members (best practices, discussion board/Google groups)
- Shared drivers / vehicles
- Centralized communication / dispatch
- Medicaid
- Consolidated fleet
- Partner with Council of Governments and destinations (ex. Spa in Pagosa Springs)
- Share software and equipment
- Grant writing (consolidated capacity: staff, pass-through grants, grant coordination)
- Google Transit (Data Feeder)
- Southwest Connect Portal (online information database and potential 2-1-1 administrator)
- Mobility Management

#### **Second, members identified gaps in the region's transit services:**

- Transit to/from the Southwest Colorado Community College's Durango and Mancos campuses
- Public transit along the corridor between Pagosa Springs and Cortez, including stops at the airport, in towns (Bayfield, Mancos), college campuses, hospitals, etc.
- Have Mercy Hospital, surgical centers, doctors' offices help with costs
- Research necessary agreements in land use plans
- Consolidate groups of clients / Designate days for out-of-town clients
- Advocacy / Marketing efforts such as schedules, maps, web site, 2-1-1 information, subcommittee for strategy, special regional events

## Park and Ride

- Locations: hospitals, Wal-Mart, towns, churches
- Signage
- Funding: needs lots of local participation
- Vouchers to employees / incentivize employers to have employees use transit or bicycle
- Matching funds: fees for parking (ex. students)
- Coordination with school districts and private-public partnerships (churches, companies, lodging)
- Stigma for public transportation
  - Overcoming the planning / time barrier
  - Different levels of service (WiFi on the bus, Party bus, eco-friendly / bike racks)

## **VII. HOW TO ORGANIZE AND WHERE WE GO FROM HERE**

### Regional/Local Organization—Coordination with existing planning efforts—Best potentials for Southwest Colorado—Participants/Process/Content/Assignments—Next Meeting(s)

The members identified priorities to begin working on. There was no discussion of formal structure for the Council, because members did not have a good enough sense of what the Council's needs and duties would be. Working on the group's initial priorities would allow those needs and duties to emerge, and give a better sense of how formal the Council structure will be. **Members identified priorities to begin moving forward with:**

- 1) Internal information sharing / networking
- 1b) Driver / Administrative / Safety / Management training: sharing and hosting regionally
- 2) Medicaid funding: sharing knowledge about how to access
- 3) Funding for a grant writer / staff / coordinator
- 3b) Securing local match for the grant
- 3c) Umbrella organization / fiscal agent (government or nonprofit?)
- 4) Advocacy

Also:

Medical trips: coordinate with medical offices; collaborate out-of-town visits; approach Mercy Park and Ride locations

Long-range plan corridor: Pagosa Springs to Cortez (ability to access other modes of transit)

**For those priorities, the following members volunteered to head up these efforts and / or provide more information at the next meeting.**

- 1) Information (share contact information; web site / Google Groups options; 2-1-1 and ARCH; Driver training opportunities; Council update): Conor will accomplish most of these tasks for the next meeting. Christina will provide him with information on ARCH.
- 2) Medicaid: Nita will put together what information she has for the group for the next meeting. Rick will also provide information from his other coordinating council's efforts.
- 3) Mobility Manager: Laura will research funding opportunities, including when the next CDOT grant cycle begins.
- 4) Advocacy: Peter will provide information about potential advocacy efforts for the next meeting.

## **VIII. CLOSE**

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 PM.

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