Ozark Regional Transit Authority
Board of Directors’ Meeting Minutes
August 27, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Jerre Van Hoose. Adoption of the last meeting’s minutes was moved for acceptance; Mike Lanier made the motion and John Reeve made the second; all were in favor.

A proxy was sent from Shawn Shrum to Don Marr.

There was no Public Comment made.

The Financial Report was presented by Mindy Campbell, new Chief Financial Officer for Ozark Regional Transit.

Revenue is slightly under budget, but very close, in fares and miscellaneous income.

Expenditures show a negative variance of $25,000 from the budget. The variance was due largely to the Workforce Route trials, which will be discussed in the Executive Director’s report. However, continuation of Workforce Routes will be funded. Along with those funds and 2015 Razorback Charters, the negative balance is expected to be fully recouped.

Don Marr remarked he thought the Workforce Routes were to be budget neutral for ORT. Joel explained expenses for interpreters (for ESL employees) and the cost of corresponding printed materials (which had to be translated into three different languages other than English) were unforeseen, but became critical to the success of the program. Nevertheless, Joel anticipates the overall expense to become budget neutral by the end of the year. More on that is covered in the E/D report.

Don Marr made a motion to approve the financial report as presented, Mike Lanier made the second and all were in favor.

Ridership:

July and YTD ridership statistics were presented by Kendall Luallen. At the half year mark, ridership on fixed routes was up for the year, but slightly down for July. Paratransit ridership was up for both the month of July and the first half of this year. The first couple of days of NWACC and the University of Arkansas went back in session, ORT broke a record by transporting 1500 passengers in a day, and it occurred twice. Kids Ride Free closes Labor Day. At the time of this report, and the program not yet to an end, the number of passengers taking advantage of free summer ridership was 6,817, an 8% increase from last year and record breaking for the ten years of the Kids Ride Free offer. Kendall also noted ORT has been carrying approximately 350 NWACC students daily.
Routes by hours, miles and reports for each city is included in the Board’s packet.

Executive Director’s Report:

A Tiger Grant application for 2016 was jointly submitted with Razorback Transit for a purchase of additional rolling stock. However, nationally $9 billion in grant applications were submitted against $500 million in funds available. Criteria considered for award includes regional significance and multi-agency applications and we worked very closely with Razorback Transit to submit a grant that we hope the FTA will at least consider. For future reference, Joel has become acquainted with a recent retiree from the Arkansas Transit Association who was a successful grant writer with 20 years’ experience. She has made herself available as a resource for individual consultant services to ORT, which Joel hopes to utilize prior to the next preparation of any grant application.

The Surface Transportation Program (STP-A) 2016-17 grant was also applied for, jointly with Razorback Transit, with the intent to acquire additional rolling stock, either medium duty cutaways or the low floor 38’ bus. STP-A 2015 money was used for the four CNG buses in the ORT fleet.

The Maintenance Shop refurbishment granted by the state was finished on time and under budget.

Tech updates involve Kendall working to install tablets in the buses and vans, providing proper passenger counters and geo coding bus stops.

The vehicles will no longer rely on an 800 MHz system with two way radios but from tablets using a cellular network. This will bring successful communication between vehicles and to and from Dispatch, regardless of location. Mike Lanier expressed concern about cell tower reliability for Razorback Charter service, due to excess saturation during ball games; Kendall heard mobile towers are being brought in by AT&T on game days. The geocoding of the stops will enable any passenger to Google complete stop and transfer information.

National Dump the Pump was a success with over 1,000 passengers each day during that week in June. It will be offered again in November.

A four hour gap in ideal service has been recognized in Springdale Route 63. The City of Springdale offered to provide financial support to fill the gap and will do so through December 31st, 2015. After that, the City will determine if that crutch will be extended into 2016.

Workforce Routes were successful with a three month run of 3,700 passengers. Discussions have been ongoing about how to improve and continue these routes. The demonstration comes to an end on September 4th and the employee representatives are taking funding requests to their chains
of command for sponsorship. Businesses are seeing a positive impact in the attendance trend, due to these transportation options and are aware of the availability being ratcheted down if there is no financial support extended. The Workforce Routes are available on 13.5, 15.5 and 20 hours per day options. Joel believes this will continue for the rest of the year, possibly longer, for a least of couple of the corporations involved. He reiterated Workforce Routes end on September 4, 2015, unless an intent to fully fund is provided.

The City of Rogers has shown an interest in a Workforce Route, specifically for Ozark Mountain Poultry. Meeting with them, Joel requested immediate funding. As a result of the meetings, OMP, as well as Rogers Technical School is considering a memorandum of understanding to fund a work/school route from September 1 to December 31, using the Jones center as a park and ride lot. Joel was enthusiastic that ORT is making a positive impact in our communities getting people to work and school. Additionally, a labor employment company, Penmac, is entering some discussion of rural demand response en masse to Butterball (Cargill) in Huntsville.

Razorback football charters will encompass six home games this year. Although a contract is not yet signed, ORT is geared up for this profit center.

Federal money from the highway trust fund for this year is in limbo for the last 2/12’s of allotment. At the time of this report, 8/12’s of the grant has been approved and appropriated, 2/12’s has yet to be appropriated and the last 2/12’s has not yet been approved. The state of the government’s consequent decisions is a daily worry for transit, but ORT intends to stay balanced, patient and work with the FTA on a daily basis.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Don Marr asked about notifications posted on the vehicles providing passenger complaint information. As there is no current posting, it will be prepared and put on each vehicle. Don believes this will help Board members and elected city officials field complaints that come to their direct attention.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 22, 10 am at this location.