

12/9/15

SUMMARY OF “CONCERNED CITIZENS GROUP” MEETING WITH ALBUQUERQUE TRANSIT DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVES

Held on December 2, 2015, 4:00 PM

PRESENT: Transit Department: Bruce Rizzieri, Director & Lawrence Kline, Principle Planner, ABQ Ride
Concerned Citizens: Paul Lusk, Julie Stephens, Anthony Anella, Steve Schroeder, David Vogel

MAJOR POINTS ADDRESSED IN THIS SUMMARY DOCUMENT

- The configuration and station location of the A.R.T., as shown on 12/2/15 ‘Project Plans’
- Appropriate emphasis on attractive and functional sidewalks as they enhance pedestrian access to businesses and cultural facilities, as part of ‘Complete Streets’
- The ‘grid’ bus network as it relates to inclusive service, and connection to the Central Ave ‘spine’, particularly to major N/S arterials and other E/W connectors
- Ensure that ART, in its design & operation, provides substantial incentives for citizens to get out of their own vehicles and integrate use of the Transit System into their daily lives -- and to implement the goals defined in the Mayor’s “Route 66 Plan”
- To implement the ‘Cultural Centers ‘inner-loop’ and connection to other cultural centers
- The coordination of each of these components as integral and essential elements of the Comprehensive Plan.
- A typical plan-drawing with sections, and a draft grid-transit map, to achieve each of these objectives was submitted at the 12/2/15 mtg.

MEETING SUMMARY

A meeting was requested with the Director of the City of Albuquerque Transit Department by a group of “Concerned Citizens” for the purpose of:

- 1) Receiving a briefing by the Transit Director regarding the current status and next steps re the ART Project,**
- 2) Providing constructive input and feedback regarding the planned ART Project and offering related contemporary urban design recommendations, and**

3) Inviting the Transit Department to engage in future constructive dialogue & input with the Concerned Citizens Group which includes planning professionals with national and international experience, design experts with experience in urban design throughout the U.S., and community & business advocates. (See Attached Agenda)

The Concerned Citizens Group initiated the meeting by introducing Group members and stating their intentions to be as constructive and helpful as possible. The Group had prepared extensive written documentation that addressed not only the seemingly serious design flaws that currently appear on the City's ART website, but also offered some preliminary conceptual drawings & recommendations that have the potential to make Albuquerque's transit system a truly innovative, leading edge 21st Century transit system that could put Albuquerque in a class with Curitiba and Bogota, thereby building on the theme being pursued under the "Innovate ABQ" initiative.

Mr. Rizzieri gave the Group an update re the current ART status during which included the following points:

- 1) The Project planning apparently is close to completion with City Departments completed reviews and 'Construction Plans' in process, which means there might not be much opportunity to make significant changes.
- 2) The contracts with a sequence of consulting firms calls for approximately \$11 million to be spent on the planning, design and related consulting services.
- 3) The ART Proposal is requesting \$75 million and would be funded by a Department of Transportation Program called "Small Starts". This Program is apparently funds exclusively dedicated-lane, often median-oriented transit systems. Hence, in order to get this Federal funding, Albuquerque has to "fit" its transit system design into these predetermined design parameters.
- 4) The projected route includes Unser to Tramway
- 5) Outreach door to door was reported conducted (however Central business owners in the meeting had not been not contacted).

One of the group's members who has extensive experience as an urban planner in cities throughout the US offered his deep & extensive review and critique of the ART Plan that is on the City's website. Based on his and the Group's analysis of the plans available (as of 12/5/15) to the public, it appears that there are some potentially serious design flaws in the current ART Plan and design specs. A written analysis of these apparent design flaws was given to the Transit Department representatives.

A summary of the recent meeting some of the Group's members had with City Councilor Winter and City COO Richard Riordan (See Attached) was also given to the Transit Department representatives along with additional comments and concerns which included:

- 1) ART seems to run contrary to the goals of the "Innovate ABQ" initiative,
- 2) ART does not connect many of Albuquerque's major cultural & historical assets,
- 3) The true potential cost of ART does not appear to be well defined or understood, and

4) ART presents major “risks” to the City that include:

- a) Pushing the already economically tenuous merchants in the Nob Hill District -- an historic & unique “jewel” of Albuquerque -- and other Central Avenue businesses “over the edge” and out of business.
- b) Causing potentially serious deterioration in the neighborhoods along Silver, Lead, Coal & Copper as a result of shifting traffic to those streets. This is an “unintended consequence” that has been experienced previously in some Albuquerque neighborhoods as a result of intentional changes in traffic Patterns.

The group also made the following observations & recommendations:

- 1) The Transit Department representatives are encouraged to speak with the Houston Transit folks about how they are converting their system into a substantially more functional grid-oriented system, a goal that should be included in the ART Plan. (See: <http://www.humantransit.org/2014/05/houston-a-transit-network-reimagined.html>)
- 2) The Group gave the Transit Department representatives their written analysis of the apparent design flaws with the current ART Plan, as well as a number of recommendations for potentially significantly upgrading the value ART could bring to the community.
- 3) The location of stations in the ART Plan does not seem to consider as important, coordination with existing bus routes or potentially with other North/South arterials. Some stations are mid-block, some nearly halfway between major N/S arterials, which seems contrary to the objective of facilitating ease of passenger transfers. This is a critical consideration when attempting to maximize the transit system’s attraction and usefulness.
- 4) Although the current ART design apparently addresses the more narrow criteria for a BRT system running dedicated lanes via a median, ART seems to be being developed outside of current, commonly accepted urban planning principles and standards for healthy street design such as those recommended by “COMPLETE STREETS”. (See: <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets>)
- 5) ART seems to focus throughout the Plan on the space between the curbs as its primary priority at the expense of sidewalks and other important urban design components. Most of the sidewalk dimensions in the ART Plan are significantly less than those called for in contemporary urban design guidelines, including those recommended in the “COMPLETE STREETS” guidelines. In most of the cross-sections shown on the Project Plans, the sidewalk dimensions are only 6 feet, and sometimes less, and in others there is no sidewalk dimensioning whatsoever. This suggests that sidewalk design is an afterthought in the ART Plan rather than a high priority design criterion essential to creating a “Walkable City”. (See:

<http://www.walkable.org> & <http://www.walklive.org>)

The Plan needs to actively promote pedestrian traffic thereby enhancing a sense of community and support of businesses in Albuquerque.

- 6) Many of the ABQ Ride routes use Central Avenue as part of their route. There seems to be no provision in the ART Plan for curbside stops for these buses. Some, as shown in the Project Plans (as of 12/2/15), would be located in a single travel-lane adjacent to a 6-foot sidewalk. Cars behind would be forced to wait for loading (or illegally go around?).
- 7) The Transit Department should consider including certain state-of-the-art transit system concepts such as electric buses, (See article Re: Geneva, Switzerland's transit system: <http://insideevs.com/12-ultra-fast-charging-electric-buses-geneva-2017/>) Also, such a system, potentially, could be powered by dedicated PV arrays, as integral components of the ART Plan. (For example, the Gallup City Council, on Dec. 7th, this past Monday, reviewed contract bids for construction of a 10MW PV Solar array, serving municipal electric load needs. See: <http://www.gallupnm.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1023>
- 8) ART appears to be being developed as a mini-system unto itself without the requisite bigger picture "large system" urban planning concerns required for sound urban planning. The Group spoke to the importance of any major system such as ART being designed as an integral part of the larger "system". To proceed without this "large systems" perspective as an integral component of the ART design is contrary to contemporary urban "systems thinking" and planning. An example of such systems thinking is evident in the transit system as shown in: [http://www.ci.omaha.ne.us/planning/urbanplanning/images/stories/Master%20Plan%20Elements/Transportation Element Final 2012 web.pdf](http://www.ci.omaha.ne.us/planning/urbanplanning/images/stories/Master%20Plan%20Elements/Transportation%20Element%20Final%202012%20web.pdf)>.

Some examples of "larger system" planning considerations as they pertain specifically to transit include:

- How will ART and its design & operation provide incentives for citizens to get out of their own vehicles and integrate use of the Transit System into their daily lives?
- How does the ART Plan relate to the City/County Comprehensive Plan update that is currently underway?
- How does ART relate to the Mayor's "Route 66 Plan"?
<<https://www.cabq.gov/mayor/priorities-initiatives/initiatives/abq-the-plan/future-of-route-66>> and <<http://route66central.com/index.html>>
- How does the ART Plan relate to the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments 2040 Long Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan?

- Are the County and other governments in accord with ART?

9) Concerns about costs, sources of funding and regional issues continue to be raised.

- What might our match of the funds to build ART otherwise pay for? (See input to Transit Dept. 12/2/15 re alt. Central Ave Plan, sections, and Grid transit map.)

- Has there been an analysis of how this Project and its cost compares with other transit projects' construction and maintenance costs?

- What is the rationale for the Project? If the idea is to reduce our regional carbon footprint, does it? How does it compare to a more geographically distributed system of feeder vans, etc?

10) The Group also presented the "5 Capitals" concept to the Transit Department representatives as another important "frame" within which ART should be planned and executed. (See Attached)

The Group concluded it's comments by noting that ART represents a remarkable opportunity for Albuquerque to put itself "on the map", along with other cities that are planning leading edge transit systems as a means of fostering major economic development.

Albuquerque currently has an opportunity to design & create a truly innovative and exciting transit system that could become a hallmark of Albuquerque by designing and building a truly beautiful, fun and exciting to ride transit system---a transit system that would become a "go to experience" for tourists and local citizens alike.

Together with the packet of materials submitted to the Transit Department on November 4, 2015, including the Cultural Centers access loop and the Grid Network draft map, ART could be a "magnet" that would incentivize millennials and others to move to Albuquerque. In addition, it would be an inter-connected, highly functional transit system that would facilitate everyone's ability to see our City and move easily from place to place.

NEXT STEPS: The Group reiterated its willingness to work with Transit Department representatives, as well as the Transit Advisory Board, in an effort to improve the ART design. The Group requested that the Transit Department formally respond regarding the Groups recommendations, suggestions and offer to collaborate with their efforts.

**MEETING OF “CONCERNED CITIZENS” WITH
ALBUQUERQUE TRANSIT DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVES
4:00 PM, December 2, 2015**

4:00PM 1) Introductions and Outcomes Objectives for the Meeting

**4:10PM 2) Briefing by Transit Dept. Representatives re the Current Status,
Timing and Next steps re the ART Project**

4:20PM 3) Input from “Concerned Citizens” group re the current ART design:

- a) The ‘Cultural Centers ‘inner-loop’,
- b) The ‘grid’ bus network as it relates to inclusive service, and connection to the Central Ave ‘spine’,
- c) The configuration and station location of the A.R.T. as presently shown
- d) The coordination of each of these components as integral and essential elements of the Comprehensive Plan

4:50PM 4) Discussion

5:15PM 5) Next Steps

5:30PM 6) Adjourn