



# ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION FEE COMMITTEE

Wednesday December 7, 2018 12:00pm VU 462B

## Members:

**Present:** Natasha Hessami (ASVP for Governmental Affairs), Kay McMurren (Program Supervisor for Student Transportation), Jillian Trinkaus (Sustainable Transportation Program Coordinator), Ana Nicolas (Alternative Transportation Coordinator), Darcy Allen (Student-at-Large)

**Absent:** Anne Lee (ASVP for Student Life), Darin Rasmussen

**Advisor:** Greg McBride

**Secretary:** Grace Drechsel

**Guests:** Tim Gatlin

*Natasha Hessami called the meeting to order at 12:02pm on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018.*

## I. Introductions

The committee reviewed the ATF Charge and Charter.

## II. Information Items a. Budget Projections

McMurren walked the committee through the projected budget for the year. Allen clarified, is the ATF fee collected per quarter or per year? McMurren answered that the fee is charged quarterly, not annually. When the research institute comes up with the FTE (Full Time Equivalent) number, usually a couple of weeks into the quarter, then that number is used by WTA for our payment. About 2 weeks into every quarter, they get the information that they need to send us a bill.

Allen asked another clarifying question regarding the longer budget. She asked if the budget lines of large equipment costs, insurance, vehicle maintenance, and fuel were pertaining to the Airporter shuttles. McMurren answered yes, those are for the operation of the shuttles. McBride clarified that Airporter provides Western with the licensed drivers, but the equipment is all managed by the program staff, not Airporter. Airporter also does the maintenance, but they bill us separately from the contracted amount. Allen asked why the vehicle maintenance costs fluctuate so much, and McMurren answered that that amount is based on what the vehicles need; sometimes they don't need much, and sometimes everything goes wrong at once. We just put in an expected amount of \$20,000 per year to adapt to those needs, and we always project high.

McMurren explained that fuel also looks inconsistent for a series of reasons. In FY16, the program had some problems with the fuel tanks down in FM, and Airporter fueled for us on their cards at their fueling stations and added that onto their contract costs. That is why that cost looks like more, and our fuel cost

looks like less. The next year, FM gave us a \$7,000 credit because they had overcharged us in the past, so we paid that off during FY17. The \$14,000 is more in line with what it actually costs to fuel per year, so a \$15,000 projection is accurate.

Hessami asked why bus purchases are a part of our budget if the bus purchases are happening by the city and by Airporter. McMurren answered that they are our buses, and our services of the Late Night Shuttle are not affiliated with WTA in any way. Even though we are contracted with Airporter, they are our buses, so we are able to offer their services as a Western-exclusive service. Allen pointed out that us owning the buses provides students with a level of reliability and expectation higher than if we were relying on Bel Air. McMurren said that when this program first started, we had old buses that come from Skagit County: 1993 Gillig Transit vehicles. Over the last several years, we have purchased the Cutaway shuttles to replace them, and have surplused the old Gilligs. If, for some reason, all of our vehicles went down, then Airporter would bring the needed vehicles up to us, but that would be at a higher expense than just owning our own vehicles. The contract isn't set up for them to provide all of the vehicles, because they never have, but we have upgraded all of the vehicles. Guest Tim Gatlin clarified what surplus means. McMurren answered that there is a state surplus where any piece of property that the state owns gets posted. It is managed by the people down at our commissary; Dominic Garcia is in charge of taking and posting pictures on the surplus website. It is like an eBay for Washington State property where people can bid on old equipment. If it sells for over \$500, then we get some money as revenue. If it sells for less than that, then they save that money for themselves as compensation for the trouble they go through to surplus it.

McBride wanted to clarify the difference between the Gilligs and the Cutaway buses. McMurren said that the Gilligs are the WTA buses running up and down through campus. The Cutaways are shuttle buses, like the Late Night Shuttle bus, built with a Ford engine, and seat about 20-24 students with some standing room. They get about double the gas mileage as the Gilligs.

Allen asked about budget lines E367-E371 under the WTA expenses. McMurren clarified that WTA only looks large because it is an acronym – the budget codes are not organized; they have nothing to do with each other. Regardless, Allen was curious why we had employee and non-employee travel on our budget. McMurren answered that every two years, there is a transportation conference, and in the past, we have had 1 or 2 students, and/or staff who have attended. It's a student development and experience type-conference, to learn more about transportation. However, it won't be in our budget this year.

McMurren said that there has been a significant increase in fees from WTA. This is going to be something that we need to look at, because we may need a fee increase for next fall, and that will need to go to the AS Board this spring. We are looking at a 5% fee increase available without the vote of the students. That will need to happen winter quarter. If it will be necessary to increase it more than 5%, then it will have to come to a student vote. McMurren said that in 2020, we will be renegotiating our contract with WTA, and we will most likely need to raise the fee, but there will be some strategy within the negotiation. That is another year away, but what we can do for this year is raise the fee 5%. Allen asked if we have had any conversation around changing levels of service of WTA, or changing how the service interacts with campus. She wonders if that would be tied only to contract renegotiation years, or if we could have these conversations with WTA this year. McMurren answered that we don't pay for the service that we get from WTA, we just pay for the students to have a bus pass, and we represent under 3% of WTA's revenue. Allen asked if we wanted to get more than just a bus pass, and affect change, and if money had to be part of the conversations, are there mechanisms in place that allow us to do that? McMurren answered that WTA is a public transit authority, and affecting change with them comes from the public giving input. To this date, Western Washington University has not organized themselves to

interact with WTA to be engaged with them. It is possible, but it hasn't happened. What we pay and what WTA does is like comparing apples and oranges. McBride said that one of the roles of the committee is to gather input around transportation-related issues.

McMurren asked Allen what her ideas are for how to improve WTA's services. She answered that the program needs to work better; we need to address overcrowding, surplus changes, routes connected with Western, intersection, the parking crisis, and the fact that three buses showing up at the same place and the same time multiples times per day. McMurren said that WTA has a limited number of buses and they put extra buses and shuttles up and down Billy Frank and Bill McDonald Parkway to accommodate students. McBride said that if this is the direction the committee wants to go, it will be necessary to raise student awareness of the services offered by WTA. McMurren said that over the years, she has learned a balance between all of the people in Whatcom asking for service. She said that WTA does a pretty good job accommodating students by providing extra buses, and they only have a certain amount of money. If students want to pay, then maybe some of the services can improve. Allen said that based on what she knows about WTA, we have not built good mechanisms for having these conversations, and the public comment route is not utilized very effectively. Right now, WTA isn't really interested in putting effort into opening the doors to these conversations. What hurts now will be a crisis in a few years. McMurren said that in order to do all of that, the idea has to go beyond this committee and beyond our program; it will have to go up through administrative levels to create structured communication with WTA.

Hessami said that, for time's sake, we should put this conversation on next meeting's agenda.

McMurren agreed, and said that the bottom line is that our cash balance is going down as WTA payments go up, and we need to adjust our fee to stay in the green. Hessami asked, between FY15 and now, how much has the fee increased – has it increased 5% at every opportunity? McMurren answered that they have increased the fee once in that time period; it increased to \$26 from \$25. Allen asked that, if we raise the fee the 5% that we are allowed without a student vote, would that alleviate the deficit that we are projected to have? McMurren answered that it would depend on what our FY20 contract looks like with WTA, but the deficit in 2020 is *with* the 5% increase. It reduces the deficit, but it does not eliminate it.

#### **b. Late Night Shuttle Service**

McMurren reported that they have implemented the Shuttle service ride-tracker app, and they are seeing an increase in ridership this fall. The mechanism of tracking is drivers recording ridership on their tablets. Allen asked if WTA could provide us with any data of how many Western students use their services. McMurren said that we have a lot of data concerning this, and she can bring it to a future meeting. Allen said that is good, because it is important information for the broader conversation – how do we have a more integrated relationship between WTA and Western? McMurren answered that WTA is the resource for the current information.

### **III. Next Meeting's Agenda Items**

#### **a. Potential Fee Increase**

#### **b. Further Negotiations with WTA**

*Natasha Hessami adjourned the meeting at 12:59pm.*