A meeting of the Committee on Traffic and Transportation was held this date, beginning at 2:05 pm over Zoom Conference Call.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

**Present**

Councilmember Seekings, Chair; Councilmember Brady, Vice-Chair; Councilwoman Jackson, Councilwoman Delcioppo; and Mayor Tecklenburg. **Also Present:** Randall Keith Benjamin II, Robert Somerville, Janie Borden, Ron Mitchum, Councilmember Appel, Jason Kronsberg, Edmund Most, Terri Hubbard

The meeting was opened by a moment of silence led by Councilmember Brady.

**Approval of Minutes**

On the motion of Councilwoman Jackson, seconded by Councilwoman Delcioppo, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the October 13, 2020 and January 12, 2021 meetings.

**Discussion: CARTA Transit Accommodations Update and Partnership with the City of Charleston**

Mr. Benjamin said they were always grateful for their partnership with BCDCOG and CARTA staff. One of the things that they had really been pushing for was the fleet and making sure the buses were top-notch so that riders now and in the future were well accommodated. City Council was helpful in that process by moving forward the transit accommodations ordinance. That really opened the door for them to make sure that transit was a part of traffic mitigation studies that all major developments went through.

Ron Mitchum stated they appreciated the opportunity to be with them that day and to share what they had been working on. There were a lot of major projects going on, but nothing was more important than trying to take care of the customer amenities. One of the big things they had been working on were bus stop improvements, fleet modernization and service. Those were the things that were always foremost in their minds because if people couldn’t get to where they were going efficiently and reliably, they wouldn’t ride. They were working on some solar lighting projects to help make it easier to be seen by the drivers when people were waiting at the stops. They were working on digital signage that they were hoping to put in place on the Peninsula shortly which would help if certain stops weren’t functioning. They were also developing a set of guidelines to make sure they had a consistent product across the system. They had brought the newer shelters to the City and they had been approved. They gave the opportunity to show the whole system map, as well as information related to the specific route. The panels around the shelters would be perforated which would keep the shelters from being extremely hot in the summer. They also handled the rain well. There were a number of shelters that they were working on including a few under review at the DRC. One had been approved and was getting ready for construction. There were also a few that they were retrofitting the new panels onto. They also had future plans to upgrade some of the older shelters. The Transit Accommodations Ordinance was working the way they intended. They had already partnered with developers at over 20 locations in order to work on the improvements that customers wanted to see. Solar lighting was something that
customers had asked for at stops. People did get nervous in some of the darker areas. Solar lights would reduce rider pass-bys, enhance public safety and the lights could attach to the regular poles. They would be looking at the colors of the signs in the future because the green did sometimes blend into the background at certain times of the year. They had ordered 151 of the lights and 50 were designated for locations in the City of Charleston. The digital signs would have two lines of text that ran across the top and they were solar powered. They wanted to be able to convey real-time messages, especially when there was flooding and a stop may be closed. They also had a transit app.

Councilmember Brady asked if the digital signs would give information such as the estimated time until the next bus arrival. Mr. Mitchum said that would be included. The technology from the app was beneficial because then people could stay in their buildings instead of waiting out at the stop. They also hoped to eventually partner with the hospitals to have those signs inside so people could stay inside and wait there. They were making a lot of progress with fleet modernization. The DASH and HOP buses were not battery electric and there was a particular reason for that. They used clean diesel. Part of what they were looking for on the Peninsula was to reduce the width of the bus. The bus they had right now was about 8 inches narrower than the regular buses which was very beneficial downtown. Under FDA guidelines, if the bus was in any kind of accident or hit its mirror on something, it had to stop and there had to be a report done which made customers late. They hoped that the newer buses would eventually be electric. They had replaced all of the commuter buses. They were also in the process of replacing all of the fixed route buses that you typically saw downtown. They currently had three battery-electric Proterra buses which were manufactured in the Upstate. Three would be delivered this week and there was another 30 in production that they hoped to receive in the next 12-14 months. Most were Proterra buses which were 35 feet, but they did have some New Flyers which were 40 foot buses. They all used the same charging platform. They were working on service improvements including increasing the frequency to Route 31. That route had been a little more resilient during the pandemic and a lot of people depended on that route. They would also be doing a LCRT Route Optimization Study which would look at all of the routes and how they would tie together with Low Country Rapid Transit. They had thrown out the idea of the Medical District Mobility to County Council. The hospitals were all trying to do different things, some of which were easily dealt with by the other two hospitals, but sometimes there were conflicts. They believed there would be some value of getting together with the leadership of the three hospitals and look at their expansion plans, what they envisioned for how their service might change, and see if they can improve mobility for vehicles, transit, and bike/ped. Earlier this week or last week, DOT signed their Complete Streets program into place, so now every project had to look at all the modes of transportation.

Mr. Mitchum continued and said they had some major Capital Projects in the works. One was the HOP Park and Ride lot. Initially, they were doing it as a surface lot, but Lowcountry Rapid Transit came through there and they needed to provide room for the station. They didn’t want to get into a situation of trying to acquire additional right-of-way from the railroad because they weren’t interested in having that discussion right now. That could be a long-term issue to resolve. So, they were looking at the possibility of going up since it was a small, oddly-shaped parcel to begin with. The Mayor had asked them to look at possibly including some housing and they were open to those ideas. For Lowcountry Rapid Transit, they had an alignment and everything was moving forward. They were now meeting with individuals and trying to work out the smaller details. They were looking to get to a 30% design phase, complete the environmental, and get it all submitted to the Federal Government by September. They
expected to be able to do that and to receive a satisfactory rating to allow them to move to the next phase which would take the design from 30% to 100%. Shipwatch Square was a project in North Charleston. It was a shopping center across from the Navy Hospital. They were building a new transit center there where all the routes would come together and connect to the LCRT. It was part of the County complex where the County services building would be and the library. There would also be a police substation to provide security for the entire site. They were looking at some maintenance facility upgrades at their facility on Leeds Avenue. The last thing they were looking at was the Mary Street camera and digital sign system. He told the Mayor he could use some help on that in finding the right person to talk to, but they did have funds in place to establish a new camera system there. They just needed the right staff person to coordinate so they could get it in place. It would be similar to what they had done at the Superstop in North Charleston, which had been very well-received. Camera systems helped law enforcement and also encouraged people to behave. Mayor Tecklenburg asked if they needed permission on placement or an IT person. Councilmember Seekings said he thought they identified that person and sent it to someone on CARTA’s staff. Mr. Mitchum asked if they could give them a little nudge and let them know it was a priority because that was old dollars and they needed to get them spent. The camera system would be available to the Police Department if they wanted to keep an eye on things.

Mr. Mitchum continued and said that other things that CARTA had done that had been great was letting students ride for free. That helped them learn the system and gain access to places they may not be able to get to otherwise. The CARTA OnDemand Pilot Program was something they just started and that was aimed at people who traditionally used the tele-ride service. They were focused on the Peninsula right now for the program. They worked with Uber Drivers who were trained to understand that they had to help people in and out of the car. They eliminated transfer fees to make it easier for people to transfer. They also applied the senior rates to the whole day. They were also helping DHEC at doing some Covid testing sites at the Superstop and Mary Street. For the guidelines, they hoped to have general guidelines that they could tailor to the City to make it easier for a developer to put in bus stops/shelters.

Councilwoman Jackson stated that as the primary district served by Route 31, they appreciated them leaning into the promise that Chairman Seekings had made a few years ago. She hadn’t heard that their route had stayed one of the strongest during the pandemic, so she thought that proved what kind of ridership needs there were. Her follow-up question was whether there was an opportunity to experiment with things like shuttle service that would be feeding neighborhoods that didn’t have a route like the length of Harborview and Fort Johnson. There were families she thought would really take advantage of a bus service. Mr. Mitchum said they weren’t done. They had to be logical and methodical about what they did because they didn’t have an unlimited budget. They had to get a little deeper into the neighborhoods. Councilwoman Jackson referred to the 20 partners that had been able to provide accommodations/improvements and they said something about the timing. She asked how they made sure the developer/partner would pay up when they were ready to construct. Mr. Benjamin said what they voted on in that ordinance was that when a major development went through the TRC process, they were obligated to do a traffic study. Up until that point, everything was car-centric. Nothing was there to help mitigate traffic through other modes of transportation. The allowance in the ordinance gave them the ability to stipulate through the TRC process to work in concert with CARTA and they had to have that in their design plans before they go their CO. Chairman Seekings said one of the biggest accommodations was turn-out areas off the main drag to get out of the flow of traffic so there was a
quick ingress/egress. Mr. Mitchum said they put that money from the developers into the bank and earmarked it for that project so they didn’t spend it elsewhere. They found that most of the developers didn’t mind the improvements. What they didn’t like was if their questions/expectations couldn’t be answered. Mayor Tecklenburg said that Dale Middleton from the Police Department would call Mr. Mitchum. Chairman Seekings said that what Mr. Mitchum had gone through and showed them what was happening was almost a miracle. Five years ago, they were talking about how they would fund anything or replace buses and through his stewardship CARTA had really turned around and come out the other side. That had come through really hard work and partnerships.

**BUILD Grant Update**

Jason Kronsberg said he was going to give a high-level update. He stated that the current alignment was leaving 25 Folly Road future park site, along the road shoulder and up to the bridge. It utilized the existing road shoulder and minimized the critical area impact. From there, the bridge would take off and cross the river. Then, it would come back in and touch down close to the Lockwood and Bee intersections. They had conceptual renderings for the intersection at Lockwood and also from the Greenway across Folly Road. Councilwoman Jackson referred to the BUILD Grant and asked if that covered the intersections he just showed. Mr. Kronsberg said that it did. He continued and stated they had a thirteen task contract with HDR. For the Request for Qualifications, they would advertise the RFQ at the end of March and the submittals would be due on May 10th. They would announce their short listed teams near the end of June. Then, they would issue a request for proposals to those teams on the short-list. Then, they hoped they would issue their final RFP at the beginning of September which was their major deadline. There was a lot of work that happened within each of those steps. The NEPA process was currently ongoing and the goal was to have it completed by the end of May. The Bathymetric Survey had been completed. Traffic analysis was underway which would have a lot of input into the design of the intersections. The geotechnical and OCRM permit had been submitted to OCRM. The hazardous material survey had been completed. The natural resource tech memo was near completion. The cultural resources report was ongoing and the underwater archaeology report was complete with no significant findings in the project area. They had a draft website that would hopefully be public soon to give the project a presence in the public.

Their strategy for public engagement would be mostly virtual due to Covid. If they could get together in person, he would like to, but he didn’t see that happening in the short-time frame they were working within. In mid-March, they were planning a Stakeholder kick-off. Then, they would schedule a public meeting at the same time. They had a couple different span types they were evaluating with HDR. One was a vertical span. Another was a single-leaf bascule. High in the ranking was a bobtail swing span. There were a lot of moving parts with the field work. Councilwoman Jackson said it impressed her how much they were learning. She knew it was a lot of work but hoped they were having fun. They would be so accomplished at the end. Mr. Kronsberg said he had to give a little plug to the FHWA and SCDOT. None of them in the City had ever done anything like this. Those agencies had been extremely helpful and if they didn’t have them guiding the City, they would be lost. Councilmember Appel said this was easily the largest and most exciting project going through District 11 and he couldn’t be more excited to hear the update and about the positive collaboration. He said if there was every anything they could do to help, to let them know. He could only imagine how complex it was and how busy everyone was. He congratulated them on the great work thus far. Mayor Tecklenburg said this was a team effort. Everyone had been working hard. The collaboration with other agencies had been remarkable. He was excited.
They had Phase 1 of the Ashley River Walk permitted already. They would probably have to make some modifications to align with the bridge. Chairman Seekings said that a lot was going on in a matter of months. He said in advance of this, he wondered how they built that second turn lane for Bee Street. He asked if that was also BUILD Grant dollars. Mr. Benjamin said that it wasn’t BUILD Grant. Mayor Tecklenburg said he was pretty sure that was from County Sales Tax.

**Discussion: Murray Blvd. Improvements and Parking**

Chairman Seekings said he had asked for this item to be put on the agenda. Phase 1 of the Low Battery Project was essentially complete barring a few punchlist items and cleaning up to do. Phase 2 would begin soon and he believed the contract had been signed. One of the issues that came up often was parking in that area of south of Broad and particularly along Murray Boulevard. There had been a parking study done in the City a couple of years ago and one of the things they looked at was this parking. One of the things they hadn’t done, and he would ask the Committee to give the go-ahead for Ms. Borden to bring back to them, was to put the south side of Murray Boulevard in the currently existing District B Parking District. Currently, it was outside of that district so they had no controls or say over the manner of which parking was had there. It would be nice to institute some policies along that area. He thought they should try to institute a ‘no overnight parking’ policy along that area. But, they couldn’t even do that until it was included in the district. He thought it should be transient to some point and people shouldn’t park there for free forever. The first step would be to direct Legal to simply add the south side of Murray Boulevard into the district and then talk about how to manage parking as the Low Battery went through phases. Councilwoman Jackson said she thought that was the right idea. It should have some kind of enforcement and she didn’t know why they wouldn’t just move the line. She would support that. She knew that was a beloved location for fishers and she didn’t want to make it more bureaucratic. They could let them have some sort of identification and let them be there longer than two hours. Chairman Seekings said in his mind, it wouldn’t ever be two hours. They could make it much more extended such as six or eight hours. But, there should be some finite limitation. Mayor Tecklenburg said that he wanted to make sure if they brought it into the district, that they weren’t bringing it in at two hours. They should have the discussion first and decide on the length and settle that before they brought it into the district. Chairman Seekings said they should discuss it with the Charlestowne Neighborhood Association and the community. Mr. Benjamin said there were two options for how to regulate the parking. They could include it in the district, but by ordinance they would have to study that and there would have to be a public hearing and buy-ins from the neighborhood. The other option was what had occurred in other areas which was making a determination around the pre-requisite time preferred and having that go ahead and create signage. The second option would be a quicker process. Chairman Seekings said he did understand that, but the reason he thought they should do it the first way, which didn’t take away the second option, but it would give people tools years down the road to be flexible and do what they wanted down there.

**Director’s Update**

Mr. Benjamin stated that he wouldn’t belabor it but the DHEC testing had been very successful at Mary Street and they definitely wanted to continue that. The Brigade Street Project was also moving forward and they just started constructing the concrete bulb-outs and the drainage aspects had been completed as well. They were sending weekly updates to the neighborhood and stakeholders so they were aware of what was going on. Hopefully, it would warm up a little bit so they could get the pavings and markings
on there also. TST submissions had been put in place on February 1st. They would let them know as they got into the summer what had been awarded. They had a CTC Committee meeting that morning for a vote on additional funds. When they voted on dollars last year, the committee voted to hold some dollars back to see what the results of Covid would be and how they could make sure they were covered if anything had happened. The performance was about 7% lower in the last year in terms of the gas tax, so it was great they held onto some of those funds. There was about $700,000 that was there for projects such as Camp Road sidewalks and Sanders Road. The Secretary from SCDOT had given a directive of a new Complete Streets policy. It wasn’t just a resolution, but specifically line by line how they would incorporate multi-modalism thought processes in their decision making around transportation. This would support the implementation of walking, biking and transit accommodations when documented as part of approved plans. All department projects that were currently in the project development phase would now have to check if they checked the box of multi-modalism. Integrative design principles had now been adopted. Finally, there would be a policy council formed to start walking through how to implement this. It was a major move by SCDOT and much needed. Councilwoman Jackson asked if this would take away the need for legislative action. Mr. Benjamin said the policy could be improved upon. The biggest thing was that the secretary put a line in the document that the way they had been doing transportation/transit was not working and they had to think in a different way in every aspect for how they approved projects.

Having no further business, the Committee adjourned at 3:23 p.m.

Bethany Whitaker
Council Secretary